

Flight from the Middle East

Being a history of the Royal Air Force
in the Arabian Peninsula and adjacent territories
1945-1972

by Air Chief Marshal Sir David Lee GBE CB

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A Beverley of 84 Squadron unloading on an airstrip in the Western Aden Protectorate.
(Painting by David Shepherd.)

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Although this is a history of the Royal Air Force in the post World War II Middle East, it would not be intelligible, and would certainly lack interest, if it were confined to the activities of that one Service and failed to include some of the background to events and some of the work of the other two Services. For background information about the Mau Mau insurrection, I am indebted to Mr L S B Leakey's *Mau Mau and the Kikuyu*, and also to Mr F Majdalany's *State of Emergency*, both of which permitted me to place the RAF participation in the Mau Mau campaign into an accurate and descriptive framework.

Similarly, I am indebted to Lieutenant-Colonel Julian Paget's *Last Post: Aden 1964-67* for an excellent description of the Radfan campaign and the events leading to Britain's withdrawal from Aden.

To David Shepherd, the contemporary artist, my thanks go for permission to reproduce his painting of a Beverley unloading in the Western Aden Protectorate as my frontispiece. The original of his painting is a prized possession of 84 Squadron, and, at the time of writing, hangs in the Mess at RAF Akrotiri, Cyprus.

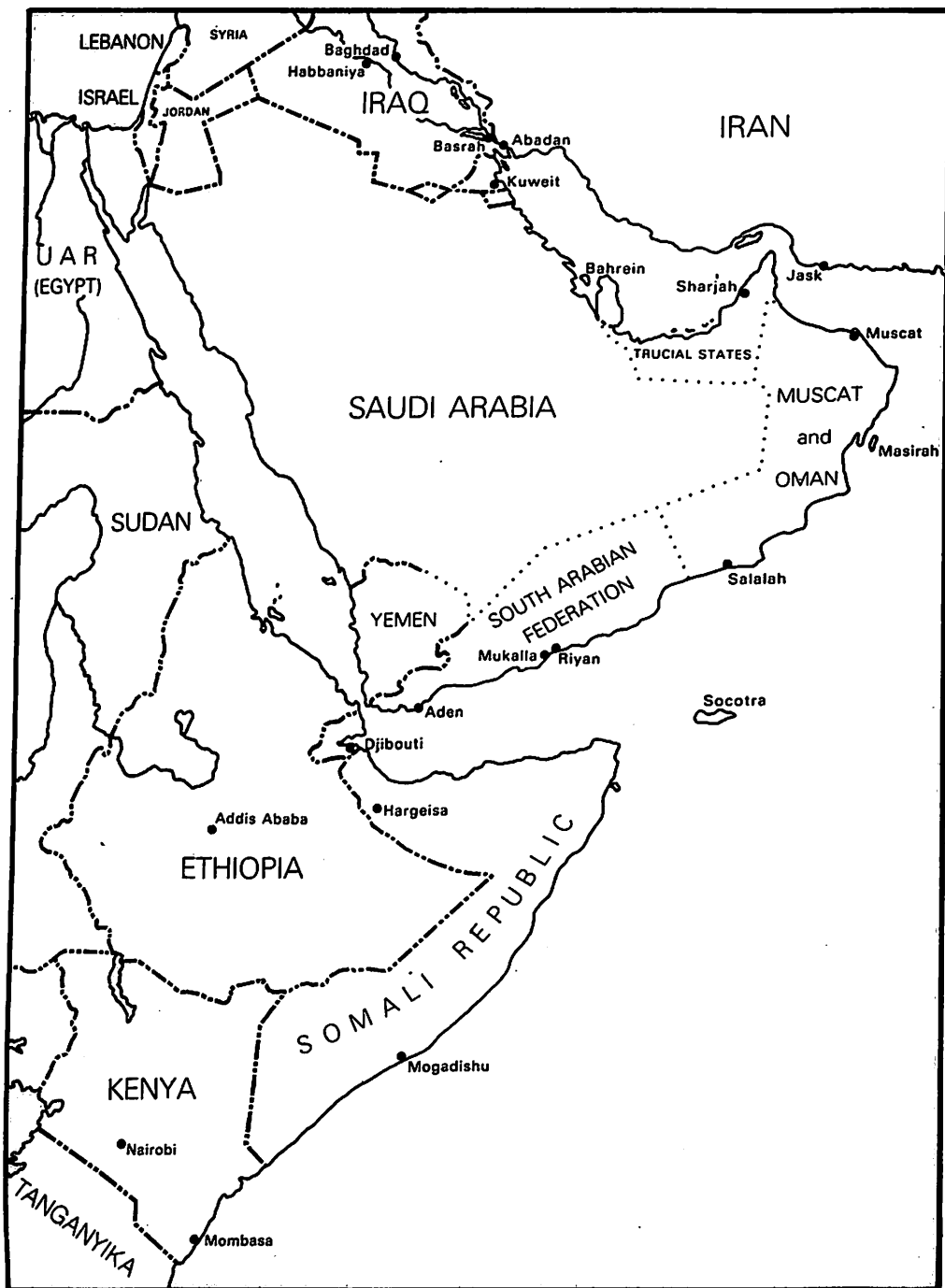
The RAF material in the book is drawn from a very large number of official documents, Operations Record Books, Air Staff files and associated papers made available to me by the Air Historical Branch (RAF). Group Captain E B Haslam MA FRHistS, RAF (Retd), the Head of the Air Historical Branch and his staff have assisted me in every possible way, and it would not have been possible to write this book without their unstinted help, notably that of Mr D C Bateman whose assistance in selecting the illustrations and copy-editing the text I greatly appreciated. My thanks also go to Mr G Hammond of Her Majesty's Stationery Office for the cover design and assistance in the preparation of the copy. Finally, I have to thank Mr Frank Smith and the staff of the General Staff Map Section, Ministry of Defence, who prepared the various maps and diagrams, often from the most inadequate information and material.

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NOTE BY THE AUTHOR

The spelling of Arabic proper names and place names is notoriously varied. Standardisation is therefore difficult. In this book, for the benefit of future researchers into history, the spelling is in accordance with that found in the records of the time, and it may not always coincide with the spelling found on modern maps and in recent books.



Map 1: Middle East

Introduction

Setting the scene

The story in this book is that of the Royal Air Force in certain areas of the Middle East and the African continent from the end of World War II until 1972 – a period of some twenty-seven years which saw dramatic changes in Britain's policies in these areas. The period is also notable for the steady reduction in the size of her Armed Forces, a reduction which resulted not merely from a return to peace but also from the decision to reduce her commitments, and consequently her Armed Forces, in both the Middle and Far East. This decision particularly affected the area of the Middle East covered by this narrative which is broadly described as 'the Arabian Peninsula and Adjacent Territories' and can be more precisely defined as Iraq, the Persian Gulf including Muscat and Oman, Aden and its hinterland and the East African territories (see Map 1).

The selection of these areas to be covered by a single historical narrative is not as illogical as it may at first seem. Most of them lie to the south and east of the Suez Canal. The events of the late 1950s created a physical barrier across the region originally known as the Middle East, and effectively separated the Mediterranean portion from the Arabian Peninsula and East Africa. With the exception of Iraq, the territories covered by the title were thus isolated from Britain's interests to the north of the Suez Canal so effectively that, in 1955, it became convenient to group them together as a single area of operational interest under a newly structured command centred on Aden. Iraq, from which all British forces had departed before the advent of this new command, has been included because Britain's defence problems and interests in relation to Iraq have always been inseparable from those of the Persian Gulf in general, and Kuwait in particular.

The British connection with the vast area between the central Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean has been long and close, and as complex and varied as the numerous states which make up the area. The history of Royal Air Force participation as the newest instrument of policy has been brief – a mere fifty years – but even that period has been sufficient for air power to demonstrate its great versatility and economy in both warlike and peaceful operations in an area where distance and terrain are peculiarly suited to the characteristics of the aeroplane. To provide a background to the fascinating story which RAF records have

to tell, one needs to understand something of Britain's policy in the Middle East and her reasons for playing such an active role and deploying so much effort in a highly unstable and – one might think – a highly unrewarding area.

Pilgrims, crusaders, merchants and adventurers have travelled the Middle East from Britain since Roman times, but it was not until the 15th Century that any official Government policy towards countries of the Eastern Mediterranean can be discerned. The great maritime explorers of that era were opening up the seaways of the world with the discovery of the Cape route to India, the Philippines and the East Indies. The impetus thus given to maritime exploration took British seamen and merchants to the Levant, Syria and Greece in search of trade: the formal establishment of trade with Turkey, for example, dates from 1553. A leisurely opening up of communications for the benefit of trade continued until the acquisition of Imperial territories during the 18th and 19th Centuries aroused much greater interest in the Middle East, particularly as most of the new Empire territories, and notably India, lay through and beyond that area. The overland route through Syria, Iraq and Persia was much used by merchants until the advent of the steamship and the construction of the Suez Canal more than halved both the time and the distance to India. One can see therefore, a gradual change from a policy of somewhat desultory trade with countries of the Middle East to one of developing communications through many of those countries for the support of Britain's Empire in the East.

The need to safeguard these trade routes caused Britain to embark upon an astounding variety of treaties and agreements with numerous countries in the Middle East. Such was her appetite for agreements that, on the South Arabian coast alone, some thirty were signed with ill-defined tribal states to create the strip of pink on the old schoolroom maps (known as the Aden Protectorate) which lies between the Red Sea and Dhofar. With variations and amendments the total had reached no less than ninety by the time that the last one was initialled in 1954, at which time every one was valid and in force. One astonishing aspect is that, all told, they covered an area no larger than the British Isles with a population of less than threequarters of a million.*

Another interesting aspect of this surfeit of treaty making in the Arabian Peninsula is that it was entirely peripheral, and nowhere did the influence of these agreements extend more than a hundred miles or so into a continent bigger than Europe. In this connection it has been said that Britain has shown a great talent for "backing into Arabia". Viewed against the need to protect the route to her Indian possessions, this purely peripheral penetration of Arabia is understandable. There was no threat to the lines of communication from within the continent, and,

**Farewell to Arabia*, by David Holden (p. 30).

provided that the activities of other covetous Powers could be controlled along the Arabian coastlines, no deeper penetration of the continent was necessary. The first of these peripheral treaties was signed with the Sultan of Muscat from whom Britain obtained a promise of help against the French during the Napoleonic wars. A further move to frustrate Napoleon's designs on India led to Britain's seizure of her first Arabian military base – the island of Perim at the southern entrance to the Red Sea – during the French attack on Egypt. Then, in order to subdue piracy against her Indian trade, Britain imposed a maritime truce upon the sheikhdoms of the Persian Gulf, and also annexed the Port of Aden. Finally, the chain of agreements was extended along the Arabian coast which gave Britain the right to conduct the foreign affairs of the states concerned in return for defending them against their enemies. Preservation of the sea routes around Arabia and the denial of its coastal regions to unfriendly Powers was, therefore, a major part of Britain's policy East of the Suez Canal, at least until the independence of India in 1947.

With the development of the internal combustion engine in the early part of this century Britain, always in the forefront of technological and industrial development, became deeply interested in oil, then being discovered in large quantities throughout the Middle East. She was not slow to involve herself in many commercial undertakings for the exploitation of these oil resources in Persia, Iraq and subsequently in Kuwait and other Persian Gulf states. Pipelines across the desert to the Mediterranean coast required protection, and the stability and friendship of Transjordan and Palestine were thus of great concern. Safeguarding her oil interests consequently became an even more compelling reason for Britain to take an active interest in the Middle East than had been the protection, mainly by naval presence, of the trade route and communications to India and the Far East.

During the dying years of the 19th Century, and the first half of the present century, the extent of Britain's involvement was almost frightening – standing between Palestine and the Arab countries, guarding the Suez Canal, responsible for the defence of a host of Arab potentates, standing in treaty relations with Iraq, the Sudan and Libya, maintaining colonial possessions in Aden, Cyprus and Malta – and fulfilling countless other commitments. Even a heap of rocks with the grandiose title of the Kuria Muria Isles, located a few miles off the coast of Oman had been bequeathed to Queen Victoria, and had therefore to be defended, in theory if not in practice.

The aftermath of World War II produced yet another compelling reason for continuing to pay close attention to the stability of the Middle East. Russia had always cast covetous eyes upon the Indian Ocean area and her relations with the countries which lay in her path, namely, Turkey, Iraq and Persia were always sensitive. The discovery of oil increased the attraction, and victory in World War II enhanced

Russia's opportunities for spreading Communist ideology to the countries of the Middle East. This danger was fully recognised by the Western Powers, and Britain found that, with them, she had yet another reason for maintaining a close interest in the area. The signing of the North Atlantic Treaty helped to strengthen Greece and Turkey against Russian pressure, but this did nothing to remove the danger to Iraq, Iran and Pakistan. Britain played a leading role in bringing these countries into a new alliance on the eastern flank of NATO, namely the Baghdad Pact which was signed in 1955 but renamed the Central Treaty Organisation some four years later when Iraq opted out of it. Thus participation in, and support for these two great alliances became a main pillar of Britain's strategy in the Middle East.

In spite of the relatively new commitments brought about by the need to safeguard oil interests and deter the spread of communism, the end of World War II marked the beginning of a period of reduction of involvement in the area. India gained her independence in 1947 and the need to safeguard the trade route and communications through the Middle East declined. However, there was initially no such reduction in the task of securing the oil which was flowing in even greater quantities to Europe at low cost thanks, in part, to the Suez Canal. It was thought by many, with considerable justification, that the closure of the Canal in 1956 would be an unmitigated disaster. Fortunately it came at a time when super tankers and large bulk carriers were beginning to be built and, even by 1956, some of these were too large to transit the Canal, certainly when loaded. The closure of the Canal and the subsequent years of uncertainty about its future greatly encouraged and accelerated the building of gigantic ships which could supply Europe with Persian Gulf oil more economically using the Cape route than could their smaller and slower predecessors via the Canal. Furthermore, developments in aviation produced, in a few years, aircraft which largely displaced a passenger shipping to the East for both civilian and military purposes. In the space of thirty years we have seen the great fleets of P & O liners which steamed through the Canal and refuelled at Aden give way to jet air liners which do not even need to land in the Middle East if the political situation is at all sensitive – as is usually the case in some part of that troubled area. The loss of that waterway, so recently a vital link between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean has, thanks to the speed of technological developments, turned out to be relatively unimportant and no great hardship for Britain.

Perhaps the greatest change was caused by the reduction of Britain's status as a colonial power after World War II and her assumption of a totally different role in the Western world as a member of a number of regional security acts, notably NATO, CENTO and SEATO. After the independence of the Indian sub-continent, the wind of change freshened and colonial territory after colonial territory sought and obtained the independence it desired, and as each territory in East Africa,

in the Indian Ocean and in the Far East gained freedom, so the importance of the Middle East to Britain declined to some degree. Middle East oil remained important and its sources needed to be safeguarded but the discovery of further deposits in commercial quantities in Libya, the Trucial States, Oman and elsewhere, diversified supplies to Europe and it became evident in the late 1950s and 1960s that, although oil remained an important strategic product, it was also a commercial commodity which the producing countries had to sell to maintain their newly acquired standards of living. As Nasser once said, "They can't drink it". In consequence the protection of oil was regarded as a decreasingly valid reason for Britain's military presence in the Persian Gulf although her defence agreements with numerous small states, which originally had nothing to do with oil, were still in force. These commitments clearly did not necessitate the retention of large military bases at Aden, Bahrein and Sharjah and the decade from 1960 saw a change of British policy with a withdrawal of all but token forces from the Arabian Peninsula.

There remained the continuing need to strengthen the weaker countries of the Middle East against the penetration of communism from the north. Although communism and Islam do not make easy bedfellows, the persuasive overtures of the USSR were attractive to a number of Middle East governments. The Central Treaty Organisation, flanked as it is by NATO, with Turkey as a full member of both organisations, was regarded by Britain as the most appropriate deterrent to Russian infiltration, particularly in the slightly relaxed international climate which followed the cold war period. Her interest in this aspect of Middle East security has, therefore, been taken care of by immediate support of her CENTO allies from the military base in Cyprus and, in greater depth, from the United Kingdom.

As Britain's policy and strategic objectives in the Middle East changed, one would have expected the changes to be clearly reflected in the deployment of her military forces. The interruption caused by the world wars, both of which involved Middle East territory tended, however, to obscure any clearly discernible pattern of deployment geared to specific objectives. There has, however, been one significant development, concerned with the evolution of air power and of particular importance to the Royal Air Force. At a conference held in Cairo in March 1921, it was decided to give responsibility for the control of Iraq to the Royal Air Force thus recognising the ability of air power to maintain effective control of a mandated territory with the maximum economy in the deployment of forces. This principle of control by the Royal Air Force was subsequently extended in 1928 to Aden and, in many other theatres, the great versatility and flexibility of military aircraft has been used to full advantage largely as a result of the important precedent created at the 1921 Cairo Conference.

The narrative which follows is concerned only with Royal Air Force

activities from the end of World War II, and it is appropriate to move on from this introductory description of Britain's historical involvement in the Middle East to a more specific picture of the military scene in 1945, when the defeat of Germany was shortly followed by the capitulation of Japan, thus bringing an end to World War II, but not peace to the Middle East.

[I]

The aftermath of war

Very few parts of the world were unaffected in one way or another by World War II and it was evident that the return to peace would be a long and difficult process. For Britain it had been a hard and exhausting fight from which she emerged, victorious certainly, but drained of energy, depleted in manpower, resources and money, and physically battered.

Preoccupation with war had not, however, excluded consideration of future policy and the Foreign Office had, as early as March 1944*, drawn up the tenets of HMG's policy for the Middle East after the war. Sea, air and land communications between the United Kingdom and India and the Commonwealth countries in the Far East would continue to depend upon stable and friendly governments in the Middle East. The security of oil installations and the routes by which oil products passed through Middle Eastern countries on their way to Britain and her dependents was equally important. Although HMG hoped that some form of United Nations organisation would emerge during the aftermath of war which would maintain international peace and security and implement the Atlantic Charter, and although it was hoped that the influence and interest of the United States in the Middle East would continue to increase, it nevertheless remained Britain's policy to do all in her power unilaterally to maintain peace and stability in the area as a whole. To this end she would continue to honour the many and varied agreements to which she was party and which contributed to the security of certain Middle Eastern countries. Some of these arrangements placed obligations upon HMG purely for defence while others gave Britain the responsibility for internal security, administration and foreign political commitments as well. In return for the fulfilment of these obligations, HMG had guarantees of assistance in safeguarding Britain's special needs in the Middle East.

Although at the time of formulating this postwar policy, the expansionist aims of Russia had not been positively identified, continued and widespread involvement in the Middle East was regarded by Britain as the best means of immunising the influence which might be exercised by nations potentially hostile to her interests in the area. As the conflict

*Foreign Office Memorandum dated 27 March 1944 - 'British Policy in the Middle East'

against Germany and her allies progressed operations against Italy and Germany had moved from the North African littoral, up through Italy and France and into the heartland of Germany. The Allied air forces participating in these campaigns were steadily drawn away from the Mediterranean to support the Allied invasion of Europe and the subsequent advance into Germany. After VE Day, strategic priorities were switched to the defeat of Japan which came, somewhat unexpectedly a few months later, due largely to the coup de grace inflicted by the atomic attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Preoccupation with Europe and with the Far East had created something of a military vacuum in the Middle East as the earlier threats to that region receded.

As far as the RAF was concerned, the autumn of 1945 produced the operational stagnation and the chaos which is inseparable from the aftermath of war. Although many operational squadrons had earlier moved on to more active theatres, the RAF command organisation which had successfully controlled the air battle throughout the Mediterranean was still in existence, and thus available to tackle the long and intricate transition to a peacetime deployment. The Middle East was littered with bases, airfields, landing grounds, depots and countless administrative units only a fraction of which would be needed once peacetime policy was formulated and implemented. It was clear that several years would be needed to remove the debris of war and to reorganise the Royal Air Force for its peacetime role in the theatre. Demobilisation and repatriation alone posed formidable problems as the majority of officers and airmen were serving for 'hostilities only' and were naturally anxious to resume civilian life.

During the latter part of the war in Europe, overall command of the Allied air forces in the Middle East area had rested with Headquarters, Mediterranean Allied Air Forces (MAAF) under United States supreme command with a Royal Air Force deputy commander-in-chief. This headquarters was located at Caserta with a rear echelon in Algiers, and it remained in existence until the end of July 1945, by which time its usefulness had declined to a point where it could be succeeded by a smaller organisation more appropriate to the forces and the tasks which would face them in the postwar years. Thus, on 1 August 1945, Headquarters, RAF Mediterranean and Middle East rose from the ashes of the former Allied headquarters and remained at Caserta, with Air Marshal Sir Guy Garrod KCB OBE MC DFC as its first Commander-in-Chief, having previously been the deputy c-in-c in the former organisation.

The principal formation under the new RAF Headquarters was Middle East Command located at Cairo under command of Air Marshal Sir Charles Medhurst, KCB OBE MC. Territorially this was a very large command and which the Commander-in-Chief controlled through no less than six subordinate headquarters. Of these, Air Headquarters, Eastern Mediterranean (Alexandria), Air Headquarters, Egypt (Cairo) and Air Headquarters, Levant (Jerusalem) had no res-

possibilities in the area covered by this narrative with the exception that any activity in the Sudan was controlled by AHQ Egypt. The three remaining headquarters are, however, relevant, namely Air Headquarters, Iraq and Persia (Habbaniya), Air Headquarters, East Africa (Nairobi) and Headquarters British Forces, Aden (Steamer Point). For historical exactitude and for the interest of those readers who served in them, the units which comprised the order of battle of the whole region covered by this narrative will be found in Appendix A. This list is long and contains many small administrative and logistic units. The lack of operational squadrons and, indeed, the paucity of aircraft of any kind, illustrates most clearly how the movement of the war firstly towards Europe and then to the Far East had denuded the Middle East of teeth units, but left behind the depots and bases almost on a care and maintenance level of activity in case they should be needed again.

Who, at that time in 1945, could have predicted that, within twenty-five years, not only would these air headquarters and their units have disappeared, but that Britain would have withdrawn virtually the whole of her naval, military and air forces from the millions of square miles controlled by these headquarters?

Iraq and Persia

In the autumn of 1945, the atmosphere in both Persia and Iraq could be described as 'quiet instability'. In Persia, British and Russian forces had occupied the country since August 1941 when the importance of supplying Russia with arms and equipment through the Persian Gulf route had compelled the Allies to act against the pro-German sympathies of the Shah. He abdicated in favour of his son who, after concluding a treaty in January 1942 designed to ensure his country's territorial integrity and political independence, and to provide certain rights to the Allies for the duration of the war, later declared war on Germany in 1943. The end of hostilities, therefore, found Persia on the Allied side but restive and anxious to have foreign troops removed from her soil. HMG's declared policy, after withdrawing her few remaining forces, was to support the Shah's regime by economic help, to foster trade between Persia and India, to support and assist the development work of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company and to give military backing to Persia through the medium of the British forces which would remain in neighbouring Iraq.

Iraq also finished World War II on the Allied side, somewhat fortuitously as it happened. A military coup in 1941, encouraged by Axis propaganda brought to Baghdad a radical government hostile to Britain which had to be crushed by British forces. Nuri-as-Said, the strong man of Iraq politics, maintained thereafter a firm grip on affairs, but the end of the war swiftly brought a resurgence of nationalism and a desire to review existing treaties. Relations between HMG and Iraq were governed by the Treaty of Alliance of 1930 whereby extensive

economic, administrative, technical and educational aid was provided for Iraq in return for the use of certain military facilities, notably the sites for air bases at Habbaniya and Shaibah. Britain's postwar policy rested upon the hope that it would be possible to continue her relationship with Iraq under the terms of the 1930 Treaty.

Air Headquarters, Iraq and Persia

Air Headquarters, Iraq and Persia or, to give it its more familiar title – 'AHQ Iraq', remained at Habbaniya where it had been located for many years. Air Vice-Marshal S C Stafford CB CBE had, in August 1945, been in command for some three months. Habbaniya had been developed into a magnificent desert station with every form of amenity and facility to combat the stifling and arid conditions which affected it for a very large part of the year. As for the remaining stations, AHQ Iraq probably controlled, at that time, the most uncomfortable and primitive in the world and yet those stations often fostered the greatest esprit de corps. Being thrown together in adversity is a condition well known to generations of airmen, and it is one which seems to bring out the best in them. In addition to Habbaniya, the main RAF stations in Iraq were Basrah and Shaibah, and the area controlled by the Air Headquarters extended down through the Persian Gulf with main RAF stations at Bahrain and Sharjah. In all, some thirty-six miscellaneous units and detachments located on ten stations made up the RAF Iraq order of battle. RAF personnel at the end of 1945 numbered 21,353. The fact that only an Air/Sea Rescue Squadron (No 294) and a photographic reconnaissance detachment from 680 Squadron (Deversoir) remained under command, gives the clearest indication of how the passage of war had left in its wake a heavy residue of administrative and technical support units and personnel. Clearly the priority task of the AOC and his staff was to speed the repatriation of personnel and to close down as many units and stations as possible. In addition it had been decided that the Royal Air Force would resume peacetime responsibility for all British forces in the region; a decision which was to take effect as soon as British Army units had been withdrawn. The inter-war years had shown the wisdom of the decision made at the Cairo Conference of 1921 to give control of military operations in Iraq to the Royal Air Force, and had demonstrated how effectively air power could control a sparsely populated region of desert and mountain where sporadic dissidence and relatively minor problems of internal security tended to be the order of the day. AHQ Iraq could, therefore, look forward to a reversion to prewar policy with the RAF Levies and RAF Armoured Car Companies operating in conjunction with suitable operational squadrons and transport aircraft. The AOC anticipated that the rundown of squadrons elsewhere in Middle East Command would shortly make available to him units suitably equipped for his peacetime role to replace or reinforce the air/sea rescue squadron and photographic

reconnaissance detachment which remained as the sole survivors of his wartime force.

For the time being, however, Iraq and Persia were relatively stable and untroubled and the most pressing need was to get officers and airmen home and demobilised. The problem was two-fold: not only were the 'hostilities only' men and women due for release from RAF duty as soon as possible, but many, including regular personnel, had exceeded their normal tours of duty abroad and were well overdue for repatriation on that score. The intense heat, poor accommodation, lack of fresh food and scarcity of air conditioning had made Iraq a pretty uncomfortable and unpopular posting and, although such conditions were acceptable in war, they very quickly added to the general feeling of restlessness once the task was done and the war won. Also the premonition, however inaccurate, that the best civilian jobs were being snapped up at home by others more fortunately placed, did nothing to pacify the man forced to remain at Shaibah or Sharjah where there was little for him to do and whose release date was close at hand, if not already past.

Air Ministry plans for demobilisation were sound and efficient and Class 'A' and 'B' release and tour expired regulars left Iraq both by sea and air in a steady flow at the end of 1945 and during the early months of 1946. The flow created further problems for the Air Headquarters: the men were tending to depart faster than units could be disbanded and a serious undermanning situation developed. There was intense turbulence and dilution of skill in spite of every effort to send out replacements. Fortunately there were few, if any, pressing operational commitments at this time and it was probably better to accept some temporary loss of efficiency than to hold back reluctant personnel who had played their part splendidly when their country most needed them. It was already clear to HMG that conscription, or National Service to give it its more acceptable official title, would have to continue for some years during the transition from war to peace.

In connection with release and repatriation, it is interesting to recall that the Inspector-General of the Royal Air Force, Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Barratt KCB CMG MC, toured the RAF world wide at this time, spending some time in Iraq in April 1946. His specific task was to explain release procedures and to discuss these in relation to the problems of each RAF Command. He had an exhausting and difficult tour, finding considerable dissatisfaction wherever he went, and returned to London with first hand knowledge of the great problems which were being experienced overseas in reducing the RAF smoothly to a peacetime basis and yet fulfilling the huge backlog of tasks left by the receding tide of war.

The first quarter of 1946 was notable for the contraction of stations and units. No 680 Photographic Reconnaissance Squadron, based at Deversoir in Egypt had maintained a detachment of its Mosquito Mark

economic, administrative, technical and educational aid was provided for Iraq in return for the use of certain military facilities, notably the sites for air bases at Habbaniya and Shaibah. Britain's postwar policy rested upon the hope that it would be possible to continue her relationship with Iraq under the terms of the 1930 Treaty.

Air Headquarters, Iraq and Persia

Air Headquarters, Iraq and Persia or, to give it its more familiar title – 'AHQ Iraq', remained at Habbaniya where it had been located for many years. Air Vice-Marshal S C Stafford CB CBE had, in August 1945, been in command for some three months. Habbaniya had been developed into a magnificent desert station with every form of amenity and facility to combat the stifling and arid conditions which affected it for a very large part of the year. As for the remaining stations, AHQ Iraq probably controlled, at that time, the most uncomfortable and primitive in the world and yet those stations often fostered the greatest esprit de corps. Being thrown together in adversity is a condition well known to generations of airmen, and it is one which seems to bring out the best in them. In addition to Habbaniya, the main RAF stations in Iraq were Basrah and Shaibah, and the area controlled by the Air Headquarters extended down through the Persian Gulf with main RAF stations at Bahrein and Sharjah. In all, some thirty-six miscellaneous units and detachments located on ten stations made up the RAF Iraq order of battle. RAF personnel at the end of 1945 numbered 21,353. The fact that only an Air/Sea Rescue Squadron (No 294) and a photographic reconnaissance detachment from 680 Squadron (Deversoir) remained under command, gives the clearest indication of how the passage of war had left in its wake a heavy residue of administrative and technical support units and personnel. Clearly the priority task of the AOC and his staff was to speed the repatriation of personnel and to close down as many units and stations as possible. In addition it had been decided that the Royal Air Force would resume peacetime responsibility for all British forces in the region; a decision which was to take effect as soon as British Army units had been withdrawn. The inter-war years had shown the wisdom of the decision made at the Cairo Conference of 1921 to give control of military operations in Iraq to the Royal Air Force, and had demonstrated how effectively air power could control a sparsely populated region of desert and mountain where sporadic dissidence and relatively minor problems of internal security tended to be the order of the day. AHQ Iraq could, therefore, look forward to a reversion to prewar policy with the RAF Levies and RAF Armoured Car Companies operating in conjunction with suitable operational squadrons and transport aircraft. The AOC anticipated that the rundown of squadrons elsewhere in Middle East Command would shortly make available to him units suitably equipped for his peacetime role to replace or reinforce the air/sea rescue squadron and photographic

reconnaissance detachment which remained as the sole survivors of his wartime force.

For the time being, however, Iraq and Persia were relatively stable and untroubled and the most pressing need was to get officers and airmen home and demobilised. The problem was two-fold: not only were the 'hostilities only' men and women due for release from RAF duty as soon as possible, but many, including regular personnel, had exceeded their normal tours of duty abroad and were well overdue for repatriation on that score. The intense heat, poor accommodation, lack of fresh food and scarcity of air conditioning had made Iraq a pretty uncomfortable and unpopular posting and, although such conditions were acceptable in war, they very quickly added to the general feeling of restlessness once the task was done and the war won. Also the premonition, however inaccurate, that the best civilian jobs were being snapped up at home by others more fortunately placed, did nothing to pacify the man forced to remain at Shaibah or Sharjah where there was little for him to do and whose release date was close at hand, if not already past.

Air Ministry plans for demobilisation were sound and efficient and Class 'A' and 'B' release and tour expired regulars left Iraq both by sea and air in a steady flow at the end of 1945 and during the early months of 1946. The flow created further problems for the Air Headquarters: the men were tending to depart faster than units could be disbanded and a serious undermanning situation developed. There was intense turbulence and dilution of skill in spite of every effort to send out replacements. Fortunately there were few, if any, pressing operational commitments at this time and it was probably better to accept some temporary loss of efficiency than to hold back reluctant personnel who had played their part splendidly when their country most needed them. It was already clear to HMG that conscription, or National Service to give it its more acceptable official title, would have to continue for some years during the transition from war to peace.

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xvi aircraft at Habbaniya since August 1945, which, together with a similar detachment at Teheran had been charged with the task of carrying out photographic surveys and gaining topographical information over large tracts of Persia and Iraq. The agreement to withdraw all forces from Persia within six months of the end of the war lent great urgency to these tasks and, as this coincided with the time of year when conditions for photography were at their most unfavourable, 680 Squadron did well to complete its task in the time available. The Habbaniya detachment, under the command of Squadron Leader P Friend DFC had moved from Deversoir to Habbaniya on VJ Day – so great was the need to get on with the survey. The detachment initially took five of its Mosquitos with it, but severe technical difficulties soon arose. The intense, dry heat of Iraq caused shrinkage and cracking of the wooden undercarriage holding blocks and tail plane assemblies, and a great deal of ingenious improvisation was necessary to keep the aircraft flying. These troubles were not entirely unexpected as the wooden construction of this splendid aircraft was neither designed for, nor suited to, climatic extremes: the high humidity of certain areas of the Far East, for example, caused just as many problems as did the dry air and intense heat of the Middle East. It stood to reason that, because of their versatility and world wide employment, the photographic reconnaissance squadrons equipped with various marks of Mosquito tended to run into more technical difficulties than other users of the aircraft. In order to alleviate the problems caused by the climate, a few Spitfires were temporarily added to the detachment and, operating mainly from Sharjah, they carried out many of the shorter sorties and helped to complete the survey on time.

In January 1946, command of 680 Squadron was taken over by Wing Commander A H W Ball DSO DFC, a highly experienced photographic reconnaissance pilot, and Squadron Leader T E Tasker assumed command of the Habbaniya detachment in its last few months in Iraq. The detachment rejoined the remainder of the Squadron at Deversoir in mid-February 1946, the first occasion on which the whole Squadron had been together for a very long time; and with the satisfaction of having overcome many technical and climatic difficulties to complete a valuable survey of large areas of Syria, Persia and Iraq since August 1945.

One of the first effects of the shortage of manpower due to repatriation and release was felt in the aircraft safety organisation, and was responsible in February for the closure of the Aircraft Safety Centre, Persian Gulf, at Bahrein. Its duties were taken over by the Aircraft Safety Centre, Iraq and Persia, located at Habbaniya, and it was decided that, although the co-ordination of search and rescue could remain centralised, each station would assume responsibility for rescue operations in its own locality. The reduction of flying intensity to peacetime levels and the cessation of war damage enabled small detach-

ments which had originally been established mainly for rescue purposes to be closed down under this policy with the result that RAF Khor Kuwait, which had played a valuable role in safeguarding air traffic in the approaches to the Persian Gulf closed down on 12 April and the detachment at Kuwait was withdrawn from 25 March. This latter withdrawal in no way affected the friendly relations which continued to exist between Britain and Kuwait and which were destined to result in rapid, large scale aid being sent to Kuwait in later years.

No 219 Air/Sea Rescue Unit had operated the detachments at Kuwait, Bahrain and Khor Kuwait from its headquarters at Basrah, and its high speed launches and rescue craft were now redistributed and placed under the control of appropriate stations along the Gulf. The Unit which closed down on 31 March had worked closely with 294 Air/Sea Rescue Squadron. This Squadron had a short, but distinguished history, having been originally formed from the first Air/Sea Rescue Flight to be established in the Mediterranean during the early years of the war. Its association with Iraq dated from June 1945, when it moved from Idku to Basrah under the command of Squadron Leader A H Derbyshire who took over the Squadron from Wing Commander D B Bennett as the establishment of the commanding officer was reduced to that of squadron leader. The move from the Mediterranean was not a happy event for the Squadron: it had been decided to move its personnel and equipment by MT Convoy, a journey of some 1,600 miles of rough desert tracks at the hottest time of the year, when temperatures approaching 130°F in the shade – where there is any shade – can be experienced. The condition of the transport left in the 'backwater of war' was understandably pretty poor, and 294 Squadron's move was one long series of breakdowns and mishaps. The discomfort of the journey was not alleviated on arrival at Basrah to find that the accommodation allotted to the Squadron was quite inadequate and most uncomfortable. The Wellingtons, Warwicks and Walruses, with which the Squadron was equipped, followed shortly after the arrival of the weary convoy, and detachments almost immediately were sent to Sharjah, Bahrain and Masirah – a widespread deployment for a squadron with such a varied assortment of aircraft which, apart from perhaps the Warwicks, were old, well used and, consequently difficult to maintain. Fortunately for the Squadron, which began to suffer heavy personnel releases at about this time, the level of operational commitments was fairly low and the last few months before disbandment were relatively quiet, but most unsatisfactory months for a squadron which had been accustomed to a heavy operational task in the Mediterranean. Squadron Leader G G A Davies DFC had just taken over command when orders came for the disbandment of the Squadron during April 1946. It was decided that the Wellingtons and Walruses would be flown to Shai-bah to be broken up, whereas the few Warwicks in the Squadron, which were much newer aircraft, would be retained in service. No clearer

evidence of the effort which had been expended by the Squadron to keep the old Walrus serviceable is needed than that one of them could not even reach Shaibah on its last flight. A complete engine failure due to a valve falling into a cylinder resulted in a forced landing at Jubail where the aircraft was subsequently burned, doubtless with some ceremony, by the Squadron engineer officer. No 294 Squadron may have finished its days quietly and somewhat unhappily but it could look back upon a proud record in the Middle East. It had rescued a total of 378 personnel, 225 of them from the sea and 153 from land.

Although the Iraq and Persian Gulf stations were to remain important staging posts and emergency airfields for air traffic en route to the Far East, the density of this traffic as well as movements within the region were steadily decreasing, and economies in the handling organisation were justified by the beginning of 1946. There were, at that time, four staging posts – 40 at Habbaniya – 42 at Shaibah – 43 at Bahrain and 44 at Sharjah. They were all controlled by HQ 151 Wing at Habbaniya on behalf of 216 Group which controlled the transport forces and co-ordinated air movements throughout the Middle East. As the density of traffic no longer justified the existence of these separate staging posts, it was decided to amalgamate 151 Wing with Air Headquarters, Iraq, and to transfer control of the four staging posts to the stations upon which they were located. At Air Headquarters, a new section of the staff was formed with the title of Air Transport Section, AHQ. Instructions for this simplified organisation to come into effect from 1 June 1946 were issued and a considerable manpower economy resulted.

Another small, but highly significant reduction, also took place at this time, namely, closure of the RAF station at Jask on the Persian coastline of the Gulf. Its significance lay in the fact that it completed the departure of all RAF personnel from Persia – except for the Air Attaché and his staff. HMG had fulfilled its treaty obligations to withdraw British forces from Persia as quickly as possible after hostilities ended. Withdrawal from Jask created the need to change the title of Air Headquarters, Iraq and Persia. It became Air Headquarters Iraq on 1 March 1946, a title which, colloquially at any rate, it had never really lost. Very few had ever alluded to it as anything but 'AHQ Iraq'.

The disbandment of 294 Squadron left Iraq without a single operational squadron or even a detachment – not an encouraging picture for any AOC of an overseas command to contemplate. The personnel strength had been reduced by some three thousand, and stood at a figure of 18,523 in May 1946. Even this reduced total was excessive for a command containing no operational squadrons, and the closure of additional technical and administrative units was clearly justified. The quiet and uneventful period gave the staff of Air Headquarters time to continue with reorganisation to peacetime standards and great efforts were made to improve accommodation, install air conditioning and

generally improve the appalling discomfort which existed on all the stations with the exception of Habbaniya. The words of that famous song *Those Shaibah Blues* had not been composed without good reason, and the sentiments they expressed were as valid in 1946 as they had been twenty years before, when the song was written.

The aftermath of the war was not, however, destined to remain peaceful for long and the Middle East was soon to live up to its age old reputation for instability. In both Persia and Iraq the opening months of 1946 saw the resurgence of political unrest. The USSR, less meticulous than her wartime allies – the United States and Britain – in honouring the agreement to withdraw troops from Persia, retained substantial forces in the northern part of the country for a considerable time after the departure of all British and American troops.

January 1946 saw the fall of the Persian Government and Casam-al-Saltaneh was elected Prime Minister by the narrow margin of two votes. A powerful land owner in Northern Persia, he had pro-Russian leanings and a strong desire to come to terms with the USSR which, at this time, was camouflaging its retention of troops in the country with encouragement to the Communist inspired Tudeh party to pursue a violent anti-British policy, attacking in particular the alleged bad treatment of workers in the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. Little encouragement was needed to provoke strikes at various oil producing plants, and the action of the Government in settling one such strike by means of an ex-gratia payment was hailed as a notable victory for the workers, with the inevitable effect of exacerbating the situation. The Tudeh party, however, overreached itself and provoked Arab workers to such an extent that serious fighting broke out in July. Firm government action resulted in the arrest of twelve Tudeh leaders. But the effects of Russian encouragement to the Tudeh party were widespread and were felt in neighbouring Iraq where disaffection among the employees of the Iraq Petroleum Company resulted in a fourteen day strike at the Kirkuk oil installations in August.

Although these events were not in themselves unusual or particularly serious, they revealed the extent to which Communist ideology could influence the politically unstable countries of the Middle East. Already in Europe the problems of the cold war were being experienced and its extension through the Middle East to Africa and the Far East was now becoming apparent. That shrewd statesman Nuri-as-Said, the Prime Minister of Iraq, read the signs correctly as is shown by a decision at this time to change the policy for training the Iraq Army from that of a force suitable only for internal security duties to one fit for all forms of modern warfare.

Air Headquarters, Iraq watched the deteriorating political situation in the two countries with growing concern and consultations between the AOC and the British Ambassadors in Baghdad and Teheran were frequent. Safeguarding the lives and property of the many British

residents and oil technicians dotted throughout Persia and Iraq was naturally the first and most important consideration, and a number of plans were drawn up. In particular, the AOC and the Officer Commanding British Troops in Iraq (BTI) made arrangements to receive all British nationals from the Abadan oil fields into Shaibah and Basrah should the need arise. The various plans were completed and approved in London by July 1946. Plans, however, are of no value without at least minimum forces to ensure their success, and Iraq had been almost denuded of British forces – not a single operational RAF squadron, very few army personnel and a few frigates in the Persian Gulf. Even when backed by the considerable political influence of HMG these meagre forces were quite inadequate to give validity to plans to extricate British nationals safely from their widely dispersed locations. In July, therefore, the Admiralty instructed the Senior Naval Officer, Persian Gulf (SNOGP) to move up the Gulf to Abadan in the frigate *HMS Wildgoose* and to await the arrival of *HMS Norfolk*, a County class cruiser from the East Indies Fleet. An additional frigate was also sent to reinforce the Gulf squadron. Early in August, an Indian brigade was moved to Basrah to be on hand should the various evacuation plans have to be implemented. These naval and army moves caused considerable irritation to Persia who regarded this closing in of British forces at the head of the Persian Gulf as an unfriendly act.

In the meantime reinforcement of the RAF had not been overlooked, and the AOC's urgent need for some operational RAF presence in Iraq was met by the arrival of 249 Squadron at Habbaniya at the end of June 1946, at the moment when his plans for safeguarding British interests were nearing completion. The original 249 Squadron had been disbanded at Brindisi on 18 August 1945, having had a distinguished record as a fighter squadron in both the United Kingdom and the Middle East. It was reformed at Nairobi (Eastleigh) on 23 October 1945, by renumbering 500 Squadron which was at that time equipped with Baltimores. The renumbered squadron was equipped with Mosquito FB26 aircraft during the next few months and was fully operational with its new aircraft by the time it moved to Habbaniya in June 1946. It familiarised itself with the new conditions by intensive exercises with the RAF Armoured Car Companies but, unfortunately, the climate of Iraq again took its toll of the wooden Mosquito as had previously been the case with the detachment of 680 Squadron. The intense heat of July and August, combined with the dryness of the atmosphere produced shrinkage and other technical problems which proved to be beyond the skill and resourcefulness of 249's fitters and riggers, with the unhappy result that the Squadron had to be grounded at the end of August. Blame for the failure of the Mosquito to tolerate the extreme conditions of Iraq should not be attributed to its constructors. It was, after all, an aircraft designed and built in record time, intended to save precious steel during the wartime emergency, with an outstanding record of performance in

European conditions. It was not, however, designed for long life and it was only its availability in large numbers after the war which dictated deployment to areas for which its construction was unsuitable. No 249 Squadron remained at Habbaniya with its ground staff intact until the Tempest FVI, in the fighter bomber role, was selected as its new equipment and the Squadron was able to resume flying during January 1947.

AHQ Iraq thus enjoyed ownership of an operational squadron for a few months only before 249 Squadron was grounded and, for the last quarter of 1946, was again thrown back upon reinforcement from elsewhere in Middle East Command should the need arise. Fortunately the need did not arise and the end of the year saw further reductions possible among administrative and technical units, bringing the RAF in Iraq down to a size which was much more realistic in relation to its peacetime responsibilities: personnel strength at this time dropped to 12,281 little more than half the end of war figure some eighteen months earlier. The number of stations had declined from ten to four main stations, namely, Habbaniya, Shaibah, Bahrein and Sharjah, with Basrah as a satellite airfield to Shaibah. No 1 Armoured Car Company had been transferred to Palestine, under the command of AHQ Levant where it was considered to be more urgently needed to deal with the difficult Palestine situation. No 30 Movements Control Unit was closed down at Baghdad and the handling and shipment of RAF stores was transferred to a civilian contractor.

Air Vice-Marshal Stafford had supervised the transition of his command from war to peace – a most difficult period of reorganisation and reduction, accompanied by manpower shortages and administrative crises. Fortunately the internal situation in both Persia and Iraq had called for no active military intervention, but there was no doubt that the New Year of 1947 showed political strife and internal dissension arising again in both countries and the quiet aftermath of World War II seemed to be coming to an end. Before following the fortunes of AHQ Iraq into 1947, it is appropriate to see how other RAF formations in the Arabian Peninsula and East Africa had fared during the same period.

Aden

In Aden, Air Vice-Marshal H T Lydford CBE AFC had assumed command of Headquarters, British Forces, Aden just before VE Day, and the autumn of 1945 found this area almost as devoid of operational units as that of AHQ Iraq. Only 621 (GR) Squadron (Wellingtons) remained at Khormaksar, for surveillance of the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea. Small detachments and units, mainly of an administrative nature, were located on Socotra Island, at Hargeisa in British Somaliland, on Kamaran Island in the Red Sea and at Addis Ababa. Aden Colony and the Protectorates were quiet, as they had been apart from the occasional tribal feud throughout the war.

The whole of the Arabian Peninsula and its environs seemed to be in

limbo as 1945 drew to its close. The world war had passed through it, over it and by it, leaving it virtually unscathed but somewhat breathless. It was, as we shall see, soon to recover its breath and to resume the intrigues, rivalries and general instability which seem inseparable from that part of the world.

These last few months of 1945 posed for the AOC problems similar to those of his colleagues elsewhere in the Middle East Command. The repatriation of personnel, closing down of units and reorganisation to meet peacetime requirements were the tasks which fully occupied him and his staff at Steamer Point, Aden. These tasks were complicated by the nature and extent of the Aden Command. Since 1928, when the principle of 'Air Control' was decided upon as the most economical and appropriate method of supporting the administration of Aden Colony and the Western and Eastern Protectorates, the AOC had commanded all British forces there. He was in consequence, concerned with the postwar problems, not only of the Royal Air Force, but of a considerable number of British and Indian personnel, and a handful of naval personnel who manned a number of RN base facilities. The Command was also extensive, stretching along the South Arabian coast for some 1000 miles as far as Muscat and including RAF stations at Riyan, Salalah and on the islands of Masirah and Socotra. Certain facilities in British Somaliland, Eritrea and Ethiopia remained, at least temporarily, under the AOC's jurisdiction. As far as the RAF was concerned, HQ British Forces, Aden, controlled some fourteen widely scattered stations and detachments, housing more than thirty units, the majority of which were of an administrative or technical nature. Aden, as in the case of the remainder of the Middle East area, had been denuded of operational squadrons and 621 Squadron, was for a short period the only operational squadron left in the Command.

Formed at Port Reitz in East Africa on 12 September 1943, 621 Squadron was originally equipped with sixteen Wellington XIII aircraft and was tasked to provide general reconnaissance in the Indian Ocean, operating when necessary from a series of widely dispersed airfields. As, however, a high proportion of the Squadron's operations took place in the focal areas of shipping around Somaliland and in the Gulf of Aden, Khormaksar became its new home in December 1943. Under the command of Wing Commander F T Gardiner DFC, the Squadron was kept busy with a multitude of maritime surveillance and rescue duties until the end of the war, operating from Socotra and Scuiscuibau in addition to Aden. Early in 1945 the Wellington XIII aircraft were largely replaced by Mark XIVs which were fitted with the Leigh Light for ship and submarine spotting at night. This device had proved successful in the Atlantic and the new aircraft considerably increased the capability of 621 Squadron. With the end of the war the Squadron was reduced from sixteen to eight aircraft and the surplus airmen and aircrew were distributed throughout the Middle East Command.

It was about this time that the shortage of transport aircraft to undertake the immense task of redistributing and repatriating Service personnel made it necessary to use the capacity and range of maritime aircraft to assist the transport fleet. To 621 Squadron fell the task of assisting the hard pressed Communications Flight at Khormaksar with routine flights between Aden and the stations on the route to the Persian Gulf. Even an occasional long range VIP flight to destinations such as Karachi was undertaken and doubtless provided a welcome diversion to a squadron whose specialised maritime skills seemed no longer to be in much demand. However, 621 Squadron's connection with Aden was soon to end as, in October 1945, orders came to move to Mersa Matruh where the Squadron lost its Wellingtons and its general reconnaissance role, and was re-equipped with Warwicks in the Air/Sea Rescue role, to take over the duties of a South African Air Force squadron due to return home.

During the Squadron's stay in Aden, its records reveal an interesting piece of initiative, namely the introduction of discussion groups to debate general topics of the day. All ranks participated and discussed a wide variety of subjects, such as housing, the falling birth rate, the school leaving age, the woman's place and the colour bar. After discussing the advantages and disadvantages of a career in the RAF on one occasion, the Squadron personnel came down heavily against it!

The peacetime RAF tasks were likely to be more concerned with the land areas of the Arabian Peninsula than with maritime surveillance, and it was appropriate to substitute a light bomber/general purpose type of aircraft for the specialised maritime reconnaissance Wellingtons of 621 Squadron. When 621 Squadron moved up to Mersa Matruh in October 1945, its place was taken by 114 Squadron, a light bomber squadron equipped with Boston IV and V aircraft, which had operated in Italy during the closing stages of the war in Europe. With the war over and with the sources of spares for American aircraft beginning to dry up, it was clearly neither economic nor far sighted to begin to stock Aden with spares and equipment for Bostons which, in any case, had already seen several years of rugged service in the Middle East and were showing signs of operational 'old age'. As the disbandment of squadrons elsewhere was throwing up surplus British aircraft and spares in considerable quantity, it was decided to re-equip 114 Squadron with the Mosquito VI as soon as possible after its deployment to Khormaksar. Aden was thus furnished, by November 1945, with an operational squadron having a general purpose role in keeping with the peacetime tasks which were likely to be forthcoming.

Fortunately for Britain in general, and for the RAF in particular, the Aden scene had remained relatively quiet and peaceful during the war, and this was to continue, with minor exceptions in the form of habitual tribal skirmishes, for a short time to come. The peace between Aden Colony and its Protectorates on the one hand, and the Yemen on the

other was, however, fragile in the extreme. Britain had always maintained that the Yemen, as the successor State of the Ottoman Empire, should accept the frontier with the Western Aden Protectorate which was agreed in the Anglo-Turkish Convention of 1914. The Yemen, however, refused to accept the validity of the Convention and claimed large sections of the Protectorate. Nevertheless, by a treaty of 11 February 1934, the frontier existing at that time was stabilised pending a final decision.* This treaty had been sufficiently stable to keep the two countries friendly while the world was preoccupied with more important differences of opinion.

For a while it looked as if tribal peace might continue, particularly when, in October 1945, Sultan Abdul Hussein, the Naib of the Fadhli State assisted by various sheikhs and an Assistant Political Officer managed to negotiate a three year truce between the Meiseri, Hassani and Dathina tribes on the one hand, and the Markashi, Billeili and Nakhai tribes of the Fadhli on the other. One year truces were also negotiated between the various Fadhli tribes. This was probably the first time that these warlike tribes had ever been at peace† and much goodwill was evident: the RAF was warmly thanked for the not inconsiderable part played by its personnel and units, notably the Armoured Car Squadron and a number of staff officers who escorted the negotiators.

The period of tribal peace which followed the signing of these agreements coincided, most unusually, with a period of unrest among RAF and other Service personnel in Aden. In general the reasons were the same as those which affected nearly all Service men and women who were overseas during the months following the end of hostilities: the effect of the unrest on the RAF in Iraq has already been described. Like Iraq, Aden was a particularly uncomfortable station and it is very noticeable that the degree of dissatisfaction throughout overseas stations was proportionate to the distance from the United Kingdom and the degree of discomfort suffered by the airmen. A particular complaint from Aden was the firm impression that priority for release from the Services was being given to the Navy and Army at the expense of the RAF. That this was a correct impression was admitted by HMG, the reason given being the need to use the RAF fully to redistribute Servicemen and equipment by air owing to the serious shortage of merchant shipping resulting from the heavy wartime losses. Logical and understandable though this reasoning might be, it could hardly be expected to appeal to airmen forced to endure the discomforts of Aden, Riyan, Salalah and Masirah, in many cases long after their normal tours of duty had been completed, and with little active operational work to occupy them. The AOC was very conscious of the depth of feeling among his airmen, and sympathetic towards those who had genuine

*Foreign Office memorandum dated 27 March 1944 – 'British Policy in the Middle East'.

†'HQBF Aden Operations Record Book', October 1945.

worries about their future prospects when released from service. He went to great lengths to represent these grievances fully and accurately to Middle East Command, and was able to give a full explanation of the problems which militated against quick release for all those who were due, or overdue, to leave the RAF. The explanation was contained in a long and interesting letter* sent out to all units by the AOC on 24 October 1945.

In this context of demobilisation, Aden played its part as an important staging post on the repatriation air route from the Far East. No 115 Wing of Transport Command was transferred in October 1945 from Khartoum to Sheikh Othman for the specific purpose of supervising the South Arabian route using Masirah, Salalah, Riyan and Sheikh Othman for air trooping. This route was surveyed for its suitability for use by Transport Command aircraft by a party from HQ 216 Group in Middle East Command and formed an important part of the world wide trunk route system which Transport Command began to build up for peacetime use. Used initially for repatriation purposes, the system eventually developed into a vital element of the rapid reinforcement policy which became one of the pillars of Britain's postwar strategy. Until the withdrawal from Aden in the late 1960s, Sheikh Othman and later Khormaksar were key airfields on the trunk route system.

The work of reducing the administrative and technical elements of the Command in step with the reduction of personnel, and return to a peacetime role occupied much of the time of the Headquarters. The primitive airfield on Socotra Island in the Gulf of Aden was closed down, never to be used again except in emergency. The 'route stations', the title commonly given to Riyan, Salalah and Masirah remained in being, each manned by a small complement of some fifty to sixty airmen under the command of a junior officer. Each station had a balanced establishment of tradesmen suitable to handle the small but significant flow of aircraft which used the South Arabian route. They also provided the essential communications and navigational links around the periphery of the Rub-al-Khali – well named 'the empty quarter' which stretches for 1,000 miles between the coast of South Arabia and the upper part of the Persian Gulf.

In Aden itself, it was decided to concentrate control of most of the supporting units and sections under a predominantly administrative station at Steamer Point where Headquarters, British Forces was itself located, on Barrack Hill. It is of some interest that RAF Steamer Point was to become eventually a command appointment for a group captain of the Secretarial Branch, one of the most senior and important appointments to be held by that Branch and a training ground for a number of secretarial officers who were eventually to rise to the top of the Branch. Further reductions affected by the Air/Sea Rescue organisation which,

*Personal letter from the AOC, ADEN/901/P dated 24 October 1945.

as in the Persian Gulf, had played an important and complementary role to the work of the general reconnaissance aircraft in the theatre in safeguarding the vital sea route for supplies to Russia via the Gulf, as well as protecting the focal points at the exit from the Red Sea into the Gulf of Aden. These narrow and congested waters where many routes vital to the Allied cause had converged were now free from the attentions of German and Japanese submarines and, with the departure of 621 Squadron from the area, the ground organisation could be simplified. Simplification took the form of disestablishing 214, 215, 216 and 220 Air/Sea Rescue Units and forming in their place one marine craft unit at Aden with small detachments operating from Masirah, Salalah and Mukalla.

Sheikh Othman, which had for some years been a self accounting RAF station although only some five miles, as the kitchhawk flies, from Khormaksar, was reduced in status to that of a satellite to Khormaksar. Despite these and other reductions and economies, and despite the airmen's complaints about the tardiness of their release from the Service, 1945 drew to a close with severe manning shortages which affected all trades to a varying degree, but which was particularly felt by the signals organisation, necessitating the temporary closure or reduction of a number of communications facilities.

1946 was but a few days old when the habitual tribal hostilities began to erupt again: on this occasion the region of the Subeihi tribes in the Western Aden Protectorate was the scene of the dissidence. The western Subeihi had consistently disregarded the terms of a truce which had been negotiated in May 1945, and it was decided to send a punitive column out from Aden. The small force comprised RAF armoured cars, Aden Protectorate Levies, Government Guards and Lahej trained forces with instructions to penetrate the disaffected area, arrest the mal-factors and to instal a settled administration under the aegis of HM the Sultan of Lahej, in whose territory the trouble arose. On this occasion the tribesmen were overawed by the strength of the force and capitulated without fighting. A number of fortified village towers were destroyed by the troops, fines were levied and some of the ringleaders imprisoned: these were the customary types of punishment for such dissidence, involving some material hardship but no loss of life. This small operation was notable for the fact that it provided an opportunity for the first operational flight by 114 Squadron with its new Mosquitos. With guns loaded, but carrying no bombs, demonstration flights of three aircraft supported the ground forces as they entered the operational area.

In February a more serious incident occurred in the region of the Dathina tribe, whose weakness had always encouraged the depredations of its neighbours. The Assistant Political Officer of Dathina was ambushed and injured although escorted by twenty Government Guards. A party sent to his relief was also attacked and two of the guards

were killed. Within six days of the incident, on 21 February, a flag march through the area was organised using a considerable force of Indian infantry, armoured cars, two rifle squadrons of the Aden Protectorate Levies and a 3-inch mortar section. This force was supported by 114 Squadron who were not called upon to open fire. The operation was completed by 1 March and, as usual, fortified village towers were destroyed and a fine of money and rifles levied upon the dissidents.

These two small operations have been described as being typical of the work which the British forces in Aden were constantly called upon to carry out in the Protectorates. Very little effort had been made over the years to drive roads and communications into the Protectorates, and no 'peaceful penetration', such as that practised on the North West Frontier of India before independence had been introduced into Aden. Although a few rough roads and tracks had been constructed by the time Aden was giving up in 1967, the Western Aden Protectorate, in particular, remained a pretty impenetrable haven for dissidents, a situation which enabled the great versatility and economy of air power to be demonstrated.

Elsewhere in the command, reduction to a peacetime basis continued and gradually the difficult manning situation improved. Disbandment of the Aden Telecommunications Centre, and the assumption of its responsibilities by Khormaksar in April came as a particularly welcome relief to the signals organisation which had suffered greatly from the manpower shortage. Bearing in mind that the general introduction of air conditioning was yet to come, watchkeeping duties on telephone switchboards, receivers and transmitters, cypher offices and message distribution centres were extremely arduous in the stifling climate of Aden, and any shortage of watchkeeping personnel bore particularly severely on those who were available.

The route stations

A significant change took place at this time in the organisation of the 'route stations' along the South Arabian coast, namely Riyan, Salalah and Masirah. The flow of large Transport Command aircraft which, for months, had been repatriating and redistributing servicemen began to slacken and the need to maintain sizeable staging facilities at these three stations decreased. The story of these tiny, isolated desert airfields is worthy of a separate book as they have played a significant part through the whole period of RAF activity in the Arabian Peninsula. Two of them, Masirah and Salalah have remained active to this day, long after the RAF has departed from its bases and stations elsewhere in the region.

Masirah and Salalah are both in the territory of the Sultan of Muscat and Oman, the former occupying the northern tip of the island of Masirah situated in the Arabian Sea a few miles off the coast of Northern

Oman, and the latter on the mainland in Southern Oman. Riyan, on the other hand, lies within the East Aden Protectorate, close to the port of Mukalla.

Masirah is the largest of the route stations and has been mainly used as a staging post, strategically positioned as it is at the crossing of two routes to the Far East, one through Turkey, Iran and the Persian Gulf to Gan and Singapore, and the other through Khartoum, Aden and on to Karachi, India and so to the Far East. The latter route, with its shorter stages, has been invaluable for ferrying single engined, short range aircraft. Operationally, Masirah has occasionally played its part in support of the Sultan's forces in Oman territory, particularly as a refuelling and rearming point for aircraft based at Sharjah and Bahrein but carrying out reconnaissance and strikes in the Muscat area. Until the late 1960s the two runways at Masirah were prepared natural surface runways of about 2,000 yards length with excellent open approaches: satisfactory for most aircraft except when waterlogged after heavy rain. The maintenance of the natural surface was, however, a perpetual and costly problem as each landing and take off tended to remove large quantities of top surface which then had to be replaced.

All heavy stores, fuel, ammunition and bombs could reach Masirah only by sea during the fair weather period from about October to March: they then had to be handled over a primitive jetty and a miniature railway system to reach the station situated several miles inland. Every drop of drinking water had to be desalinated and fresh food and vegetables flown in from Aden by a periodic 'mail run' which also brought in replacement personnel, urgently needed spares and medical needs.

Although less isolated to the extent that they were on the mainland Salalah and Riyan were equally primitive. The same layout of natural surfaced runways made them suitable for most aircraft with care, but damage from flying stones was something of a hazard at Riyan, and several tons of top surface were alleged to be blown off every time a large aircraft took off from Salalah. The advent of jet aircraft greatly increased this erosion and, during periods of intensive operations, it became almost impossible to keep these small airfields permanently serviceable. Fortunately the normal flow of traffic was light, rarely exceeding a dozen aircraft a week, and then there were no great problems in maintaining the airfield surfaces.

Despite the fact that Salalah and Riyan were on the mainland, they could not be supplied overland from Aden and all heavy stores were transported by sea, often in LSTs operated by the Army.

The decrease in the immediate postwar repatriation of personnel along the South Arabian route, together with the serious manpower shortages in his Command, caused the AOC to reduce the three route stations to a care and maintenance basis in April 1946. The sole function of the care and maintenance parties, each comprising one junior

officer, ten airmen and nineteen civilians, was stated to be the care of the buildings and the reception of the aircraft which took in supplies or which needed to use the airfields in emergency, with the addition of any small services which BOAC might require. The AOC laid down that no airman should serve at a route station for more than six months, the remainder of his tour normally being completed at Khormaksar which provided the basic administration and accounting for the three stations.

Opinions about service at the route stations varied. For some it was an opportunity to save money, to experience an unusual degree of independence, to pursue interests and hobbies – even to study. For others it meant separation, loneliness and some hardship. On balance, however, these small units provided unique opportunities to develop leadership and initiative and to give experience in conditions of service which were rapidly disappearing from RAF life as Britain's world wide commitments were reduced.

Further policy direction

A most important conference on future policy in the Middle East was called by the Air Commander-in-Chief at Headquarters MEDME on 24 April 1946: it was attended by all senior commanders and staff officers in the Command, including the AOC from Aden.

The main theme of this conference was concerned with the effect on MEDME of a decision which had been taken to carry out an extremely rapid reduction in the size of the Royal Air Force: this involved reducing personnel strength from eight hundred and twenty thousand at the beginning of January 1946 to three hundred and five thousand by the end of the year. This was clearly a formidable task if stations and units were to be closed or disbanded efficiently and if the mass of surplus aircraft, vehicles and equipment of all kinds was to be sold or passed on to other countries in respectable condition. For example, MEDME alone was asked to prepare more than eight hundred surplus aircraft for sale to foreign buyers, a task which, in fact, proved impossible to achieve – and all this in addition to operating its own squadrons and units effectively.

The Air Commander-in-Chief indicated to his commanders how they could best contribute to the implementation of this pronouncement of policy from Whitehall. He directed that all small and non-essential units should be closed down as soon as possible; that a number of squadrons should be reduced to cadre establishments; that flying units should take on unaccustomed but nevertheless interesting work, such as meteorological flights and transport work; that as many tradesmen as possible should be used to prepare surplus aircraft and equipment for sale. Finally, he asked that every endeavour should be made to maintain the interest of the airmen by employing them on varied and unusual tasks during what would obviously be a difficult and unsatisfying period.

The effect of these new directives on Aden was to accelerate the tempo of reorganisation which had been proceeding for months past. The first unit to feel the resharpened axe was 1566 Meteorological Flight at Khormaksar; its disbandment on 30 April saw the end of the Spitfire flights from the airfield from which they had been sampling the upper air conditions for many months. No 114 Squadron was reduced to cadre establishment at about the same time in spite of the fact that its Mosquitos were the only operational aircraft available to the AOC at a time when the Western Aden Protectorate was showing signs of tribal unrest. Sufficient aircraft and personnel were, however, retained to provide a modest degree of air support should it be needed.

In May the RAF station at Asmara in Eritrea was closed down and handed over to civil control as BOAC was still interested in its use. Further reductions in the aircraft safety organisation took place, reflecting the decrease in air trooping and aircraft movements generally in the South Arabian area. A small Air Traffic Control Centre, Southern Arabia, was formed at Steamer Point and took over the duties from the disbanded Aircraft Safety Centre and the Area Control Centre.

The last six months of 1946 saw very little operational activity, and 114 Squadron was required to mount demonstrations and show the flag on very few occasions, which was all to the good in view of the reduction of the Squadron to a cadre basis. Towards the end of the year it was, however, decided to reconnoitre and improve if possible, the overland route to Beihan in the Western Aden Protectorate. Beyond Dhala there was no road usable by wheeled vehicles up to the Hadhina plateau. If such a road could be constructed, it would open up a route from Aden to Beihan and thence on to the Hadramaut. This important road link was successfully constructed, not without some tribal opposition, and the expedition achieved all that it set out to do. Some forty-five hours of air cover were provided by the Mosquitos and the ground force received daily air drops of food and other necessities mainly from the Albacores of the Communications Flight at Khormaksar. The task was finished and the small force returned to Aden on Christmas Day. Although some sort of road fit for wheeled vehicles had been completed, the hostility of the tribes along its length made it totally unsafe for unescorted travel. However, a start had been made on opening up this wild and unruly area to trade, and the new section of road – or track to be more accurate – would certainly facilitate the future movement of troops when called upon to settle the tribal disputes which were inseparable from life in the Protectorate.

This particular operation was notable in that the Mosquitos which provided the air cover were operating for the first time as 8 Squadron. As part of the postwar reorganisation of squadrons, 114 Squadron changed its number plate to that of 8 Squadron in September, retaining its aircraft and personnel and remaining at Khormaksar. No 8 Squadron had always been closely associated with Aden and was now to com-

mence yet another long and distinguished tour which was to last until Britain's final departure.

No 8 Squadron was originally formed in the Royal Flying Corps in 1915 and had a fine record in France in World War I, followed by service in Mesopotamia before moving to Aden in 1927. It remained at Khormaksar until after VE Day in 1945 equipped with Wellingtons in the general reconnaissance role. On 15 May 1945, the Squadron was disbanded in Aden and its number plate transferred to 200 Squadron (Liberators) at Jessore in India. This started an entirely new episode for 8 Squadron as a special duties squadron engaged mainly in dropping supplies to clandestine agents in Burma, Siam and French Indo-China. Later, from Ceylon, it continued its cloak and dagger operations but chiefly over Malaya and Sumatra. These activities did not cease with the defeat of Japan and the Squadron continued to carry out many special tasks in the Far East until it was disbanded in November 1945. Its number plate was held in reserve for a brief period of eight months until, as described earlier, it was transferred to the Mosquito squadron in its old home at Khormaksar. No 8 Squadron thus came home to Aden after an absence of only one year and four months.

1946 ended quietly in Aden with the return of the road building party from Dhala on Christmas Day. Although the shortage of manpower was still causing many difficulties, as indeed it was in every theatre the level of operational activity was fortunately low and reorganisation of the Command for its peacetime role was almost complete. The RAF had taken over many of the administrative responsibilities from the Army, 8 Squadron had returned home and Air Vice-Marshal Lydford, who had been in command since before the end of the war, could feel justifiable satisfaction in having seen Aden through the aftermath of war and surmounted the many problems which had faced his particular area of the Middle East.

East Africa

The primary role of the East African territories during World War II had been that of a base from which British aircraft and naval units had carried on the war against German and Japanese shipping in the Indian Ocean, and protected the supply route round the Cape to the Middle East and to Russia via the Persian Gulf. On land the East African scene had been inactive and had shown little of the signs of restlessness and movement towards independence which were soon to appear.

Air Headquarters East Africa, located at Nairobi, not only controlled the East African High Commission territories of Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika but also a large area of the western Indian Ocean where a number of island bases and staging posts had been established at various times during the war. The Air Officer Commanding, East Africa, had been, during the closing months of the war, Brigadier H G Willmott OBE, of the South African Air Force. That this command was held by a

South African officer is an indication, not only of the close ties between the South African Air Force and the Royal Air Force during the war years, but also of the importance of maintaining a closely co-ordinated operational organisation along the whole length of the East African seaboard, from the Cape to the Gulf of Aden. One of the Brigadier's last tasks in East Africa was supervision of the disbandment of two of his command's three flying boat squadrons – 259 and 265, and transfer of the third, 209 Squadron, to Ceylon. To quote a somewhat heartfelt phrase from the Operations Record Book of July 1945 – “with the flying boats went the last semblance of operational activity in East Africa.”

This sweeping removal of operational units left the Command with a personnel strength of only 2,286, scattered over a large area in small units and detachments. Brigadier Willmott made a start on reducing his organisation and it was a slightly more compact command which Air Commodore SHC Gray OBE took over on 29 September 1945. Brigadier Willmott returned to South Africa and must surely be the last officer from his country to hold the appointment of a Royal Air Force AOC. Thus began the end of an era of collaboration between the South African and Rhodesian Air Forces and the Royal Air Force, an end which was unhappily brought about by subsequent political developments in the African continent.

Air Commodore Gray thus inherited a command containing a photographic reconnaissance flight of Baltimores at Eastleigh, but no operational squadron, and a task which largely consisted of repatriating tour expired personnel and continuing with the reduction and reshaping of his support units which had been started by his predecessor. However, East Africa was not to remain for long without a squadron, as the Baltimores were given the number plate of 249 Squadron, recently disbanded at Brindisi, and the new squadron was officially formed at Eastleigh on 23 October 1945, and given responsibility for all photographic tasks in East Africa. This involved a considerable commitment to survey large areas of Tanganyika, Kenya, Uganda and Somaliland in conformity with British policy world wide to bring up-to-date survey and topographical information which had lapsed during the war, and which could conveniently be undertaken while wartime aircraft were still available, and while occupation of suitable bases continued. As the Baltimore was an American aircraft obtained under lend/lease terms, it was clear that 249 Squadron's equipment would soon have to be returned to the United States, and the survey task was accelerated in an endeavour to complete it while the Baltimore remained in service. Within a month of the formation of 249 Squadron, it was learned that it would be re-equipped in the fighter/bomber role with the Mosquito FB26.

The many small island bases scattered throughout the western Indian Ocean as well as the large East African land area covered by the Air Headquarters had necessitated a comprehensive air transport

service to provide for the needs of the personnel and aircraft. The more distant ocean bases had been supplied by Catalina and Sunderland flying boat, and the remainder by an assortment of landplanes, mainly Dakotas, Hudsons, Ansons and Albacores. By November 1945, redeployment had reached a point at which transport schedules could be replanned and substantially reduced. For many months, 216 Squadron which was based in the Middle East, had kept a detachment of its Dakotas at Eastleigh. This detachment was withdrawn and a limited number of Dakota schedules continued to be flown and controlled direct from HQ 216 Group in the Canal Zone. The East African Communications Flight, which temporarily moved from Eastleigh to the newly opened Nairobi civil airport to allow the main runway at Eastleigh to be improved for York aircraft, reorganised its schedule of flights to Dar-es-Salaam, Kusaka, Kisumu and other airfields on the mainland. Finally, the Catalina Ferry Flight at Mombasa was strengthened with three new Catalina Mk IVB boats and programmed for essential flights to the remaining island bases. A number of these bases in French territory, such as Pamanzi in Madagascar and Diego Suarez, were handed back to the French authorities, and much of the communications equipment and spares sold to the French. The ex-French bases had proved invaluable during the anti-shipping and submarine campaign, but there was no longer any good reason to retain them, particularly as the French had expressed a strong wish to have them returned.

By the end of 1945 the strength of the Command had dropped to 1,490 personnel which represented a reduction of 35% in five months. Shortages of manpower, particularly in certain trades, were being keenly felt and the AOC issued orders that no repatriation was to take place without his personal authority. Nevertheless, the disbandment of units had been carried out with such rapidity, that the manpower shortages in those remaining were not being felt at that time quite so keenly as in Aden and Iraq.

The whole of 1946 was peaceful and provided the much needed opportunity to complete the rundown of wartime units which were no longer needed, to refurbish and dispose of surplus aircraft and equipment, and to complete the redistribution of personnel. The administrative organisations for embarkation and disembarkation, for anti-mosquito and anti-malaria control and for equipment holding were all put on to a more streamlined basis; the last of the meteorological units, 1414 Meteorological Flight at Eastleigh, was disbanded in May 1946, and its Spitfires scrapped and, finally, the Catalina Ferry Flight which had done splendid work among the island bases was disestablished at the moment when the two RAF stations in Mauritius and the Seychelles closed down and no longer needed to be supplied by flying boat.

The move which perhaps gave the greatest cause for regret to Air Headquarters was the very rapidly executed decision to transfer 249 Squadron from Eastleigh to Habbaniya in Iraq, in June. The Squadron had

become operational on its new Mosquitos within a few months of losing the Baltimores and Eastleigh had been reorganised to ensure that these somewhat sensitive aircraft were kept under cover and not dispersed around the perimeter of the airfield. However, it was abundantly clear that East Africa looked like offering very little employment to a light bomber squadron, whereas there were political stirrings in Iraq and Persia which might, at any time, need the deterrent influence, if not the active intervention, of a resident squadron.

Before the end of the year Air Commodore N A P Pritchett took over the command from Air Commodore Gray who departed for further education at the Imperial Defence College, having supervised a remarkably rapid and very efficient reduction of the Command. As he departed, the strength of AHQ East Africa was only 651 personnel, little more than a quarter of its size when he has assumed command some eighteen months earlier.

Conclusion

The aftermath of any great event brings a period of anti-climax. The eighteen months following the end of World War II was just such a period and the effect on most RAF men and women was that of relief but, at the same time, of emptiness, reminiscent of the day in November 1932 when walking sticks were discontinued as an item of RAF officers' uniform. Officers were at a loss to know what to do with the left hand which had always firmly and reassuringly grasped a walking stick. They were frequently seen on parade with the left hand in the trousers pocket and, for many months, that left hand was a source of great embarrassment. Accustomed to the rough and tumble of a busy wartime life, the RAF in 1945 suddenly found itself with no operational activity and only humdrum administrative chores to occupy its time. Top buttons had to be fastened again, wires in caps bent straight, shoes worn instead of flying boots and even mess kit began to reappear. The proportion of regulars whose careers still lay in the Service was minute, probably less than one in ten of the RAF at VJ Day. It was small wonder, therefore, that a great restlessness and desire for release pervaded the Service as soon as the war was over. It speaks highly for the leadership of senior officers and NCOs that the rundown to the position at the end of 1946 was achieved as efficiently as it was.

By that time, Iraq, Aden and East Africa had stabilised at a size and deployment which matched the peacetime tasks visualised in those regions of the Middle East Command. The end of 1946 is, therefore, an opportune moment to select as the conclusion of this period of anti-climax which we have chosen to call the aftermath of war.

Command organisation

The period between 1945 and 1972, which is covered by this narrative, saw many changes in the structure of Royal Air Force command in the Middle East. These changes were necessitated partly by the political developments in the area such as that which led to British withdrawal from Egypt followed by nationalisation of the Suez Canal, and partly by the postwar evolution of defence policy in Whitehall which was influenced by lessons learned during the war.

Many of these lessons had resulted in a closer association, or 'interdependence' of the three Services in the fields of operations, administration and logistics, and it was appropriate that the 'interdependence' should be reflected in the postwar structure of command. Thus Britain's unified defence policy which was developed during the 1950s resulted in the Middle East being selected as the most suitable theatre for the first unified command, which was formed in Aden in 1959. The new spirit of 'interdependence' affected not only the relations between Britain's own Services, but also the relations with Britain's allies within the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the Baghdad Pact (later the Central Treaty Organisation). Within these international defence pacts, Britain had to participate in a number of allied commands in the Middle East theatre in addition to maintaining her own national structure.

All these developments produced a most confusing and complicated picture and this chapter is designed to unravel the RAF command structure from the tangled mass of British and Allied formation headquarters which took shape in the Middle East after the war. Reference back to this chapter will help to clarify succeeding parts of the narrative and avoid repetitive descriptions of the higher command organisation. No longer was the simple system of dividing the RAF into regional or territorial commands overseas and functional commands at home adequate, and the postwar requirement for inter-Service and inter-Allied co-operation necessitated a more sophisticated structure.

We have already seen that, during the closing years of the war, all Allied air forces in, and around the Mediterranean were controlled by Headquarters, Mediterranean Allied Air Forces under the command of a United States officer, with a Royal Air Force deputy. On 1 August, within a few months of VE Day, this very successful Allied command was disbanded and from it was formed Headquarters, RAF

Mediterranean and Middle East (MEDME)* at the same location in Italy, namely Caserta, retaining a rear headquarters at Algiers. This was intended as a temporary arrangement until a more permanent peacetime system could be evolved.

On 14 September the rear headquarters was moved from Algiers to Cairo, to be followed on 16 October by the main headquarters from Caserta. Air Marshal Sir Charles Medhurst, who had, until then, commanded Headquarters, RAF Middle East, in Cairo, disbanded his old command and took over the new HQ MEDME. He controlled his forces through a number of subordinate headquarters and the area covered comprised "the central Mediterranean, North Africa, the Middle East, Levant, Iraq, the Sudan, Aden and East Africa", to quote from the Air Ministry Organisation Memorandum of the day.† The first step towards establishing an appropriate peacetime Royal Air Force organisation had been taken. Although it was apparent that air force commitments in the Middle East would not for long justify the continuation of the many air headquarters and groups which were a wartime legacy, nevertheless the formidable task of clearing up the debris of war necessitated a top hamper of this magnitude at least initially.

The traditional RAF chain of responsibility from a command headquarters through a number of subordinate formations to stations and thence to squadrons had proved highly successful and adaptable in war, and it had the great merit that it could be expanded or contracted to meet changing circumstances by adding or subtracting squadrons, stations and groups without affecting the basis of the organisation. The Middle East seemed to be admirably suited to this system of delegated authority. It comprised a number of regions, geographically compact and homogeneous, but differing widely in other respects. The problems of East Africa, for example, were as different from those of Iraq as were those of Palestine from Aden. The establishment of a subordinate headquarters to conform to each region was clearly a sound method whereby the C-in-C could delegate his authority, and it also ensured that each subordinate commander controlled a relatively compact area.

In the early days of its existence HQ MEDME contained no fewer than nine subordinate air headquarters, and four group headquarters – a spread of responsibility which most experts would regard as excessive, particularly bearing in mind that the area covered by the Command stretched from Northern Italy to Dar-es-Salaam, and from the Western Mediterranean to Persia. However, postwar reductions rapidly took effect and, by the end of 1946 the Command Headquarters had moved out of Cairo into the Canal Zone and was split between Ismailia and Abu Sueir. It had lost a number of subordinate headquarters and had

*Air Ministry Secret Organisation Memorandum 299/44

†Air Ministry Secret Organisation Memorandum 1778/45.

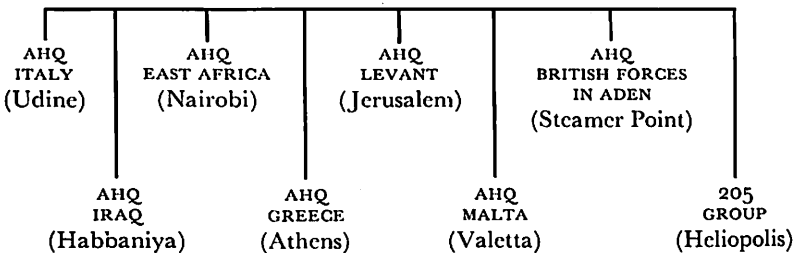
achieved the configuration shown in Figure 1. Even this was still a huge command for Air Marshal Medhurst, but at least it was fully decentralised, both regionally and functionally. The organisation worked well and remained basically unchanged for some years although more of the subordinate formations either disappeared or changed their titles or locations to match the steady rundown of the RAF in the Middle East. One major change took place on 1 June 1949, when the Command Headquarters was re-designated Headquarters, Middle East Air Force (MEAF) and the Air Commander was re-styled Commander-in-Chief, Middle East Air Force (C-in-C MEAF). The organisation remained unaffected by the change of title which was merely the result of an inter-Service tidying up in the overall British military position in the theatre.

Fig. 1

MIDDLE EAST COMMAND ORGANISATION

31 December 1946

**Headquarters RAF Mediterranean and Middle East
(Ismailia/Abu Sueir)**



Note: AHQ Italy was disbanded in January 1947, AHQ Greece in the following year and AHQ Levant in July 1948. AHQ East Africa survived until September 1951, when control of RAF units in the area passed to HQ British Forces in Aden. AHQ Malta became an independent formation under the Air Ministry in December 1953.

However, the status quo was not destined to be maintained for much longer, not because of any inadequacy in the command structure itself, but largely as a result of political developments which were to change Britain's responsibilities and commitments in the Middle East radically. The British military presence in the Suez Canal Zone had for long been a particular source of irritation to Egypt and, as the political pressure for the departure of British forces mounted, Ismailia and Abu Sueir became increasingly unsuitable and insecure as locations for a large headquarters with its static population of administrative personnel and their families, not to mention local employees of doubtful loyalty. In conformity with a decision to move the military base from the Canal Zone to Cyprus, HQ MEAF was transferred to Nicosia on

1 December 1954, a great relief not only from the riots and sabotage which had created considerable risk for everybody stationed along the Canal, but also from the parched, arid conditions in one of the least attractive areas of Egypt.

The departure from Egypt and the establishment in Cyprus of the command and control organisation for all British land and air forces in the theatre increased the separation of the forces located in the Mediterranean area from those south and east of the Suez Canal, a separation which was to be accentuated by the nationalisation of the Canal by Egypt, and the events of 1956 which resulted in the erection of a political barrier across the centre of the Middle East Command. Communications by land, sea and air between its northern and southern extremities became extremely difficult, and were virtually confined to a few circuitous air routes. The expression 'overflying rights' began to assume a much more serious meaning and many countries of the Middle East saw for the first time the political value of the air space above their territories when negotiating with the great Powers. This was a development which was to create many problems and difficulties for Britain in the years to come.

The transfer of British military forces from the Canal Zone to Cyprus and the subsequent difficulties of communication and travel rendered the organisation of regional air headquarters, each answerable to the command headquarters, unsatisfactory, and a regrouping of subordinate formations was introduced in 1955. A northern grouping under Air Headquarters Levant, which was transferred from Habbaniya to Nicosia, and replaced the disbanded Air Headquarters, Cyprus, assumed control of all RAF units in Iraq, Jordan, Cyprus and Libya. Similarly a southern grouping controlled by Headquarters, British Forces, Aden was established for units in Aden, the South Arabian coast, East Africa and the staging posts in the Persian Gulf. This new organisation settled down into the pattern shown in Figure II by the end of April 1956.

Although these two groupings remained under the direct control of HQ MEAF a much greater decentralisation of authority to the subordinate commanders in Aden and Cyprus was possible and reflected the increasing isolation of the two regions. For the next four years or so, the only significant change in this organisation was the move of the headquarters of the Command from Nicosia to Episkopi. Episkopi and the main RAF airfield nearby at Akrotiri were eventually to form the British sovereign base area, and this was clearly the logical place for MEAF Headquarters.

In spite of the decentralisation of a considerable measure of control of the units in the southern group to HQ British Forces, Aden, the increasing difficulty of communication between Aden and Cyprus made it almost impossible for HQ MEAF to oversee the southern units effectively. Visits by staff officers could only be undertaken by air over a

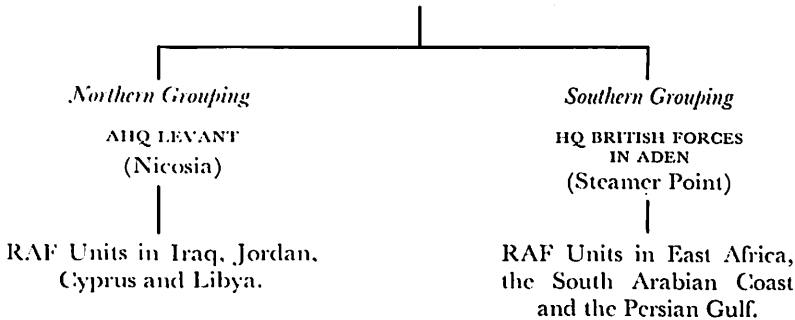
long and difficult route through Turkey, Iran and thence to the Persian Gulf and Aden. Stores, equipment and ammunition had to be supplied to the southern units via the Cape route from the United Kingdom: personnel had to be sent out from the UK by the best available route, and it became apparent that there was little or no point in this isolated part of the Middle East remaining under the jurisdiction of a headquarters located in Cyprus. Furthermore, in the event of war, or operations on any significant scale, the Commander-in-Chief would be placed in an invidious position in attempting to co-ordinate his wide-spread forces.

Fig. II

MIDDLE EAST COMMAND ORGANISATION

30 April 1956

**Headquarters Middle East Air Force
(Nicosia)**



Note: 205 Group was disbanded in Ismailia in April 1956. AHQ Levant (until May 1955, AHQ Iraq) moved to Nicosia in January, replacing the short lived AHQ Cyprus which had been formed in January 1954.

These considerations led to a number of evolutionary changes in the southern grouping during the next few years. On 6 October 1956, Headquarters British Forces, Aden was renamed Headquarters, British Forces, Arabian Peninsula, a title which reflected more accurately the wider responsibility of the Headquarters. It remained under the control of the Commander-in-Chief in Cyprus until 1 April 1958 when its isolation from the Mediterranean was finally recognised by the decision to make it responsible directly to the Chiefs of Staff. The Commander, British Forces Arabian Peninsula – at that time Air Vice-Marshal M L Heath CB CBE – remained a Royal Air Force appointment, being responsible to the Chiefs of Staff for his command in general, and to the Air Ministry for the RAF units allocated to him. Never again were British Forces in the Arabian Peninsula and East Africa to be commanded from the Mediterranean such was the effect of the closure of the Suez Canal and the erection of 'Nasser's barrier'.

Although this re-organisation was fundamental, it like others before was transitory and lasted little more than a year owing to a major reappraisal of defence policy which had been taking place in Whitehall. The tactics and weapons which had resulted from lessons learned during and after World War II had, as mentioned earlier, shown the interdependence of navies, armies and air forces. Almost all forms of operations required the participation of two, and usually all three, of the Services, and the designation 'combined operation' had grown from a small scale rarity to a universal description which accurately fitted most military actions. It stood to reason that this increasing interdependence in the field should be reflected in a closer association of the three Services in their organisation of high command. Experience in war with Supreme Commanders, in both Europe and South East Asia had proved the operational efficiency and the economy of overall theatre command by one senior commander, chosen from any Service, or indeed from any allied nation, for his experience and leadership. The attractions of 'unified command', as it became known, to politicians and government officials were great, conjuring up visions of immense economy and greater control of the military machine. Military leaders were not opposed to these developments, but they advocated caution in their adoption, and could visualise distinct limits to which the unification of Armed Forces could proceed in view of the highly specialised nature and complexity of modern weapons and equipment.

The creation of a centralised policy staff in the Ministry of Defence designed to serve in particular the newly established Chief of the Defence Staff paved the way for an experiment in unified command in the field. On 1 October 1959, the first British unified command came into being in Aden under the existing title 'Headquarters, British Forces, Arabian Peninsula'. At the time, the RAF element of the headquarters staff was entitled 'Air Forces, Arabian Peninsula'. Aden was a natural choice for this experiment. The situation in the Middle East had been giving increasing cause for concern since the deterioration of relations with Egypt and the worsening of Arab/Israeli relations. Britain had begun to reinforce her garrisons East of Suez and the headquarters at Aden was increasing rapidly in size and responsibility. It had for many years been a single inter-Service headquarters, and what was more natural than that it should be selected for the unified command experiment. Furthermore, since its isolation from the northern part of the Middle East it had been directly responsible to the Chiefs of Staff, and therefore, no intermediate headquarters stood in the way of the experiment.

The expressions 'integration' and 'unification' constantly crop up in discussion of command developments at this time, and it is as well to be clear as to their exact meaning in the military sense. An integrated command, if such a command were to be established, would comprise a single commander-in-chief with a staff in which an officer belonging to

one Service, say the Army, would be required to carry out his particular operational or administrative duties for the Navy and the RAF as well as for his own Service. Although this is feasible in certain fields of activity common to all the Services and is, indeed, practised to a limited extent, successive governments have been quick to allay justifiable Service fears by declaring in, for example, the 1962 White Paper on Defence, that they had no intention of fully integrating the Armed Forces.

A unified command is a less far reaching and certainly less controversial organisation, although not without its critics. A single commander-in-chief, who has his own small secretariat and joint planning and intelligence staffs, relies upon three subordinate commanders, one in direct command of each Service and each with his own single Service staff. A feature of this type of organisation is that it permits many administrative functions, which may be undertaken by one Service on an agency basis for the others, to be controlled by a single commander-in-chief. Storage, housing, rationing and the control of movement are typical of facilities which can be provided in this way with great economy and effectiveness. Although unification could be described as a step along the road towards integration, full integration is not regarded as a desirable or attainable goal for Britain's Armed Forces.

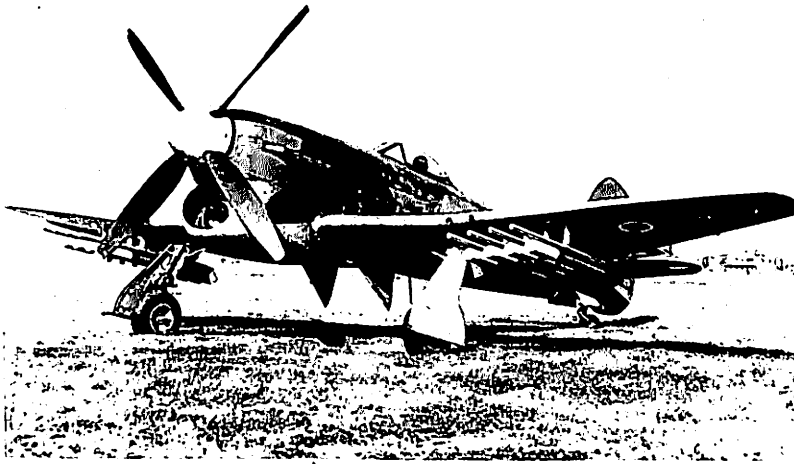
Since the decision made in 1928 to control Aden and its Protectorates predominantly by air power, the commander of the forces based on Aden had always been a Royal Air Force officer and the RAF provided the bulk of the administrative services. It was therefore decided that these precedents should be continued and the first Commander-in-Chief of the new unified Command was Air Chief Marshal Sir Hubert Patch KCB CBE, who took up the new appointment on 1 October 1959. Due to ill health, his tenure of office was brief and he was succeeded by Air Marshal Sir Charles Elworthy KCB CBE DSO MVO DFC AFC on 3 August 1960.

This first experiment in unified command quickly showed every indication of being successful: the command was operationally very active at this period, and the new organisation had a number of challenges in its early days which were met efficiently. Any hesitation which might have existed in London about establishing similar commands in Cyprus and in the Far East was dispelled, and the decision was taken by the Ministry of Defence to repeat the successful Aden pattern. This development necessitated a rationalisation of the titles of the overseas commands, and it seemed appropriate to describe that based on Cyprus as the Near East Command, and that at Aden as the Middle East Command, thus perpetuating the separation which had become inevitable with the political developments in Egypt. The new titles were introduced on 1 March 1961 and Headquarters, British Forces, Arabian Peninsula became Headquarters, Middle East Command (Aden) and the command in Cyprus became Headquarters, Near East

Command (Cyprus). The location of each headquarters was retained in brackets after the title for a period of six months to avoid confusion in addressing and delivering mail. Nevertheless, so identified had the Eastern Mediterranean become with the title 'Middle East', that mail for Aden was delivered to Cyprus for a very long time to come.

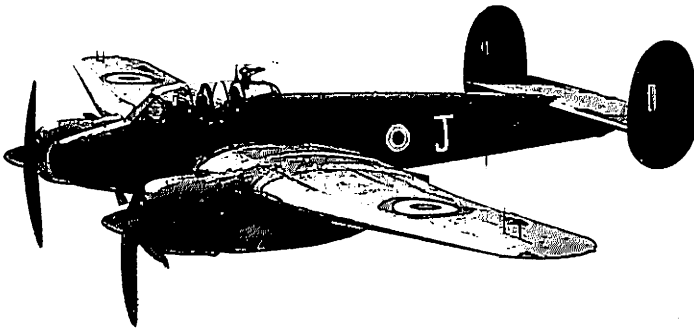
The titles of the subordinate single Service commanders under the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East had to be changed appropriately and the top echelon of the new organisation is shown in Figure III. Although the focal point of the land and air forces in the Arabian Peninsula had always been Aden, the Royal Navy had maintained its headquarters in the Persian Gulf at *HMS Jufair*, a shore establishment in Bahrein. Until the build up of British forces in the Command commenced, the squadron of three or four frigates in the Gulf comprised the main naval contribution, and it was clearly appropriate for the naval headquarters to be located with its ships. However, the build up of naval and amphibious forces between 1959 and 1961 tended to place the Flag Officer, Middle East in an isolated position, 1,200 miles from the Command Headquarters and, after the Kuwait crisis of 1961, it was decided to move his headquarters to Aden alongside the Commander-in-Chief and the AOC and GOC. The story of the building and occupation by the Admiral of the famous 'round house' at Steamer Point, Aden, is fascinating in itself. The house had to be circular as it was constructed on the emplacement of an old 15-inch naval coastal defence gun overlooking the harbour. The cost of the circular construction and the problems of furnishing a house containing no corners caused a number of political comments at the time, and these would have been much more critical had it then been known that the house would only be used for its intended purpose for some five years. With the concentration of the three subordinate commanders in Aden, the Middle East Command stabilised into a pattern which underwent only minor changes, and which proved highly satisfactory until the final departure of British forces from the theatre.

As far as the RAF organisation within the theatre was concerned, Air Forces, Middle East (AFME) whose first AOC was Air Vice-Marshal DJ P Lee CB CBE, had two subordinate formation headquarters, one in East Africa and another in the Persian Gulf. The initial rundown of units in East Africa and the Indian Ocean territories after the war made Air Headquarters, East Africa superfluous and it was succeeded by a very small Headquarters, RAF East Africa under the command of an air commodore entitled Senior RAF Officer East Africa. This arrangement was adequate to supervise the few units which continued to use the valuable base facilities in Kenya, and which also helped to raise and train the Kenya Air Force after independence. In the Persian Gulf a similar small Headquarters, RAF Persian Gulf was located at Bahrein under the command of a group captain entitled Commander, RAF Persian Gulf, to supervise units in the area, and to provide advice on air



1. Tempest Mark VI – an example of the type with which 324 Wing, 6, 8, 213 and 249 Squadrons were equipped.

2. Bristol Brigand – an example of the type with which 8 and 84 Squadrons were equipped.

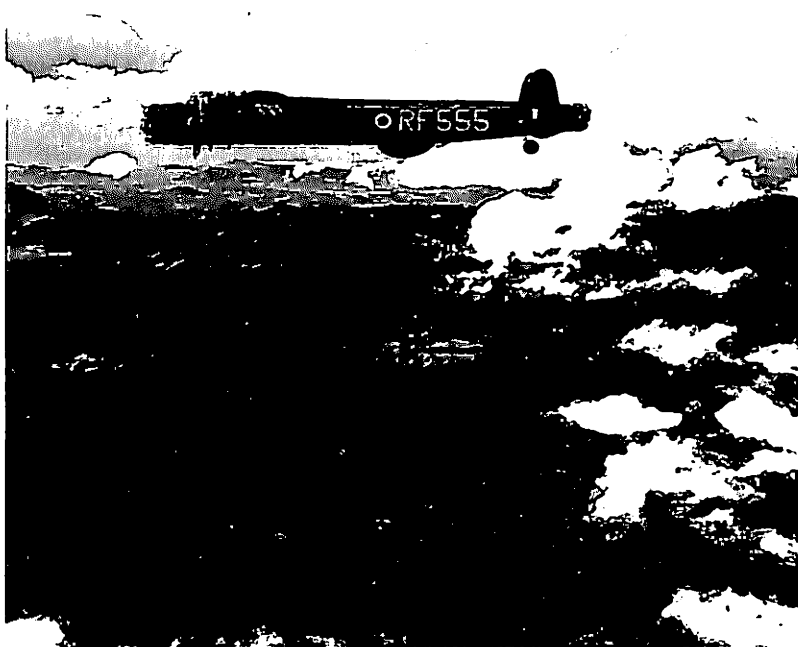




3- Searching for the tracks of Mau Mau terrorists in the Aberdares.
(With acknowledgements to *Soldier* magazine.)

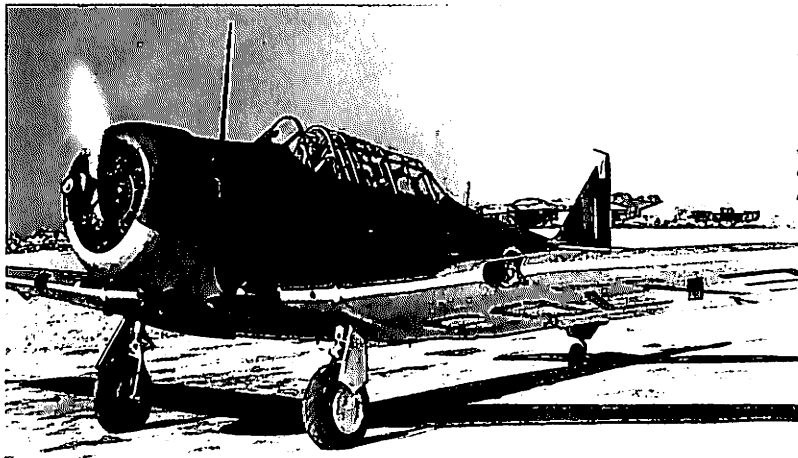


4. One of fifty guns made by a single Mau Mau terrorist.
(With acknowledgements to *Soldier* magazine.)



5. Lincoln of 61 Squadron, Bomber Command, on Mau Mau operations.

6. Harvard of the type used to equip 1340 Flight.

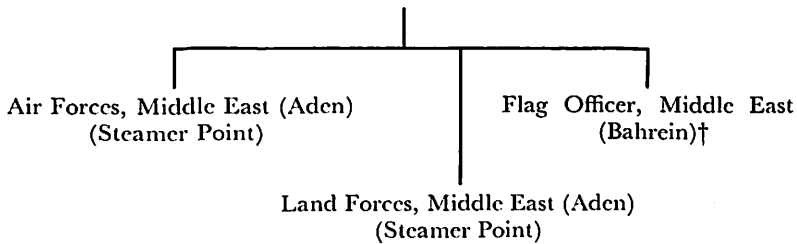


force matters to the Political Resident, Persian Gulf. In view of the large area covered by the new Middle East Command, and the high level of operational activity which persisted in the theatre during the 1950s and 1960s, the command organisation was remarkably compact and economical, with authority well delegated to subordinate commanders: it stood the test of many periods of both political and military activity in widely differing parts of the theatre; in particular, the Kuwait crisis of 1961 and the Radfan Campaign in the Western Aden Protectorate in the mid-1960s.

Fig. III

**MIDDLE EAST COMMAND ORGANISATION
1961**

**Headquarters Middle East Command (Aden)
(Steamer Point)***



*The location in brackets was discontinued after six months.

†FOME moved to Steamer Point in 1963.

Although the unified command organisation operated in the Middle East for only five or six years before Britain began to pull out of the theatre, it was a sufficiently long period to reveal without doubt that it was an efficient and economical system. One particular reason for its success undoubtedly stemmed from its foundation in Aden upon an existing single Service base – a Royal Air Force base. The perpetuation of this single Service base during the years of rapid military build up was the keynote of the economical administration which resulted from the RAF being made responsible, on an agency basis, for the provision of most of the administrative services and facilities for everybody. It is interesting to note that the prior existence of this single Service foundation greatly facilitated the evolution of the unified command in comparison with similar organisations in Singapore and Cyprus where three fully independent Services had previously operated and created many more problems for unification.

The only changes of the command structure which occurred from its inception in 1959 to the end of the period covered by this narrative were of a minor nature, and mainly concerned changes of title and responsibility in East Africa and the Gulf consequent upon political

development and military withdrawal.* As so often happens when an efficient organisation is finally discovered after many experiments and changes dictated by events, it has but a brief period to function. Nevertheless, it will always be possible to look back upon the first of the unified commands and say that it was successful, and provided an excellent pattern for the future.

*RAF East Africa was disbanded in December 1964. HQ Middle East Command, along with Air Forces Middle East and RAF Persian Gulf, were replaced in September 1967 by British Forces Gulf and Air Forces Gulf, located at Bahrein until withdrawal at the end of 1971.

[3]

The quiet years

As we have seen in Chapter 1, World War II was followed by a period of rapid reduction and reorganisation – so rapid that the speed of demobilisation, repatriation of personnel and disposal of aircraft, equipment, bases and depots created many new problems. The end of 1946 saw the Royal Air Force in the Arabian Peninsula and adjacent territories levelling out at a size and disposition consistent with the peacetime duties which could then be foreseen. This level was to be broadly maintained for a few years, a period which we have called ‘the quiet years’ – quiet only in their relation to the intense activity of the war years which preceded them, and the mounting tempo of events which were to follow in the 1950s and 1960s.

The influence of the war had been truly world wide, and even the smallest sheikhdom in the Arabian Peninsula, the remotest tribe in East Africa or the smallest island in the Indian Ocean had felt some effect or played some part: tribal manpower throughout East Africa was recruited for the King’s African Rifles, land was given for airfields, landing grounds and military installations, and money contributed for the purchase of aircraft and weapons. As the major powers fought it out, the rest of the world, while making its contribution, stood by, absorbed by the spectacle and too preoccupied to pursue its own ambitions or to worry about internal problems. This state of euphoria continued for a year or two after the war was over, the preoccupation then being with the tasks of re-establishing the economy and the husbandry which had been disrupted. Unfortunately the sobering lessons of war, even on a global scale, do not last long, particularly for those who are only on the fringe of the hostilities: old quarrels are resurrected and new ambitions create new dissension.

From 1947 the signs of internal unrest began to appear in many parts of the area in which we are interested. In East Africa the desire for independence was greatly strengthened by the growing resentment of the Kikuyu tribe at the alleged ‘theft’ of their farming land by European settlers. This eventually resulted in the Mau Mau uprising of the early 1950s. In Somaliland, disputes over the possession of the Ogaden territory, which was eventually to be transferred to Ethiopia, caused much internal unrest. Life in Aden and its Protectorates was rarely entirely peaceful, and there was sporadic tribal dissidence even during those

quiet years. That, however, was mild compared with the troubles which were later to assail the British base and which ultimately led to the decision to withdraw from Aden altogether.

Around the barren coastline of the Arabian Peninsula, and at the entrance to the Persian Gulf, troubles began to beset the Sultan of Muscat, beginning with the short-lived occupation of the much coveted Buraimi Oasis by Saudi Arabia, and leading on to the uprising by Omani rebels against the Sultan's authority. Both of these events necessitated British intervention at the Sultan's request and the campaign to flush the Omani rebels out of the Jebel Akhdar (Green Mountain) was both prolonged and fierce. In the Gulf itself, the constant need to maintain the security of oil supplies and their transportation was a steady, but not particularly onerous commitment, until the Kuwait crisis of 1961 arose when the announced intentions of Iraq to annex Kuwait brought British forces very rapidly into action. Finally, in Iraq, political developments not unconnected with the Arabs' intense dislike of the Palestine Settlement caused Britain's treaty with Iraq to be abrogated, and all British forces to be withdrawn from that country.

In 1947, however, none of these happenings could be foreseen although the tide of nationalism which was beginning to flow strongly gave a pretty clear indication that there would have to be changes in the foreseeable future between Britain and the many countries in the theatre with which she had some form of colonial or treaty relationship. For the moment, however, the northern part of the Middle East provided the focus of attention, and problems connected with the future of Palestine and the aspiration of Egypt demanded that the bulk of the British forces which could be made available should be deployed in that part of the Command.

Aden and the Protectorates

It was in the Western Aden Protectorate – that habitual cauldron of tribal unrest – that most of the operational activity took place from 1947 onwards but, even there, the tempo was leisurely and the incidents sporadic, well within the capacity of 8 Squadron and the Aden Protectorate Levies to control. The Dhala area was the scene of most of the dissidence in 1947, caused mainly by the rebellious son of the Amir Wasr of Dhala. Owing to the weakness of his father, Haidara was allowed to gain power and to prosecute a campaign of hostility against the government. In February he spurned all forms of negotiation and retired with his followers to the heavily fortified Jebel Jihaf, a 7,000-foot plateau close to Dhala. (See Map 6.) It was decided to deal with his intransigence by force, and a column consisting of the mobile wing of the Aden Protectorate Levies, a 3-inch mortar flight and two RAF armoured cars left Aden on 5 February, supported by the Mosquitos of 8 Squadron. The subsequent action was brief and effective, culminating in the destruction of Haidara's fort but also resulting unfortunately in

his escape, probably across the Yemen border which lies very close to the Jebel Jihaf.

This small operation was noteworthy for the first use of 60lb rocket projectiles (RP) against a solidly constructed fort, the walls of which were more than $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet in thickness. The semi-armour piercing heads of these rockets were not quite man enough for the job. They created a great deal of damage but failed to destroy the walls of the fort, which eventually had to be blown up with gun cotton. However, an excellent lesson was learned, namely that fully armour piercing heads were essential if forts of this type were to be breached by RP. On the credit side, the accuracy of the rocket attacks proved to be excellent and, in the years to come, 8 Squadron became one of the most accurate and experienced rocket firing squadrons in the RAF, with average errors measured in feet rather than yards.

As Haidara had escaped with many of his followers before his lair on the Jebel Jihaf was destroyed, it seemed prudent to maintain a garrison in the Dhala area to support the Political Agent and to be on hand to meet further trouble without delay. A small force from the APL provided this garrison but, hardly had it settled in to Dhala, when tragedy struck from a different direction. The Political Agent, Mr Peter Davey, went to the Ahmedi village of Al Husein with an escort of Government Guards to collect a fine and was shot and killed by the Ahmedi Sheikh himself, on 16 April. A ground force was sent out immediately from Aden and orders were subsequently issued for 8 Squadron to destroy the village of Al Husein, which was most effectively accomplished by four Mosquitos and three Tempests using rockets and cannon. An extract from the official report states:

"The Political Officer reported that, from the morale standpoint, the effect was most impressive and awe inspiring, and the attack undoubtedly made an impression not easily to be forgotten in Ahmedi country."

The reason for the mixed force of Mosquitos and Tempests in this operation was that 8 Squadron was in the process of re-equipping with the Tempest VI. The Mosquito had completed a short spell with the Squadron, and had suffered from the same problems of shrinkage in its wooden construction as elsewhere in the Middle East. As the Tempest VI was becoming available in considerable numbers, and as its rugged metal construction was better suited to the climatic conditions, it was decided to equip the Aden squadron with it. Coincidental with the re-equipment, Squadron Leader F W M Jensen DFC AFC, an experienced Tempest pilot, assumed command of 8 Squadron. The manning situation, together with the extra work involved in keeping the Mosquitos serviceable, had kept the Squadron's flying hours low for some months. With the arrival of the Tempests these improved, helped also by a better flow of regular airmen as the Service reached the end of the difficult period of postwar demobilisation and repatriation.

The hot weather of 1947 in Aden passed without much operational activity, other than a few Tempest sorties in support of the Sherif of Beihan who suffered some harassment from a small nomad tribe, the Bal Harith. Unfortunately 8 Squadron lost a Tempest pilot during this operation: he crashed and was killed in the target area, probably due to a high speed stall, an error which it was not difficult to make when attacking from low level in mountainous country, concentrating on accurate identification and attack. Disorientation under such conditions is something against which all pilots had to guard. So difficult was the identification of the village targets in parts of the Western Aden Protectorate that the leader of a formation would often be flown over the area in, for example an Anson, before the attack to obtain precise visual identification of his target. Many of the maps of this area were rudimentary and inaccurate even to the extent of whole villages being incorrectly shown. For these reasons it was important that a ground attack squadron should always have among its pilots a high level of experience and continuity.

As far as the organisation of the Aden Command was concerned, 1947 saw further reductions and a concentration of operational units in the Khormaksar area with administrative elements largely concentrated around Steamer Point. The airfield at Sheikh Othman was placed on a care and maintenance basis – never in fact to be used again – and the headquarters of the Aden Protectorate Levies was transferred from Lake Lines alongside Shiekh Othman, to Seedeseer Lines near Khormaksar. The Equipment Depot at Steamer Point was renamed 114 Maintenance Unit, and the RAF Supply Depot assumed full responsibility for all Service rationing.

With only one operational squadron in a command which was hardly ever free from some form of operation, the need was felt for a reinforcement plan which could be rapidly implemented should the need arise. Aden Command Operation Order 6/47 filled this need and legislated for the rapid move of 324 Wing and two Tempest VI Squadrons, 6 and 213, from Shallufa to Khormaksar, thus ensuring that a homogeneous force of three Tempest squadrons would be available in Aden in emergency. The opportunity arose in November for another form of reinforcement to be practised, namely reinforcement by Lincolns of Bomber Command in a routine exercise SUN RAY whereby detachments of Lincolns exercised frequently in the Middle East usually being attached to Shallufa in the Canal Zone. The Quteibi tribe had for some time terrorised and looted caravans on the Aden-Dhala road. Warnings not only went unheeded but the incidents tended to increase, and punitive action was clearly called for. It was decided to use air power alone and to destroy the village and fortified buildings of Thumier, the Quteibi capital. Tempests of 8 Squadron assisted by six Lincolns from Shallufa destroyed the village and demolished a number of small forts in the neighbourhood. During the operation a total of 66.7 tons of bombs were

dropped and 247 rockets were fired. No deaths were caused, making this an outstanding example of tribal control by air action. This first use of a SUN RAY detachment in active operations from Aden gave the UK based bomber crews valuable and unusual experience, and an opportunity for the logistic and administrative support of the Lincolns to be exercised by Khormaksar, and by 114 MU.

Aden Colony could usually be relied upon to be peaceful in contrast to the almost continual dissidence in the Protectorates. The United Nations endorsement of partition and the establishment of separate independent Arab and Jewish States in Palestine, which came towards the end of 1947, had serious repercussions throughout the Arab world, including Aden. Anti-Jewish riots broke out in December with severe damage to Jewish property and loss of life in the Crater and Sheikh Othman areas of the Colony. A State of Emergency was declared which lasted until 2 February 1948, the Governor delegating control of internal security to the AOC. Two companies of British infantry from Egypt were flown to Aden as reinforcements to the police, the Aden Protectorate Levies and the Royal Air Force: the rioting was brought under control within a few days but not without Jewish and Arab loss of life. These incidents were significant as they revealed a political awakening in Aden: the seeds of unrest had been sown although it was too soon to be able to visualise the situation which was to arise in the 1960s.

Early in the New Year, Air Vice-Marshal A C Stevens CB, took over the Command in Aden from Air Vice-Marshal Lydford who had completed a long tour of duty and had guided his command very successfully through the difficult period of reorganisation after the war. As if to welcome the new AOC, the Bal Harith played up again and were the recipients of further attention from the Tempests of 8 Squadron which, once again, forced their submission after a few accurate strikes. This type of punitive operation continued on a small scale, a section of the Haushabi tribe being the next to receive attention. It was customary for forty-eight hours warning of an air attack to be given, the leaflets usually being dropped by an Anson over the target area. Every tribe knew from bitter experience that these leaflets contained no idle threat and there was rarely a living soul or head of cattle to be seen when the attack materialised. Most tribesmen watched operations from the safety of neighbouring hillsides, taking the occasional pot shot at the attacking aircraft and sometimes registering a hit. Fortunately their knowledge of deflection was rudimentary with the result that it was the slow flying Anson or Dakota which tended to return with the odd bullet hole, and not the Tempests. A good example of the type of warning leaflet which was dropped on these occasions will be found at Appendix B.

After the Haushabi, the Saqladi had to be punished for consistent refusal to pay fines which had been levied as the result of arbitration no less than four years earlier. It was only by such action that the authority

of, in this case the Dhala Sheikh, who stood in treaty relations with Britain, could be upheld. The most effective example of this type of operation during 1948 took place in October, against the Mansuri tribe in the Wadi Mirria. Although the action lasted for only three days, 8 Squadron carried out constant rocket and bombing attacks from dawn to dusk, flying a total of 107 hours in the three days with only seven pilots available. 468 rockets were fired, resulting in 202 direct hits and many near misses. The overall squadron average error for all these attacks was assessed at 6 yards, a remarkable standard of accuracy against small targets within the confines of a narrow wadi. Of sixteen forts attacked, eleven were demolished and all but one rendered uninhabitable. The Tempest had proved itself to be a very steady platform from which to fire both RP and cannon.

Somaliland

For a brief period in mid-1948 there was a switch of interest to Somaliland where the Ogaden territory was in process of being handed back to Ethiopia. When Ethiopia resumed its prewar status under Haile Selassie after the defeat of Italy, the former Italian Colony of Somaliland, together with the Ogaden, remained under British administration until such time as a United Nations solution for the future of these territories could be reached. The decision to return the Ogaden, the traditional grazing grounds of nomadic tribes, to Ethiopia brought a sharp reaction from the Somalis and increased the demands for a united Somalia. The Somali Youth League was particularly active, and it was expected that the withdrawal of British troops from the area would be regarded by Somalis as a breach of faith, giving rise to violence and rioting.

As there was no operational squadron in East Africa and as the single squadron in Aden was fully occupied with local problems, a plan had been drawn up to send part of 324 Wing, and one of its Tempest squadrons from Khartoum to operate from Mogadishu in support of British forces in the Jiggiga area of the Ogaden. No 213 Squadron flew into Mogadishu on 17 August fully prepared to give any support needed. In the next few weeks, many flag showing and reconnaissance flights were carried out over the Ogaden, and the occasional fire power demonstration was also laid on, all with good effect. No offensive air operations were necessary and the withdrawal of the British troops took place without interference, covered continually by the Tempests. Squadron Leader P J Kelly DFC commanded 213 Squadron throughout and some very long range Tempest flights were carried out. On one occasion a reconnaissance of four and a half hours was completed, an unusually long sortie for a single seater of this type. The last British troops withdrew from Mustahil on 23 September, 213 Squadron remaining at Mogadishu for a further month as a stabilising influence, eventually flying back, on 20 October, not to Khartoum, but to its

new base at Deversoir. Any routine air cover or support required in Somaliland was thus left to Aden to provide and in both November and December reconnaissances and flag showing flights over the Mogadishu area were carried out by 8 Squadron aircraft, but all seemed quiet.

That this small and relatively unimportant incident should necessitate the use of a squadron detached from the Sudan illustrates the extent to which the RAF in East Africa had been allowed to run down to virtual impotence during the immediate postwar years. Air support and cover for an operation in the Horn of Africa could normally be expected to be provided either from East Africa or from Aden, but neither was able to do so in this case. Some contribution, and a valuable one at that, was however made by Air Headquarters, East Africa in equipping Mogadishu with all the radio and signals facilities needed by the Tempest squadron. A fitting party from Eastleigh installed the equipment in the control tower at Mogadishu and elsewhere as early as May 1948 and maintained it in a fully serviceable state until required by 213 Squadron in August and September.

Aden and the Protectorates

It was unusual at this period for the RAF to be called upon to provide air support in the Eastern Aden Protectorate, a much more sparsely populated and peaceable territory than its western neighbour. Early in 1949, however, a severe famine followed the failure of the harvest and the Aden Government was called upon to provide urgent famine relief. The requirement was assessed as 750 tons of grain to be air dropped in the Wadi Hadramaut. Three Dakotas were provided from the Aden Communications Flight and 205 Group, the operation being carried out from the airfield at Riyan to which the grain was transported in bulk and bagged on the spot for air dropping. The operation was completed in twenty-seven days, a total of 751 tons being dropped.

Back in Aden the first jet aircraft to be seen in the Command landed at Khormaksar in March. It was a Vampire which had flown out to Singapore from the United Kingdom, and was returning along the South Arabian route, landing at Masirah, Salalah and Riyan before touching down at Khormaksar. This 'mini jet' created much interest and was thoroughly inspected by all and sundry before leaving for the UK via Khartoum. Of particular interest for the future was the ease with which it coped with the loose and stony surfaces of the three coastal airfields through which it passed, although it was abundantly clear that jet aircraft would rapidly erode the top surface of these airfields.

A quiet period for 8 Squadron coincided with a change of command, Squadron Leader A McK S Steedman taking over command of the Squadron on 11 April 1949 at about the same time that the Squadron learned that it was to be re-equipped with the Brigand. Continued unrest among the Somali tribes and labour troubles in Kenya necessitated demonstration flights from Aden and 8 Squadron was kept fully

occupied during its last months with the Tempest which was eventually discarded for the Brigand in August. The Brigand was used for the first time in anger very shortly after its arrival against a Yemen fort which had been illegally built on the Aden side of the frontier at Nagd Marqad. (See Map 6.) The fort was destroyed but it was quickly apparent that the new aircraft was less manoeuvrable than the Tempest, and that the Squadron would need to change its tactics. Also during August, Aden was saddened by one of the worst flying accidents in its history. A Dakota of the Communications Flight, with a crew of three and nine passengers crashed in very bad weather while on its final approach to Salalah. It hit a 3,000-foot escarpment some 25 miles short of the airfield and all but one of the occupants were killed in the crash, the single survivor dying on the way to hospital. This accident served to illustrate the treacherous flying conditions, particularly at Salalah where the normally good visibility and high cloud base can change with disturbing rapidity to severe monsoon with thick dust and negligible visibility. Such were the circumstances when this crash occurred.

Somaliland continued to provide the main interest for the forces in Aden throughout the winter of 1949-50, and as the time approached for British forces to withdraw from the area known as Italian Somaliland, in March 1950, a detachment of 8 Squadron Brigands joined a similar detachment of Brigands of 84 Squadron from Habbaniya, on the airfield at Mogadishu. The handing back of the territory to Italy as the result of a UN resolution took place without incident, but it provided an opportunity to practice at least one of the Middle East reinforcement plans, and also gave the Brigand detachments some valuable co-operation with Royal Navy units which were also supporting the British withdrawal.

Shortly before the return of 8 Squadron's detachment, command of British Forces, Aden was taken over by Air Vice-Marshal F J Fressanges CB, and his attention was immediately directed to another theatre of activity - Eritrea. Nomadic bands of brigands from the Shifta tribe had, for some time past, kept up a constant campaign of pillage and indiscriminate robbery on the borders of Eritrea and the Sudan. It was decided to use the airfield at Asmara as a base for combined land and air operations against the Shifta, Aden being called upon to provide a small detachment of two Brigands. This was new country to 8 Squadron and an excellent opportunity to test the operational performance of their new aircraft from a relatively high altitude airfield. A full programme of reconnaissance and other forms of support for the land forces was carried out, culminating in a rocket firing demonstration in conjunction with the Spitfires of 208 Squadron being given to Eritrean chiefs in the Asmara area during July.

Command of 8 Squadron passed to Squadron Leader C R A Forsyth DSO on 21 September, the last task of his predecessor, Squadron Leader Steedman being to take the Squadron to the Armament Practice Camp

at Nicosia in Cyprus, where the full range of the Brigand's armament could be exercised for the first time by most of the crews.

As will probably have been realised from the widespread commitments of the RAF in Aden described in this chapter, an establishment of eight Brigands was quite inadequate, particularly when account is taken of the servicing difficulties which are inseparable from conditions in Aden. It was also wasteful to use the Brigand for many tasks which were well within the capabilities of a less sophisticated aircraft. In consequence, 'B' Flight of 8 Squadron was equipped with a number of Ansons, and named 'the Protectorate Support Flight', a title which is self-explanatory. Not only was this a relief to the Brigand Flight, but it greatly reduced the calls upon the Aden Communications Flight whose scheduled services and special communications sorties around the Command fully occupied the available flying hours.

1950 ended with the despatch of an 8 Squadron detachment to Hab-baniya for affiliation with 6 Squadron (Vampires) from the Canal Zone, and with units of the Royal Iraq Air Force. Some photographic reconnaissance of the Iraqi-Persian border gave the Squadron experience of yet another area of the Middle East. The year had been an exceptionally quiet one, particularly in the Western Aden Protectorate, although an attempt to assassinate the Senior Political Officer at Dhala was made before the end of the year. Fortunately it was unsuccessful, and a punitive expedition from the Aden Protectorate Levies dealt with the matter without the need for air action.

The detachment of 8 Squadron to Iraq was to prove an even more valuable exercise than it appeared at the time as it gave the Brigand crews experience of the flying conditions and geography of Iraq and Persia which they were destined to reinforce for a brief period in 1951, as part of a plan to safeguard British lives and property in the Persian oilfields. Not to look too far ahead, however, the early part of 1951 saw some further administrative changes in that Khormaksar was made fully responsible for the manning and administration of Riyan, Salalah and Masirah, and also for the RAF detachment and 1910 AOP Flight (Austers) at Asmara, in Eritrea. New establishments were drawn up for these small but important stations, that for Riyan being 65 personnel, Salalah 39, Masirah 42, Asmara detachment 12 and 1910 AOP Flight, 12. Apart from maintaining a base from which 1910 AOP Flight could operate in support of the Army against the Shifta bandits, the detachment at Asmara ran the Leave and Rest Centre which continued to provide a change of air for personnel stationed in Aden. Although the Western Aden Protectorate remained unusually peaceful, both February and March were months of continued tribal dissidence in the Eastern Protectorate and 8 Squadron was called upon to carry out a number of flag showing demonstrations in the Wadi Duan and the Wadi Hadramaut. No offensive operations were necessary and as the hot weather approached the dissidence gave way to apathy, as so often

happened in these areas, and calm was restored. This kind of sporadic activity was always welcomed by the 'route stations' as it enlivened their somewhat dull routine, gave the airmen an active interest and enabled stocks of fuel, ammunition and spares to be turned over.

If undue attention seems to be paid to 8 Squadron, it is because it was at this time the only operational squadron in the whole area covered by this narrative. Consequently life was busy and full of variety for air and ground crews alike. A revised directive for the Squadron was issued in April, necessitated partly by the closure of the Brigand Operational Conversion Unit in the UK which placed the onus of converting crews upon the squadron itself. The new directive described 8 Squadron as a Tactical Light Bomber Squadron capable of undertaking the following tasks:

Internal security and tribal duties within the Aden Protectorates.

Operational conversion of aircrews posted to the Squadron.

The aircraft establishment for the Squadron was to be nine Brigands B Mark 1 with a flying task of 198 hours per month, four Ansons Mark XIX - 124 hours per month, and two Buckmasters Mark 1 - 44 hours per month, the latter being the dual controlled version of the Brigand. This gave a total of 366 hours per month for the many and varied tasks allotted to the unit. Bearing in mind the considerable distances which had to be covered in fulfilling these tasks, flying hours were understandably precious to 8 Squadron. This latter factor was much in evidence the following month when six Brigands of the Squadron were called upon to move to Shaibah as part of a Middle East plan to reinforce Iraq in the event of unrest in the Persian oilfields. The details of this emergency will be described later in this chapter, but the 8 Squadron detachment spent almost four months away from base at Shaibah during which time it carried on with day and night training, completing some 492 hours during the detachment. Some excellent fighter affiliation with the Vampires of 6 Squadron, which was also detached from the Canal Zone to Iraq, was carried out as well as a number of exercises with HM ships at the head of the Persian Gulf.

The rump of the Squadron, back in Aden, was hard pressed to fulfil the commitments which arose, notably a demonstration flight with live rocket firing in the Mansura area, south of Cheren in Eritrea. However, the earlier decision to equip 'B' Flight with Ansons was now proving of great value and taking a considerable load off the Brigands. From this development came a decision to improve the rough, stony and almost precipitous airstrip at Dhala up to Anson standards. Hitherto it had been suitable only for Austers which, in view of the importance of the Dhala area and its proximity to the Yemen border was a serious operational restriction.

As 1951 drew to its close, a comprehensive review of all unit establishments under the command of Headquarters, British Forces, Aden was undertaken and a few administrative changes made: perhaps the most

important was the transfer of RAF Khartoum to the control of the Headquarters. A complete list of the units under command at this time will be found at Appendix C.

East Africa

Turning to the activities of East Africa in the years following the immediate postwar reduction of the Royal Air Force, the territories of the East African High Commission and the Indian Ocean were quiet and uneventful. The Royal Air Force world wide had, of necessity, accepted such heavy cuts that any theatre which was operationally peaceful tended to bear the full brunt of the rundown of units and manpower. East Africa came into this category with the result that Air Headquarters, East Africa controlled a force of only 545 RAF personnel by the end of 1948 and its flying activities were confined to a communications flight at Eastleigh and the occasional visiting unit. The opportunity was taken in East Africa, as elsewhere, to carry out a programme of air survey in order to bring up-to-date maps and topographical information which had lapsed due to the pressure of war. Both 13 Squadron (Mosquitos) and 82 Squadron (Lancasters) participated in this work, covering very large areas of both East and South Africa. The high altitude performance of the Mosquitos and the range and endurance of the Lancasters combined to cover all the terrain to be surveyed efficiently and rapidly, all processing being carried out in the Photographic Section at Eastleigh where the photographic staffs of the Station and 82 Squadron teamed up. In addition to playing host to these detached squadrons, Eastleigh was increasing in importance as a transit airfield. A steady flow of Ansons and other aircraft for both the South African and Royal Rhodesian Air Forces used the Eastleigh facilities. A number of Middle East transport services and Transport Command trunk route schedules terminated there and the postwar resurgence of civil airlines also gave Eastleigh an increasing amount of business. It was this latter development which prompted discussion between the Director of Civil Aviation (Kenya) and the Air Headquarters staff on a project for all signals communications to be taken over by the Post and Telegraphs Department, East Africa, a project which was to come to fruition on 1 September 1948.

Manpower reductions of the magnitude required by the Air Ministry necessitated other administrative and technical economies: the station at Kisumu was closed down when the disposal of surplus wartime equipment and aircraft was completed. RAF Thika followed suit, units in the Mombasa area were further reduced and, finally, the Air Headquarters itself gave up a number of posts and made arrangements to move from Nairobi onto the station at Eastleigh. Thus, Air Commodore A G Bishop CBE AFC, who took over command towards the end of 1947, inherited a much emasculated Air Headquarters, and a very small and under-manned force.

The inactivity of the Armed Forces in Kenya at this time was not accompanied by corresponding political inactivity. As early as January 1947 the dissatisfaction of African workers with rates of pay, particularly in unskilled trades, in relation to the pay of Asian and European workers caused widespread strikes. The unusual action of a leaflet drop by an Anson of the Communications Flight to massed strikers in the Mombasa football ground was resorted to in an endeavour to lower the temperature. Inequitable rates of pay became an increasingly serious bone of contention, although it is probably true to say that it was in fact the earliest manifestation of a much deeper nationalistic movement which was beginning to affect Africans in many parts of the continent. Being employers of African labour on a considerable scale, the RAF was unable to stand aside from these troubles and, being tied to fairly basic government pay scales, found great difficulty in employing and retaining the civilian labour it needed – and needed badly at a time when Service manpower was extremely scarce. At one period the average time for which an African worker remained in RAF employment was only seven months.

These internal developments led to a general tightening up and practising of station defence schemes as well as the formulation of a plan to reinforce Kenya with an infantry battalion from the Middle East should the need arise. The main commitment of the RAF in times of internal disorder was to safeguard its own stations and installations and to provide a limited amount of air communication and transportation. Should any larger scale air operations be needed, reinforcements would have to come from elsewhere, probably from the Canal Zone or Aden.

Further labour unrest occurred early in 1949 and station defence arrangements were thoroughly rehearsed in conjunction with army units. Although the plans were considered to be generally adequate, it was found that the airmen had very little idea of defence tactics. They shot well and accurately with their weapons but their sense of self preservation, use of cover and other essential elements of successful defence were rudimentary. This was only to be expected as most of the men were hastily trained National Servicemen who had taken the place of the wartime veterans: the proportion of well trained regulars was still woefully small. However, the indication of serious civilian unrest gave the necessary spur to intensive ground training with which local Army units lent great assistance. If further proof that East Africa was in for a period of internal trouble was needed, it came in April 1949 when severe rioting broke out in Kampala, the capital of Uganda, and reinforcements from the King's African Rifles had to be sent from Kenya. A few aircraft from the East Africa Communications Flight flew up from Eastleigh to assist, being used for reconnaissance and leaflet dropping tasks. The rioting was quelled without much difficulty but two months later, in June, it broke out again in both Kenya and Uganda and, at the request of both governors, demonstration flights over the disaffected areas were

carried out by squadrons flown in for the purpose from Aden and elsewhere in the Middle East. These operations will be fully described in a later chapter which examines the powerful influence exerted by the Kikuyu tribe and the underlying reasons which eventually led to the bloody Mau Mau terrorism of later years.

As Eastleigh had no resident operational squadrons, and as it became increasingly clear that the internal situation might necessitate reinforcement at any time, it was decided to take more active steps to prepare for the arrival of suitable squadrons. A number of the RAF tradesmen at Eastleigh were given short courses of training in first, second and third line servicing of the various types of aircraft with which the squadrons scheduled to reinforce East Africa were equipped. These included Tempests, Brigands and Lancasters as well as the various transport types – Yorks, Hastings, Valettas and Dakotas which would accompany reinforcements. The airmen of Eastleigh thus acquired a versatility akin to that possessed by the old wartime Servicing Commandos whose technical skill and versatility had become almost legendary. The manning situation was acute and East Africa was really running on a shoestring when Air Commodore EDH Davies CBE took over command from Air Commodore Bishop on 6 September 1949.

There was little further activity that year but establishments continued to be cut and cut. The Air Headquarters staff was reduced to six officers and arrangements were put in hand to close down 396 Maintenance Unit at Kaya Punga. The new AOC, Air Commodore Davies fell ill and had to be invalided home after only six months; after a short interregnum, Air Commodore LT Pankhurst CBE stepped into the command appointment on 18 April 1950. His arrival was followed by a reappraisal of the future of RAF East Africa: in spite of the internal threat which was manifesting itself in the increasing frequency of strikes and other labour troubles, it was decided to retain only Eastleigh and a signals relay station to be constructed there, and to dispose of Mombasa and Kaya Punga. The latter unit closed down almost immediately and Mombasa within two months, after the airfield had been taken over by the civil authorities, and some of the buildings by the Army. By the end of 1950 the personnel strength of the Command had fallen to an all time low figure of 267, all concentrated at Eastleigh, virtually the last stronghold of the RAF in East Africa.

An incident which occurred early in 1951 served as a reminder that the undercurrent of African hostility was on the increase. A Service vehicle was ambushed and shot at, the African AMDGW driver being killed outside the main entrance to Eastleigh which was, and indeed still is, in the vicinity of a particularly unsavoury suburb of Nairobi, an out of bounds area to British airmen. However, the remainder of 1951 proved surprisingly uneventful – almost a lull before the storm – and the only occurrences of interest to the RAF both concerned the shape of things to come, in the form of jet aircraft.

In March, Sir Frank Whittle, a director and technical adviser of BOAC, paid a visit to Nairobi to examine the possibility of constructing a civil airport for Kenya, capable of operating the new generation of civilian jet aircraft. Although the environs of Nairobi are flat and unobstructed, the capital is almost 6,000 feet above sea level, a factor which would pose certain problems for high performance jet airliners. These discussions resulted later in the year in a decision to build a civil airport at Embakasi and to provide a link road from it to Eastleigh thus obviating the necessity for traffic between the two airfields to travel through the centre of the city. The idea was also canvassed of moving the RAF operational area to the new airport to take full advantage of the excellent control facilities which the airlines would clearly need. The second occurrence of interest, was caused by the arrival of two Meteors at Eastleigh in June, participating in tropical trials. These were the first jet aircraft to be seen in the theatre and they created immense interest when briefly displayed to the public.

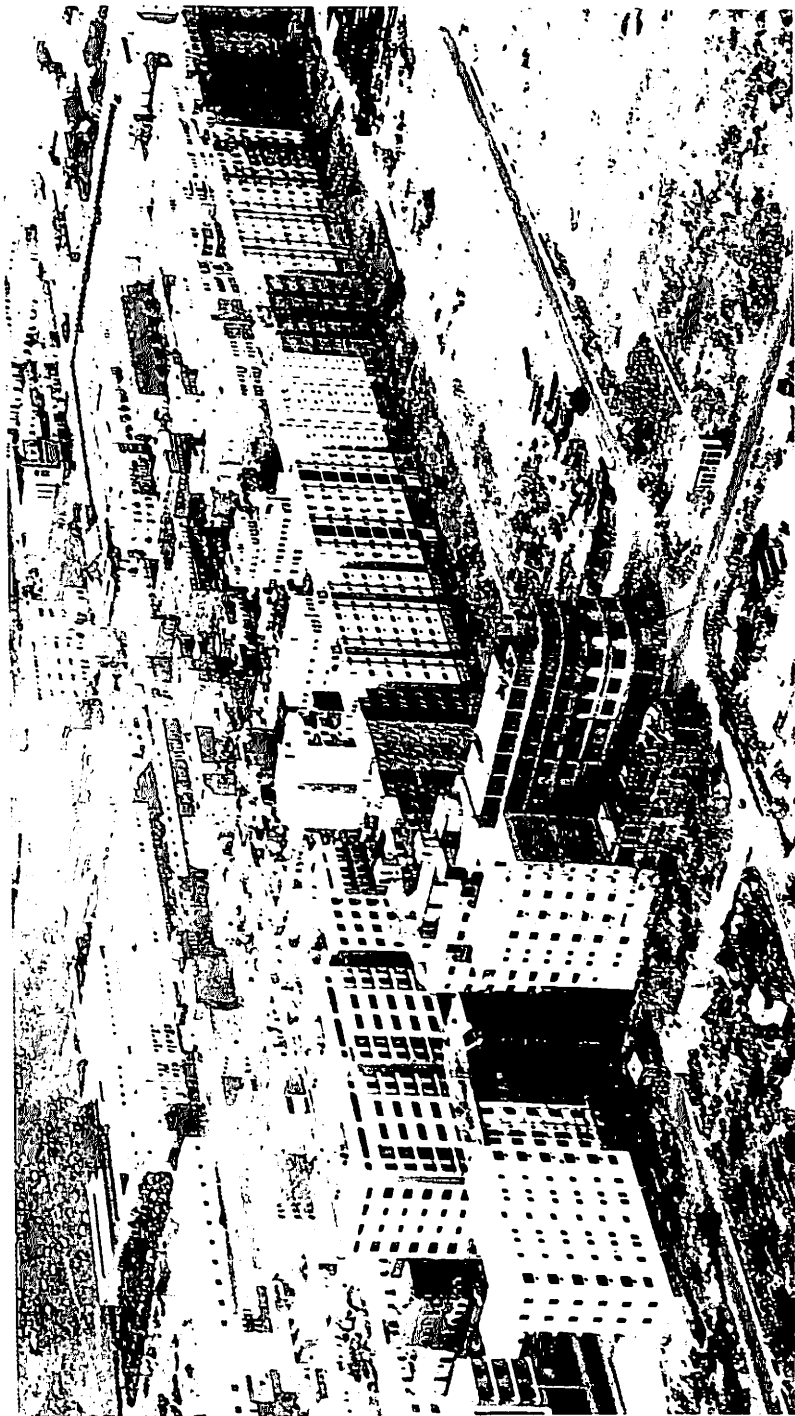
Before the end of a very quiet year, the final stage in the rundown of the RAF in East Africa took place with the disbandment of the Air Headquarters. Eastleigh the sole remaining, but nevertheless important station, was placed under the direct control of the AOC British Forces, Aden.

Command of Eastleigh was upgraded to the rank of air commodore, an appointment which was filled by Air Commodore Pankhurst who also retained the title of 'Air Officer Commanding, RAF East Africa'. His new directive made him responsible to the Commander-in-Chief MEAF for all war planning concerned with the East and Central African territories as far as they covered RAF and Allied air operations. He was required to act as air adviser to the governments of Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika and Nyasaland, and the islands of Zanzibar, Mauritius and the Seychelles; in this capacity he sat on the local defence committees of these territories.

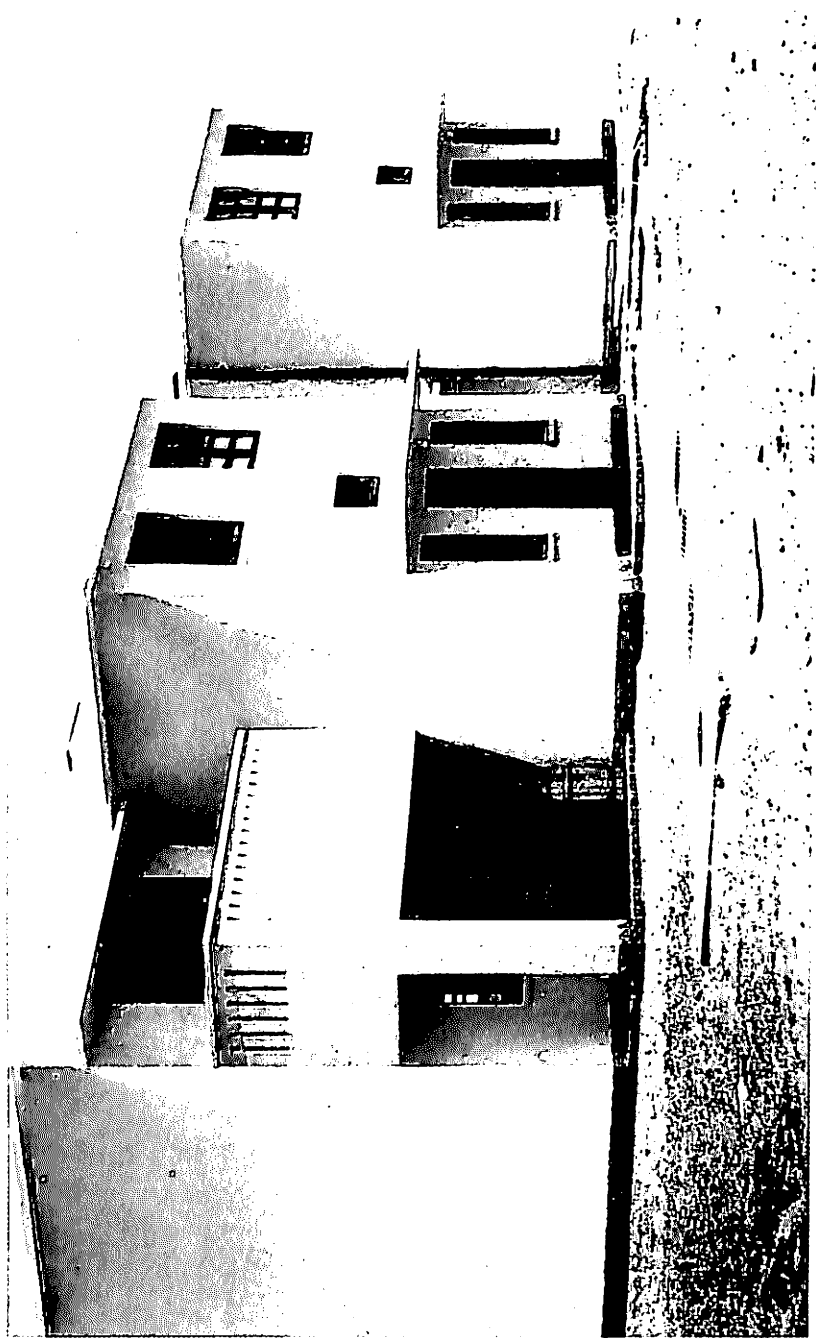
As will be seen in later chapters, the end of 1951 was the bottom of the curve for the RAF in East Africa and, although the organisation was never to be as comprehensive and widespread as it had been in the 1940s, Kenya was yet to become an important base area as well as a centre for limited operations before the arrival of independence for the various East African territories.

Iraq

Like East Africa and much of the Arabian Peninsula, with the possible exception of Aden, Iraq enjoyed a relatively quiet period after the immediate postwar reorganisation was completed. The total personnel strength of the RAF in Iraq at the end of 1946 was 12,281 but this figure includes the RAF Levies and all locally employed civilians. The uniformed RAF strength within this total was 2,050 and it continued to reduce slowly as further administrative economies were ordered.



7. Blocks of custom built flats for Service families on the Maala Straight, Aden, 1961.



8. New airmen's married quarters at Khormaksar.



9. Arming the 3-inch rockets of a Hunter FGA9.



10. WRAF sergeantant buying silver in Iraq.

1947 was an exceptionally uneventful year and no operations were carried out by 249 Squadron, the sole operational squadron in the Command, stationed at Habbaniya. No 249 Squadron found itself without aircraft for three months at the end of 1946 owing to the failure of the Mosquito to stand up to the climatic conditions. The Squadron was not, however, disbanded: its ground tradesmen were loaned to other non flying units which were seriously undermanned until the Tempest VI became available in January 1947 and the Squadron was able to reform. Even so, it was reformed on a cadre basis only with an establishment of eight Tempests, one Harvard for instrument training, ten pilots and fifty ground personnel. Squadron Leader J I Kilmartin continued in command, and the year was spent in training, particularly in conjunction with the RAF Levies. Not only was the Tempest a new aircraft to both aircrew and tradesmen, but the rocket projectile was an entirely new weapon to the Squadron, and much time was devoted to perfecting tactics and range firing.

On 28 March, Air Vice-Marshal A Gray CB MC assumed command of AHQ Iraq from Air Vice-Marshal Stafford whose tour of duty had covered the postwar reductions in the Command. These reductions were not quite complete, and this particular year saw both Bahrein and Sharjah reduced to satellite status and placed under the parenthood of RAF Shaibah which itself was reduced to the minimum manning level. These changes resulted in a drop of almost four thousand in the overall strength of the Command which, at the end of 1947, stood at 8,582.

Arab dissatisfaction with the United Nations decisions to partition Palestine at the end of this year was not expressed in Iraq with rioting and bloodshed on the scale that occurred in other Arab countries, such as Aden but the dislike of the decision was equally intense. January 1948 was thus an unfortunate moment at which to negotiate a new Anglo-Iraqi Treaty. The treaty which was signed at Portsmouth on 15 January (and repudiated two weeks later) was not radically different from its predecessor: it contained clauses for mutual assistance in war, and gave HMG the responsibility for maintaining the air bases at Habbaniya and Shaibah in an effective state of operational readiness. Transit facilities through Iraq were granted to HMG and a Joint Defence Board was inaugurated to replace the British Military Mission. Finally the treaty was signed for a period of twenty years. Excellent though the terms were for Britain and her interests in the area of the Persian Gulf, they were greeted with much disfavour by many sections of the population in Iraq who considered that they placed unacceptable restrictions upon the country's aspirations.

The political unrest was greatly heightened by the serious financial and economic plight of the country, a situation which the Prime Minister, Mohamed-al-Sadr and his Government made no attempt whatsoever to rectify. The first half of 1948 was marked by constant demonstrations and rioting in the major cities of Iraq, against the internal

situation, against the United Nations' decision on Palestine and also against the position which Great Britain was quite wrongly alleged to have taken up in supporting the Jews at the expense of the Arab nations. Feelings ran so high that some 5,000 Iraqi Army and Air Force personnel were sent to take part in Arab military action in Palestine in May and martial law was declared at about the same time in order to restore internal order. It quickly produced a stabilising effect, particularly in the cities which had become the scene of almost continual rioting and the whole country quietened down by the middle of the year.

The Royal Air Force could play little part in these internal happenings and was not called upon to participate in any way by the Iraqi Government. Self-effacement in view of the prevailing anti-British feeling and the tightening up of security and station defence were the most appropriate occupations in these circumstances. No 249 Squadron was required as a possible reinforcement for Palestine, and half of the Squadron provided a detachment of four Tempests at Ramat David, carrying out tactical reconnaissance in the Jordan Valley. The detachment was brought to full readiness with other Tempest squadrons to cover the final withdrawal of British forces from Palestine as the British Mandate ended at midnight on 14 May. The withdrawal was peaceful and the 249 Squadron detachment was not called upon to operate: it rejoined the remainder of the Squadron at Habbaniya and settled down to hot weather training. And so the summer months of 1948 – a very hot summer even by Iraqi standards – passed without serious incident although the undercurrent of discontent was constantly in evidence, particularly in the cities. The arrival of Arab refugees from Palestine, in a pitiable state, served to reinforce the irritation felt by many at the partition of Palestine, and this irritation tended to increase anti-British attitudes. There was widespread hostility towards foreign oil companies operating in Iraq, and continued dissatisfaction with the terms of the Portsmouth Treaty. The Iraqi Cabinet was reshuffled and an uneasy calm was maintained throughout the country. It was in this atmosphere that Air Vice-Marshal J N Boothman CB DFC AFC took over command from Air Vice-Marshal Gray on 1 November, bringing to a close an uninteresting year for Air Headquarters. The strength of the Command had remained virtually unchanged with some 1,723 RAF personnel in an overall total of 8,603.

Nuri-as-Said, the so-called 'strong man of Iraq' became Prime Minister early in the New Year of 1949 which, in view of his well-known pro-British sympathies, appeared to be a most favourable development. He was not, however, a popular figure with the more extreme political elements and it was clear from the start of his regime that he could look forward to no easy passage. In fact, within days of taking office, an incident occurred which well illustrates the sensitivity of the situation. A consignment of twenty-five thousand rounds of 20 millimetre ammunition for the RAF reached Baghdad railway station: the RAF

personnel sent to collect it were prevented by Iraq Army guards from removing it from the station. The Iraq Army was extremely short of this particular type of ammunition and eventually, in order to avoid an unpleasant incident, it was left under protest in the care of Iraq's Ministry of Defence. A small incident maybe, but one which certainly called into question the efficacy of the recently negotiated Portsmouth Treaty.

It had been decided some months earlier to change the single operational squadron in Iraq by transferring 249 Squadron to Deversoir where it would join the Tempest Wing already there, and to reform 84 Squadron on Brigands at Habbaniya. No 249 Squadron, under the command of Squadron Leader CS Vos, DFC left Habbaniya in most inauspicious weather – rain, thunder and high winds. After an eventful flight during which the Squadron Harvard had to force land at the H5 airfield along the oil pipeline, the Squadron reached Deversoir, thus completing an excellent tour of duty in Iraq. Throughout its stay, 249 had remained a cadre squadron but, despite the low manning state which this entailed, had consistently exceeded its flying target and proved the Tempest VI to be a rugged and thoroughly suitable aircraft for desert conditions.

For 84 Squadron this was to be a homecoming: the Squadron had spent no less than twenty years at Shaibah, from 1920 to 1940 and, during the inter-war years had become one of the most famous desert squadrons in the Service. It had adopted the famous, or infamous *Shaibah Blues* as its own song, and its return to Iraq was a nostalgic occasion indeed. Since 1946 the Squadron had been stationed in the Far East, serving in Java on Mosquito vis and latterly at Tengah, in Singapore, on Beaufighters: it was thus one of the few RAF squadrons which had seen action and continued to participate in active operations after VJ Day. The Squadron personnel left Tengah in October 1948, travelling by sea to Iraq where they had to endure four frustrating months before the Squadron's new Brigands began to reach Habbaniya. During this time, aircrews were being converted to the Brigand in the United Kingdom, and the airmen were loaned to other short-handed units at Habbaniya or elsewhere in the Command. Squadron Leader SE Nunn DFC remained throughout in command, and did his best to keep in touch with his scattered personnel and to organise their reformation as a squadron as quickly as possible. Probably due largely to the Brigand being a new aircraft, particularly to the Middle East, there were many delays in modifying them for desert conditions and considerable inefficiency in providing pack ups of spares and equipment not only in Iraq, but also along the delivery route from the UK. However, in February 1949, 84 Squadron was winging its way over the desert again for the first time in nine years, with perhaps some slight regret that it could not return to its old home at Shaibah. The Squadron silver – a particularly fine and historic collection – had wisely been left at Shaibah

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when the Squadron departed on its wartime travels. No time was lost in retrieving it and 84 Squadron felt at last that it had fully regained its old and respected place in the Middle East. The full complement of eight Brigands was achieved in March, but it was some months before the Squadron could declare itself to be fully operational as it lacked rocket rails, practice bombs and 20 mm cannon links, thus making weapon training virtually impossible. As an indication of the frustration felt by the Squadron, it is perhaps worth recording the somewhat caustic comment of its commanding officer in his Operations Record Book of February 1949:

"It appears incredible and beyond comprehension that a squadron, scheduled to be operational in October 1948, should only have received 50% of the 'pack ups' by the end of February 1949."

In fairness it must be said, however, that 84 Squadron probably paid a price for being the first squadron overseas to be equipped with the Brigand and, like a pioneer in any field, had to pave the way for those who followed.

When studying the Middle East, one cannot help noticing the extent to which activity, whether it be tribal dissidence or political rioting, dies down as the hot weather months approach. Fortunately heat and humidity sap the energy of the indigenous population just as severely as that of military forces, and often to an even greater extent as military personnel are at least trained to accept and operate in any conditions they may encounter. The hot weather of 1949 was no exception and Iraq remained generally quiet although there was mounting opposition to Nuri-as-Said and his Cabinet for failure to improve the economic plight of the country and for pursuing a foreign policy which many regarded as too pro-British, particularly over the Palestine settlement. Iraqi forces were gradually withdrawn from Transjordan, the last two brigades arriving back in Iraq by July as the armistice agreement which had been signed between Israel and Transjordan in April took effect. This was not popular in Iraq, and the feeling that the Arab cause was being weakened persisted, leading to the resignation of Nuri Pasha and his whole Cabinet in November.

The disposition and strength of the RAF remained unchanged and 84 Squadron was able, not without technical difficulties, to bring itself up to a high state of operational readiness. The Bristol Brigand had its teething troubles, mainly involving cracking and wrinkling of the skin of the mainplane when more than a limited amount of 'g' was applied during dive bombing practice. This did not, however, prove to be serious and suitable repairs and performance limitations were recommended by Bristols which enabled the problem to be solved within the Squadron.

The reinforcement of Iraq by 6 and 32 Squadrons from 324 Wing in the Canal Zone was practised, and the opportunity was taken to mount a flying display for the benefit of the Regent of Iraq in which 1 Squad-

ron Royal Iraq Air Force took part with the Vampires of 6 and 32 Squadrons and the Brigands of 84 Squadron. In view of the relatively few squadrons throughout the Middle East command, a series of interlocking reinforcement schemes existed to ensure that any particular area could be rapidly reinforced should a contingency arise. No 84 Squadron had such a plan to reinforce Somaliland in company with 8 Squadron from Aden and, in February 1950, the Squadron was placed on standby to implement this plan in order to cover the withdrawal of British forces when the southern part of Somaliland was handed over to Italy. Four Brigands flew to Mogadishu on 2 March and spent four weeks carrying out flag showing flights as well as participating in a fire power demonstration. Cured of their teething troubles, the Brigands gave excellent serviceability and completed an entirely trouble free detachment during which the chief sufferers were the Squadron personnel who were very badly housed and fed: this did much to mar an otherwise unusual and interesting task. Two British Army infantry companies suffered the same conditions but appeared to maintain their spirits by vigorous 'bugle blowing'. It was said that "fifty-three bugle calls a day between 0530 hours and 2300 hours did not go down too well with the airmen". The handover of Italian Somaliland was carried out without incident and the 84 Squadron detachment returned to Habbaniya on 4 April, only to find that the whole Squadron was under orders to move immediately back to the Far East to support the Malayan operations. And so, after a stay in Iraq of only sixteen months, the *Shaibah Blues* Squadron once more exchanged the desert for the jungle and returned to Tengah, leaving Iraq again without an operational squadron and dependent upon reinforcement from elsewhere.

The political instability of Iraq was in no way reduced by a tripartite statement of policy on the Arab-Israeli problem made by the United States, Britain and France in May. This three Power statement guaranteed the security of Arabs and Jews alike, and authorised the provision of arms for both, a policy which was not well received in Iraq and which did nothing to dispel the widespread hostility to Tewfig al Suweidi's Government. It was in this unstable atmosphere, with no operational squadron in the Command, that Air Vice-Marshal G R Beamish CB CBE became the AOC on 2 September 1951. In view of the absence of any operational aircraft, the plans for reinforcing Iraq in an emergency were overhauled, arrangements being made for up to sixteen aircraft from 324 Wing to move from the Canal Zone to Shaibah or Habbaniya at short notice. As this reinforcement could be implemented at a few hours notice, the RAF in Iraq did not feel quite as naked as it looked but, nevertheless, it was surprising to find an overseas command of this size and importance without combat aircraft. It reveals how stretched the Royal Air Force was at this time, with increasing commitments in the Far East, manning difficulties and large scale re-equipment. The tour of duty for all RAF personnel in Iraq had finally been stabilised at

two years, in conformity with other uncomfortable stations such as Aden. This was indeed a change from the prewar days when an airman would spend two years in Iraq, and then be shipped straight on from Basrah to complete a further three years in India. There was no mid-tour or other home leave for these men who, having once got their knees brown, kept them brown for five years!

The shaky Government of Tewfig al Suweidi finally fell in September after only seven months in office and the 'strong man', Nuri-as-Said again stepped into power, giving a welcome priority to internal economic and administrative affairs at the expense of foreign policy. Among other developments, a much discussed oil pipeline from Iraq to the Mediterranean – Kirkuk to Anias – was at last started.

Before the end of the year the reinforcement plans for Iraq were exercised by the attachment to Habbaniya of sixteen Vampires and two Meteors of 6 Squadron and six Brigands of 8 Squadron for a period of several weeks during which they not only carried out intensive training but gave a most successful bombing and air firing demonstration in front of HM the King and other high ranking dignitaries.

1951 proved to be a year in which interest centred upon Persia where the desire to nationalise the oil fields and installations found its expression in increasing rioting with risk to British lives and property. During the first few months of the year the campaign for oil nationalisation speeded up, instigated largely by the Communist-inspired Tudeh party. A climax was reached with the assassination of the Prime Minister on 7 March, outside a mosque in Teheran. It was said by many that General Razmara had virtually sealed his own fate by refusing to contemplate nationalisation of the oil industry, as proposed by the Tudeh party. After this tragedy events moved fast, with strikes and rioting against the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company and its officials, particularly at the southern oilfields around Abadan. Such were the threats of intimidation against authority, even against the Shah himself, that the Persian Parliament passed unanimously a resolution calling for the nationalisation of oil. On 27 March, martial law had to be declared in the oil regions, and it was hoped that this step would protect the workers and calm the situation. This placed the Government in a position of some difficulty as the agitators and leaders of the striking men were, outwardly at least, merely supporting nationalisation, a policy which the Government itself had resolved to implement.

From the British point of view these were serious developments in a country which Britain wished to remain stable. The entire output of the Anglo-Iranian fields, at that time some 20 million tons annually, was shipped to Europe and was an important factor in European economy. In addition it was possible that Russia might resort to military action if Britain endeavoured to safeguard her oil interests by military means, invoking as justification the 1921 Russo-Persian Treaty (although this Treaty did not provide for such action).

Nevertheless the lives of many thousands of British oil workers and their families, and much British property was endangered, and plans were hurriedly formulated for the protection of Abadan should the danger reach unacceptable proportions. As we have seen, RAF reinforcement plans for Iraq already existed and, indeed, had been exercised on more than one occasion. These plans were, therefore, incorporated in a specific operational plan for the use of two infantry battalions with a brigade headquarters, one cruiser and two frigates, one light bomber squadron, one fighter/ground attack squadron and a force of Hastings and Valetta transport aircraft. The object of this operation would be to occupy the oil field area of Abadan, to evacuate and otherwise safeguard British employees and their families, and endeavour to maintain the flow of oil. If Iraq raised no objection to the use of her airfields for such an operation, Habbaniya and Shaibah would be used for both land and air forces: if Iraq were to object, Kuwait and Bahrein would provide the operational bases, the Royal Navy units being positioned in the Shatt-al-Arab, in Iraqi waters off Abadan: the frontier between Persia and Iraq at this point runs roughly down the centre of the waterway.

Political developments in Persia followed thick and fast: severe rioting at Abadan resulted in a number of casualties, including the death of two British employees of AIOC, and the refineries were closed down on 15 April. The Prime Minister resigned ten days later and Dr Mohammed Mussadecq took over the Government, declaring his intention to proceed with nationalisation. These events brought an end to the general strike at Abadan, but nationalisation of the AIOC's assets became virtually inevitable. During May and June, the forces which would be required to implement the plan to occupy the Abadan oil field area were deployed to their operational bases, 6 Squadron with its Vampires and a detachment of six Brigands from 8 Squadron converging on Shaibah from the Canal Zone and Aden respectively. *HMS Mauritius*, a 6-inch gun cruiser from the East Indies Fleet, was positioned in the Shatt-al-Arab on 28 June accompanied by vigorous protests from Persia to Iraq for allowing this unfriendly act to take place in her territory. Iraq, however, gave her official support to these British preparations although there were Iraqi political elements which were sympathetic towards the nationalisation of oil, and would have liked to see it applied to the Iraq Petroleum Company as well.

Such was the determination of Dr Mussadecq to take over the AIOC, and such was Britain's desire to avoid a military confrontation over such an issue that the prospect of a settlement by negotiation increased. Several additional military plans, designed to meet specific contingencies, were added to the original and the forces remained at the alert for several months, their presence and obvious readiness, having a steadying effect on the situation. Meanwhile, in Iraq the Government negotiated more favourable terms with the Iraq Petroleum Company

for the payment of oil royalties, the figure to be paid by the latter being raised to 50% of the profits before foreign taxation. Although this agreement did not satisfy extremists who wanted nothing short of full nationalisation, its terms did find general favour, and at least deferred any spread of the Persian disaffection to Iraq.

In September 6 Squadron moved from Shaibah to Habbaniya, its place being taken by 73 Squadron from Malta, also a fighter/ground attack squadron equipped with Vampires. This released the Brigands of 8 Squadron to return to Aden where they were needed for operations in the Protectorates. As is so often the case with this type of political upheaval, no active operations were carried out, but the various reinforcement plans were fully exercised and gave the squadrons involved some excellent experience in operating their aircraft away from base in unfamiliar surroundings – the type of experience which every mobile squadron periodically needs to stimulate its interest and to test its equipment. At Abadan the climax came in November when negotiations resulted in the assets of the AIOC being taken over by the Government and the last of the European employees evacuated. It was an inevitable outcome: any other solution would probably have cost British lives. The British forces were not intended to prevent nationalisation, but to safeguard British lives and property and it was fortunate that their clearly visible presence was sufficient to achieve this.

The other political event of 1951 which had its repercussions in Iraq was the abrogation by Egypt in October of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936, a treaty which, *inter alia*, permitted Britain to station her forces in the Canal Zone. Many Iraqis hailed this step with enthusiasm and raised their voices in support of a similar step to abrogate the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930. This was clearly a straw in the wind, but for the time being, the firm hand of Nuri-as-Said prevented anything more serious than expressions of opinion. The year ended quietly, but before 6 Squadron returned to the Canal Zone from Habbaniya, its Vampires joined the Furies of 1 and 7 Squadrons Royal Iraq Air Force in a large scale and highly successful fire power demonstration on the ranges at Markyab, near Habbaniya.

The end of the quiet years

The end of 1951 has been chosen as an appropriate moment to conclude the period which has been entitled 'the quiet years': it marked the end of five years of muscle-flexing around the Arabian Peninsula. World War II had receded into distant memory and a postwar generation was feeling the need for self expression: colonial rule and treaty relationships were becoming ever more unpopular and stationing of the armed forces of a foreign power in the homeland was causing increasing resentment. Although, in the area under consideration, these feelings were expressed in the form of hostility to Britain, this was so merely because the area was primarily a British sphere of influence. The movement was world

wide and every major power with overseas possessions or influence was experiencing similar hostility.

Although the Royal Air Force had retained the framework of a command organisation in East Africa, the Arabian Peninsula and Iraq, 8 Squadron with an establishment of only eight operational aircraft had, for much of this quiet period, been the only operational unit in the whole region. True, there were reinforcing squadrons at hand in the Canal Zone, but the physical presence of combat aircraft was lacking. The brunt of the day to day routine work was admirably shouldered by the assortment of Ansons, Austers, Dakotas and Valettas which made up the three communications units in the region. In addition to fulfilling their normal transport and communications roles, they were employed for reconnaissance, leaflet dropping, photography, supply dropping and many other tasks. They were not infrequently hit by small arms fire, particularly in the Western Aden Protectorate and, in all but name, were virtually operational units.

The quiet years were clearly coming to an end; even in 1951 the Royal Air Force had been on the brink of operations in southern Persia, and Iraq was showing unmistakable signs of resentment at the continued use by Britain of her airfields. In the Persian Gulf, Saudi Arabia was again casting covetous eyes at the Buraimi Oasis, and deliberately fomenting frontier disputes with the Sultan of Muscat. In Aden the continual tribal dissidence was tending to increase, and, to add to the problems, Aden Colony itself was far from stable. In the territories of the East Africa High Commission, resentment of British colonial power was becoming increasingly evident. This was particularly noticeable in Kenya where it was fostered by the Kikuyu tribe and its newly formed Mau Mau organisation.

Whereas the early chapters of this narrative have covered the whole region from Iraq to East Africa – a suitable treatment in view of the relatively low level of activity – future chapters will deal with specific campaigns or operational phases in particular regions. Again, this is appropriate because, fortunately, there was rarely a high level of activity in more than one part of the theatre simultaneously and we find the same squadrons operating at one moment in Iraq, at another in Oman and then in Somaliland or Aden or Kenya. No better example of the true flexibility and economy of air power can be found than in the series of events in which the Royal Air Force was involved in this theatre during the twenty years from 1952.

Mau Mau

Historical background

In order to understand fully the underlying reasons for the vicious terrorist campaign which caused so much loss of life to Africans and to a lesser extent Europeans and Asians during the mid-1950s, it is necessary to turn back the pages of history. Although the campaign erupted suddenly and with great violence, resentment against European settlement in Kenya had been smouldering below the surface for many years.

The native population of Kenya is drawn from many tribes of which two predominate, the Masai and the Kikuyu. The former is a nomadic warlike tribe which has always depended for its subsistence upon grazing its herds of cattle which were obtained largely by raiding and pillaging neighbouring tribes. They never tilled the soil and as the primary need was to find good grazing grounds, they were constantly on the move, occupying huge tracts of good grassland, driving their weaker brethren into forest and scrubland. Owing to the need to allow the grazing grounds to recover they constantly occupied much more land than they needed at any one time. Early in the present century their numbers were drastically reduced by famine and disease and so desperate was their plight that they made treaties with the British Government, surrendering thousands of square miles of humid land suitable for European types of farming. The tribe, greatly reduced in size was allocated a large and much drier Reserve, located to the south of Nairobi and the railway. The areas ceded to Europeans by the Masai form a preponderant part of the 17,000 square miles of the 'White Highlands' so named because it was settled by white families from Britain and South Africa, and subsequently reserved for Europeans. Despite their warlike qualities, the Masai had accepted the arrangement, and they played only a minor part in the rioting and bloodshed of the 1950s.

The Kikuyu, on the other hand, have always been an agricultural farming community who occupied a large area around Fort Hall, to the north east of Nairobi, some six hundred years ago. During the 16th Century the tribe expanded across the Chania River and negotiated for more land with the Wanderobo tribe in the Kiambu district, growing in size and prosperity. At the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th Century a series of disasters struck both the Kikuyu and the Masai. A severe outbreak of rinderpest, a form of distemper, ravaged the herds

and smallpox wrought havoc among the tribesmen and their families. An intense drought followed by a bad harvest produced widespread famine, resulting in the tribal population being reduced by a figure variously assessed as anything from 20% to 50%. These disasters forced the remaining Kikuyu to concentrate back in their original area around Fort Hall leaving parts of the Kiambu district to the new white settlers who, quite understandably, thought that the land was unoccupied and available for them to take up.

It is essential to understand the philosophy of the Kikuyu and their age old tribal customs and superstitions to appreciate the nature of events which followed. They were intensely religious people whose lives were dominated by family rites of marriage, initiation and oaths of loyalty to the tribe. They believed deeply in the power of black magic and superstition. In their agriculture the Kikuyu practised a system of tillage known as 'shifting cultivation'. This method produced only two or three crops, after which the tilled patches are abandoned to nature until the lapse of fifteen years or so has regenerated the soil. To the European newcomers, most of this fallow land looked unoccupied, as indeed it was in a westernised legal sense. To the Kikuyu, however, it was still their own land to which they felt entitled to return at any time to recultivate or to graze their cattle. Although most of the land acquired by settlers was bought at a fair price and deeds of ownership correctly drawn up, the Kikuyu never lost the conviction that the land had only been rented or temporarily occupied and that it remained their own to reoccupy whenever they wished. This deep conviction emanated from their tribal traditions and even those tribesmen who had been well paid for land could never rid themselves of the belief that it remained their permanent property. This, in a nutshell, was the root cause of the Mau Mau uprising, and it explains why the Kikuyu tribe, and not the Masai, were behind the organised terrorism.

The arrival of the first missionaries and early settlers had a considerable influence on the Kikuyu. Few of them had any great desire to become Christians, but many were attracted by the opportunities offered to learn to read and write: the easiest way to learn these new arts was to profess to become a Christian. Many took this course but failed to forsake their old tribal practice and superstitions. With this education came medicine, better health and lower mortality, particularly among the children of the tribe, which in turn led to a population expansion. It was not long before the expanding tribe needed more land and found that the old areas from which they had retired during the disasters of 1901 were no longer available to them. Families became homeless and many had no alternative but to work for the very settlers whom they considered had deprived them of their land.

In 1924 the Kikuyu Central Association was founded by a group of

young men who had fought in World War I and had received some British education. The slogan of this association was 'we must be given back the lands which the white man has stolen from us'. The growing hostility was exacerbated by the complete ignorance and scepticism of the Kikuyu system of land tenure displayed by British Government officials, who completely failed to appreciate that the possession of title deeds by the European settlers meant nothing to the tribesmen. It was not until 1932 that the Carter Land Commission endeavoured to sort out the problems, but its work was largely nullified by the countless false claims which were filed.

British rule brought many advantages in the form of education, health, modern farming methods, seeds, irrigation and machinery, but unfortunately none of these benefits assuaged the young militant element which was determined to concentrate upon the wrongful acquisition of land in its effort to oust the British. During World War II the Kikuyu Central Association had to be banned on account of its political activities under the leadership of men like Harry Thika and Jomo Kenyatta. It was not long before a broader based organisation, the Kenya African Union (KAU), was formed. It had as its object the welding together of native opinion of many different tribes to improve conditions for Kenya Africans. Jomo Kenyatta became president of the KAU in 1947. It was from these roots that the secret organisation of Mau Mau sprang, apparently having its origins among agitators from the banned KCA. The date of its foundation is obscure and the words 'Mau Mau' have no known meaning. One theory is that they merely constitute a code name, but another theory which was popular at the time is that the words are an anagram of "uma uma" which, in the Kikuyu language, mean "out out"! Anyway, the Society's slogan was 'save the lands' and one of the earliest demonstrations of its power came in 1950 when HRH the Duke of Gloucester visited Kenya to confer the status of a city upon Nairobi. The rumour spread that this ceremony was to be accompanied by more thefts of Kikuyu land. The Mau Mau then came more into the open and it was realised that compulsory oath taking ceremonies were being held in an endeavour to commit as many of the superstitious Kikuyu as possible to the aims of Mau Mau. Violence and compulsion to take the oath grew, and the ground was very fertile for such persuasion. Fortunately a number of genuinely Christian Kikuyu, who had been forced to take the oath under pain of death, had the courage to go to the police. Prosecutions began but not before the movement had taken deep roots which were to prove difficult to eradicate.

As far as the Royal Air Force in East Africa was concerned, the earliest manifestations of trouble from the Kikuyu were seen in the form of labour unrest, in both Kenya and Uganda. Pay differentials between African workers on the one hand and Asians and Europeans on the other were a source of much discontent. In 1948 and 1949 the RAF was called upon to fly leaflet dropping and reconnaissance sorties with com-

munications aircraft over Kampala and over various Kikuyu strongholds. In addition a number of flag showing flights were carried out by visiting squadrons, such as 8 from Aden and 82 from West Africa with Tempests and Lancasters respectively. Although this wave of unrest cannot be classed as part of the Mau Mau campaign, which started a little later, it was undoubtedly part of the preparatory process which inflamed the sense of injustice felt by Africans; it is regrettable that there was so little understanding of Kikuyu traditions at this time, as the violence which was to follow could probably have been forestalled, or at least reduced in intensity.

Early phases of the campaign

During the early part of 1952 the period of terror and violence which became known as the Mau Mau Campaign began in earnest. Initially intimidation and violence was largely directed against Africans, and mainly those Kikuyu who either refused to participate in the Mau Mau oath taking ritual, or who contravened the oath which they had taken under duress. The horrible injuries and mutilation inflicted on these victims acted understandably as a very serious deterrent to others who wished to free themselves from Mau Mau involvement. Thanks, however, to some extremely courageous Kikuyu, the intelligence network and the Kenya Police were steadily compiling a massive portfolio of evidence about the Mau Mau, its organisation and the details of the oath taking ceremonies. Penetration of its organisation on this scale compelled the Mau Mau leaders to take even more excessive reprisals in order to demonstrate their power, and it was at this stage that the violence began to spread to European settlers, particularly those who lived on isolated farms, or whose employees included Kikuyu who had been attracted by Mau Mau propaganda and had taken the oath. Between May and October 1952 no less than fifty-nine Africans who had been loyal to the Government were murdered.

Sir Evelyn Baring, the Governor of Kenya reported to the Colonial Secretary on 13 October that the situation had deteriorated to such an extent that the time had come to declare a State of Emergency under which he would have power to detain any persons concerned with breaches of public order and to prohibit the carrying of any offensive weapons such as 'pangas' in disturbed areas. He fully realised that such action would inevitably result in at least an initial flare-up of violence, but it would also deprive Mau Mau of its leaders at a single stroke: most of the leaders had been identified and their whereabouts was known. Although most of the battalions of the King's African Rifles had, by this time, been concentrated in Kenya at the expense of the other East African territories, and although it was felt that they, together with the Police, should be capable of dealing with any outbreak of violence, His Excellency nevertheless considered that the presence of a British battalion would provide a stabilising influence, as well as giving support

and encouragement to the Police and KAR. The Governor's proposals were agreed with remarkable rapidity in Whitehall and orders were given to the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East Land Forces, to despatch one infantry battalion from Egypt to Nairobi, to coincide with the declaration of a State of Emergency. The 1st Lancashire Fusiliers was selected for the reinforcement and was flown in by a mixed force of Hastings from Transport Command and Valettas from MEAF on 21 and 22 October.

The arrival of the battalion coincided with the formal announcement of a State of Emergency throughout Kenya on 21 October which was accompanied by the immediate arrest of all known Mau Mau leaders. Jomo Kenyatta, President of the Kenya African Union was taken into custody at his home and immediately flown in an Anson of the RAF Communications Flight from Eastleigh to Lokitaung, in the Northern Frontier District. He was to remain with other leaders in internment for the duration of the campaign. The events of 21 October produced shock and incredulity throughout the Colony, followed, as was expected, by a short period of bewildered calm, and in turn, by a great upsurge of hatred and violence against Africans and Europeans alike as new Mau Mau leaders hastily stepped into the shoes of those who had been arrested.

At this stage the forces available in Kenya for internal security comprised four battalions of the KAR located mainly in the areas of greatest violence, the Kenya Regiment in Nairobi and the 1st Lancashire Fusiliers who were distributed in company strength with the KAR battalions. The Kenya Police completed the list of available land forces. Internal security problems of this nature were regarded as being largely the responsibility of the police, supported by army units, but it very quickly became evident during the Mau Mau troubles that air action could play a major role.

As we have seen, the Royal Air Force in East Africa had been run right down until Eastleigh remained as the only active RAF airfield, with no operational squadron upon it, and a communications flight of one Proctor, two Ansons and one Valetta. In addition to the RAF, Kenya had a useful Police Reserve Air Wing containing a number of light civil aircraft, flown and often owned, by pilots on the Reserve. It was commanded by an ex-RAF officer, Wing Commander R Johnston, and when the State of Emergency was declared, it was mobilised at the Nairobi West civil airfield. The aircraft of the Air Wing had no offensive capability, if one discounts the World War I tactics of lobbing hand grenades out of the cockpit! They had, however, a valuable light communications and reconnaissance role and, what was probably their greatest asset, they had pilots with an intimate knowledge of the country. Here then was a small air component which could always play a valuable complementary role to any additional forces which the RAF might bring in. Early in the emergency the value of placing the

mobilised Police Air Wing and the RAF resources under a single command was foreseen and was to be put into practice at a later date.

As the army and police forces were deployed to cover the worst of the trouble centres, which lay mainly in the Kikuyu Reserve and in the White Highlands, the calls for every form of air support, from communications to leaflet dropping and from casualty evacuation to reconnaissance far outstripped the slender resources of the RAF and the Police. In addition the need for accurate and discriminate offensive action from the air became evident. The situation was slightly alleviated in October when 82 Photographic Reconnaissance Squadron, which had been working from Eastleigh for some months with its Lancasters, returned to the United Kingdom but left behind its two Dakotas to swell the station's resources.

The first significant step to strengthen the RAF came, however, early in 1953 when it was decided to provide a flight of armed Harvards, capable of limited offensive action. The Rhodesian Air Training Group was in process of winding up at the time, and its Harvards were available and conveniently adjacent to Kenya. A new flight of four Harvards, under the command of Squadron Leader A Trant and designated 1340 Flight, was formed by the RATG at Thornhill in Rhodesia. Each aircraft was equipped with one .303 Browning fixed front gun and light series bomb racks capable of carrying 20lb fragmentation bombs, designed primarily for anti-personnel targets. A psychological factor which was probably not considered in selecting the Harvard for this role was that, with its propellor in fine pitch, it was probably the noisiest aircraft ever built, well able to scare the living daylight out of tribesmen caught in a target area, if suitably flown, without any need to fire a gun or drop a bomb. Countless long suffering residents in the vicinity of Harvard training schools, where propellor controls were not always used with experience and discretion, could support this contention. No 1340 Flight flew into Eastleigh on 23 March 1953 to spend a brief period settling into its new role before being deployed in the operational area.

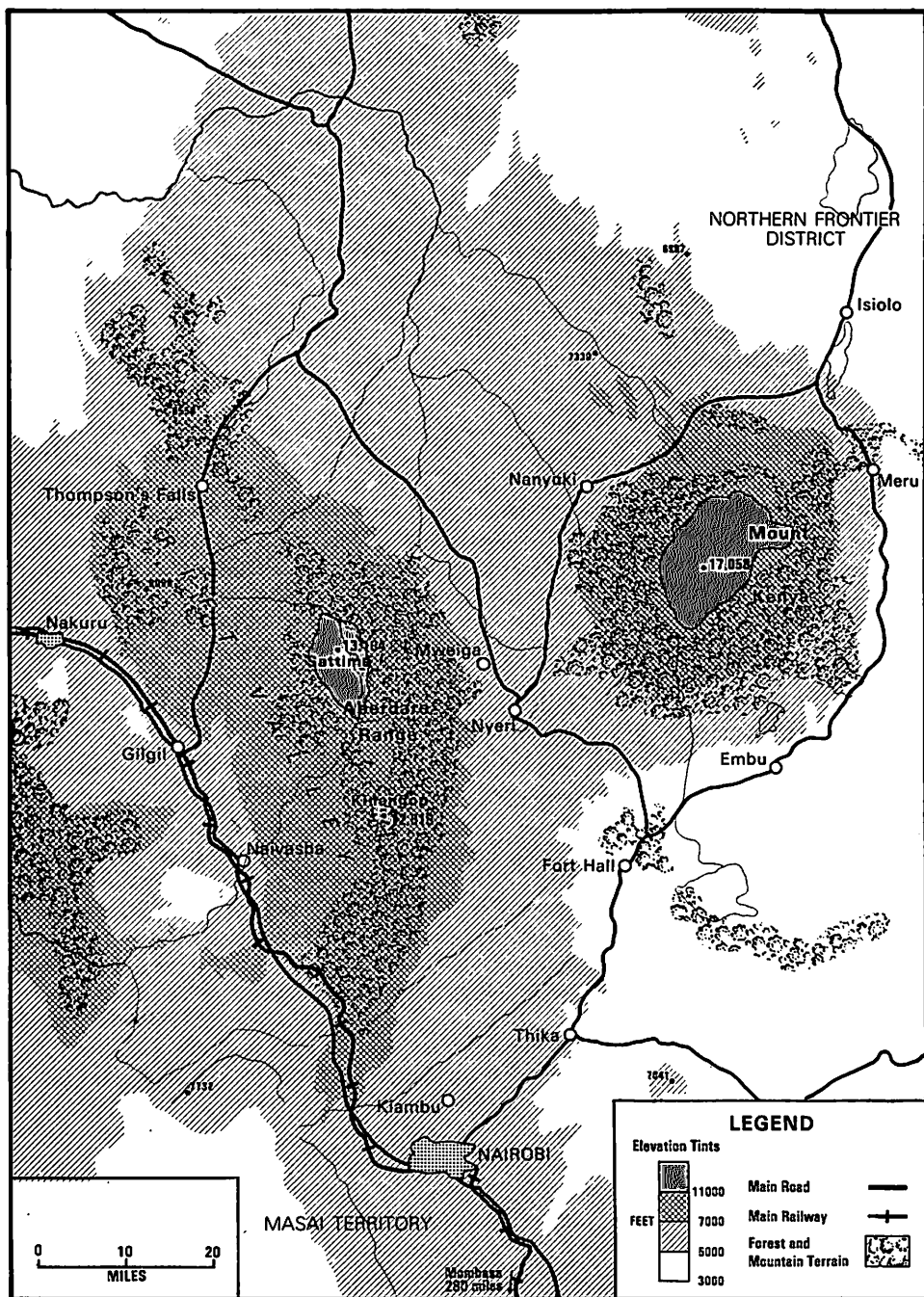
Operational areas

Two immense geographical features run the length of East Africa. The first is the Rift Valley which starts at the Dead Sea and ends in Lake Nyasa, and the second, the East African Plateau, between 4,000 and 7,000 feet high which has its northern boundary in the Abyssinian Highlands and its southern boundary in the South African Drakensberg Mountains. In Kenya, the Rift Valley divides the Plateau in two. The extent of the main troubled area in Kenya is shown on the map (Map 2, overleaf), the boundaries of which are the western edge of the Rift Valley and the eastern edge of the plateau where it starts to fall gradually towards the coast. The northern limit is the lower edge of the Northern Frontier District of Kenya, and Nairobi marks the southern

limit. The whole operational area is approximately 17,000 square miles in extent, encompassing the White Highlands and the Kikuyu Reserve, and containing the Aberdare range of mountains with peaks rising to 12,000 feet and Mount Kenya itself is over 17,000 feet in height. As the lower slopes of the Aberdares and Mount Kenya are clothed in dense jungle up to about 7,000 feet, the operational area clearly afforded a great deal of cover and was ideal for hit and run terrorist operations. The immediate effect on Mau Mau of the declaration of a State of Emergency and the internment of eighty-three of its leaders was to drive the organisation underground, as was only to be expected. As and when new leadership for the Mau Mau gangs was arranged, they tended to disappear into a series of forest hideouts which were constantly changed, and from which they sallied out to continue their acts of violence. In general these hides were to be found throughout the forest areas in the Aberdares and around Mount Kenya, often partially underground, usually adjacent to water, and always heavily camouflaged and extremely difficult to see both from the ground and from the air.

Within the broad operational area which has been described, it became possible from the available intelligence to delineate much smaller 'prohibited areas'. Of these, the two largest and most important were the Aberdare mountain range of about 820 square miles and an area around Mount Kenya of some 780 square miles. All persons, other than the security forces were denied right of access to these prohibited areas and military or police action could, therefore, be taken without any preliminary challenge. It was to these areas that offensive air action was confined, at least during the early stages of the campaign. The fact that the boundaries of the prohibited areas could be, and indeed were adjusted frequently to meet the changing pattern of Mau Mau activity gave the terrorists no opportunity to create safe and permanent bases, and they were kept constantly on the move by their pursuers.

Although the last few months of 1952 were relatively quiet, nobody in Kenya was under any illusion that the lull would be permanent. The shock of the arrests and, in particular, that of Kenyatta, served only to instil a new determination within the hard core of Mau Mau to oust the European from East Africa. It was, in this atmosphere, that the murder of European settlers began on New Year's Day in 1953 with the brutal murder of Mr Charles Fergusson and his neighbour Mr Richard Bingley at Fergusson's farm at the foot of the Aberdares. This was followed on the next night by a similar attack on two women farmers, Mrs Simpson and Mrs Hesselberger which was foiled by the extraordinary preparedness and gallantry of the two ladies which resulted in the hasty departure of the gang leaving three dead behind them. Only three weeks later, perhaps the most savage murder of all took place at the farm of the Rucks on the Kinangop. Mr and Mrs Ruck and their young son were all butchered and, as so often happened, two of their trusted employees were found to have been key accessories. Among European



Map 2: Mau Mau affected area of Central Kenya

settlers none had done more for the well-being of the Africans than the Rucks; their murder finally convinced even the most lukewarm Government official that Mau Mau had to be ruthlessly exterminated.

Hitherto the emergency had been regarded primarily as a police responsibility, strengthened and supported by army and RAF units. Movement of the Mau Mau gangs to forest areas under their new leadership, followed by the new spate of attacks on Europeans as well as on loyal Kikuyu, presented a different and much more serious situation which was clearly beyond the capability of the police force to handle. Pursuit and destruction of the gangs must now be regarded as a full scale military operation, and the security force strengthened accordingly. The Governor had always combined with his appointment that of Commander-in-Chief but in view of the emergency which affected about one-sixth of the territory of Kenya it was decided to set up a new military command and, on 7 June 1953, General Sir George Erskine GCB KBE DSO took over the new operational command with the title of Commander-in-Chief, East Africa. Furthermore, his command was removed from the jurisdiction of HQ Middle East, and placed directly under the War Office, thus giving formal recognition to the gravity of the emergency. At the same time the British Army units in Kenya were greatly strengthened by the despatch from the UK of Headquarters 39 Brigade and two battalions of infantry – The Buffs and Devons. These reinforcements were just sufficient to permit General Erskine to take the war into the forest areas, using all the battalions he could release from the police work on which they had hitherto been engaged. A long and arduous cat and mouse campaign commenced, the successes against the gangs coming slowly and painfully as the unaccustomed troops became more practised in jungle skills.

The part played by the air, in the shape of the RAF and the Police Air Wing during these initial phases of the campaign was very important, if not spectacular. In this type of jungle warfare against a fleeting enemy, the initiative must be with the ground forces, the air playing a supporting role; but no other type of warfare can make greater use of the versatility and flexibility of aircraft with a consequent saving of large numbers of troops and police.

Until the Mau Mau gangs took to the forest, the main requirement from the RAF was for transportation and communications. The transfer of reinforcements to Kenya was handled by Transport Command and MEAF Hastings, Valettas and Dakotas, while the Communications Flight at Eastleigh and the Police Reserve Air Wing provided the internal transportation. However, the proscription of specific jungle areas into which the security forces were deployed to hunt the gangs produced an additional requirement for supply dropping and low level reconnaissance. The altitude at which most of the operations were carried out posed something of a problem. At 7,000 feet and above, the performance of the smaller aircraft such as Ansons and Proctors began

to fall off rapidly. Dropping zones for bulk supplies were impracticable as the need was for small quantities of supplies to be despatched to widely scattered, small patrols in the heart of the jungle. This necessitated low level free dropping and was particularly hazardous at the higher altitudes. On the other hand, the use of larger aircraft with reserves of power, such as the Valetta and Dakota was wasteful for such small loads, added to which the size of the aircraft restricted their manoeuvrability. The Sycamore, which was the only helicopter available at the time, suffered loss of power at altitude as did the Ansons and Proctors. In general the lightly loaded Tripacers and Cessnas of the Kenya Police Reserve Air Wing, proved to be the most suitable of the available aircraft and the knowledge of the terrain possessed by most of the Police Reserve pilots gave them a great advantage in identifying the more difficult target areas. The Harvards of 1340 Flight which, after a few days training and familiarisation at Eastleigh, moved up country to join the Police Wing at Nyeri, were also used occasionally for supply dropping although their main effort was reserved for air strikes and reconnaissance.

As the forces available to General Erskine increased and were able to exert greater pressure in the forest areas, it became clear that the potential of the air could be used to better advantage. A Joint Operations Centre had been established at Mweiga, near Nyeri, which became the operational base of the Harvards and the Police Wing. It was decided that these slender air resources must be placed under a single command to ensure complete coordination of their operations. This was effected in a somewhat novel way. The Commanding Officer of RAF Eastleigh, Group Captain DJ Eayrs, became the overall commander of all air forces, including the Police Wing, and air adviser to the C-in-C. The Commanding Officer of the Police Wing, Wing Commander Robin Johnston, an impressive man with a most distinguished record, was considered to be an ideal choice to assume tactical command of both RAF and Police resources in the operational area. As he was on the RAF Reserve of Officers, there was no difficulty about recalling him to active service, and he stepped into the new appointment. This solution not only satisfied any reluctance which the KPR Wing might have had about being placed under RAF command, but gave the air component a field commander with quite incomparable knowledge of the operational scene. It was decided at the same time to increase the aircraft in 1340 Flight from four to eight Harvards, to use them mainly for air strikes against targets selected by the Joint Operations Centre and, taking full advantage of the superior knowledge of the KPR Wing pilots, to use the latter as pathfinders in identifying and marking the more obscure targets for the Harvards. The air reorganisation was completed in June 1953 and marked a considerable stepping up of air action, the details of which were sufficiently important to be reported in detailed Situation Reports to London at weekly intervals. Mid-1953

also marked the end of the opening phase of the campaign, to be followed by a long and remorseless phase of attrition in accordance with the planned offensive initiated by General Erskine.

Attrition

The second phase of the campaign, which it is appropriate to entitle 'attrition' was fought almost exclusively in the two forest areas, namely the Aberdares and Mount Kenya. It was fought with dogged perseverance by the security forces who were called upon to endure intense discomfort and hardship. Not only were they stalking a fleeting and virtually invisible enemy in dense, humid jungle, but they had to contend with big game which turned out to be a greater danger than the Mau Mau. Many injuries and accidents to the security forces were inflicted by wild animals, notably rhinoceros and buffalo, until the troops learned something of the behaviour and reactions of individual animals.

Various methods of sweeping the jungle areas to uncover the Mau Mau hides were tried. Initially a series of concentrated sweeps, with lines of troops acting as beaters were pushed through specific areas, but so skilfully were the hides constructed, that this method failed to uncover many of them and the number of terrorists captured was disappointing. The second, and more successful method, consisted of allotting a small area of forest permanently to a platoon or company who lived in it and got to know it intimately, being supplied and supported by air. Most of the forest area was but a few minutes flying from the Mweiga base of the Harvards and the KPR Wing where a 400 yard strip at 6500 feet above sea level proved to be an adequate operating base. The Police Wing had grown to a strength of fourteen full-time and twelve part-time pilots. Their particular role was the close support of the infantry patrols: flying low over the forest they would locate the patrols, help them to identify their positions and direct them towards Mau Mau targets they had spotted from the air. They brought the army food, news and letters, carrying out the supply drops from low altitude without parachutes, the supplies being packed in 30lb loads, eight such loads being the capacity of the Piper Pacers and Cessnas.

To fly the ridges of the Aberdares needed a special skill. The valleys and ravines between these lateral ridges were steep and treacherous, sometimes narrowing to a dead end, sometimes dangerously curving. Often there was little room to turn. The mountain could be blacked out in less than a minute by cloud and the small aircraft had to endure an incessant buffeting by capricious air currents. If anything Mount Kenya was worse than the Aberdares, with its radial ridges, larger area and greater altitude. Difficult though these conditions were by day, much of the Police Wing patrolling was carried out at night, mainly because it was possible to locate the Mau Mau gangs easily by their camp fires.

It was during these close support sorties that most of the targets for immediate strikes by the Harvards were identified and passed back to the JOC at Mweiga. Distances were so short in the prohibited areas that a Harvard strike could often be over a target within a few minutes of it being reported by a KPR Wing pilot. A typical week's work by the Harvards of 1340 Flight was that for the period 22 to 29 July 1953. Fifty-six strikes were flown, twenty-one of them being in support of a particular army operation in progress at the time, and thirty-five against suspected hideouts in the Aberdares. Some of these sorties were flown at night when camp fires were attacked. Two hundred and thirty-two fragmentation bombs were dropped and 18,950 rounds of ammunition fired. One unsatisfactory feature of these offensive operations was the near impossibility of obtaining information of the results. Photography was useless under the prevailing conditions, visual reconnaissance little better and army patrols were unlikely to be able to reach target areas quickly enough to be able to assess casualties. However, the piecing together of subsequent intelligence eventually showed that these strikes were highly effective in constantly harassing the gangs and keeping them on the move; so much so that General Erskine called for more and more air action as his operations in the forest areas progressed.

By August there was clear evidence that the unrelenting pressure on the gangs, particularly in the Aberdare forests, was having the desired effect, and it indicated that the tactics of maintaining small bodies of troops in forest locations, supplied by air and supported by air strikes were sound. General Erskine did not, however, have sufficient forces to cover all the forest areas and many terrorists managed to escape the net and move to an unpatrolled part of the forest. Unfortunately, most of the KAR battalions had, of necessity, been left on police work outside the forest where the 'Passive Wing' as it was called, of the Mau Mau was active among the Kikuyu in providing supplies and money for the operational gangs. Police recruiting had been stepped up from the beginning of the emergency, but it was a slow business and the Police continued to need reinforcement from army sources.

All these considerations led General Erskine to propose to the War Office that another brigade of two battalions should be sent to Kenya, for a period of about seven months which was the time he estimated that Mau Mau would be brought under control, if not defeated. Whitehall reacted rapidly to this request and decided to send HQ 49 Brigade with two infantry battalions – The Royal Northumberland Fusiliers and The Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers from the United Kingdom. Consideration was given to sending a brigade from the Canal Zone which would have been quicker and much less costly in flying hours. The situation in Egypt was, however, sensitive and it seemed prudent not to weaken the Middle East forces at that moment.

The airlift for this reinforcement was, as on previous occasions, shared between Transport Command and civil aviation. Between 10

and 29 September, 49 Brigade was flown into Eastleigh in RAF Hastings and a mixed fleet of civil Yorks, Hermes and Argonauts. Eastleigh was called upon to receive, turn round and despatch some forty-one four-engined aircraft during this period, and handle the arrival of about 1,300 troops and many hundreds of tons of equipment. The transport role of Eastleigh, in addition to its operational task in supporting the emergency deserves to be remembered and appreciated. In particular, the problems of maintaining the red 'murrum' dirt runways in a serviceable condition for increasing numbers of extremely heavy aircraft were formidable and the Air Ministry Works Directorate staff deserved great credit. Throughout the whole emergency lasting some four years Eastleigh airfield was unserviceable for only a few hours at a time, after unusually heavy rains, and then only for the heavier aircraft. It was fortunate that the era of jet transports had not yet arrived as the effect of such aircraft on the surface of a dirt runway would have been catastrophic with the intensity of flying to which Eastleigh became accustomed. Even the mini-jets, the Vampires of 8 Squadron from Aden, which were to be the first jet aircraft to use the airfield in any numbers, caused heavy erosion of the top surface, and the brilliant frangipani trees which surround Eastleigh received liberal coatings of red dust.

With the arrival of 49 Brigade, the security forces reached the peak of their strength. General Erskine had at his disposal eleven infantry battalions, the Kenya Regiment, 21,000 Police, the Kikuyu Home Guard and the Royal Air Force. The excellent work of 1340 Flight, which during the month in which 49 Brigade arrived, flew no less than 332 offensive sorties, dropping 2,555 bombs and firing 97,760 rounds of ammunition, had convinced the C-in-C that the time was now ripe to step up air action against the gangs. The 20lb bombs carried by the Harvards were not powerful enough for effective use in the jungle. This anti-personnel bomb was designed for use against bodies of troops in the open and its effects were seriously dissipated when used in dense jungle against targets which were heavily concealed in the undergrowth. Representation was, therefore, made to London by both the Commander-in-Chief and by the Air Officer Commanding British Forces in Aden, for a detachment to be sent to Kenya for trials of four of the Lincolns from Bomber Command which were involved in routine SUN RAY detachments to the Middle East. Initially two aircraft were despatched to Eastleigh and the trials carried out against jungle targets were so successful that, by the end of the year, it was agreed to maintain a detachment of six Lincolns in Kenya for as long as the operations justified it. The commitment was to be shared among the Lincoln squadrons which normally provided the SUN RAY detachments. As can be imagined it was to prove an unusual and most interesting diversion for the crews of Bomber Command who found the climate of Kenya and the operational activity much to their liking.

With the increased forces and the rise in tempo of air operations,

coupled with the employment of three brigades, it became obvious that a proper Air Staff was required and, by January 1954, a Joint Operations Centre was established for the first time at GHQ East Africa, to coordinate requests for air support to control air operations and to develop operational techniques and joint planning. Improved operational control brought to light the need for photographic reconnaissance facilities which had been virtually non-existent since the departure of 82 Squadron many months before. In March 1954, therefore, HQ MEAF agreed to the attachment to Eastleigh of two Meteor PR10s from 13 Squadron to carry out basic intelligence and photographic cover of the Aberdares and Mount Kenya. After a brief stay the Meteors returned to the Middle East and the Lincolns endeavoured to fill the gap with vertical photography alone. This was not adequate for interpretation purposes and, after much discussion, it was finally agreed to establish a permanent detachment of two Meteor PR10s at Eastleigh, with suitable interpretation facilities alongside the JOC at GHQ. Experiments were also carried out with speech broadcasting from the air, or 'sky shouting' as it was colloquially known, by the installation of loud hailer in Auster aircraft. Although not very successful at first, a number of technical difficulties were overcome and several Austers, and later a Pembroke, were equipped for this role. It was too early in the offensive to expect many gangs to surrender at the invitation of a 'sky shouter', and the aircraft were not greatly used until later in the campaign.

As in the case of the land forces, early 1954 saw the air forces, both RAF and Police, reach peak strength and, for the remainder of the campaign the following aircraft were permanently available to support the operations:

- 6 Lincolns detached from Bomber Command
- 8 Harvards of 1340 Flight
- 2 Austers and a Pembroke for speech broadcasting
- 1 Sycamore helicopter for casualty evacuation
- 4 communications aircraft
- 13 KPR Wing light aircraft

Medium bombing

The first Lincoln detachment was drawn from 49 Squadron and, in January 1954, was succeeded at Eastleigh by 100 Squadron from Wittering. The tempo of their bombing increased steadily as the Joint Operations Centre received more and more intelligence and was able to allocate targets which were known to contain hideouts. During March, when the detachment from 100 Squadron was in process of handing over to one from 61 Squadron a large scale combined effort of eighty-one sorties was laid on which resulted in $612 \times 500\text{lb}$ and $171 \times 1,000\text{lb}$ bombs being dropped and 18,000 rounds of 0.5-inch ammunition being fired. One Lincoln from 61 Squadron was lost, crashing at night in the Aberdares and resulting in the death of all five crew members.

This early use of medium bombers was judged to have been successful and, in consequence, an important directive was issued from the JOC in August which stated that "the Commander-in-Chief has decided that air operations are to be given priority over ground operations in the Aberdare forest from 22 August until commencement of a certain operation timed to begin in December 1954". 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 re-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. The sketch (Fig IV overleaf) shows how the whole area of the Aberdare Range was apportioned to the security forces with a permanent ring of ground forces on the perimeter ready to intercept any Mau Mau endeavouring to escape from the central area. These stringent precautions, to ensure that the targets attacked were not only well within the Prohibited Areas but were properly identified as centres of Mau Mau activity, were very necessary in view of the extreme political sensitivity of bombing on such a heavy scale. As always there were many ready to condemn such tactics as inhumane, totally regardless of the appalling atrocities carried out at every opportunity by the gangs. Bombing in accordance with the JOC directive continued throughout 1954, the Lincoln squadrons changing over at about two monthly intervals to avoid the need to carry out major servicing away from their bases in the United Kingdom. By September the intensity of bombing had risen to a peak: in that month 214 Squadron carried out 159 day and 17 night sorties, dropping $2,025 \times 500\text{lb}$ bombs and firing no less than 77,850 rounds from their turrets. All these operations were in the Aberdares but, in the following month, attacks were abruptly switched to the area around Mount Kenya, the same tactics pursued and the same intensity maintained. At the end of the year, by which time 49 Squadron which had initiated the medium bombing campaign had arrived for its second Kenya detachment, reports were beginning to show the effectiveness of the attacks. More and more terrorists were coming out of the jungle to surrender and it was evident from the stories they had to tell that the bombing was seriously affecting the morale and determination of the gangs. There was an inevitability about the bombing which they knew could be maintained and which they could not in any way counter. Their hideout areas were being subjected to concentrated attack, they were ringed with troops waiting for them to come out and they could no longer obtain enough food and supplies from the Kikuyu Reserve. They could not send parties out to pillage and terrorise on any large scale, and the future for the movement looked bleak indeed.

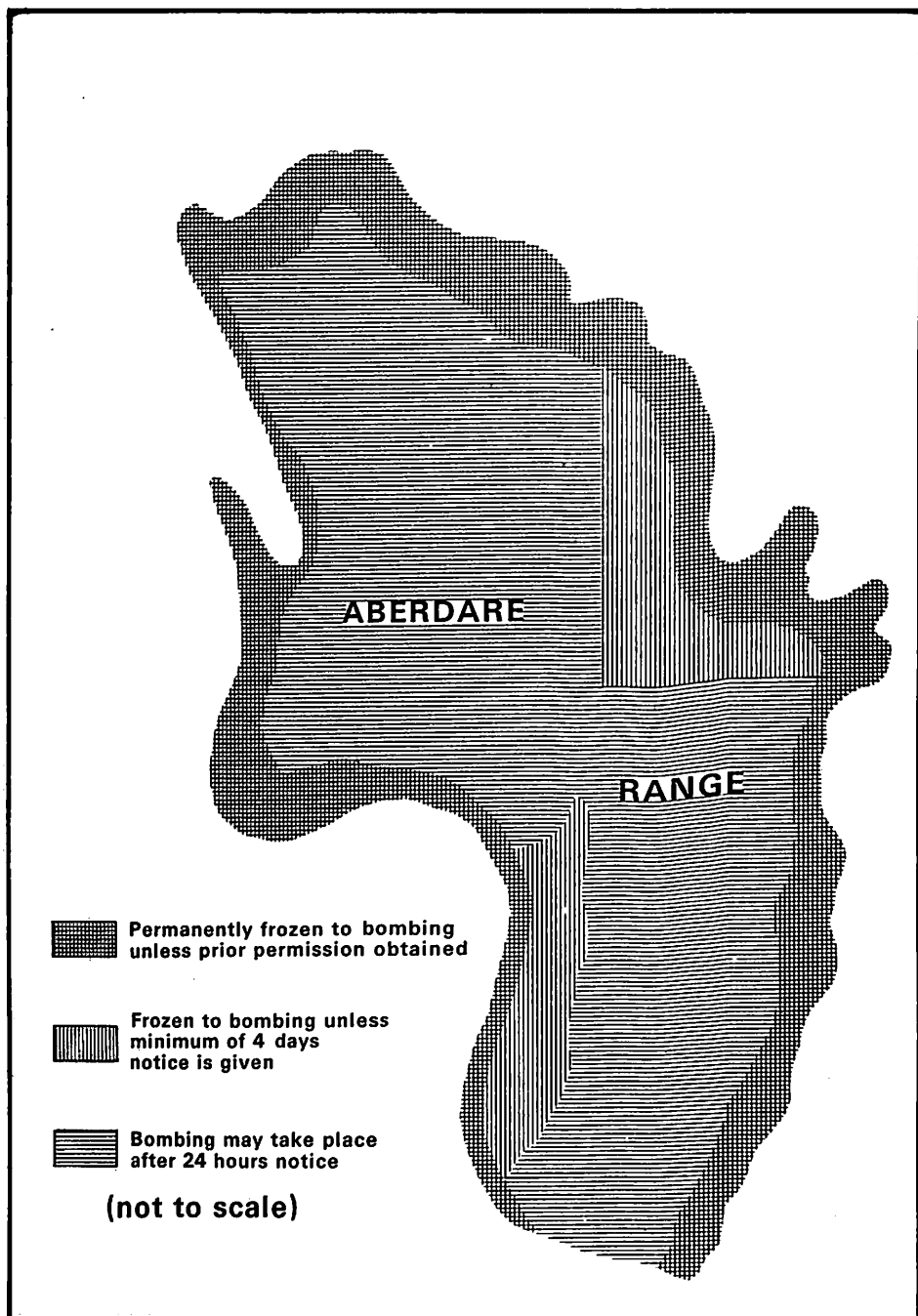


FIG. IV: Bombing Areas

The Passive Wing of Mau Mau

In order to cover the campaign comprehensively, it is necessary to go back in time to the beginning of 1954 and to describe an extremely important phase in which the RAF could play little part. The gangs in the forest had always been dependent upon the Passive Wing of the movement for supplies of food, weapons, ammunition, money and, indeed, every necessity to continue their operations. It was well-known that the Passive Wing was controlled from Nairobi with well organised subordinate headquarters throughout the Kikuyu lands and centres of population. To break this organisation was, however, a formidable task; Nairobi alone had, for example, sixty-five thousand Kikuyu, thirty thousand of whom had come into the city since the emergency started in 1952. As oath taking ceremonies had been widespread throughout the tribe, every Kikuyu man and woman who had not already been screened had to be regarded as suspect in regard to aiding Mau Mau. The situation in Nairobi was duplicated in other towns and villages close to the capital with the result that, until early in 1954, security forces could not be spared from the campaign in the forest to undertake the huge task of rounding up and screening Kikuyu in the towns in an attempt to destroy the supply organisation.

However, early in the New Year a stroke of good fortune befell the security forces who, in the course of a routine clash with a gang near Karatina to the southwest of Mount Kenya, wounded and captured its leader. They had no difficulty in identifying him as Waruhiu Itote, better known as 'General China', commander-in-chief of the armies on Mount Kenya, and he knew full well that he was destined to be tried and inevitably put to death. His interrogation disclosed much information about the organisation which supported the Mau Mau forces. The operation, long since planned, to break the Passive Wing organisation now became possible, and was in fact launched in Nairobi with great secrecy, on 24 April. The size of the task can be appreciated from the fact that twenty-five thousand men from the security forces took part in a clean up of Nairobi planned to take a fortnight. By 8 May, 30,000 Kikuyu had been interrogated, of whom 16,538 had been detained and 2,416 of their dependants had been returned to the Kikuyu Reserve. There is no doubt that this operation achieved exactly what it set out to achieve, it smashed the Mau Mau organisation in Nairobi and broke the movement's grip on the city. By the time similar rounding-up operations had been carried out in other towns known to harbour elements of the Passive Wing, the forest gangs were left virtually to fend for themselves. The success of these operations is generally regarded as the turning point in the emergency; the insurrection had been broken and it now remained to finish it off.

The main participation of the RAF in dealing with the Passive Wing was not by direct involvement, except for a few RAF Regiment personnel and Service Police, but in continuing to prosecute the bombing

policy in the forest areas with the utmost vigour, enabling as many land forces as possible to be released for the round-up of Kikuyu in the towns, thus keeping the Mau Mau gangs on the move and destroying, or causing them to use up, their valuable supplies.

Mopping up

Although it may be somewhat premature to suggest that mopping up operations began as early as the beginning of 1955, the Mau Mau movement had in fact been broken by that date, its military activities disorganised and fragmented and its supply machinery smashed. Such was the toughness and dedication of the many hundreds of terrorists who were still at large in the forests that it was clearly going to be a long and arduous job to flush them all out. There could be no question of leaving them to wither and die from lack of support. So malignant was the movement that it could easily break out again from the smallest residue.

Command of the Royal Air Force in East Africa had once more been elevated to the rank of air commodore, which was a reflection not only of the importance being paid to the campaign as a whole, but also to the political sensitivity of the bombing policy. Air Commodore W K Beisiegel OBE had taken over from Group Captain D J Eayrs as both Senior Royal Air Force Officer, East Africa and Commanding Officer at Eastleigh. He pressed home the bombing policy to such good effect that, in January 1955, 49 Squadron set a new record by carrying out 204 sorties, which was considerably in excess of their planned effort, dropping 2,725 × 500lb bombs and 13 × 350lb clusters. Following this effort a series of sweeps by the brigades through the areas which has been intensively bombed began, and was conducted progressively throughout the whole operational area. Psychological warfare began to assume greater importance and the sweeps were accompanied by 'sky shouting' Austers and Pembrokes in an effort to persuade the gangs to surrender.

General Erskine reached the end of his tour as Commander-in-Chief in April. He had pursued a relentless offensive policy which had clearly been highly successful and had undoubtedly broken the Mau Mau movement. He had been quick to appreciate the part which the RAF could play in an unusual campaign, and before leaving Nairobi, he told an assembled audience of RAF personnel of the great success and economy of the bombing campaign. Had this air action not been taken, he declared, an additional infantry brigade or three regiments of artillery would have been essential; neither would have achieved such good results and both would have been more expensive. This was a valuable vindication of the air effort expended as it had not been without its critics in London both from the viewpoint of expense and effectiveness. Lieutenant-General Sir Gerald Lathbury GCB DSO MBE became the new Commander-in-Chief.

The bombing effort by the Lincolns now began to wane. The re-

duction and splitting up of the gangs in both forest areas which had resulted from the land and air offensive produced less and less suitable targets for heavy bombing. The final Bomber Command attacks took place in June 1955 after which it was decided to reduce the Lincoln detachment from six to four aircraft, and to review the situation again during the following month. It is interesting to note that, in spite of the difficulty of obtaining good photographic intelligence in the dense forest area, no less than 250,000 photographic prints were made between August 1954 and May 1955. Most of the cover for this huge output had been provided by the two Meteor PR10s on detachment from 13 Squadron.

It was clear to General Lathbury that this was the moment to take the fullest advantage of the effect on the morale of the terrorists of the hounding and pounding to which they had been subjected during the past year. This was the time for psychological warfare and it was pressed home in every possible way. A number of Mau Mau who had surrendered earlier were trusted to go back into the jungle in an endeavour to persuade others to give themselves up. Speech broadcasting from the air was stepped up, including efforts to obtain more 'sky shouting' aircraft. Unfortunately, there were no Pembrokes or Austers in the UK or in the Middle East and the few Dakotas equipped for the role were fully occupied in the Malayan campaign where they were judged to be indispensable. As the equipping of new aircraft would take at least four months, East Africa was compelled to make do with its existing Austers and the solitary Pembroke. Although satisfactory platforms for 'sky shouting' their range and endurance were short and they could only achieve about forty sorties per month.

The review of the Lincoln requirement duly took place in July, the decision being made to dispense with their services, and also those of the PR Meteors which returned to their Squadron in MEAF on 25 July, followed by the four remaining Lincolns which returned to the UK on 28 July. Their departure was followed by a generous letter of appreciation from the Kenya War Council, and this brought to an end the major RAF participation in the campaign. The need for the Joint Operations Centre had declined, and it was disbanded during the following month.

No 1340 Flight had returned with its ten Harvards from the operational area to Eastleigh and, with the 'sky shouting' aircraft and the Communications Flight, remained available to support the mopping up operations, but there was now little work for the Harvards and it became the turn of 1340 Flight to be disbanded, on 30 September. The Flight had been in being for exactly two-and-a-half years and it was wound up as quickly and unobtrusively as it had been formed when the need arose. The formation of the Flight provided a good lesson in versatility; the adaptation of a purely training aeroplane for a specialised offensive role by means of simple modifications not only produced a

most economical and rapid solution to a sudden need, but also gave a valuable extension of useful service to the Harvards which had just completed the training commitment in Rhodesia. Any alternative solution would certainly have necessitated using operational aircraft which would have been both costly and inconvenient, and would not have fulfilled the particular need any more efficiently. The Harvards were the first RAF reinforcements to reach Kenya after the State of Emergency was declared, and they were the last to leave. Under the command of Squadron Leader Trant, they had played a notable part in the campaign alongside their colleagues of the Police Wing. This Wing, which had been under RAF control for most of the campaign, and had eventually been given a limited offensive capability by fitting light series bomb racks for four 20lb bombs to the aircraft, now reverted to control by the Kenya Government. The offensive weaponry was removed and the aircraft were used once again for reconnaissance, supply dropping and general communications. Finally the appointment of Senior RAF Officer in East Africa was downgraded from air commodore to group captain. In December 1955, Group Captain E G Palmer assumed the two appointments of SRAFO and OC Eastleigh from Air Commodore Beisiegel.

The end of 1955 saw the completion of the major part of the RAF's participation; the aircraft which remained at Eastleigh had a limited capacity for 'sky shouting', casualty evacuation, leaflet and supply dropping and, of course communications. The mopping up of the terrorists continued on a reducing scale throughout 1956, a year which was particularly notable for the capture of the Mau Mau leader, Dedan Kimathi, on 21 October, after a nine months' hunt. The capture of their leader, who was tried and eventually executed in February 1957, proved to be the final blow to the gangs in the forest, bringing the four-year old campaign virtually to an end. On 17 November 1956, the Army withdraw from operational control and handed over to the Commissioner of Police. The security forces were thinned out and it remained only to count the cost.*

When the operational phase of the emergency ended in December 1956, Mau Mau had lost 10,527 killed and 2,633 captured; the security forces 63 Europeans, 3 Asians and 534 Africans killed; 102 Europeans, 12 Asians and 465 Africans wounded. Casualties to loyal civilians reflected a similar pattern. Of loyal Africans, 1,826 were killed, 918 wounded compared with the European figures of 32 killed, 26 wounded; and the Asians, 26 killed and 36 wounded. At this time 38,449 Mau Mau were in detention, a high figure but much reduced from the peak of 77,000 at the end of 1954 after the round-up and screening operations in Nairobi and surrounding towns. The total cost of the operations was assessed at £55,585,424, half of which was borne by the Kenya Govern-

**State of Emergency* by F Majdalany (p.22)

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For the Royal Air Force it was another internal security episode in which the Service combined smoothly and effectively with the land forces who inevitably set the pattern of operations. Perhaps one aspect in particular should be mentioned. Prior to the operations the RAF in East Africa had been reduced to insignificance. The emergency showed the importance of Eastleigh in particular as a valuable air base in the East African territories. This was to be well remembered in later years when closure of the Suez Canal and the departure of British forces from the Canal Zone caused Kenya to be considered as a potential base for part of Britain's strategic reserve forces. This development will be dealt with in later chapters but, had it not been for the Mau Mau campaign, it is possible that the RAF would have left Kenya and given up what was to become, for a few years at least, a most valuable base area for the front line in the Arabian Peninsula.

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Living and working conditions

The Middle East in general, and the Arabian Peninsula in particular have always provided a challenging environment for the British Serviceman, both in the conditions under which he and his family have had to live as well as those under which he has had to work and operate. But after centuries of world wide service the men and women of Britain's Armed Forces have developed great adaptability, and they have never found any difficulty in settling down to extremes of climate.

Climate

If, for the moment, East Africa is excluded, there is a climatic similarity between the other regions with which this narrative is concerned. All have intense heat during certain months of the year varying from a dry, parching heat to one with high humidity. All have minimal rainfall except where mountains create precipitation, and all suffer from severe dust storms and bad visibility during those months which are associated with the south west monsoon.

Iraq enjoys the greatest extremes of temperature, being a land-locked desert mass with no sea to effect a cooling influence in summer or a warming influence in winter. Temperatures rise sharply during the summer months and central Iraq becomes one of the hottest places in the world with shade temperatures as high as 130°F. There is, however, the compensation of relatively cool nights and the benefit of a distinct seasonal change, the winter months being cool by day and cold by night, with temperatures dropping to freezing or near freezing point. These seasonal variations permitted the RAF to go into blue winter uniforms for a few months in each year, and to enjoy such traditional winter sports as rugby – not that the British Serviceman is deterred from playing rugby anywhere in the world and in any climate.

Moving to the south east, the climate in the Persian Gulf, Muscat and Oman has less extremes of temperature but is still seasonal. The shallow waters of the Gulf exert some slight stabilising influence with the result that the coastal areas of Bahrein, Sharjah and Muscat have summer temperatures of around 110°F, very high but less than the maxima found in central Iraq. However, the influences of the Gulf and the Indian Ocean produce a higher humidity which, in turn, tends to reduce visibility, July to September in the Gulf is, therefore, a

period of stifling humid conditions. Dust and haze together with a flat featureless desert landscape make flying uninteresting and any form of visual navigation difficult. As in Iraq, the Gulf does enjoy a seasonal change and several cool months allowed the RAF to go into blue, usually for two months – January and February. These are very pleasant months with night temperatures dropping to, perhaps, 40°F but rarely lower. A considerate AOC would always carry out his annual inspections during these months, not simply for his own comfort, but mainly to give the stations the opportunity to look their best.

Moving on again down the South Arabian coast past Masirah, Salalah and Riyan to Aden, the influence of the Indian Ocean becomes increasingly noticeable. Temperatures become more equable; if the maximum variation at, say, Shaibah is between 130°F and 32°F, at Khormaksar it is between 105°F and 65°F. This apparent temperature advantage in favour of Aden is, however, offset by the constant high humidity, almost total lack of rainfall in the Colony and unpleasant dust storms which are a feature of the south west monsoon which reaches Aden across the Indian Ocean from June to September, but without the rain which is associated with it in the Far East. In relation to the remainder of the year, the months of December to March are pleasant, the north east monsoon providing calm warm weather with good visibility. Neither Aden nor the coastal stations could change into blue uniform at any time as day temperatures rarely fall below 80°F, and humidity remains quite high. Of all the South Arabian stations, Masirah probably enjoyed the best climate. Lying thirty miles off the Muscat coast it rarely experienced the high temperatures of the mainland and was cooled by an almost constant wind which could, however, reach gale force during the south west monsoon. This prevented resupply of the island by sea over the beaches from about May to October each year.

Finally, East Africa which, as far as the RAF was concerned, virtually meant the highland plateau of Kenya. So unlike the Arabian Peninsula is the climate that, to a traveller from the north, it seems idyllic. Although the Equator passes through central Kenya, the plateau area, which is some 6,000 feet above sea level, has a warm moist climate which varies but little throughout the year. There are periods known as the 'short rains' and the 'long rains' but there is nothing excessive or violent about either of them and the variation between the length of daylight and darkness in Kenya, is negligible. Dropping down from the highlands to the coastal plain and Mombasa, the climate becomes more equatorial but the proximity and influence of the Indian Ocean keeps temperatures down and even the coastal regions of Kenya avoid the unpleasant climate associated with the Equator in central Africa. Flying conditions are good and visibility excellent except in the conditions created by tropical storms. Probably the most uncomfortable effect on aircraft is caused by the turbulence in the more moun-

tainous areas due to the build-up of massive cumulo nimbus formations which tower up to 40,000 feet and above. Although this turbulence is not quite as severe as that encountered in the Far East, it can prove extremely uncomfortable to aircraft which cannot operate above, say, 30,000 feet where it is usually possible to avoid the cloud peaks, and the worst of the turbulence. A flight from Aden to Nairobi in a Dakota or Valetta at 10,000 feet could be a very uncomfortable experience.

Flying conditions and problems

There is a world of difference between flying through the Middle East with perhaps one or more intermediate landings, and operating for any length of time in the theatre. In the former case, one is usually favoured by good weather at altitude, generally free from turbulence and hampered only by occasional bad visibility caused by dust and haze when descending to land. Navigation aids are not always as sophisticated as in Europe but this is not of great account as the weather is seldom as perverse. Operating continuously in the theatre, on the other hand, did pose many problems for the RAF which, at times, demanded the highest levels of airmanship. Not least of the problems was that of combatting intense heat and glare. In this respect it is worth mentioning the extraordinary 'volte face' which took place, largely during the war years, as a result of advancement in medical knowledge. In the 1920s and 30s aircrew not only wore flying topees over their normal helmets and goggles in their open cockpits, but were also compelled to wear thickly padded 'spine pads' under their shirts as protection against sunstroke. The discomfort of these trappings was intense: the slipstream playing on top of the topee caused the goggles to vibrate and any movement of the head outside the protection of the windscreen allowed the slipstream to get under the brim of the topee, giving the neck a nasty jerk. First the spine pad and then the topee was discarded and their place was taken by sunglasses, tinted goggles and vizors indicating that medical science had reached the conclusion that it was more important to protect the eyes than the head or the back. One exception concerned the perspex cockpit canopy of the generations of aircraft which succeeded the open cockpit designs. The curved perspex moulding tended to focus the rays of the sun onto the head of the pilot or navigator, and prolonged exposure to this concentration could induce headaches and sunstroke. In this type of aircraft, however, aircrew normally wear protective helmets, or 'bonedomes' for safety in ejection, and this headgear fortuitously fulfils the same purpose as the ancient flying topee.

This astonishing revolution from a policy of 'cover up' to one of 'uncover' applied not only in the air but also on the ground. The heavy and cumbersome Wolseley helmet, worn by all officers and airmen for many years, was discarded in favour of standard RAF caps and berets, and the normal working dress for airmen in the desert became simply shorts and sandals. If lucky enough to be an NCO you either wore the

stripes as a wristlet, or painted them on the bare upper arm. Visiting officers, who were strangers to the theatre, were often aghast at the scruffiness of the airmen in their working dress of oil-stained shorts, sandals and sunglasses, but became more understanding as the heat and humidity began to work on their gaberdine uniforms, collars and ties.

While open cockpits existed, any discomfort suffered by aircrew from heat quickly disappeared after take off, but the advent of closed cockpits created new problems. Air ventilated suits, cockpit cooling and canopies were all introduced at various times and all brought some measure of relief, but none was entirely satisfactory. Cockpit refrigeration and air ventilated suits worked only when airborne but failed to provide the necessary cooling on the ground. External cockpit coolers were expensive machines and could not be made available in large numbers or on isolated landing grounds; they tended to be reserved for the larger passenger aircraft, the cabins of which could become quite unbearable after an hour or two on the ground at Bahrein or Shaibah.

It was quite normal for the cockpit temperature under the canopy of aircraft such as Hunters and Canberras to exceed 150°F when standing in the open at, say, Sharjah. A simple canvas canopy built on a tubular frame on wheels and drawn over the cockpit could reduce the internal temperature by as much as 20°F, but the pilot still found himself black with sweat by the time he had taken off and obtained relief from his cockpit cooling. 'Emptying the oxygen mask' was not an unusual item of cockpit drill immediately after take off. The aircrew might then have to fly for several hours at altitude, soaked to the skin in a refrigerated cabin or cockpit. It is amazing that more of them did not contract pneumonia, but they became acclimatised to this as to other physical discomforts inseparable from the theatre.

Navigation was not in general difficult, largely owing to favourable weather conditions. However, the great distances to be covered, frequently put aircraft temporarily out of range of direction finding stations and other navigation aids. For example, when flying across the Rub-al Khali (Empty Quarter) from Salalah to Sharjah, aircraft could be out of range of any station for a considerable time, particularly if it proved impossible to obtain a bearing from Masirah en route. It was therefore, most important to adhere rigidly to a flight plan, to ensure that, if a forced landing had to be made in the desert, there was a good chance of search aircraft finding the victim along the planned track. As an additional safeguard, it was customary for single engined aircraft to fly in pairs whenever this was feasible, and certainly on long cross-country flights from say, Aden to Bahrein.

If navigation was relatively easy, map reading was not. Some areas, notably the two Aden Protectorates, the Trucial States and the interior of Oman were badly mapped and finding a small target could prove extremely difficult. The Commanding Officer of 6 Squadron recorded that, when his squadron was called upon to demonstrate in the region of

the Buraimi Oasis in 1952, the best maps were those which he tore from the *National Geographical Magazine* which were based upon Wilfred Thesiger's earlier travels in Oman. The official maps, he said, were quite valueless for his purpose. In the Western Aden Protectorate and in Oman, villages were frequently incorrectly shown on the available maps, and there was always considerable risk of attacking a friendly village or fort. Even when correctly mapped, pilots had no easy task in identifying targets in extremely difficult country when flying a high speed aircraft with a heavy load. It was for this reason that experience and continuity among the aircrew of squadrons operating in those areas was essential, and the practice of flying the leader of a projected attack over the target in advance was frequently adopted. Many a pilot was laughed to scorn on returning from an abortive sortie with the information that his target "was not there", until subsequently proved right by photography or further reconnaissance. In later years the maps of many areas were greatly improved as the result of photographic survey but right up until the departure of British forces, some regions were never mapped in accurate detail.

The variety of airfields and landing grounds which had to be used was almost unlimited. From international standards, such as Bahrein and Khormaksar, every conceivable kind of surface, length and gradient could be found, down to rough, short and precipitous landing grounds like Dhala in the Western Aden Protectorate; a hazardous strip, fit only for single Pioneers was even carved out at Saiq on the summit of the Jebel Akhdar in Oman during the operations of 1958. Compacted natural surfaces, of which there were many in the theatre, have always produced hazards of one kind or another, and these increased as the aircraft using them became more demanding in their requirements. Those airfields which were of compacted sand, such as Sharjah, Salalah and Masirah were smooth and excellent in dry weather, apart from the dust clouds which were created and the erosion which resulted. In wet weather, however, they rapidly became unusable and, if subjected to heavy traffic, soon became deeply rutted. Certain other airfields, such as Riyan and Hargeisha had hard natural surfaces but were stony with a great danger to tailplanes, mainplanes and undercarriages from flying stones. The wear and tear on tyres and on nose and tail wheels from these conditions was excessive and a significant amount of un-serviceability could always be attributed to the landing and take off conditions to which all aircraft were subjected. Improvements in the standards of airfields tended to lag well behind the development of the aircraft with the result that pilots were constantly being asked to operate, say, Hunters from airfields which had been adequate for Vampires, but which were no more than marginal for Hunters. It is understandable that the accident rate for the theatre as a whole tended to be higher than the RAF average, not because of any lack of skill, but because of the greater hazards with which pilots had to contend.

Maintenance of aircraft and equipment

If flying conditions posed a few problems for aircrew, the servicing of their aircraft and equipment posed many more for the airmen. Salt and sand, either separately or in mixture, were certainly at the root of many of the more serious technical problems. The rate of corrosion in aircraft, vehicles, equipment and buildings was quite alarming, Kenya alone in the whole theatre being relatively free from it. The effect on metal skinned aircraft was particularly serious and added many hours to routine inspections. Wheels and undercarriage components, which obviously were greatly affected by salt and sand thrown up from runways, were relatively easy to change, but corrosion of the metal covering of mainplanes and fuselages necessitated some very complicated and difficult repair schemes. For example, large sections of the Beverley mainplane, behind the engine nacelles were particularly vulnerable. Vehicles suffered in a similar manner. The Bedford 3-ton truck had a chassis cross member which was constantly bombarded with sand and salt from the front wheels. Unless frequently treated with anti-rust preparations this cross member would fail within three years, necessitating either write-off or a total rebuild of the vehicle. Even allegedly immune aluminium was seriously affected. The Twyneham hut which was erected in thousands, was found to corrode badly at the base within a few years. Some of the most impressive evidence of corrosion was to be seen at Masirah where all fuel was shipped in 40 gallon drums which were not returnable owing to the difficulty of loading ships standing offshore. The empty drums were dumped in great stacks in the open desert away from the station. Within a few years those which had not been taken by the natives for house building had rusted away to dust. This appalling corrosion was worsened by the lack of rain and good supplies of fresh water with which to wash aircraft and vehicles. The Middle East must have been the only theatre in the world where aircraft washing plants had to be installed, and even with these, much of the water had to be purified before it was sufficiently free from salt to be usable. One good reason why Eastleigh became a major servicing base for the larger aircraft in the late 1950's was that corrosion could be tackled there much more efficiently than anywhere in the Arabian Peninsula, and aircraft could be washed thoroughly in rain water. So devastating were the effects of corrosion and the hard wear and tear imposed by the climate and the terrain that it was sometimes difficult for the technical staffs to convince the Air Ministry that the rapid deterioration of equipment of all kinds was not due to carelessness and poor servicing.

Middle East conditions not infrequently induced failures in components which were unheard of elsewhere. A Twin Pioneer, for example, suffered a distorted and damaged stern frame in 1960 as the result of frequent landings in rough and difficult conditions at Dhala. Such was the degree of centralisation of technical repair policy that it was necessary to obtain a special repair scheme from the manufacturers, in

Scotland, and for the essential parts to be despatched to Aden, before the repair could be effected by Khormaksar. That aircraft was out of action for nine months on account of damage which could have been made good within the resources and skill of the local engineering staff, had it been permitted. This, and a number of other examples eventually resulted in a greater degree of responsibility being decentralised to the Command, but even so, it is questionable whether the delegated authority was sufficient in view of the high qualifications and skill of the Command engineering personnel. There was always great reluctance on the part of Air Ministry and the manufacturers to allow a repair scheme for any stress bearing part of an aircraft to be drawn up by the Command engineers. Notable examples of this cautious attitude were the frequent bird strikes on the leading edges of metal covered mainplanes, many of which could only be repaired either by changing the mainplane or awaiting a repair scheme from the UK.

If the technical problems were trying, the conditions under which the airmen had to solve them were even more trying. Conditions for servicing aircraft could hardly be worse than they were at Khormaksar and Sharjah, Masirah and Shaibah, and many other stations throughout the Command. At Eastleigh alone were conditions in any way comparable with those found on every station in the UK or Germany. Hangers were few and inadequate, sufficient only for major servicing and repair. Almost all other work had to be carried out in the open, exposed to the heat, sand and dust which rarely seemed to be absent. It was always said that the humid, dust filled, salt-laden atmosphere of Aden produced the finest grinding compound in the world, and immense patience was needed to reassemble components with bearing surfaces free from these harmful ingredients. A notable case in point was the Aden gun pack which formed the armament of the Hunter FGA9. In Fighter Command special air conditioned armouries were built, with control of temperature and humidity, in which these packs were stored and serviced. Not so in the Middle East, at least until very late in the day. If a building of any kind was available for servicing, it was fortuitous; often a square patch of sand denoted the armoury and the Aden guns were required to swallow their allotted portion of sand like everything and everybody else. The extraordinary thing was that, although the rate of wear was fairly high, the guns worked quite satisfactorily and this caused many an eyebrow to be raised at the luxurious accommodation being provided in the UK. The choice between stifling heat but reasonably clean conditions inside a hangar, and salt-laden blowing sand but cooler air in the open was often a difficult one for servicing personnel to make. It was also necessary to lay down some unusual safety regulations. An incident occurred at Khormaksar in which an NCO died of heat exhaustion while working behind one of the engines inside the mainplane of a Beverley. He collapsed and was not found in time to revive him which immediately caused an order to be

issued that no airman was to work inside the mainplane unless accompanied by a second airman to watch over him. The protection of tyres against direct sunlight, perspex canopies against cracking and various fluids against excessive expansion all necessitated special orders and precautions.

In spite of the unusual technical problems created by these taxing conditions most of the aircraft with which the RAF was equipped stood up to them very well, a tribute both to the rugged design and to the excellence of the servicing. Khartoum and Khormaksar were favourite stations at which to conduct the tropical trials of new aircraft, a fact which in itself reveals the opinion which the manufacturers held of these two locations. The only aircraft which did not stand up to the conditions well, and there was every reason why it should not, was the Mosquito. It was never designed for long service in excessively hot or wet and humid climates; its deployment to the Middle East and Far East immediately after the war was understandable, and probably inevitable, but it was hardly a fair test for its wooden construction. If any single criticism can be levelled at designers and manufacturers, it is probably that more attention to anti-corrosion in the less accessible parts of their aircraft, such as internal wing structures, would have proved a boon and a blessing to the airmen who had to combat the almost unbelievable ravages of salt and sand.

Health

In spite of the extremes of climate, the Arabian Peninsula was on the whole a healthy area in which to serve. Heat and the absence of stagnant water discouraged flies and mosquitoes except in Arab villages where insanitary conditions prevailed and refuse was allowed to accumulate. Consequently malaria and other tropical diseases spread by mosquitoes were rare, but not unknown. Anti-malarial precautions were enforced, but more as a wise precaution than of necessity. Sunburn, sunstroke and heat exhaustion were greater dangers, but there was no difficulty in avoiding these if simple and sensible precautions were taken, particularly during the early part of a tour of duty before becoming fully acclimatised. Loss of salt from the body has always been a contributory factor to heat exhaustion, a condition which was repaired with salt tablets added to the daily diet. There could, however, be no specific regulations about taking salt tablets; some people lose less salt than others, and therefore need less; those with hard manual jobs tend to need more than others and, finally, some constitutions find salt tablets obnoxious and difficult to take. The practice within the Service was to make tablets freely available at meal times, and to encourage everyone to take them when and if they could. In Iraq and Kuwait, where the heat could be intense, but dry, it was possible to lose a great deal of salt by sweating without realising what was happening due to the almost immediate evaporation of the sweat. This was a dangerous

situation which could induce heat exhaustion without much warning. During the Kuwait crisis of 1961, airmen who were working on aircraft in the open in temperatures of at least 120°F in the shade were taking as many as fifteen salt tablets a day, with a cool drink every quarter of an hour or so. Considering that many of these airmen had come straight from the UK and were not acclimatised, the instances of heat exhaustion were remarkably few, and these were quickly cured after a few hours in an air conditioned room with liberal doses of salt.

Apart from the usual forms of gastroenteritis, which seem to be inseparable from any service abroad, respiratory complaints in the form of sinus troubles and bronchitis, and skin diseases were the chief causes of ill health. These clearly were aggravated by the high concentrations of dust and sand in many parts of the theatre; they were not, however, serious and the whole area could be regarded generally as healthy, not only for airmen and airwomen, but for wives and children as well. Discomfort rather than ill health was the penalty of serving in the Middle East.

Tours of duty

There were considerable variations in the length of tours of duty in the various regions with which this narrative is concerned. These however, tended to stabilise in the 1950s into a two-year tour for those accompanied by their families and a tour of one year for those who were unaccompanied. As the proportion of officers and airmen who were married rose steadily, up to 70% and 80% of the total, the problem of finding suitable accommodation for families in some of the less salubrious areas became increasingly difficult. Many of the smaller stations, notably Sharjah, Masirah, Salalah and Riyan remained unaccompanied stations as it was quite impracticable to provide quarters, schooling and all the other amenities required by families. These stations always remained on a one year unaccompanied tour basis, the single year counting as a full overseas tour. It was a reasonably popular system and there was never any great difficulty in finding volunteers for these short tours of duty. A volunteer was always better than a pressed man and every effort was made to staff these isolated units with the former.

On the larger stations such as Habbaniya, Bahrein, and in Aden, various schemes were tried. It became impossible latterly to house the families of all who wished to bring them if acceptable standards of accommodation were to be maintained, and a policy of mixed two-year accompanied and one year unaccompanied tours was finally adopted. To the end this was never really successful; the two types of tour were not compatible, the married man who was not accompanied by his family feeling somewhat aggrieved at living in bachelor quarters alongside his friends who were happily with their families. In addition, the

married but unaccompanied man was given certain privileges and allowances not obtained by bachelors which caused some dissatisfaction among the latter. In consequence the happier stations tended to be those where tours of duty were not mixed. It is quite understandable that so few married quarters were available when it is recalled that, before World War II, an officer received no marriage allowance until he was thirty years of age (except in the unlikely event of being a Squadron Leader), and an airman none until he was twenty-six. The great majority of young officers and airmen serving overseas were single, and married quarters were needed only for relatively few senior officers and NCOs. Naturally enough, no married quarters were built during the war years and the postwar marriage explosion not only found the RAF extremely short of quarters, but also reluctant to build large numbers in areas where the security of British tenure was uncertain.

Accommodation

The scarcity of married quarters in the postwar years had one, but only one advantage. It enabled all new quarters which, in Aden in particular had to be built in large numbers, to be designed for air conditioning, a facility which had been limited to a few specialised buildings only in prewar years. The typical prewar barrack block or married quarter was constructed on the old tropical principle of thick walls, high ceilings and unglazed window openings to permit the maximum circulation of what little cool air there was. Shutters and wire screens provided protection against sandstorms, rain and insects, and ceiling fans kept the air moving. When air conditioning was introduced, it proved virtually impossible to instal it in these buildings except at prohibitive expense. It became necessary to adapt one bedroom in some of the old married quarters by glazing the window openings and installing window box air conditioning units. It was impossible to do the same with the large barrack blocks. All new construction, however, was built to European patterns with smaller rooms, lower ceilings and normal windows, with air conditioning included in the design. Because of Britain's uncertainty about her length of stay in the Middle East, every effort was made to persuade speculative builders to erect blocks of air conditioned flats to be rented as married quarters on a guarantee of a minimum period of occupation. This scheme worked well, particularly in Aden, where many hundreds of comfortable modern flats, fully air conditioned were built for occupation by the Services; the long straight road between Steamer Point and the Crater, usually known as the 'Maala Straight' was entirely filled with these blocks of flats, which after the departure of the British in 1967, remained as a deteriorating monument to the British occupation of Aden.

The decision on how many families to allow on the various stations and consequently how many married quarters to provide was a difficult

one to reach. On the one hand, as the Arabian Peninsula had replaced the Canal Zone as the main Middle East base, families could reasonably expect to accompany their menfolk to an area which if not particularly comfortable, was quite suitable in most respects. On the other hand, the cost of providing for all entitled families in an area where few official quarters already existed and where rented private accommodation was both sparse and substandard, was excessively high. Nevertheless, if Britain was to recruit all her forces from volunteers, the flow of recruits would largely depend on conditions and treatment within the Services. The RAF had always prided itself on looking after its men and women, and it was clearly imperative to provide satisfactorily for the much married postwar force. It would have been quite unreasonable, and most harmful to recruiting, to have sent thousands of married officers and airmen to the Middle East with no prospect of being joined by their families. And so the compromise which has been described was adopted. It undoubtedly cost a great deal of money for a relatively brief stay in the theatre but it had to be done and, considered retrospectively, it was probably the most practicable solution under the circumstances.

Recreation and amenities

From the end of World War II until about 1954, the RAF personnel in the theatre were widely scattered in fairly small numbers, with the sole exception of Habbaniya which was a large and extremely well developed station with almost every conceivable amenity, from sailing on Lake Habbaniya to air conditioned cinemas, and from excellent swimming, tennis and football facilities to clubs, schools and churches. As far as RAF stations of that era were concerned, Habbaniya was a model, and it needed to be. Service in Iraq was far from comfortable and, unlike other tropical stations, such as India and the Far East, it was difficult, if not impossible for many, to get away to a cool climate for local leave in the hot weather. At the other end of the theatre, the RAF in Kenya lived in much greater comfort. Eastleigh was a well built station with good amenities on the outskirts of Nairobi which, at that time was rapidly expanding into an attractive capital city. The climate was delightful and there were endless possibilities for local leave. Between Kenya and Iraq the scattered stations of the Arabian Peninsula enjoyed few amenities but this was not so important at that time as the small numbers of airmen and very few families seemed satisfied to pursue their own interests and make the most of what recreational facilities did exist. Standards of living were not so high and British servicemen were not so demanding as they were later to become. 'Sweating it out' and identifying oneself with the life of the country in which one was stationed became less customary when the advent of radio, television and the air mail brought the most isolated RAF station within a few hours of home. Although some old stagers may have deprecated these developments, they did compel the authorities to provide greater com-

fort and more civilised living conditions for the many thousands of servicemen overseas, some of whom had previously been compelled to exist in quite disgraceful conditions compared with their colleagues at home.

Thus we find a revolution in living standards beginning to take place during the late 1950s as the military build up in the Arabian Peninsula gathered momentum. Nowhere was this more apparent than in Aden where schools, clubs, swimming pools and good sports facilities were built in both the Steamer Point and Khormaksar areas. The only Leave and Rest Centre which existed for Aden-based families was at Asmara, in Eritrea, until about 1955. It was small in size and never really popular despite the temporary relief it afforded from the humidity and heat of Aden. When it closed down, a new and much more popular centre was opened in Kenya, on the seashore close to Mombasa. It was administered by the Army and provided a welcome seaside holiday for many thousands of families, not only from Aden but from the Gulf stations also. The journey from, say Bahrein, was however somewhat daunting as it entailed a long seven or eight hour flight to Aden, an overnight stay in a transit hotel, followed by a six hour flight, which was often very bumpy, to Mombasa. At least four days were, therefore, spent in travelling, and this made the Silver Sands holiday camp in Kenya considerably less popular with families from the Gulf than with those from Aden. Until the last few years in the Middle East when the growth of civil airlines and Air Support Command made mid-tour leave in the UK practicable, those who did not go to Kenya for leave had virtually no other places where they could take refuge from the hot weather at reasonable cost. It has to be constantly borne in mind that the Arabian Peninsula had no railways and very few roads. Although private cars were owned by many officers and airmen, their use was severely restricted by lack of roads. For example, Aden Colony boasted only 26 miles of road, and the longest drive which could be undertaken was some 23 miles from Steamer Point round the harbour to Little Aden where the road petered out at the BP oil refinery. It was too dangerous to venture far into the Western Aden Protectorate and, in any case, the tracks were suitable only for Jeeps and Land Rovers. This virtual confinement to the locality of the scattered stations put severe restrictions on sports fixtures. It was out of the question to arrange inter-unit competitions on a Command basis along familiar lines. Distances were too great and travelling facilities too scarce to send large teams around the Command as a matter of routine. Great efforts were made to encourage competition between units, but it was only in the individual sports, such as boxing that representatives from all round the Command could be gathered together. A boxer from Bahrein who took part in Command championships held in Aden might be away from his unit for a week, or even ten days and, on a large scale, this was obviously unacceptable. Consequently, the airmen in one part of the Command saw little or

nothing of those serving in another part, the distance from Eastleigh to, say, Shaibah being as far as from the UK to Canada and communications infinitely more difficult. The lack of fraternisation bred a kind of insularity on stations and it was most noticeable how those at Bahrein pitied those who had to endure the horrors of Aden, whereas airmen in Aden pitied the outcasts in the Gulf stations. Both were deeply sympathetic towards those forced to serve in Iraq. All were, however, united in their envy of those lucky enough to be given a tour of duty in Kenya.

The challenge of the Middle East

Service in the Middle East produced curious effects on different individuals. To some the heat, sand and discomfort were anathema; they claimed to have hated every moment of it, but curiously enough, proceeded to talk about it with a kind of reluctant nostalgia for the remainder of their lives. For others the desert held a fascination. The isolation and the vague but irresistible feeling of a link with Biblical times has affected many Britons who have dedicated their lives to serving one or other of the many Arab potentates in some advisory or administrative capacity. It was often said of Muscat that it was 'advancing rapidly towards the Middle Ages.' Even the advent of airlines and package tours has not destroyed the mystery of Arabia, a mystery and a fascination which captured the imagination of many RAF men who served there. Who would have imagined that an RAF station could have the reputation of standing beside the last incense orchard in the world? But such is the reputation of Salalah. Where else in the world could a 6,000 ton merchant ship, completely devoid of crew, be driven ashore onto an RAF station? But it happened at Masirah in 1961. Passengers still travel by slow dhow sailing all the way round the Arabian coast from Dubai to Aden, a long and extremely uncomfortable voyage of more than 1500 miles which may take weeks to accomplish, but less than two hours in a modern aircraft. This juxtaposition of the distant past and present has probably done more than anything else to create the interest which most RAF men and women felt in this strange part of the world.

With the exception of East Africa, living and working conditions around the Arabian Peninsula were undoubtedly difficult, but they provided a challenge: meeting this challenge successfully provided satisfaction and a justifiable feeling of superiority over those who lived and worked in easier conditions. This was very good for the Royal Air Force; not only did it encourage individual initiative to deal with unusual problems, but it increased the skill of tradesmen. Thrown together in adversity, it forged closer relationships between aircrew and ground tradesmen and between officers and airmen, and finally, it did much to 'improve the breed' of British aircraft by creating for manufacturers

problems which their aircraft and equipment did not experience in any other theatre.

When, by the end of 1971, a mere handful of officers and airmen were left serving in what had so recently been the Middle East Command, the RAF had suffered a considerable loss. Although service in other overseas areas remained, the particular conditions associated with the Arabian Peninsula were no longer available, and the loss of these conditions was bound to have some effect upon the versatility of the Service, and to deny a particularly challenging tour of duty to many who would have liked to have undertaken it.

Last years in Iraq

During the six years following the end of World War II, activity in Iraq had been, as we have already seen, at a low level. Political instability had been a feature of those years but it had not involved the Royal Air Force to any significant extent and the only event of any note had been the Abadan crisis of 1951 in neighbouring Iran which had necessitated some show of determination on the part of British forces, but no more. From the beginning of 1952, however, the tempo of events quickened although it was too soon to foresee that the RAF would, in a short time, have to relinquish the bases which had been occupied and built up in Iraq, under treaty arrangements, over a period of more than thirty years.

The event which probably influenced developments in Iraq more than any other was the abrogation of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty by Egypt towards the end of 1951. Iraq expressed her solidarity with Egypt in her dispute with Britain, and many of the more militant political factions in Iraq saw in Egypt's action an opportunity to become even more vociferous in their desire to tear up the much criticised Anglo-Iraqi Treaty. If Egypt could oust British forces from the Canal Zone, why should Iraq continue to suffer their presence at Habbaniya and elsewhere? So went the argument and, not unnaturally, it gained a good deal of support. Fortunately (for Britain) Nuri-as-Said was in power and he held firmly to the opinion that, on balance, the presence of British forces in Iraq under the terms of the Portsmouth Treaty was of advantage to Iraq. Nevertheless, the straws which had always been in the wind were now thicker, and blowing about in greater concentrations.

The effect on the RAF of Egypt's abrogation of her treaty with Britain was to make greater use of the bases in Iraq, and to disperse some of the squadrons and units, which had for years been stationed in the Canal Zone, to other available areas in the theatre, eg Malta, Cyprus and Jordan, as well as Iraq. Thus, although some of the forces based in the Canal Zone were dispersed, they remained nearby prepared and ready to act as immediate re-inforcements in the event of trouble with Egypt which was undoubtedly the most sensitive part of the Middle East at that time. As was to be expected, greater use by the RAF of Iraq bases as a springboard against Arab colleagues in Egypt gave valuable

ammunition to those factions who wished to abrogate the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty. In this way anti-British sentiment was fostered and was clearly seen to be on the increase.

After an uncomfortable period with no operational squadron in his command, Air Vice-Marshal G R Beamish CB CBE the Air Officer Commanding in Iraq, was again in possession of one DF/GA squadron at the beginning of 1952. No 6 Squadron equipped with the Vampire Mark 5 and commanded by Squadron Leader P A Kennedy DSO DFC who was one of the most experienced DF/GA pilots in the Service, had moved from the Canal Zone to Shaibah on 17 June 1951. After a brief stay there as part of the show of force assembled for the Abadan crisis, it moved up to Habbaniya on 18 September of the same year. The Squadron was equipped as a mobile squadron which entitled it to a slightly larger establishment of personnel, a more comprehensive range of servicing equipment and spares to make the squadron independent of a station's maintenance resources, and a fleet of vehicles designed to move the ground echelon at short notice and to support the squadron in the field. The theory of the mobile squadron was excellent, but, as will be seen when following the fortunes of 6 Squadron during 1952 and 1953, the theory was not always put into practice, and a mobile squadron whose mobility is not used, is wasteful of men and equipment. Habbaniya was clearly the most suitable base for 6 Squadron: being in the centre of Iraq and superbly equipped, the station could not only give resident squadrons the best facilities and backing, but its central position enabled any squadron based there to reinforce the Canal Zone or Jordan to the west and the Persian Gulf or Oman to the east, with equal facility. No 6 Squadron's mobility was, in fact, put to the test early in the New Year when, owing to tension in Egypt, its Vampires implemented one of their reinforcement plans by moving to Abu Sueir and remaining at a high state of readiness until May. This opportunity was taken to re-equip the Squadron with the Mark 9 Vampire, a similar aircraft to the older Mark 5 in performance, but containing more sophisticated equipment, notably a Godfrey Cold Air Unit. This cockpit cooling equipment, which was coming into universal use in the latest range of jet aircraft, was more than welcome as 6 Squadron was being called upon to operate at times in intensely hot conditions.

As tension in Egypt eased slightly in May, 6 Squadron was released from its reinforcement role in order to attend the Armament Practice Camp at Nicosia. As the only day fighter squadron with a ground attack capability in the region at that time, it was doubly important that its standard of rocket firing and shallow dive bombing should be high. It was the first chance the pilots had had of testing the armament on their new Vampires and they obtained very creditable results on the Nicosia ranges, returning home to Habbaniya on 11 July after an absence on detachment of almost six months. It was at this point that Squadron Leader Kennedy commented in his Operations Record Book that the

Squadron was not being properly used as a mobile squadron. He pointed out that detachments were constantly being provided by the Squadron, leaving its main elements at the Habbaniya base. Understandable though this was for short detachments involving one or two aircraft and crews for a few days, it was highly unsatisfactory for the lengthy detachments involving virtually the whole Squadron which seemed to be the prevailing pattern. It was, he said, inevitable that stations should be more interested in their own resident units than those on attachment from elsewhere, with the result that 6 Squadron personnel tended to be allocated accommodation inferior to that which they would have received had the whole Squadron moved as a self-supporting independent unit. The detachments necessitated much travelling back and forth to Habbaniya for spares and the more difficult servicing, which could have been avoided if the true mobility of the unit had been exercised. Furthermore, Kennedy asserted that an airman on a tour of duty with such a squadron suffered considerable disadvantage from spending much of his time on detachment, living in conditions inferior to those enjoyed by personnel in a non-mobile squadron. These were telling comments by a highly experienced squadron commander and they clearly went home as many of 6 Squadron's subsequent moves were undertaken by the whole unit, making full use of its mobile establishment.

The Vampire squadron was now joined at Habbaniya by 683 (Long Range Photographic Reconnaissance) Squadron from Aden. Its equipment comprised four Lancaster PR1 aircraft and one Valetta. A number of survey tasks were required, mainly in Jordan and northern Iraq and the Squadron commenced a busy programme of both survey work for mapping purposes and photographic sorties for the collection of intelligence. The presence of Lancasters always made an impressive addition to the more usual type of resident squadron which, in the Middle East, tended to be equipped with fighter or light bomber types of aircraft.

These two squadrons were not the only additions to the strength of Air Headquarters, Iraq. The AOC had been given responsibility for Amman, in Jordan, which had expanded considerably with the location there of 19 Wing of the RAF Regiment and supporting units and detachments. With a new runway nearing completion, Amman had been built up to operate DF/GA squadrons should the Arab-Israeli or the Egyptian situation make this necessary and, although no squadron was permanently based there, a number, including 6 Squadron, had plans to operate from Amman at short notice. Later in 1952 – in September – the RAF station at Aquaba was placed under the control of AHQ Iraq, thus giving the AOC control of all RAF units in Jordan. His responsibilities were considerably increased and it is worthwhile to summarise the stations which came directly under his command in mid-1952, particularly as this order of battle was to be the peak strength reached by the Air Headquarters.

<i>Jordan</i>	<i>Iraq</i>	<i>Persian Gulf</i>	<i>Pakistan</i>
Amman	Habbaniya	Sharjah	Mauripur
Aquaba	Baghdad	Bahrein	
Mafrag	Basrah		
	Mosul		
	Shaibah		
	Ser Amadia		

To the more militant factions in Iraq this appeared to be a British military expansion aimed primarily against Iraq's Arab colleagues in Egypt, and the increased use of the treaty airfields, at Habbaniya and Shaibah in particular, was much resented. Anti-British feeling continued to mount, reaching the point of active hostility to the RAF. A strike of civilian employees at Habbaniya in June turned into a riot. After four Service personnel had been injured by bricks thrown at them, the troops were compelled to fire on the rioters, causing seven civilian casualties before the rioting was quelled.

In the following month Nuri Pasha's Government resigned, this having been the twelfth cabinet over which the 'strong man of Iraq' had presided – and the longest in office for many years. A caretaker government was formed by Mustafa-al-Umari who, although himself a moderate, was less well disposed to Britain than Nuri. Mid-1952 thus found the RAF in Iraq in a somewhat sensitive position and uneasy about the security of the airfields and, indeed, about the whole structure of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty which was being criticised from all sides. It was in this atmosphere that Air Vice-Marshal Beamish completed his tour as AOC Iraq and handed over in August to his successor, Air Vice-Marshal J G Hawtrey CBE.

During the second half of the year the eyes of the Air Headquarters staff were directed towards the Trucial States, and to the Buraimi Oasis in particular. A long history of disagreement between Saudi Arabia on the one hand, and Britain and the Sultan of Muscat on the other, existed over the ownership of this important desert crossroads and Saudi Arabia was again casting her eyes in that direction. The history of this disagreement and the operations in which the RAF became involved are described in a subsequent chapter, and it is mentioned here solely because, until responsibility for the Trucial States was transferred to Headquarters, British Forces, Aden some years later, it fell to AHQ Iraq to provide any reinforcements needed. Sharjah, being adjacent to Buraimi, was normally used as the base for additional forces, and it was to Sharjah that 6 Squadron was called upon to send a detachment of Vampires in September. No offensive air action was, in fact, required on this occasion and the short detachment is important only in that it signalled the beginning of a long period of dissidence and tribal upheaval in Oman, of which more later.

Meanwhile it had been decided to strength the RAF in Iraq still further, by the formation of a DF/GA Wing of two squadrons, to be stationed at Habbaniya and to be available for use throughout the Middle East. The Vampire was proving to be a robust, reliable and satisfactory aircraft for Middle East conditions, easy to handle and relatively simple to maintain. If somewhat short on endurance, its small compact size made it easy to house and protect against the extremes of climate. It could be dismantled in the desert and loaded onto a 'Queen Mary' much more easily and quickly than, say, a Brigand.

No 185 Squadron, located in Malta was selected to join 6 Squadron to form the new 128 Wing at Habbaniya. 185 Squadron had been a day fighter squadron with no ground attack capability other than that provided by its guns. Its Vampires were, therefore, equipped with rocket rails and bomb racks and subjected to the other minor modifications necessary to convert them to DF/GA aircraft. After spending a valuable month at the Armament Practice Camp at Nicosia the Squadron, commanded by Squadron Leader P H P Roberts flew to Habbaniya on 13 October and settled into its accommodation alongside 6 Squadron. For the first time for many years, Habbaniya now had two resident fighter squadrons as well as 683 PR Squadron. By a stroke of genius, the Air Ministry replaced Squadron Leader Kennedy, who had completed an extremely successful tour in command of 6 Squadron, by Squadron Leader E J Roberts, thus ensuring the utmost confusion by having both squadrons in the Habbaniya Wing commanded by officers of the same name! The primary role of the Wing was the reinforcement of the Canal Zone and, to this end, the two squadrons embarked upon an intense programme of training during the remainder of the year.

Habbaniya airfield was now the scene of intense activity with large numbers of transit aircraft adding to the daily flying of the resident squadrons. A project to construct a second runway up on the plateau adjoining the main airfield had been mooted some years before, and it was now decided to implement this plan in order to relieve congestion on the main runway and apron. It was intended to use the plateau runway for turning round and refuelling transient aircraft, mainly those of Transport Command which used Habbaniya as a staging point en route to and from the Far East. In the event of hostilities the plateau runway would permit a fighter squadron to maintain a state of readiness away from the activity of the main station as well as offering better facilities for aircraft dispersal. Work was started on this new runway in December and was planned for completion within one year by which time it was anticipated that the runway on the main airfield would need reconstruction.

The area of responsibility of AHQ Iraq subsequent to taking over control of all the stations and units in Jordan was becoming too large to be handled efficiently when incidents of unrest were as widely separated as Oman and Jordan. The continued and indeed increasing tension in

the Canal Zone tended to focus the attention of AHQ Iraq more and more towards the west, to the area of the Eastern Mediterranean rather than towards the Persian Gulf and South Arabia. The early part of 1953 saw the beginning of what was eventually to become a complete transfer of responsibility for the whole of the Persian Gulf area from Iraq to Aden. The first small pointer was the transfer of the commitment to supply POL to the Arabian airfields to HQ British Forces, Aden. This step made good sense; most of these airfields and notably Masirah and Salalah were difficult to supply in monsoon conditions, and the port of Aden was much better equipped with suitable shipping and lighterage and with supplies of fuel to undertake the task.

The situation in Buraimi continued to cause concern during 1953 and 6 Squadron was again required to send a large detachment to Sharjah during January and February. On this occasion, the mobility of the Squadron was correctly used, the main body of ground personnel, equipment and vehicles being transported in the LST *Boxer* together with two flights of 2 Armoured Car Squadron. At the request of the Foreign Office, a number of demonstrations of force were arranged in the vicinity of the oasis, culminating in a large inter-Service exercise in February. A period of heavy rain revealed the limitations of the natural surface runway at Sharjah and prevented 6 Squadron from participating. The high loading on the small wheels of the fighters, coupled with erosion caused by the jet efflux, produced a combination of effects which this type of airfield was never designed to accept, and it was necessary to use Sharjah with the greatest care and discretion if serious damage to its surface was to be avoided. A constant programme of grading, watering and rolling was carried out on this and other similar airfields by the Air Ministry Directorate-General of Works but even this could never prevent the surface from deteriorating under heavy operational use. As, however, it was unusual at that time for such airfields to be used intensively except for short and infrequent periods, the intervals between heavy use gave the respite necessary to rehabilitate the surfaces.

1953 proved to be a quiet year politically in Iraq, but not a stable one. A general election was held in January resulting in the formation of a government under Jamil-al-Madrai, but he remained in power for only some eight months being succeeded by Fadhil Jamali in September. The best that can be said for this perpetual political instability is that, so preoccupied were the Iraqis with their internal problems, that there was little spare time to indulge in open anti-British activity and the RAF was little affected by the political changes other than to be constantly aware that their presence was not welcome to all. It was, however, in Persia that political hostility to Britain, which had reached its peak with the breaking off of diplomatic relations at the end of the previous year, caused most concern. Relations between Mussadecq, the architect of oil nationalisation, and the Shah himself continued to be strained and violent student demonstrations in support of the former

took place in March. The United States endeavoured to play a mediating role by requesting Persia to patch up her relations with Britain in the interests of Middle East stability. The outcome was the fall of Mussadeq's Government in August and the succession of his old opponent General Zahedi. A calmer atmosphere prevailed and diplomatic relations with the United Kingdom were re-established before the end of the year. A purge of the Tudeh party took place and Mussadeq himself was sentenced to three years solitary confinement. The RAF was involved only once in these activities, being called upon in August to provide air support for *HMS Wildgoose* when escorting a British merchantman down the Shatt-al-Arab to refuel at Kuweit, having refused to comply with Persian demands that she take up her fuel at Abadan. Ten Vampires of 6 Squadron provided this air cover, and the incident passed off without further unpleasantness.

Apart from remaining at constant readiness to reinforce the Canal Zone, the Wing at Habbaniya was not involved in the political activity which continued to affect the countries bordering the Eastern Mediterranean. No 6 Squadron's mobility was again tested during an exercise in March when most of the unit moved to Mafraq and operated for a while in support of the Arab Legion. Unfortunately the pressures of the world wide rundown of the Service were now to affect the Habbaniya Wing with the result that 185 Squadron was disbanded on 1 May, after a mere seven months at Habbaniya. As had been the case with 185 Squadron, Squadron Leader P H P Roberts was sent off to Malta to take command of 73 Squadron at Takali and to bring it back to join the Wing at Habbaniya. Some continuity was thus preserved including that of maintaining two commanding officers with the name of Roberts in the same wing. The transfer flight from Malta to Habbaniya was marred by a bad accident when one of the Vampires crashed when taking off at El Adem and Flying Officer Bennett was badly burned. This type of accident was fortunately rare with the Vampires which, in both Mark 5 and 9 versions, were proving to be highly reliable and relatively free from technical problems. No 73 Squadron proceeded to hold the fort while settling in at Habbaniya allowing 6 Squadron to cover itself with glory at the Armament Practice Camp at Nicosia in June by breaking no less than three of the APC records, namely, rocket firing with an average of 9.5 yards, air firing at 10,000 feet with 9.5% and dive bombing with an average error of 17.7 yards. The Squadron could with justification regard itself as the most experienced and skilled squadron in the Command at that time. When the turn of 73 Squadron came to attend the APC in September, it equalled the RP record set up by its sister squadron of 9.5 yards, but its other achievements were less spectacular which was not surprising as its pilots were less experienced. Nevertheless the Habbaniya Wing had attained a formidable standard of efficiency.

The uneventful year of 1953 ended with the disbandment of the

Lancaster PR Squadron, No 683, which had completed the survey tasks allotted to it, including complete coverage of large parts of Muscat and Oman carried out from Sharjah in an endeavour to improve the appallingly inaccurate maps which aircrew had been compelled to tolerate for years. On the departure of 683 Squadron from Sharjah the need was felt for some permanent air support to remain available there for the Trucial Oman Scouts who were still occupied with the problems created by Saudi Arabia's hostility over the ownership of Buraimi. Consequently 1417 Flight was formed at Bahrein in November, 1953, using the resources of the small Communications Flight there and three additional Ansons provided from within the Command. Backed by the resources of the Habbaniya Wing, the Ansons were adequate for the reconnaissance and transport duties which were needed on a day to day basis by the TOS. The airfield surface at Sharjah also benefitted from these lightly loaded aircraft compared with the depredations of Lancasters or Vampires.

The new plateau runway at Habbaniya had been under construction for most of the year but it had now been completed and was brought into use mainly for the transient aircraft of Transport Command. Its distance from the main facilities of the station made it inconvenient for use by the resident squadrons, although it did provide an economical site to which one of the Vampire squadrons could move at short notice to exercise its mobility role: both 6 and 73 Squadrons were at this time established as 'mobile' squadrons. During the construction of the plateau runway, the main airfield had been heavily used and was badly in need of reconstruction. In order to facilitate this task, it was decided to move the two Vampire squadrons out of Habbaniya for three months, and so, in January 1954, 73 Squadron with elements of the Wing Headquarters moved to Shaibah and 6 Squadron to Amman. This move coincided with the fortieth birthday of 6 Squadron and it was presented with its Squadron Standard. Almost by way of celebration, the Squadron was selected to carry out the first of a series of 'quick return' reinforcement flights to South Africa. Four Vampires undertook this quite ambitious flight, taking six days for the journey to Johannesburg through Central Africa, and a similar time for the return. It was accomplished without incident and provided another example of the robust reliability of the Vampire and its Goblin engine. As if to reward the Squadron for its excellent record on Vampires, the return from South Africa coincided with receipt of the news that 6 Squadron was to re-equip immediately with the Venom Mark 1.

The melting of the winter snows in northern Iraq caused disastrous flooding of the Tigris and Diyala Rivers in March. Baghdad itself was threatened and great damage was caused to the main railway and road links. The RAF station at Basrah was in danger of being inundated with the result that all valuable equipment was evacuated from the domestic site which was heavily sandbagged for protection. British aid in the form

of food, tents, blankets and medical supplies was sent in to the stricken areas and the RAF helped to distribute it. This disaster, however, did nothing to stabilise the political situation: dissatisfaction with whatever government was in power seemed to be a permanent part of the scene in Iraq, every event whether unavoidable or not, being seized upon by one political faction or another to create trouble. Coincidental with the floods, a strong rumour that Iraq was contemplating signing a Turkish-Pakistan treaty was circulating, and these events influenced the resignation of Dr Fadhil Jamali, whose Government was succeeded in April by one under Arshad-al-Umari. As was customary in Iraqi politics, this was a caretaker government until such time as elections could be held, usually two to three months later. On this occasion the elections were held in June but it was decided not to form another government until Nuri-as-Said, who was undergoing an operation in London, had returned to Baghdad. His return a month later marked what turned out to be an important point in Anglo-Iraqi relations. He accepted the invitation of the King to form a government and once again became Prime Minister, on 4 July. Although he had for many years advocated the presence of British military bases in his country, and had, indeed been the chief proponent of the Portsmouth Treaty, he could undoubtedly see quite clearly that the pressures from his countrymen to renounce the Treaty, to nationalise oil on the Persian pattern and to demonstrate greater solidarity with the Arab League and the Egyptian cause were becoming overwhelmingly strong.

No government which resisted these pressures could hope to remain in power for long, and what Iraq needed above all else was political stability. Bowing to the inevitable, Nuri announced that the policy of his new Government would be to terminate the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty and to base Iraq's relations with foreign states upon Article 51 of the United Nations Charter. He would strengthen relations between the Arab states, and improve Iraq's relations with her neighbours. In the reference to the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty, use of the word 'terminate' was important. It did not mean abrogation of the Treaty as in the case of Egypt and her treaty with Britain: it meant that the Treaty would be terminated peaceably without damaging the prestige of either country, and replaced by an agreement under the terms of the UN Charter which could allow a major Power, such as Britain, to retain the use of military facilities. This then was Nuri's endeavour to satisfy the growing volume of anti-British opinion and at the same time retain what he regarded as a valuable friendship with, and support from Britain. And so, at a time when the RAF was making more use of the facilities available to Britain than at any time since the end of World War II, the outlook for the future had never looked less propitious. However the gap between an expression of policy and its implementation is often wide, and there was no immediate effect upon the RAF from Nuri's announcement.

In the meantime, as so often happens upon the introduction of a new aircraft, the Venom brought a crop of technical problems. Most of 6 Squadron's aircraft were grounded shortly after their arrival due to failure of butt plates in the internal construction of the wing, and also by splits which developed in the flaps. After these troubles had been cured, a fillet in the leading edge of the mainplane caused trouble by separating from the main structure. Finally, all tip tanks had to be removed due to failure to accept the stress placed upon them, particularly in manoeuvres involving negative 'g'. This latter fault was serious in that, without tip tanks, the Venom was severely restricted in its range. Such reinforcement flights as that to South Africa were quite out of the question, and even an annual visit to the Armament Practice Camp at Nicosia was precluded. All these faults were rectified in due course but throughout its life in the Middle East, the Venom never quite matched up to its predecessor, the Vampire, in the robustness of its construction and reliability of performance. Both 6 and 73 Squadrons moved back to Habbaniya from their detachments at Amman and Shaibah respectively when reconstruction of the main airfield was completed in April. Because it was felt that the sensitivity of the situation in Palestine required a squadron permanently at Amman, 249 Squadron, still equipped with the Vampire Mk 9 under the command of Squadron Leader E C Gough, moved from Deversoir to Amman, thus giving AHQ Iraq a third DF/GA squadron. Later in the year 73 and 249 Squadrons were, like 6 Squadron, re-equipped with the Mark 1 Venom, and this gave the Air Headquarters an opportunity to rewrite its plans, now based upon three Venom squadrons, to reinforce various areas in the Command using the airfields at Mafraq, Amman, Shaibah, Bahrain and Sharjah, should the need arise. Each squadron remained permanently at forty-eight hours notice to move as a complete unit, or to send detachments to any of these airfields to support Britain's many defence agreements in the theatre.

On 1 October 1954 Air Vice-Marshal H H Brookes CB CBE DFC assumed command of AHQ Iraq. Air Vice-Marshal Hawtry had completed a tour of duty during which his command had been considerably strengthened as tension grew in the Middle East. It was particularly sad that, after a successful and popular stay in Iraq, he died suddenly in Italy on his way home to a well earned retirement. With the new AOC came a new Commanding Officer for 6 Squadron, Squadron Leader P C Ellis who ended the confusion of the 'two Roberts' commanding the two Venom squadrons in the Habbaniya Wing by replacing Squadron Leader E J Roberts.

The expressed intention of Nuri Pasha to terminate the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty began to take concrete shape during the summer and autumn. On a number of occasions the exact terms were discussed in London between Nuri and the Foreign Secretary, both being anxious to ensure that, on the one hand a precipitate withdrawal of British forces from the

Iraq bases did not leave Iraq exposed to an immediate danger of invasion, and on the other hand, that the measures taken were sufficient to satisfy public opinion in Iraq. It was felt by both parties that the most acceptable solution lay somewhere within a package deal which would cover not only the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty but also the projected pact between Iraq and Turkey about which there had been much speculation.

Early in the New Year, on 12 January 1955, the Iraq Government issued a formal statement to the effect that Turkey and Iraq had decided to conclude a defence agreement in accordance with the terms of Article 51 of the United Nations Charter. To the intense irritation of Iraq, this statement was strongly opposed by Egypt, presumably on the basis that a pact with Turkey was not in the interests of Arab League unity. If anything, this opposition tended to strengthen Iraqi resolution with the result that a Turco-Iraqi Pact was signed in Baghdad on 24 February, providing for mutual defence against aggression for a period initially of five years. It at once became clear that, if Britain would become an additional signatory to this Pact, the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty could be quietly terminated without embarrassment or ill feeling, and superseded by a more widely embracing agreement designed to safeguard these sensitive areas of the Middle East against aggression. Within a few weeks not only Britain, but Pakistan also initialled the agreement and what became known as the Baghdad Pact was created. Britain and Turkey had, of course, been members of NATO since its inception and, although no formal link existed between the two treaties, their broad objectives of containing Communist expansion were similar, and the creation of the Baghdad Pact was heralded as a valuable extension of the eastern boundaries of NATO.

Rapid progress was made with staff talks between British and Iraqi military staffs to draw up a programme for the withdrawal of British forces from the bases in Iraq. No great problems were encountered and an agreement was signed in Baghdad on 4 April. Broadly speaking, the Articles of this agreement, some nine in number, gave Iraq full responsibility for her own defence, but at the same time charged Britain with responsibility for providing training and technical assistance for the Royal Iraq Air Force whose squadrons were to move into the airfields vacated by the RAF. Service aircraft of the two countries were to enjoy staging and overflying rights in each other's territories and, in short, the RAF would continue to use the air facilities of Iraq fairly freely, but would no longer locate squadrons and headquarters in Iraq on the same permanent basis as hitherto. One particularly important clause in the agreement laid upon Britain the responsibility for assisting Iraq to establish an efficient system for anti-aircraft defence, including a radar warning network and a system for aircraft reporting. Every agreement has its drawbacks and, in this case, the loss to the RAF of the Habbaniya base, which had been built up and magnificently equipped over the years, was clearly to be a major disadvantage. In addition, it

would no longer be possible to use Iraq as a base from which to operate either in the Persian Gulf area, or to the west in the countries bordering the Eastern Mediterranean. The acceptance of these disadvantages was, however, inevitable and it was hoped that they would be offset by the advantages which would accrue from the broader based treaty relationships.

Little time was lost in starting to implement the withdrawal plans after they had been drawn up. The initial step was to hand over command of Habbaniya, Basrah and Shaibah to the Royal Iraq Air Force, and then to conduct an orderly withdrawal or disbandment of the RAF units in accordance with a phased programme. The handing over ceremony was arranged to take place at Habbaniya on 2 May 1955. It took the form of a large and impressive parade, held in the cool of the morning, in the presence of HM King Feisal II of Iraq, Her Britannic Majesty's Ambassador to Iraq, and numerous Ministers and representatives of Foreign Powers. The Royal Air Force Ensign was lowered, the Iraq Flag was hoisted and a fascinating chapter in RAF history was closed. The title 'RAF Station' was no longer appropriate to Habbaniya, Basrah or Shaibah and, in consequence, the RAF units and personnel remaining on those stations were given the collective title, 'RAF Unit, Habbaniya, etc'.

The first unit to be affected by the withdrawal was in fact 73 Squadron. At the time of the ceremonial hand over, the Squadron was undergoing its annual training at the Armament Practice Camp at Nicosia and the decision was made that it should remain in Cyprus on completion of its stay at Practice Camp. No 73 Squadron had thus spent one month short of two years in 128 Wing at Habbaniya, during which time it had converted from the pure day fighter to the DF/GA role, re-equipped with Venoms and reached a high standard of operational efficiency.

Initially 73 Squadron was the only flying unit to be affected by the withdrawal. The remaining units in the first phase were RAF Regiment units and the RAF Levies. Perhaps the greatest sadness was felt over the decision to disband the RAF Levies (Iraq). This fine body of native, mostly Assyrian, troops with RAF officers and NCOs had been in existence for more than thirty years and, with the support initially of the defunct Armoured Car Squadrons of the RAF, had played a major role in proving the efficacy of air force control in remote desert areas. Great efforts were made to resettle the redundant Levies satisfactorily and the AOC, Air Vice-Marshal Brookes, personally chaired a Resettlement Committee. Some Levies transferred to the Iraq Army, some were found compatible civilian jobs and all were given gratuities in recognition of their loyal service with the Royal Air Force. The British officers and NCOs were absorbed back into the Service, mostly into the RAF Regiment. As far as the Regiment itself was concerned, two units were affected by the initial phase of withdrawal. No 2 Field Squadron,

which had served at Shaibah for some time, was transferred to Nicosia and placed under the control of Air Headquarters, Cyprus, and 21 Independent Light Anti-Aircraft Squadron was disbanded, its gunners being redistributed among other squadrons which were well below strength at that time.

These moves completed the first phase of the withdrawal exactly as planned by the end of May, leaving a much emasculated Air Headquarters still at Habbaniya but with its major responsibilities now beyond the borders of Iraq to the west. Both the reorientation of its responsibilities and the reduction of its forces stationed in Iraq made it increasingly difficult to exercise adequate control and provide proper protection for the RAF units in the Persian Gulf. The continued presence of the RAF in Iraq would now have to be geared to the defence of Iraq against aggression from the North: interference from bases in Iraq in Arab quarrels in the Trucial States or in Muscat and Oman would clearly raise the most sensitive political issues. Consequently, after a brief series of discussions held in Bahrein, control of the RAF stations at Bahrein and Sharjah, as well as the staging post at Mauripur, Karachi, was transferred to Headquarters, British Forces, Aden. As Aden already controlled the South Arabian route stations of Riyan, Salalah and Masirah, this transfer effectively gave control of all British interests in the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf to the Aden Headquarters, the first step in the emergence of what was eventually to become the new Middle East Command. After transferring these responsibilities to Aden, and in order to satisfy the spirit of the new agreement with Iraq, it was appropriate to change the title of the Air Headquarters at Habbaniya and, on 1 May 1955 AHQ Iraq disappeared and AHQ Levant took its place, directing its operational gaze firmly towards the West.

By mid-1955 there had been some further re-arrangement of the Venom squadrons in Iraq. No 32 Squadron had arrived at Shaibah from Kabrit in the Canal Zone to replace 73 Squadron which, as we have already seen, had left Habbaniya on transfer to Nicosia where it came under the operational control of AHQ Cyprus. No 6 Squadron provided the continuity and remained throughout these changes at Habbaniya. Like 8 Squadron in Aden, 6 Squadron had made its reputation as the resident squadron in the Command: its years in Iraq will always fill an important chapter in this squadron's history. Even the pages of its Operations Record Book, from which much of this narrative has been compiled, still bear the traces of sand between the faded sheets, and the ink is occasionally smudged with what one imagines to have been drops of perspiration from the brow of the Squadron adjutant.

A great deal of frustration was caused by the continuation of technical problems with the Venom, notably in the mainplane structure which affected the wing tip tanks. The modifications designed to strengthen the structure were carried out on the spot but they could only be undertaken with sets of modified parts from the manufacturers and

these were slow to arrive. The position was eased a little by the decision to re-equip 6 Squadron with the Mark 4 Venom in July 1955, leaving the maintenance unit at Habbaniya to modify the old Mark 1 Venoms at a more leisurely pace for eventual transfer to a squadron in the Far East. The main difference between the Mark 4 and its predecessors, apart naturally from the incorporation of all modifications, was the provision of power operated controls. Once the pilots had become accustomed to the lack of positive 'feel' in these controls, they found that the Venom had become a much steadier gun platform, and some very accurate shooting was possible.

As the rundown of forces continued, it became the turn of 32 Squadron to leave Shaibah and, in October, the Squadron departed for Takali, in Malta, after a brief stay in Iraq of only some ten months. Once again Iraq was reduced to one squadron, but this time it was clear from the progress of the withdrawal plans that there would be no more build up of squadrons unless some quite unforeseen contingency arose. No 6 Squadron, the sole survivor, had an extremely busy period during the second half of the year. Not only did it provide a detachment at Shaibah and send an acrobatic team to Nairobi to give a fine display at the annual Agricultural Show of East Africa, but it temporarily replaced 249 Squadron at Amman, to permit the latter to attend the Armament Practice Camp in Cyprus. Finally, before the end of the year, the Squadron squeezed in its own APC detachment with resounding success, winning the Imshi Mason* trophy for the best gunnery results of the year, and also the Lloyd trophy for the second year running. The Squadron set up a new APC record for rocket firing with the impressive average of 6.1 yards. Being the only squadron left in Iraq, there was no longer any need for a wing headquarters and 128 Wing, which had controlled and co-ordinated the tactical operations of the Habbaniya squadrons, was disbanded on 31 October, the same month in which the civil cantonments at Habbaniya, Shaibah and Basrah were handed over to the civil authorities. As the Royal Iraq Air Force had moved into these stations, most of the locally employed civilians were able to continue with their old jobs under new masters, and the exodus of the RAF fortunately caused little unemployment.

The phased withdrawal plan had now reached the point at which the Air Headquarters itself became due to move out. It had for some time past been decided to move AHQ Levant to Cyprus, and to amalgamate it with AHQ Cyprus, at Nicosia. A period of six weeks was allowed for the move, commencing on 1 December and being completed on 15 January 1956, on which date the amalgamated headquarters would assume the title of Air Headquarters, Levant, and AHQ Cyprus would

*The Imshi Mason Memorial Prize for Air Firing presented in 1948 by Mrs Teresa Mason in memory of her son, the late Sqn Ldr E M Mason DFC who was killed in action on 15 February 1942 in the Middle East.

disappear from the Air Force List. As, however, Air Vice-Marshal Brookes had virtually completed his tour of duty in Iraq, the new formation was commanded by Air Vice-Marshal C D C Boyce CB CBE who had previously been in charge of the now defunct AHQ Cyprus. The move of the Air Headquarters from Habbaniya was accomplished by air, land and sea smoothly and without incident, leaving behind a very small rear echelon to supervise completion of the withdrawal plan, particularly as 6 Squadron was not due to move out for a further four months. The Squadron continued with its training programme, maintaining the exceptionally high standards in weapon training which had been its outstanding achievement since re-equipment with the Mark 4 Venom. A good deal of assistance was also given by the Squadron to the various Royal Iraq Air Force squadrons which had moved in to the ex-RAF stations. Relationships had always been close, many Iraqi officers having been trained either at Cranwell or at other RAF flying training schools. In addition the RAF had always maintained technical instructors in Iraq to advise on the servicing of aircraft and equipment which continued to be largely British. It was on 6 April 1956 that 6 Squadron finally left Habbaniya where it had served with great distinction for almost exactly five years. It moved to Akrotiri in Cyprus where it continued for some time to be regarded as the squadron most suitable to return to Iraq should the need arise. It was entirely fitting that this squadron, which had served longer than any other in Iraq during the postwar era, should be the last to leave, bringing to an end a most important chapter in the history of the Service.

Although the departure of the Venoms marked the end of the RAF's operational deployment in Iraq, it was not the end of the association with the country with which Britain had a new defence relationship under the terms of the Baghdad Pact. The RAF continued to maintain staging posts at both Habbaniya and Basrah, as well as two signals units and a skeleton maintenance unit at the former station to handle the flow of transient aircraft which continued to use the route through Iraq on their way to the Far East. This was entirely in accordance with the terms of the new Anglo-Iraqi agreement and Habbaniya, in particular, was extensively used by the aircraft of Transport Command flying along the trunk routes, and by shorter range operational aircraft using the reinforcement route between the United Kingdom and Singapore.

For reasons with which this narrative is not concerned, relations between Iraq and her neighbours, and with Britain, tended to deteriorate during the next few years with the result that she withdrew from the Baghdad Pact in 1959, necessitating its retitling as the Central Treaty Organisation. The use of Iraq airfields by the RAF, even for the passage of transient aircraft, was no longer welcome, and the RAF finally withdrew all its personnel from Habbaniya on 31 May 1959 and from Basrah on 8 June. As relations with Iraq deteriorated, those with Iran improved and the RAF trunk route to the Far East was moved

further to the north and east, using Cyprus, Turkey and Teheran before rejoining the old route at Bahrein. This alteration was necessary but inconvenient as the new section of the route was not only longer but necessitated flying higher with greater stage lengths, resulting in reducing the loads of some aircraft, notably the Hastings, and creating considerable difficulties for unpressurised aircraft.

Although Iraq had always been an uncomfortable place in which to serve in many respects, conditions had greatly improved towards the end of the RAF stay with the advent of air conditioning, cold storage, radio, and air mail from home, none of which had been developed when airmen first went to Iraq after World War I. The disadvantages created by the personal discomfort were, however, far outweighed by the immense value which the RAF obtained from more than thirty-five years of continuous service in Iraq. In the first place, it was the scene of the initial experiment in controlling a vast area by air: the decision of the Cairo Conference of 1921 was one of vital importance for the new and independent Air Force at a time when air power was very much in its infancy. The experiment was highly successful and led to the adoption of the principle elsewhere, notably in Aden. Secondly, the thirty-five years in Iraq covered a span of aircraft development from World War I aircraft such as the DH9A, to the early jet aircraft, namely the Vampire, Meteor and Venom. The design and construction of military aircraft in these formative years had to incorporate sufficient versatility to operate successfully in extremes of climate, and the testing conditions of Iraq offered an invaluable challenge to aircraft manufacturers. The heat, sand and corrosion found in Iraq could be guaranteed to expose any weaknesses in the design of both airframes and engines. We can, therefore, be grateful to Iraq for compelling the British aircraft industry to produce tough and rugged aircraft suitable for world wide operation. Last but not least, Iraq provided unique experience – experience for aircrew in operating in unusual conditions – experience for ground tradesmen in displaying initiative and maintaining high technical standards in most difficult circumstances, and experience for officers and NCOs in exercising command and administering their subordinates in an environment beset with unfamiliar problems. Many very fine airfield and domestic facilities had been developed in Iraq, notably at the modern station at Habbaniya, and one happy outcome of the RAF departure was that it was at least possible to hand these facilities over to another air force, the Royal Iraq Air Force, rather than to leave them, as has been necessary elsewhere, to rot and corrode away after the looters have done their worst. The Royal Iraq Air Force was very much a protégé of the Royal Air Force and the regret at leaving Iraq was at least tempered with the satisfaction of handing over to a well found successor.

Trucial Oman disputes

Historical note

The least known and most primitive part of the area with which this narrative is concerned is undoubtedly the 82,000 square miles of Muscat and Oman, and the sheikhdoms of the Trucial Coast. Although the discovery of oil has transformed life along the shores of the Persian Gulf in recent years and brought undreamed of wealth to some of the sheikhdoms, life in the centre of the land mass of Oman has changed little. The discouragement to travellers and to journalists which successive Sultans of Muscat have always offered has protected this region from the eyes of the world, with the result that much of what goes on there remains an intriguing mystery. The Royal Air Force has been more privileged than most, as Britain's treaties with the Sultan of Muscat and with many of the smaller Trucial potentates have given RAF personnel the entree to areas forbidden to others, and also enabled them to make use of the airfields at Masirah, Salalah and Sharjah as well as giving the RAF responsibility for providing the personnel and equipment for the Sultan's Air Force (SOAF).

At the end of the 18th Century the situation in eastern Arabia was extremely confused. The Persians had been driven out of Bahrein in 1783 by an Arab tribe which, after various vicissitudes, established itself as rulers of the islands comprising the State of Bahrein. Elsewhere on the western and southern sides of the Gulf there was no responsible sheikh whose boundaries were clearly defined, other than the Sultan of Muscat. Piracy and lawlessness on sea and land were rife and continued throughout the first three decades of the 19th Century.

A new factor then entered this chaotic situation when the Wahabis, a puritanical sect from the Nejd area of Saudi Arabia began to extend their influence eastward to the shores of the Gulf. Far from attempting to stop the piratical proclivities of the inhabitants of the coast and to intercede between the warring sheikhs, they tended to encourage these activities, and particularly those which were directed against the Sultan of Muscat. It was this final increase in lawlessness which brought about Britain's involvement, as the ships of her East India Company were constantly being attacked when passing through the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman on their trading missions to Persian ports. As it was abundantly clear to the pirate chiefs that Britain possessed the naval

power to suppress their activities by force if necessary, they were content to come to terms and to give certain guarantees for the safe conduct of British shipping. Treaties were also drawn up between Britain and many of the independent sheikhdoms of the Trucial Coast. These steps, however, inevitably brought Britain into conflict with the expansionist Wahabi Amirs who, it must be remembered, were the direct ancestors of the present Saudi Arabian royal family. The antagonism which has plagued relations between Saudi Arabia and Britain for so many years can be traced back quite clearly to 19th Century activities along what was always known as the Pirate Coast. Towards the end of the century, however, the Wahabis became increasingly preoccupied with dynastic quarrels, and with Turkish intervention in their affairs, and at length they disappeared entirely from the Trucial Coast.

The oasis of Buraimi was the last point of departure, the Wahabis finally leaving it in 1869. It is partly because the occupation of Buraimi by the Wahabis was of longer and more continuous duration than elsewhere on the Trucial Coast, and partly because of the strategic importance of this 'desert crossroads' that the Saudi claim to Buraimi has been more persistent, and slightly more difficult to disprove than that of any other part of the area. The Buraimi Oasis comprises eight small villages, six of which have always been regarded as belonging to Abu Dhabi, and the remaining two to the Sultan of Muscat. The plentiful water supply has permitted some cultivation in the middle of an otherwise arid desert, and the concentration of camel caravans passing through and replenishing their supplies has tended to make Buraimi a centre of the slave trade. Slaves imported through the nearby ports were sold to traders from the inland areas of Oman: the remoteness of Buraimi was beneficial to the slave traders in obscuring their activities from the eyes of the more enlightened Powers during the efforts to abolish the slave trade during the latter part of the last century. It is often said that slavery has never entirely disappeared from this remote part of the world although there is today no outward evidence of its continuance.

Turning from Buraimi, which was largely used by the Wahabis as a departure point for attacks against the territory of the Sultan of Muscat, some historical explanation of developments in Muscat and Oman is called for. Broadly speaking, Oman (in which Buraimi lies) is the huge, barren interior and Muscat is the coastal periphery of this area of the Arabian Peninsula. In writing of Muscat and Oman two salient factors should be realised. The first is that all the tribes in the area, whatever their sect of Islam – Sunni, Ibadhi, Wahabi, have divided themselves since 1723 into two great political factions – Ghafiri and Hinawi – the names of the rival leaders at that time. The majority of the Hinawi tribes belong to the Ibadhi sect of Islam which was adopted as the national Omani faith far back in the 8th Century. Their outlook is puritanical and reactionary. Of their Ghafiri opponents, considerable numbers are orthodox Sunnis and a few were converted to the Wahabi

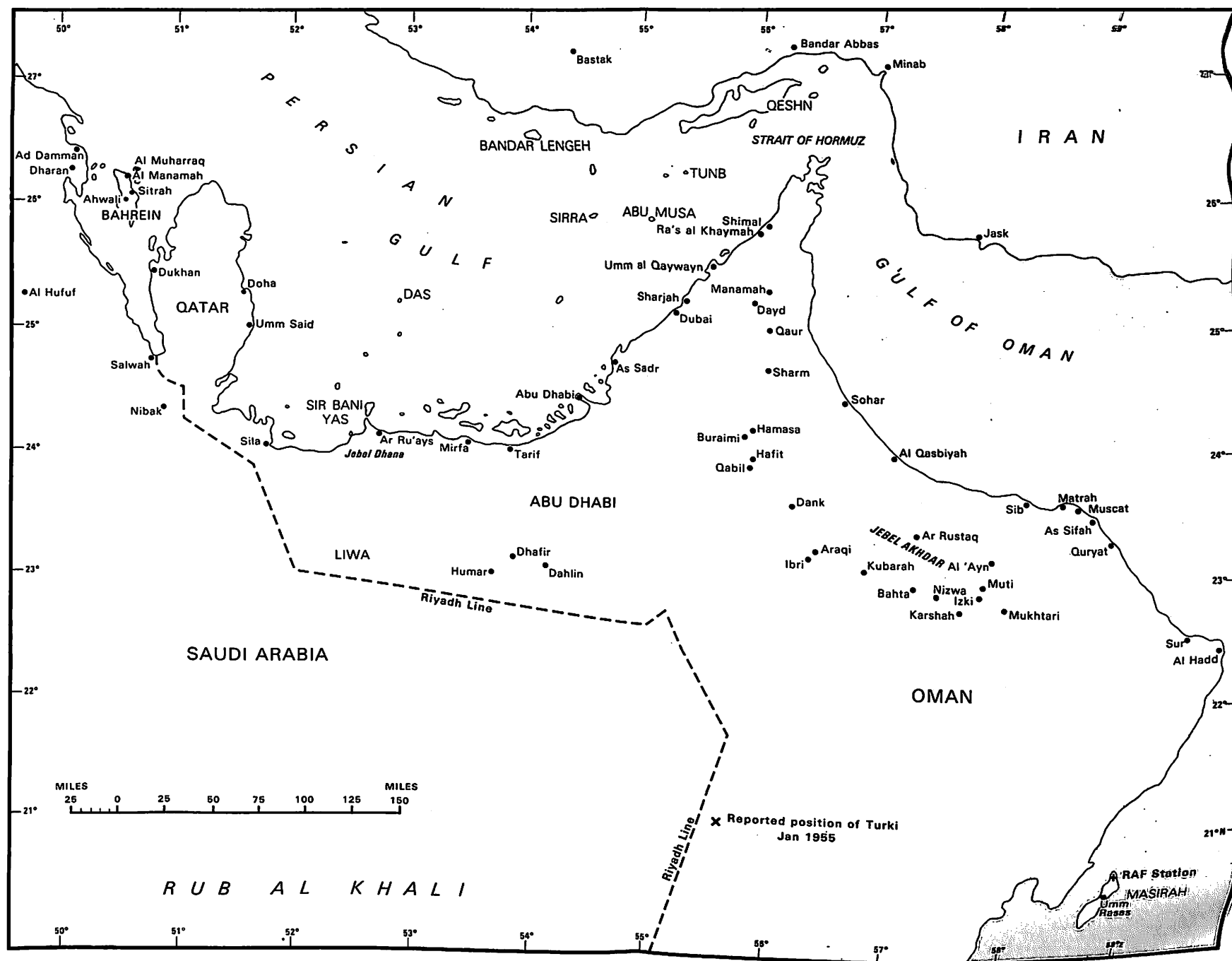
faith during the years of occupation by that tribe. The second factor is that, although the Sultan of Muscat was recognised by most of the outside world, especially Great Britain, France and the United States with whom he had treaties, as an independent monarch of the whole area, he had little real authority over any of the tribes outside the immediate vicinity of Muscat, Sur, Dhofar and the Batinah coastal towns. Although the terms of a somewhat ambiguous treaty – the Treaty of Sib signed in 1920 – formally recognised the authority of the Sultan throughout Muscat and Oman, the Imam, Ghalib, the religious leader of the tribes, was frequently regarded as having greater authority than the Sultan in the interior. The tribes grouped themselves under a triumvirate of leaders, the most important being the Imam. He and his two lieutenants appointed their own Walis, collected and administered the revenue, laid down both religious and temporal laws and fanatically resisted all penetration from without.

After the withdrawal of the Wahabis in 1869, the whole area of Muscat, Oman and the Trucial Coast enjoyed a long period of relative peace and stability. Internal dissension and tribal dissidence is always present in some part of this area but, until 1952, no external threat materialised. Only upon isolated occasions, and then on a very small scale, was Britain asked to honour her treaty relationships by supporting the authority of the Sultan in some internal confrontation.

In the years following World War I, King Ibn Saud gradually moulded the kingdom of Saudi Arabia into its present form, and this led him to look towards the Trucial Coast, to which he considered that, through his ancestors the Wahabis, he had an historical claim. One may justifiably ask why, after three quarters of a century of total indifference, should Saudi Arabia suddenly resume her interest in the coastal regions. The answer to that question is, of course, oil. Oil had been found and was being extracted on an ever increasing scale in Saudi Arabia. Its location indicated to Ibn Saud's American advisers that the Trucial Coast should, according to all their calculations, contain rich oil bearing regions, both on land and off shore in the warm, shallow waters of the Gulf. And so, by the middle of this century, the ill defined borders of Saudi Arabia and Oman, which lay mostly in featureless desert and had hitherto been relatively unimportant, suddenly assumed great importance in the eyes of Ibn Saud. Of all the areas in dispute, the Buraimi Oasis was undoubtedly the key; not only was it the natural point of entry to Oman from Saudi Arabia, but it was thought to be within the oil bearing region and, furthermore, it was historically the place to which Ibn Saud felt that he had the most unassailable claim.

Dispute over Buraimi

In 1951 discussions took place in London between the Foreign Office and HRH the Amir Faisal, Ibn Saud's representative, in an endeavour to reach some agreement on the disputed boundaries. At the first meet-



MAP 3: TRUCIAL STATES AND CENTRAL OMAN

ing it was agreed to observe the 'status quo' in the disputed territories pending further negotiations. Although these negotiations started and a full scale conference was held at Damman, on the Gulf coast, in February 1952, no progress was made owing to the extravagant claims put forward by the Saudis and the intransigence of their representatives. Negotiation was not, however, broken off and, officially at any rate the agreed 'status quo' continued. However, events now took a new and more serious turn. On the 31 August, a Saudi Arabian government official, Turki-bin-Ataishan, accompanied by an escort variously estimated at between forty and eighty armed men, arrived at the village of Hamasa, in the Muscat owned part of the Buraimi Oasis, having violated Abu Dhabi territory on his way from the Hofuf area of Saudi Arabia. The tribal sheikhs and the Sultan of Muscat immediately asked the British Government to protest to the Saudi Arabian Government at this unprecedented act, and to request the immediate withdrawal of the armed party. The protest, made at Jedda on the 15 September, was rejected by Saudi Arabia who persisted in her claim to the oasis. It would have been simple to expel Turki and his party by force, and indeed, the Sultan was fully prepared to lead an expedition to do so. HMG however, being anxious to avoid bloodshed and a grave deterioration in relations with Saudi Arabia, persuaded the Sultan to stay his hand. A show of force by the Trucial Oman Levies and the Royal Air Force was decided upon as a solution less likely to escalate the situation.

A force of Trucial Oman Levies moved from Sharjah to the Abu Dhabi part of the oasis and made their presence known in the area while a flight of three Vampires from 6 Squadron flew down to Sharjah from Habbaniya, accompanied by a Valetta. During the latter part of September, the Vampires flew a number of low level sorties over the Buraimi villages and the Valetta dropped leaflets urging the inhabitants to remain loyal to their Sultan, and to repulse the blandishments of the invaders. As was to be expected, the low flying Vampires and the leaflets brought strong protests of intimidation and aggression from the Saudis. They proposed a Standstill Agreement during which the boundary negotiations would continue. This was agreed with some reluctance by HMG whose doubts were subsequently shown to be justified as Turki used the Standstill period to continue with his efforts to bribe and entice the local tribes to be disloyal to their own chiefs. It was also noticed that the presence of the intruders had caused an entirely unwelcome renewal of interest in the slave trade.

As a result of the Standstill Agreement, the Vampires and Valetta returned to Habbaniya in mid-October. The trucial Coast was by now becoming accustomed to the Vampire which, with its high speed and the characteristic whine of its Goblin engine created a feeling of confidence among friends and instilled some apprehension among potential offenders. The sudden but infrequent appearances of the Vampires at Sharjah probably created a better impression than would have been the

case if the Squadron had been permanently located there. The tribes did not see sufficient of these little fighters to become over familiar with them and, in consequence, when they did appear, they knew that trouble was afoot. It was, therefore, in some respects fortuitous that the runway surface at Sharjah was unsuitable for prolonged jet operations.

Repeated offers by HMG to refer the dispute to independent arbitration brought no response other than repetitions of unfounded claims, and towards the end of the year it was decided that some modest reinforcement of British forces in the area was desirable. The Trucial Oman Levies numbered only about one hundred personnel, little more than enough to guard the camp and airfield at Sharjah, and provide small scale patrols. To recruit and build up a force of five hundred men, which was estimated to be the optimum size for the force, would take a number of years, particularly as recruits were not all that plentiful in such a sparsely populated area. The only means whereby a rapid expansion could be achieved was by the loan of a number of Aden Protectorate Levies while recruiting for the TOL proceeded as quickly as possible. APL could, with some difficulty be spared from Aden, and a decision was made to send three hundred of them temporarily to Sharjah, with an additional one hundred to reinforce the Sultan of Muscat's locally raised forces in the Huqf area of Muscat. In order to give greater mobility and fire power to the TOL, it was further decided to detach two flights of RAF armoured cars from Habbaniya to Sharjah. Consideration was also given to the need for aircraft to be permanently based at Sharjah: once again the suitability of the airfield became a decisive factor with the result that HQ MEAF tended to favour the deployment of Lancasters from Malta or from Bomber Command as opposed to the Vampires from Iraq. In spite of its weight and size, the Lancaster was less destructive to the airfield surface than the Vampire. In the event Lancasters could not be spared, and as 6 Squadron was readily available on a mobile basis at Habbaniya, it was decided to continue to depend upon detachments to Sharjah as and when needed. In this decision one sees a sound appreciation of the great flexibility of air power. The situation had not become one of such importance or gravity as to necessitate the permanent deployment of jet fighters on an unsuitable airfield when they could always be called forward from their base within forty-eight hours.

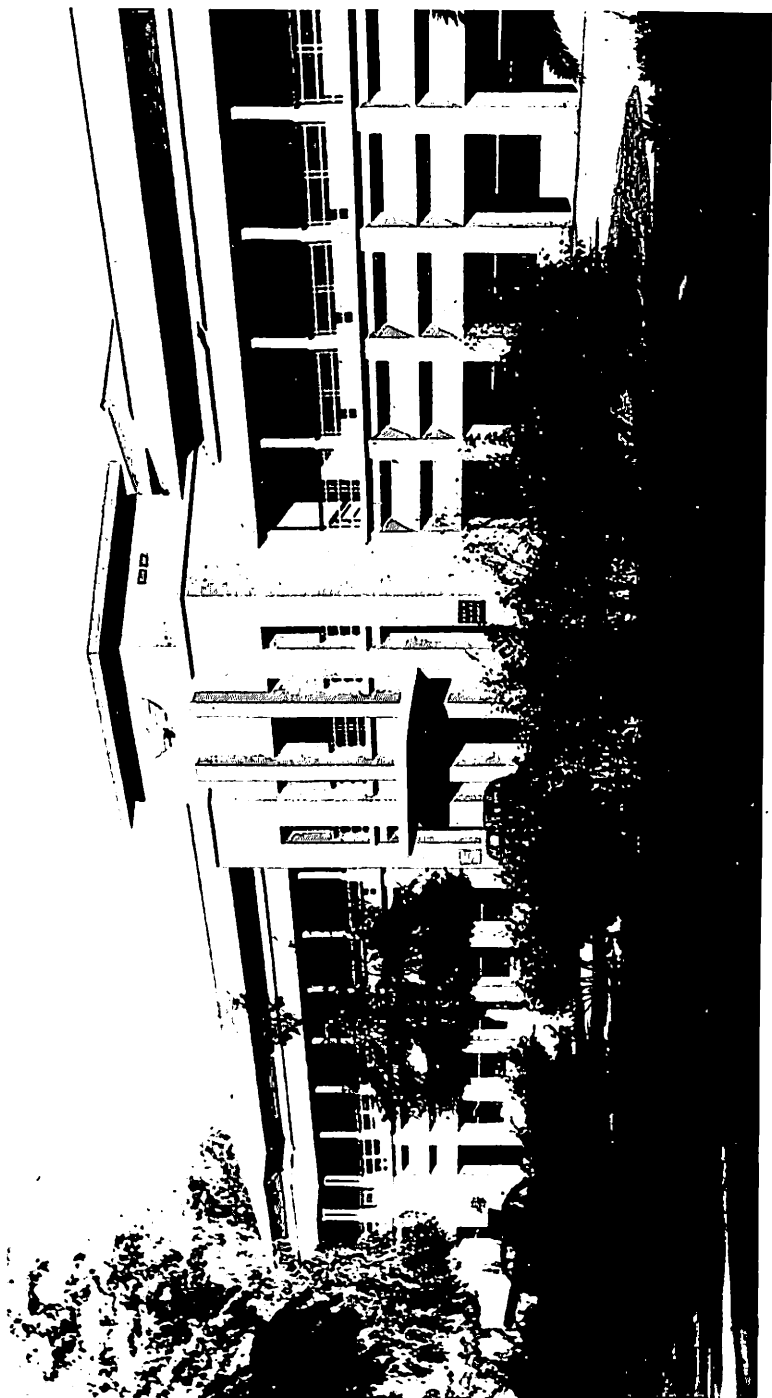
While these reinforcements were being organised during the early part of 1953, the opportunity was taken of the visit to the Persian Gulf of *HMS Ceylon* from the East Indies Fleet, to arrange for an inter-Service display of force for the benefit of the Trucial sheikhs, using available naval units to support the cruiser *Ceylon*, RAF armoured cars, the Trucial Oman Levies and the Vampires of 6 Squadron. By coincidence, on the day after the armoured cars arrived at Sharjah in the LST *Boxer*, a post of the TOL in the Wadi al Qaur was surrounded by eighty hostile tribesmen from the Buraimi area and attempts made to invest it. A



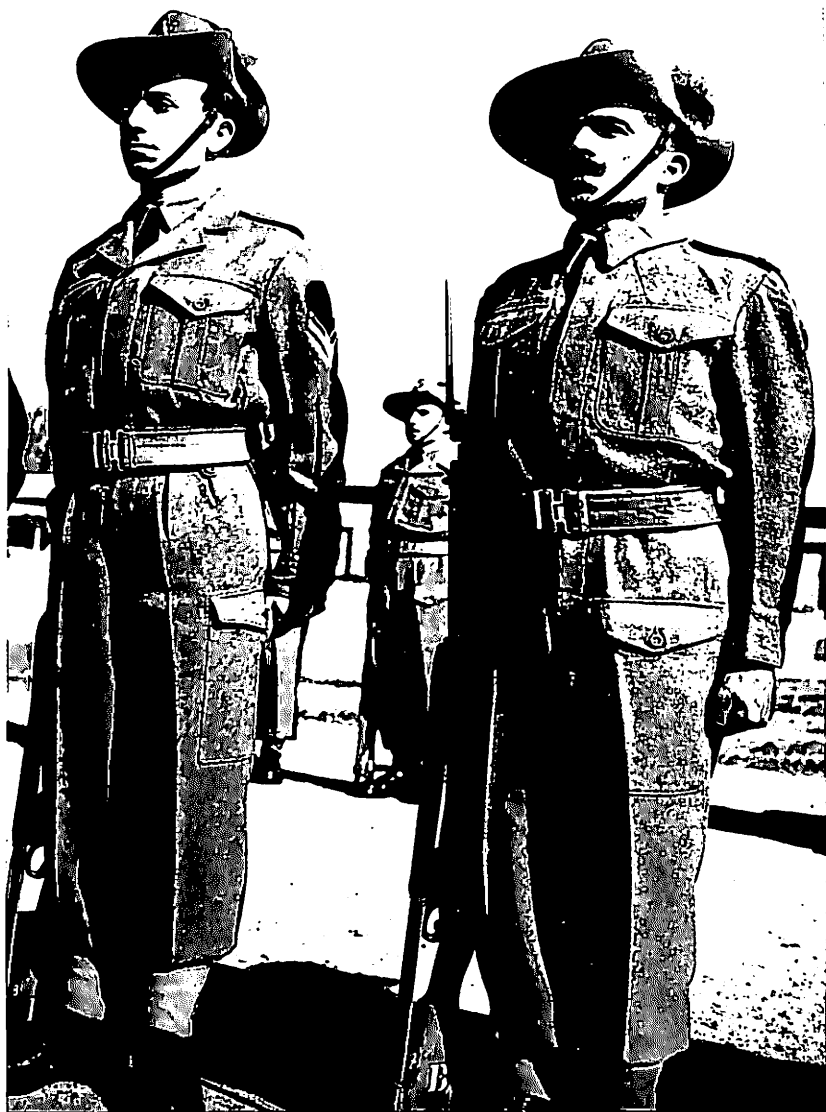
11. Corporal Foster of the RAF Mounted Police and SACW Kendall, the WRAF Rifle Champion at Habbaniya, 1954.



12. Armoured car of the RAF Regiment among the hills in Iraq.



13. Air Headquarters, Iraq, at Habbaniya.



14. Two airmen of the RAF Iraq Levies at Habbaniya.

sortie of armoured cars and Levies from Sharjah very quickly restored the situation, thus giving the Saudi party at Buraimi a clear indication that the British forces were being increased and were prepared to take action. The inter-Service demonstration duly took place a few days later but it was marred by the unserviceability of Sharjah airfield after heavy rain which effectively prevented the Vampires from taking off and participating in the demonstration. However, six of the seven Trucial State sheikhs inspected the Vampires of 6 Squadron and the armoured cars of 2 Squadron and there was no doubt that they were not only impressed by what they saw but felt great satisfaction at the clear indication that Britain was strengthening her forces in view of the Saudi intrusion at Buraimi.

While this strengthening process was in train, the manner in which Turki should be ousted from Buraimi was discussed at political and military levels in both Whitehall and the Persian Gulf. The small size of the occupation party would clearly have made it a relatively simple matter to throw Turki and his followers out by force. There were now adequate ground forces with armoured car and air support but politically this solution was viewed with some disfavour: the Standstill Agreement was still officially in force and offers of arbitration by Britain, although being ignored by Saudi Arabia, were still in being. Some slender hope therefore remained of an ultimate solution to the boundary dispute by arbitration. Military action to expel the party from Buraimi would inevitably cause casualties, would probably encourage stronger military retaliation from Ibn Saud and would certainly hasten his approach to the United Nations and destroy any further hope of satisfactory Anglo-Saudi negotiations. The alternative, but more costly and time consuming course was to blockade Turki and his party and endeavour to prevent any supplies reaching them from Saudi Arabia. Obviously it would be impossible to prevent food being provided by sympathetic or intimidated local inhabitants, but it was hoped that a blockade would demonstrate British determination, meanwhile leaving the offer of arbitration on the table to be picked up by Saudi Arabia at any time.

Many critics might justifiably say, after a glance at the map, that a more impossible place to blockade than Buraimi could hardly be imagined. That, however, is not quite true. Supplies had to travel either by slow camel caravan or by the few available and suitable vehicles using defined tracks through the desert. The Rub-al Khali (Empty Quarter) was a hazardous, rough and featureless desert with little hope of survival for the unwary or foolhardy. In consequence there were a limited number of tracks which converged on Buraimi, and the task of keeping them under surveillance, although tedious, was not impossible. But the surveillance would have to be undertaken from the air, not only because of the immense distances to be covered, but because of the better visibility from the air of movement against the background of the desert. Half a

dozen camels, which might be seen from several miles away by an aircraft, could be quite invisible at several hundred yards range from the ground owing to the indentations and undulations of the desert. The mirage has always been another disconcerting factor which can affect reconnaissance in these areas, and which tends to affect visibility from the ground more than from the air. Many pilots have been disconcerted to see a large lake apparently in the centre of the main runway at Sharjah when on their final approach at low altitude. As, however, the lake was not there a few minutes earlier when higher up in the circuit, most pilots correctly assume it to be a mirage which can safely be ignored.

Mainly for political reasons it was decided that a form of aerial blockade should be initiated which, it was hoped, would avoid offensive action and, while denying reinforcements and supplies to Turki in Buraimi, would permit diplomatic action towards a settlement by negotiation to continue. Plans for aerial reconnaissance were based upon the inspection of every caravan within some two hundred miles of Buraimi at least once in seven days. Trucial Oman Levies and armoured cars of the RAF Regiment, based on Sharjah, were to be disposed at strategic points from which they could be rapidly called in by reconnaissance aircraft to investigate any suspicious movement seen by the aircrews. In addition all aircraft capable of carrying weapons would be armed and thus able to give supporting fire to any ground patrol which met opposition although opposition on any significant scale was not expected.

By March, 1953, the strengthening of the Sharjah garrison was completed by the arrival of the last of the three hundred Aden Protectorate Levies sent to assist the TOL while recruitment to bring the latter force up to five hundred men continued. The blockade of Buraimi was initiated towards the end of the month by Vampires of 6 Squadron assisted by Valettas and Ansons. The old Sharjah bogey of runway erosion soon reared its head again as the Vampires began to operate intensively with the result that they were replaced in April by four Meteor FRG's from 208 Squadron in the Canal Zone. The Meteor jet efflux did less damage than that of the Vampire, but even so, it created a difficult maintenance problem for the Resident Engineer and his airfield staff. This was not, however, the only problem: it very quickly became apparent that the short range and endurance of jet fighters made it almost impossible for the few aircraft available to cover the area required by the blockade plan with the frequency needed to spot all movement towards the oasis. The solution proposed by HQ MEAF was to use Lancasters for the task, basing them at Bahrein and using either maritime reconnaissance Lancasters from Malta or the aircraft of Bomber Command during their routine SUN RAY detachments to the Middle East. In spite of their permanent assignment to NATO in the maritime role, it was decided to use the Lancasters from the Mediterranean. Four Lancasters, two each from 37 and 38 Squadrons in Malta relieved the

Meteors of 208 Squadron at the end of April, using Habbaniya as their base and operating a detachment of two aircraft in rotation from Sharjah. Despite the weight and size of the Lancaster, its effect upon Sharjah's sensitive runway was negligible compared with that of the jet fighters, and a much more effective blockade became possible.

Although the blockade was reasonably successful in isolating Buraimi, it was clear that Turki and his party could never be starved out so long as there were local sympathisers to provide subsistence for him. If negotiation continued to be ignored by Saudi Arabia, it looked as if the forces at Sharjah were committed to a very long, uneconomical and fruitless operation. The plan called for a minimum of 180 hours of reconnaissance flying a month, a task which the four Lancasters, assisted by a few Ansons and the occasional Valetta, had difficulty in achieving as the Lancasters were tasked for thirty hours per month only. Furthermore the maritime Lancasters were needed in the Mediterranean and could not be diverted from their correct role indefinitely. The only other Lancasters in the Middle East were the photographic reconnaissance aircraft of 683 Squadron which, based at Habbaniya, were carrying out an important survey task in Persia and Iraq which was not due to be completed until the end of July. It was then intended to disband 683 Squadron in accordance with the planned rundown of the Service.

It is hardly surprising that the Air Staff in Air Ministry showed considerable irritation at the demands of this desert operation. Not only was it wasteful of valuable flying hours, but it was not in accordance with the well tried and successful principles of control by air. This was well illustrated during an incident which took place in mid-June when one of the local sheikhs, Obaid by name, established himself on the lines of communications between Sharjah and Buraimi, in the vicinity of the village of Sharm. Two flights of Aden Protectorate Levies coming up as reinforcements were fired upon: they returned the fire and killed three of Obaid's men, whereupon Obaid brought the strength of his road block up to one hundred men. The Political Resident, Persian Gulf sought authority to use a Lancaster to drop ten practice bombs, to engage the enemy with machine gun fire and then to drop one 500lb bomb in the vicinity as a noisy warning to the dissidents. Authority was refused by the Cabinet on the basis that the use of aircraft might produce an unfavourable public reaction. It was decreed that methods short of air attack were to be used. While this matter was being considered in Whitehall, the Levies successfully cleared the road block, and no air action was in fact required.

The Air Staff were, however, quick to point out to the Secretary of State for Air that the customary technique for bringing unruly tribesmen under control was to warn them by leaflet that, in the event of misconduct, they would be subjected to aerial attack. If they failed to heed the warning, suitable targets would be nominated for attack, and a further warning given that these targets should be evacuated: they

would then be destroyed. This representation concluded with these words—

“The Air Staff believe that there will be no solution to this frontier problem in South Eastern Arabia so long as we are denied the opportunity to exercise our proper and well tried methods of air control. In the meantime, we are committed to the present protracted and ineffective aerial reconnaissance to which there is apparently no end in sight.”

In spite of the strength of this representation, and in spite of the difficulty which the RAF was experiencing in maintaining such widespread reconnaissance with its available aircraft, HMG clung to the hope of resolution by negotiation and refused to authorise any offensive air action except in strict retaliation. A reassessment of RAF resources was carried out: the maritime Lancasters of 37 and 38 Squadrons had to return to the Mediterranean by July and this would leave a hiatus of about a month before any of 683 Squadron's Lancasters could be made available from their survey task. The only solution short of returning to the uneconomical and unsatisfactory use of jet fighters was to press into service a number of Valettas from the Aden Communications Flight for the interim period. Although unarmed and quite incapable of any form of retaliation, they were better than nothing and could call upon support by Vampires from Habbaniya at fairly short notice. At least the Valetta crews were highly experienced in desert flying and the aircraft possessed adequate endurance to cover the reconnaissance routes economically. They filled the gap admirably until the first two Lancasters of 683 Squadron arrived at Sharjah at the end of July. This again was only a temporary solution to the problem of maintaining the blockade apparently indefinitely, as Air Ministry was adamant that 683 Squadron should disband not later than the end of November. The Lancaster was being phased out of service after a long and exceptionally distinguished career and, furthermore, 683 Squadron was not included in the future force of photographic reconnaissance squadrons to be equipped with the Canberra.

A further and more lasting solution had to be found during the next three months, and this was greatly facilitated by the Political Resident, Persian Gulf deciding that he could accept some reduction in the scope of the reconnaissance pattern, and would also be satisfied with unarmed aircraft provided that the Vampires remained readily available in Iraq. Whenever called upon to participate in the blockade, the Anson had always shown itself to be satisfactory, if somewhat slow and short on endurance. It was economical and reliable, could use makeshift airstrips and — an important consideration — was available in considerable numbers. The solution which was eventually decided upon was to form a special flight of five Ansons with one reserve aircraft, to be based at Bahrein but to operate mainly from Sharjah. Sole use of the Anson would necessitate a rearrangement of the reconnaissance routes and

schedules; it would also involve refuelling in the desert if valuable flying hours were not to be wasted. During August and September, a revised routine, based upon six searches a week, was evolved and the airstrip at Tarif on the Gulf coast to the west of Abu Dhabi was rehabilitated, and stocks of fuel laid down. In addition, the new pattern of flights was less extensive than before, concentrating on the distant approaches to Buraimi particularly from the north and west, leaving the area in the vicinity of the oasis to be patrolled by the Levies and armoured cars: experience had shown that they were well able to cope with caravans approaching the focal point of the journeys, leaving the Ansons to try to provide more distant warning. Experience had also shown that very few, if any, vehicles attempted to break the blockade: suspicious movement was almost entirely confined to camels, and their slow rate of progress gave the aircraft good prospects of spotting and reporting them to the Levy posts in time for interrogation. Although HMG, and the RAF in particular, were paying a high price in order to keep a small party of Saudis bottled up in Hamasa, the fact that the blockade was reasonably effective and that British forces were seen to be active and continually on the alert in the area undoubtedly paid dividends in the confidence it gave to friendly rulers and tribes, and thus severely restricted the influence which Turki and his men could exert in the Buraimi villages.

In September the new Anson Flight was formed at Bahrein, and designated 1417 Flight. The six Ansons were provided partly from MEAF resources and partly from the United Kingdom and, after a month in which to shake down, the Flight was ready to take over the reconnaissance task from the Lancasters of 683 Squadron. No 683 Squadron returned from Sharjah to Habbaniya on 13 November, and disbanded a few days later. It had finished its career with a very strange commitment for a photographic reconnaissance squadron, the four Lancasters having flown over five hundred hours in two and a half months on the Buraimi blockade and associated tasks. Flying almost continually at low levels, the crews had endured cockpit temperatures which were frequently above 130°F, and encountered severe turbulence which made many of the patrols extremely exhausting.

Before leaving Sharjah, 683 Squadron was witness to, but did not participate in, an extremely ugly incident at one of the TOL posts close to Buraimi. An Arab, thought to be an infiltrator, was shot and killed by a Levy close to the post. Subsequently it was suspected that this was a case of murder for private gain and, while investigating the incident, the TOL squadron commander, an RAF medical officer and the regimental sergeant major were all murdered by the Levies, and two British NCO's wounded. Reinforcements sent from Sharjah quelled the mutiny but it was decided to disband the Levy squadron and to dismiss its personnel who were almost entirely recruits from Aden. The subsequent inquiry revealed that the original murder of the Arab was, in fact, the outcome of a personal feud. This quite unprecedented and

unpleasant incident was a severe setback to the recruiting campaign for the Trucial Oman Levies with the result that 2 Squadron of the RAF Regiment had to be sent in from Habbaniya as a temporary reinforcement.

By the end of the year, 1417 Flight had become familiar with the new reconnaissance pattern and its aircraft were refuelling with the help of a small RAF detachment on the desert airstrip at Tarif and occasionally making an overnight stop there. This rather dull and fatiguing routine continued without major incident during the first few months of 1954. Whether due to its success, or to some other cause, somewhat more hopeful signs of willingness on the part of Saudi Arabia to negotiate became evident through diplomatic channels, and HMG renewed its offer to reopen discussions, offering various enticements such as the possibility of giving Saudi Arabia a corridor to the Gulf Coast at the foot of the Qatar peninsula. Any solution would have been more than welcome to the RAF and the TOL at Sharjah, as the forces needed to maintain the blockade, although not large, had created serious overcrowding on the Station. With the hot weather approaching, inadequate water supplies and very little air conditioning, the soldiers and airmen were clearly in for a thoroughly uncomfortable summer. The installation of air conditioning in all living and sleeping accommodation was in progress but, by May, only forty of the 220 airmen on the Station were housed in air conditioned huts. Throughout its history, Sharjah was always one of those stations which the less intelligent spoke of as a 'challenge' to the serviceman. It was a challenge which could wear very thin in the middle of a trying hot weather season. This particular hot weather at Sharjah was enlivened by the arrival of a KLM Royal Dutch Airlines aircraft bound from Malaya to Amsterdam which was forced down by engine trouble. Instead of an interesting load of passengers to add variety to the monotony of Sharjah, this aircraft was carrying a load of seven hundred monkeys, parrots, peacocks, four bears and three tigers, all confined in flimsy cages. This unusual party remained for two days during which the messing requirements taxed the ingenuity of the catering staff to the limit. Even the local rulers came, with their cameras, to inspect the creatures, and were disappointed at not being offered gifts of peacocks for their palaces.

Diversions of this nature were few and infrequent, and the hot weather of 1954 was well advanced before the endeavour to renew negotiations with Saudi Arabia began to bear fruit. In mid-July it was agreed between the two governments that the question of the common frontier between Saudi Arabia and Abu Dhabi and that of sovereignty over the Buraimi zone should be put to arbitration on certain conditions. These conditions were that Turki-bin-Ataishan and his party should withdraw from Buraimi to undisputed Saudi territory, that the TOL officials and other armed forces should similarly withdraw to undisputed territory in the Trucial States, and that each side should locate

a small police force of up to fifteen men in the disputed zone in tents in a mutually agreed place, but not in the Buraimi villages. There were many other more detailed conditions, but the outcome was the establishment of an Arbitral Tribunal comprising one representative from Saudi Arabia, one from Great Britain and three neutral representatives.

The blockade was immediately lifted, all reconnaissance flights by 1417 Flight being discontinued and the detachment on the airstrip at Tarif withdrawn to Sharjah. The various TOL posts which lay to the west of Tarif were similarly withdrawn and, on the Saudi Arabian side, Turki departed from Hamasa with his party on 15 August, not uneventfully, as all his vehicles, which had lain idle under the blockade for so long, broke down and he had to be helped over the border into Saudi Arabia by the Levies. In order to give some much needed relief to Sharjah, the Ansons of 1417 Flight moved back to their main base at Bahrein where they remained at readiness to renew the blockade if the negotiations failed and Turki returned to Buraimi. Over the next few months the Sharjah garrison was reduced to its normal complement of about five hundred Trucial Oman Levies and about one hundred airmen, with no aircraft based there permanently. The airfield suffered one of its worst floods in November and had to be closed for a week while the water was pumped off the runway. In view of its strategic importance and the frequency with which it was used for operations and aircraft in transit during the postwar decade, it is surprising that Sharjah was not provided with a hard topped runway, particularly on the advent of jet aircraft. It must be remembered, however, that there was at that time not a single hard runway between Bahrein and Aden, and it was doubtless hoped that the RAF would never be sufficiently heavily committed in the Arabian Peninsula to necessitate the provision of very expensive runways. In the event it would probably have been an economy to lay one down at Sharjah in the mid-1950s: much costly maintenance would thereby have been avoided.

Although for a time it looked as if the dispute over Buraimi might be finished, the Arbitral Tribunal made little or no headway. Ownership of the oasis was but one facet of the boundary dispute which covered the whole vast area of central Oman. There were at least half a dozen versions of the Saudi Arabia-Oman frontier going back as far as 1905. An exact frontier demarcation had been unimportant in this featureless desert no-man's land until the possibility of oil being discovered in it arose. HMG tended to regard the Riyadh Line which had been offered to Ibn Saud in 1935 as the least controversial delineation of the frontier and it had the additional advantage of being acceptable to the Sultan of Muscat who claimed no territory beyond that line. (The Riyadh Line is shown on Map 3. The many variations are omitted for clarity.

As the negotiators struggled on, there were clear indications towards the end of 1954 that Saudi Arabia might attempt to take advantage of tribal disturbances which were on the increase in central Oman. The

underlying reasons for these disturbances are described later in this chapter, but it is essential to allude briefly to them here as they were not unconnected with Buraimi, the dispute over which was far from dead. In January 1955 a report filtered through to the Sultan of Muscat that Turki-bin-Ataishan had again been identified with several hundred camels, but this time in central Oman at a point roughly assessed at $21^{\circ}00' \text{ N}$, $55^{\circ}00' \text{ E}$ (see Map 3). He was reported to be heading into northern Dhofar territory, towards Mugshin or Shishur. Coincidental with this somewhat vague report came the much more specific news that the small Saudi Arabian police detachment in Buraimi had been reinforced, above the size of fifteen men stipulated in the Anglo-Saudi Arabian Agreement. Furthermore Saudi Arabia began to spread propaganda to the local tribes that Turki was on his way back to Buraimi.

The Sultan of Muscat, disturbed by the news that Turki might have penetrated into his territory in central Oman, sought the assistance of Britain under the terms of his treaty. An air reconnaissance of the Mugshin area was clearly called for, but it posed certain problems. The area was out of range of Vampires or Venoms from any suitable airfield, and it was also beyond the range at which the Ansons of 1417 Flight could carry out any useful search bearing in mind that the reported location of Turki's party was extremely vague and that even the precise positions of Mugshin and Shishur were not known with certainty. The only aircraft available in the theatre which could navigate and search with the accuracy needed were the Valettas at Aden, and it was to them that the task was assigned. At the same time it was decided to transfer responsibility for the search to the AOC, Aden, who was far better placed to control this particular area than was the AOC Iraq. In case the search revealed a target against which air action was necessary, two Lincolns of Bomber Command were brought to readiness at Salalah for use if a target within 150 miles of Salalah presented itself. The first Valetta search was carried out on 23-24 January over a wide area, but nothing whatsoever was seen. This did not necessarily mean that the previous reports had been false, and it was decided to repeat the Valetta search at weekly intervals for the time being. Three months passed; nothing was seen from the air, no further reports were received and no activity from Saudi Arabia was identified. Consequently the Valetta searches were called off in May and nothing more transpired until September when interest once again switched back to Buraimi.

The Arbitral Tribunal was making no progress whatsoever; charges and counter charges of intransigence flew back and forth across the negotiating table and between the capitals. It was in this atmosphere that it became apparent that Saudi Arabia was unobtrusively continuing to increase her police detachment in Buraimi. Although Turki, the previous leader of the Saudi party was no longer present, his place had been taken by another official, one Abdullah bin Nami. Saudi aircraft, which could not be identified as belonging to Aramco or any other oil

company, were occasionally seen landing at one of the airstrips in the oasis and discharging men in civilian clothes, who were suspected of being soldiers in disguise. Whoever they were, it was quite clear that the Standstill Agreement was not being observed and, taken in conjunction with the rumoured Saudi activity along the disputed boundary in central Oman, HMG could not ignore the possibility of a more determined move to push back the Sultan's frontier.

The attitude in London hardened and a firm decision was taken to mount a swift operation to remove the Saudi party from Buraimi without further delay, using primarily the Sultan's forces and supporting them with the Trucial Oman Levies and such RAF assistance as was necessary. Provided that the operation was mounted speedily and without warning, it was expected that there would be little opposition and few casualties. There would undoubtedly be diplomatic fury when it was all over, but in view of the remoteness and relative unimportance of this desert oasis in world affairs, it was hoped that the fury would be short lived.

The AOC, British Forces, Aden, appointed Wing Commander CPN Newman OBE DFC to establish a small tactical air headquarters at Sharjah under the overall direction of the Senior RAF Officer, Persian Gulf. The aircraft available to support the TOL, who were deputed to apprehend and expel the Saudi party from Buraimi, consisted of two Lincolns on detachment from 7 Squadron, Bomber Command, two Valettas from the Aden Communications Squadron and two Pembrokes and two Ansons from 1417 Flight at Bahrein. In addition the Venoms which had replaced the Vampires of 6 Squadron were to be on call should offensive air action be needed, although such a requirement was not expected. Wing Commander Newman set up his headquarters on 25 October, only twenty-four hours before the operation was due to take place, such was the desire to ensure that no information leaked out. The ground force of Levies left Sharjah in time to enter Buraimi in two separate parties just before dawn on 26 October and, at first light, one Valetta and one Pembroke were to land on Buraimi airstrip, the former to bring out prisoners and the latter to evacuate any casualties. The operation went according to plan, the first TOL party surprising the Saudi police detachment which capitulated after some show of resistance. In particular, Nami, who attempted to effect the escape of one of his subordinates with a tin box subsequently found to contain 150,000 Rupees, was shot in the leg. The second Levy party met with some opposition in the village of Hamasa, but this died down when the news filtered through that Nami had been captured. By mid-morning, all the Saudi party had been flown to Sharjah in the Valetta and Pembroke, whence they were shipped to Bahrein in *HMS Loch Alvie* and later flown across the water to Dharan in Saudi Arabia by civil aircraft. One of the Lincolns flew a comprehensive reconnaissance sortie from Bahrein to cover the western approaches to the oasis but no signs of Saudi

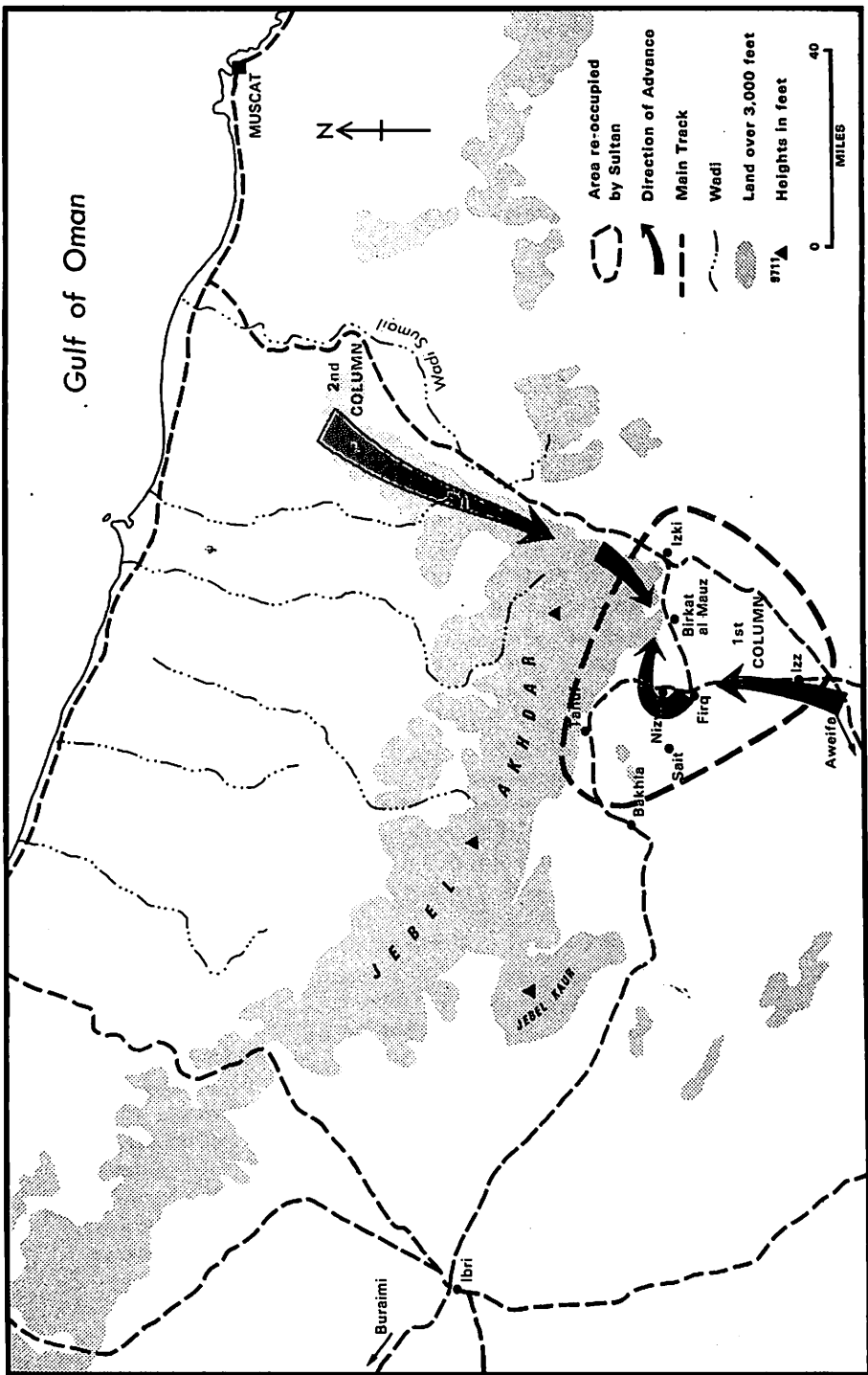
reaction was seen. The second Lincoln demonstrated over Hamasa when the Levies met opposition: no offensive action was called for but the presence of the large and menacing aircraft at low altitude with its turrets trained downwards made a marked impression on the hostile tribesmen and hastened their surrender. By early morning on the 27th, the operation was over and it remained only for the Lincolns to continue to watch the western approaches and for the other aircraft to bring back some of the TOL and a few minor casualties for treatment. However, as a precaution against retaliation, a British infantry company of the King's Royal Rifle Corps was flown into Sharjah by Valetta to reinforce the Levies.

For the time being at least, the dispute over Buraimi appeared to have been settled, not unfortunately by negotiation but by force of arms which did nothing to improve the strained relations between Saudi Arabia and Britain. But, if the problem of the oasis had been resolved, the larger problem of the boundary dispute had not, and attention was once more directed to central Oman.

Dispute in central Oman

Historically the territory of Muscat and Oman has always been a single independent Arab state. The double name is used not to indicate the fusion of two separate elements, but to distinguish the country from other parts of Oman, notably the Trucial Oman, otherwise known as the Trucial States. As has happened in the history of many tribal societies, there have been periods when certain of the tribes have tried to resist the central authority – in this case, that of the Sultan of Muscat, whose authority over the whole area was formally recognised in the Treaty of Sib of 1920. In the interior of Oman, however, the immense power and authority of the Imam Ghalib, was a constant source of irritation to the Sultan. The Imam had his headquarters at Nizwa (see Map 4), some considerable distance from the seat of government which varied between Muscat and Salalah according to the whim of the Sultan. The primitive communications throughout the interior effectively isolated the Imam and gave the tribes little opportunity to see evidence of any other authority. For more than thirty years after the Treaty of Sib the Imam accepted the authority of the Sultan although doing little to impress it upon his followers. A form of peaceful but unstable co-existence may be said to have reigned with the shadowy authority of the Sultan rarely impinging upon the tribes of the interior.

After her failure to obtain control of Buraimi, Saudi Arabia, who had always made overtures to the Imam and frequently dealt directly with him, stepped up these advances towards the end of 1955 in the context of the boundary dispute. The Sultan, doubtless encouraged by the success of Buraimi and by the help given by Great Britain considered that the time was ripe to tackle the Imam and to impose his authority upon the interior. He proposed to HMG an initial operation to occupy Nizwa



MAP 4: OPERATIONS IN THE NIZWA AREA July/August 1957

where the Imam was known to be with his brother, Talib, and his two most faithful lieutenants, Suleiman and Salih. The Sultan expected little opposition and proposed to use his Muscat and Oman Field Force (MOFF) in a march upon Nizwa, during which he intended to be present in person. His plan met with approval in London where frequent rumours of Saudi-sponsored Aramco oil prospecting parties violating the Saudi-Oman border hardened opinion against Saudi Arabia, and strengthened the desire to encourage the Sultan to safeguard his frontiers more effectively. Support for the Nizwa operation was promised in the form of one TOL squadron to be held at immediate readiness at Sharjah with Valetta aircraft sufficient to fly it in to Nizwa should the MOFF need reinforcement. The Pembroke and Ansons of 1417 Flight would also be available as would offensive air support from the Venoms of 6 Squadron if required. As in the case of Buraimi, the Nizwa operation was laid on with the minimum of delay and the Sultan's forces occupied Nizwa on the morning of 15 December without meeting resistance.

The Imam Ghalib capitulated and departed to his own village nearby, but unfortunately his brother, Talib escaped the net and fled to Rostaq where he had a considerable following, and was to become the chief adversary of the Sultan's authority in the future. Although the Sultan's forces followed him up and took Rostaq on 17 December, Talib again evaded capture and fled. Two Pembroke of 1417 Flight provided air reconnaissance over the Nizwa area during the operation and were the first aircraft ever to land at Nizwa on a rough strip which was hastily marked out (rather than prepared) by the MOFF. Accustomed as they were to landing on some pretty rugged surfaces, even the pilots of 1417 Flight found Nizwa a fairly hazardous proposition until it was subsequently improved into a passable airfield. Expressions of loyalty to the Sultan flowed in from many sources after this operation and the influence of the Imam had clearly crumbled rapidly. Talib now seemed the greater menace. The TOL, who had not been needed at Nizwa, changed their title at this moment to Trucial Oman Scouts (TOS) and, in view of the unsettled state of affairs in Oman generally, gained approval to increase their size once again, from five squadrons of one hundred to five of one hundred and fifty with the addition of a unit of 3.5-inch rocket launchers, bringing their total strength up to about one thousand men.

If, for the moment, the Sultan appeared to have forestalled any serious opposition to his authority from the interior, he was to be given only a temporary breathing space. He had failed to capture Talib and, at the beginning of 1956 rumours, later to be confirmed, indicated that Talib had been invited by the Saudis to a conference at Damman, the outcome of which was the founding of a training organisation there for dissident followers of Talib. From this organisation was to emanate the Omani Liberation Army which later caused the Sultan considerable

trouble. Several hundred followers of Talib drifted towards Damman and were given some sort of rudimentary training and somewhat better weapons and ammunition than they would normally expect to own.

The early months of 1956, while Talib was busy at Damman, were relatively quiet in Oman in spite of frequent, but usually unconfirmed reports, of violations of the Riyadh Line by Aramco oil prospecting parties; one such was definitely identified in Abu Dhabi territory, but so close to the Saudi border as to make it injudicious to take firm action to expel it. In this case, and on occasions thereafter, a message from the Political Resident, Persian Gulf, was dropped by Anson in the Aramco camp, pointing out that the frontier was being violated. In addition, it was considered desirable to maintain a close watch along the Riyadh Line and to this end, a daily reconnaissance by the Lincoln detachment was inaugurated. The four Lincolns, whose presence was proving so valuable, were organised into an independent flight, designated 1426 Flight, at Bahrein and they continued to fly along the length of the Riyadh Line daily until May, using Sharjah when necessary for refuelling or for overnight stops. This reconnaissance was a deadly dull task for the Lincoln crews; the eye strain caused by peering down into the glaring desert for several hours at a time was considerable and this, added to the heat and turbulence at the height at which the flights had to be carried out gave the crews an exhausting and uncomfortable task. It would have been more endurable if it had been enlivened by the occasional sighting of suspicious movement, but nothing other than a few itinerant camels was ever seen.

During this period a new TOS outpost was established at Humar, $23^{\circ}13'N$ $53^{\circ}30'E$ (see Map 3), to enable the Scouts to respond more rapidly to sightings by the reconnaissance aircraft along the northern part of the frontier which had hitherto proved to be the most attractive and liable to violation by oil prospectors. An extremely rough airstrip, suitable only for Ansons, was used in setting up and supplying the new outpost, the supply flights being made from Tarif. This proved to be one of the last tasks to be undertaken by the Ansons of 1417 Flight before they were replaced by Pembrokes. Although the Pembroke was faster and had considerably more range than the Anson, its higher landing speed and small wheels made it less suitable for use on some of the apologies for airfields which were a feature of operations in Oman. The frequency of the frontier reconnaissance flights was gradually reduced as no suspicious activity was encountered. The new Pembrokes of 1417 Flight were considered capable of taking over the task from the Lincolns, thus enabling 1426 Flight to return to Aden to be available for more general employment.

During the second half of 1956 and the early months of 1957 the eyes of the world, and certainly the Arab world, were directed towards Egypt and the Suez crisis. Those events play no direct part in this narrative, but indirectly they are important for the repercussions which

reverberated around the area with which we are concerned, and which affected that area for many years to come. Most of these repercussions will be discussed in later chapters; for the moment we are concerned only with developments in central Oman. As was to be expected, most Arab countries supported Egypt's stand against Israel and Britain, not necessarily from any great love of Nasser but for the sake of Arab unity. One exception was the Sultan of Muscat who, as so often in the past, remained aloof and disinterested in the affairs of other Arab nations. The main repercussions of Suez did not affect Oman and the Trucial States, but were felt in the northern part of the Gulf, notably in Bahrein, Kuwait and Iraq. Some British Army reinforcements were sent to the Gulf with further reinforcements available in Aden should they be required, but little need was felt for additional air force units, and, apart from the return of the Lincolns of 1426 Flight to Bahrein for a brief period in November, the Pembrokes of 1417 Flight remained the only aircraft available for tasks in the area throughout this period.

In Oman itself, the boundary dispute was in limbo, and, although Saudi Arabia had broken off diplomatic relations with Britain and feelings ran high between the two countries over Suez, she made no attempts to violate the Muscat and Oman frontier in any significant way. However, desultory training of the Oman Liberation Army continued near Damman and it was clear that Talib and his followers were being encouraged to create further trouble for the Sultan in the interior of Oman.

Operations in central Oman – first phase

It was in fact on 14 June 1957 that Talib was reported to have landed on the coast near Muscat, carrying with him a quantity of arms, including light machine guns and anti-tank mines. He and his brother joined forces and moved into the mountain area of the Jebel Kaur (23°N 57°E). With several hundred followers they occupied a number of fortified towers. The Sultan endeavoured to deal with this incursion using only tribal levies drawn from his loyal supporters, keeping his own forces with such artillery as they possessed in reserve, and relying upon the TOS and the RAF to come to his assistance if his forces should meet unexpected resistance. The operation proved too difficult for the untried local levies who were incapable of destroying the fortified towers and whose morale deteriorated rapidly when faced with casualties. They fell back upon Nizwa and, by mid-July, the Sultan was in danger of losing control of the interior of Oman, unless British forces came to his aid. So serious had his position become that he immediately asked for the "maximum military and air support which our friend Her Majesty's Government can give". This was not unexpected, but no less embarrassing for that, as there was understandably great reluctance to commit the RAF in particular to offensive operations in what was no more than an internal political struggle. On the other hand, if the

Sultan lost all control over central Oman, it was anticipated that Saudi Arabia would be swift to follow up the advantage obtained by her protégé Talib, and might well make a fresh attempt to occupy Buraimi. Furthermore Britain's friendship with the Sultan was of long standing, the use of his airfields at Masirah and Salalah was important and the security of Britain's major oil supply from the Persian Gulf depended upon a degree of stability within the states bordering the Gulf of Oman. HMG decided that, on balance, it would be advantageous to use the minimum forces necessary to extricate the Sultan from his predicament. The Commander, British Forces, Arabian Peninsula, in whose area of responsibility Muscat and Oman now lay, was accordingly instructed to formulate plans in consultation with Sir Bernard Burrows, the Political Resident, Persian Gulf who retained overall political responsibility for the area. The need for swift action was emphasised; a long drawn out conflict would inevitably create unfavourable speculation as to Britain's motives and involve HMG in much unnecessary diplomatic explanation.

The nature of the country and the heavily constructed fortified village towers which were likely to be the key target for attack indicated without doubt that assistance to the Sultan should take the form of air action initially, followed by the Sultan's land forces to occupy key points. Years of experience in the Aden Protectorates had proved that accurate rocket attack was the most effective way of destroying towers of normal stone and mud construction, resorting to 500lb and 1,000lb bombs in the few cases where particularly heavy construction was encountered. We have noted in earlier chapters the great competence of 8 Squadron, stationed at Khormaksar, in this form of attack, and the Venoms of 8 Squadron with the addition of some from 249 Squadron, operating from Sharjah or Masirah were the obvious means of ensuring accurate attacks on those forts which were judged susceptible to rocket and cannon fire. As Aden now possessed a flight of Shackletons, these would be ideal to supplement the fighters and to add heavy bombing to the attack if needed, and also to carry out the photographic reconnaissance which would be essential to select the targets initially and to assess damage later.

The Commander, BFAP wished, in addition to attacking selected forts known to be in dissident hands, to proscribe the area dominated by Talib and attack all movement within it during daylight hours – a popular and successful method of air control elsewhere. Initially this proposal was not approved by HMG as the risk to innocent women and children was regarded as unacceptable. If and when the air attacks were judged to have succeeded, the plan was then to move the Sultan's forces, supported by the TOS into the area and assume control of the affected villages. In order to free as many native forces for the operation as possible, the garrison duties at Buraimi and back at Sharjah would be taken over from the TOS by detachments from 1 Cameronians. Troop

movements even on this relatively small scale, but at very short notice, would clearly make heavy calls upon transportation. There were no roads in the usual sense of the term in Oman, the main tracks such as that from Buraimi to Ibri and Nizwa and that from Muscat to Nizwa being stony, dusty unmetalled tracks suitable only for Land Rovers, 3-ton trucks, and armoured cars with care. Consequently, wherever air transport could be used it was in demand. The airstrips available were few, and their standards were similar to those of the roads, but most were usable by Pembrokes, Valettas and Beverleys with skill and care, particularly if troops on the ground had had an opportunity to remove the largest of the stones which were liberally scattered over the surface of the majority of them.

The RAF aircraft required for the operation were assembled at both Bahrain and Sharjah. Nos 8 and 249 Squadrons flew their FB Mark 4 Venoms into Sharjah, four Beverleys and two Shackletons joined the Valetta of 84 Squadron – all from Khormaksar – and were distributed between Sharjah and Bahrain. The Beverley, which was relatively new to RAF service, had not been tested operationally in the conditions of Oman, but it was expected to prove invaluable in moving vehicles and heavy loads into the airstrips. Photographic reconnaissance of all the towers in the villages dominated by Talib was carried out by the Shackletons and these were studied in an effort to estimate the construction and strength of each tower. Visual reconnaissance by the Pembrokes helped to identify friendly and hostile movement, and a careful note was made of those villages which were displaying the Sultan's distinctive red flag.

When the results of these sorties had been collated, it was decided to attack the towers at Izki, Nizwa, Tanuf, Birkat al Mauz, Bakhla and Firq with Venoms on successive days, commencing on 24 July after warning leaflets had been dropped by Shackletons forty-eight hours in advance of each attack (see Map 4). Each attack was carried out as planned using ten, and sometimes twelve Venoms. Their rocket attacks were extremely accurate and, although the towers were not totally destroyed, walls were breached in each case, little if any damage being done in the villages themselves. A particularly heavy attack was mounted on Firq where Talib's men were known to be in occupation of barracks which had recently been the base for the Sultan's Oman Regiment. Little or no movement was seen during the attacks, indicating that the warning leaflets had been heeded, but considerably more red flags appeared after the Venoms had departed.

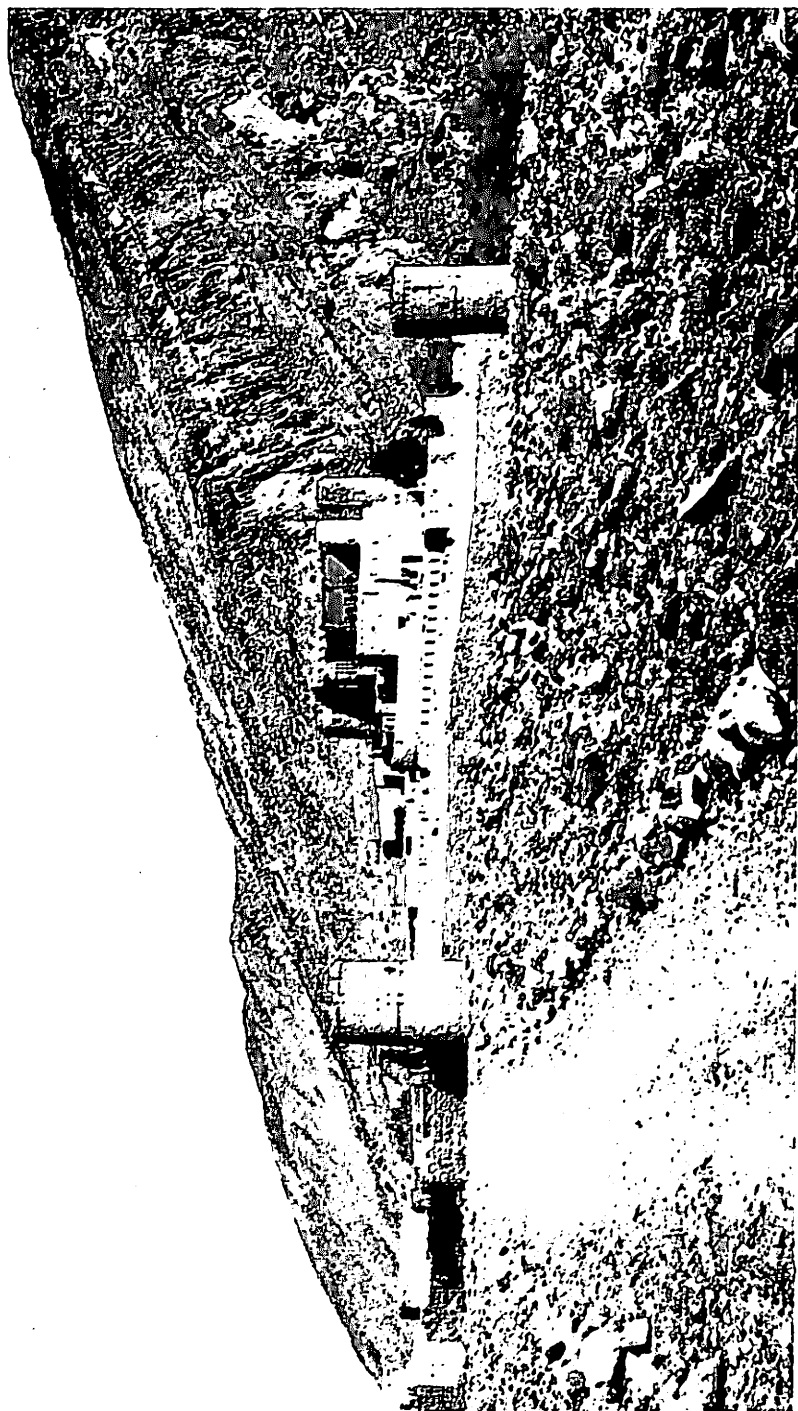
During the course of these attacks, which were officially designated 'fire power demonstrations', designed to impress the tribes with the ability of British air action to destroy their strong points, leaflets were dropped by the Shackletons outlining an area to be proscribed in which any movement would be attacked during daylight hours. Patrols of this area, which was believed to contain most of the dissident villages, were

commenced by Venoms and Shackletons at irregular intervals as soon as the rocket and cannon attacks on the selected forts had been completed. By 30 July the air action had built up to a peak with the Venoms patrolling in pairs as well as continuing to attack the selected forts, Shackletons joining in the patrols, Meteor fighter reconnaissance aircraft from 208 Squadron taking low level oblique photographs for assessment purposes and even one Canberra – the first to operate in this area – ranging widely over central Oman with its cameras collecting intelligence information. This high level of air action was maintained for about a week, by which time it was estimated that the hard core of dissidents under Talib, Ghalib and Suleiman, amounting to about one thousand men, had concentrated in the small area bounded by Nizwa, Firq, Tanuf and Bakhla. The Sultan's forces were closing in and had set up a tactical headquarters at Fahud, with the British element of three companies of the 1st Cameronians, the TOS and elements of the Sultan's regular forces at Aweifa, ready to move forward to Izz.

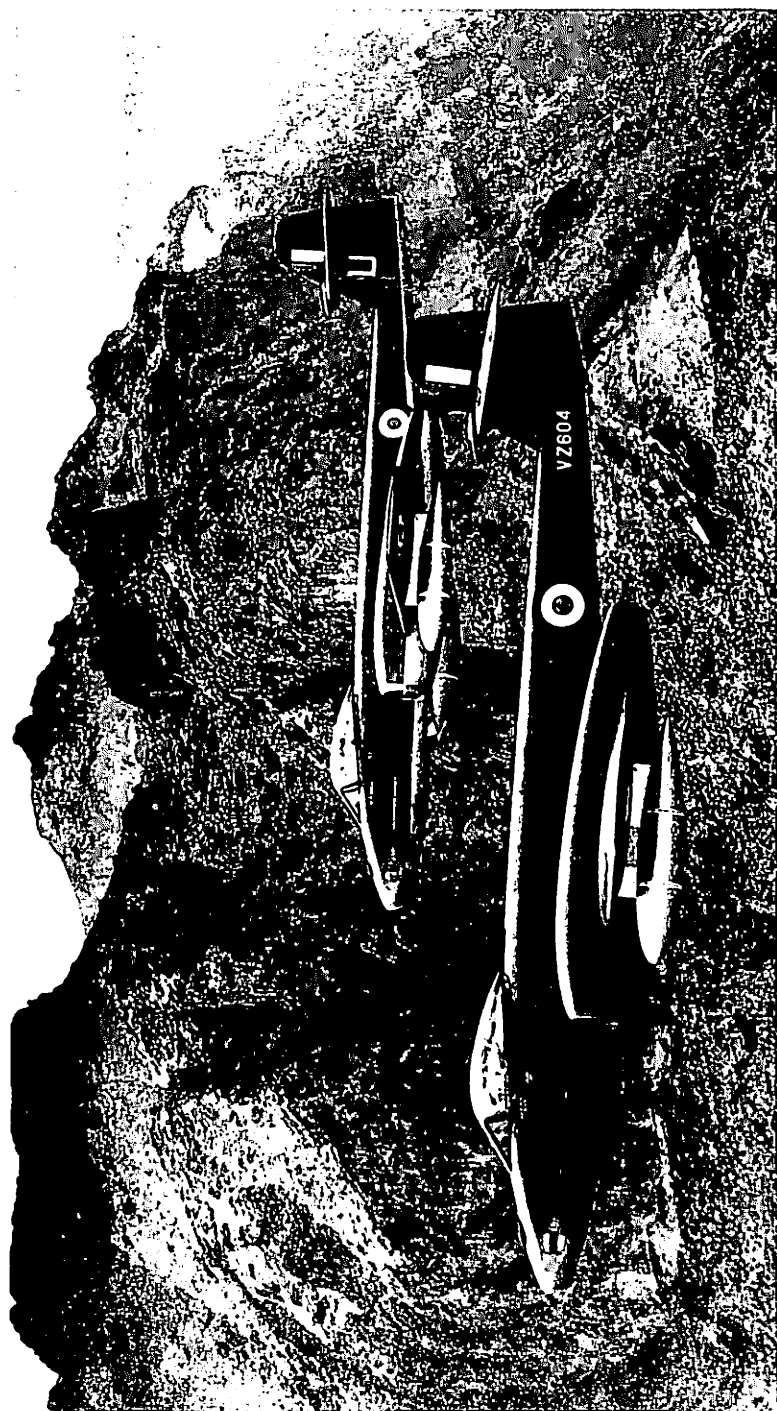
The operation by ground forces began on 7 August, the village of Izz surrendering immediately (see Map 4). The heat was intense and there were several cases of heat exhaustion among British troops; vehicles and radio equipment also suffered from the heat, dust and rough terrain. As the advance towards Firq continued, opposition increased until well directed sniper fire from dug-in positions in and close to Firq halted the column. The Venoms of 8 and 249 Squadrons provided supporting fire when directed by the Air Contact Team accompanying the troops, destroying one house in the vicinity of Firq airstrip which harboured snipers. The forward elements of the column withdrew to consolidate outside Firq, having suffered five casualties. In the meantime the second column of the Sultan's forces, approaching from north of the Wadi Sumail, was similarly held up by road blocks and sniping on the outskirts of Izki, in spite of air strikes which were seen to cause casualties. There was no doubt that the rebels were well armed and disciplined and had taken up excellently sited positions; these the Venoms proceeded to attack with rockets and cannon fire throughout the following two days, aided by anti-personnel bombing by the Shackletons. On 11 August Firq surrendered to a night attack which was decided upon as it was well known that the Arabs were unaccustomed to night operations and did not relish fighting in the darkness. The enemy withdrew to Nizwa and were rapidly followed by the Sultan's forces who occupied lower Nizwa but were held up again in the upper part of the town. On the following day however, the remainder of Nizwa fell and a junction with the northern column was effected in the area of Birkat al Mauz. The son of one of the rebel leaders, Suleiman, capitulated and denounced his father, who with Talib and Ghalib had again escaped into difficult country, to the north west. The occupied area was re-established with a new civil administration by the Sultan's Minister of the Interior and the red flag was again hoisted over Nizwa.



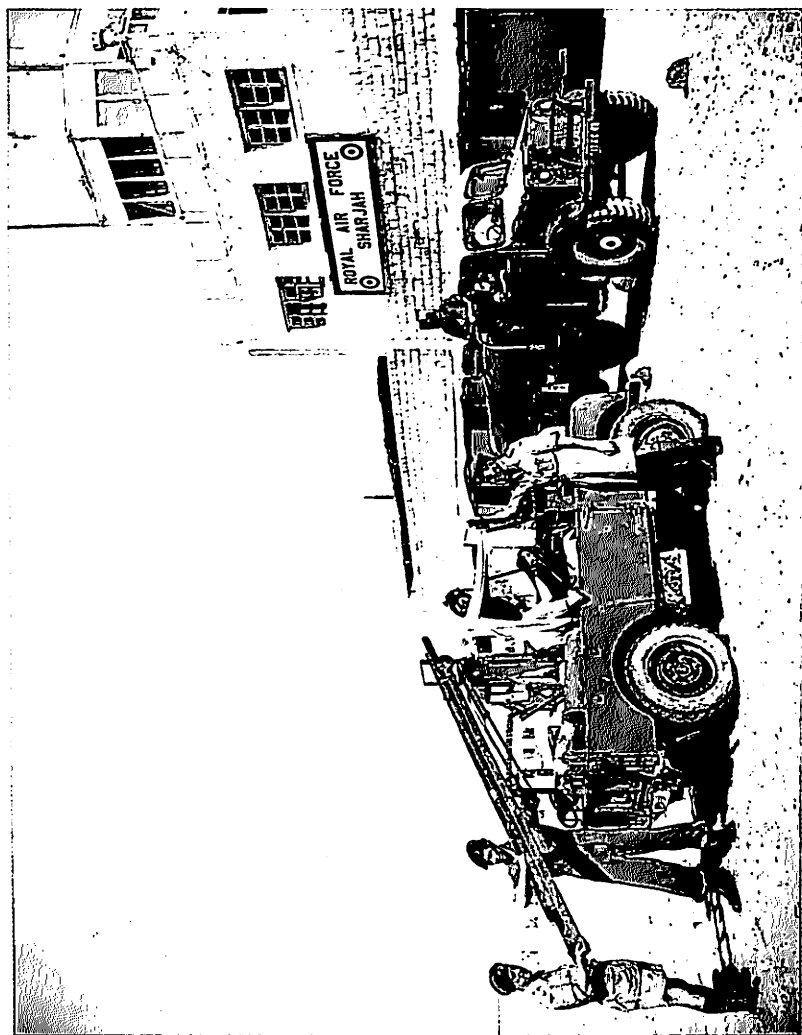
15. Soldiers of the SAS Regiment talking to bedouin tribesmen in Oman.
(With acknowledgements to *Soldier* magazine.)



16. A typical fort in central Oman. (With acknowledgements to *Soldier* magazine.)



17. Meteor FRGs of the Arabian Peninsula Reconnaissance Flight.



18. Sharjah control tower and fire section.

The two heavily constructed forts at Tanuf and Izki were destroyed completely by demolition charges to prevent them from being used again; the Tanuf fort was, in fact, destroyed by the Sultan's brother after explaining the reasons to the villagers. As a final act in this particular phase of the operation, two forts at Sait and Ghumr* were destroyed by Venom rocket fire, with great accuracy, no damage being inflicted in the villages.

Although this was not to prove the end of resistance in Oman – the three leaders and a hard core of their followers being still at large – the Sultan had at least re-established his authority in an important part of the interior. As it was essential that he should not rely upon British assistance for longer than was necessary, a thinning out of forces took place, most of the Cameronians and King's Shropshire Light Infantry returning to Bahrein and Kenya respectively, and many of the RAF operational aircraft to Aden. It was thus left to the Sultan's forces with the remaining RAF support from Sharjah to pursue and endeavour to round up the three leaders, but this was to prove a difficult task. The rebels had undoubtedly retreated into the fastnesses of the Jebel Akhdar (Green Mountain), a formidable feature rising to a peak of 11,000 feet, honeycombed with steep tracks and wadis and quite impassable for any form of vehicle. Furthermore, a plateau which averaged 9,500 feet above sea level contained a number of villages which were friendly to, or intimidated by, the rebel leaders; together they formed an almost impregnable centre of opposition to the Sultan. A form of partial blockade was imposed and a pause ensued while every effort was made to glean intelligence from tribesmen, from air reconnaissance and from the infiltration of trained spies.

This is an appropriate point at which to assess the first phase of these operations which were most inaccurately reported in the world press, largely due, it must be admitted, to the near impossibility for journalists to get close to the scene of the operations. Nevertheless this was no reason for a highly biased article to appear in *The Times* of 19 August 1957, which gave almost total credit to the ground forces – and to the few British forces which had participated, at that. In truth the initial softening up process of destroying fortified towers and restricting movement was entirely carried out by air action. The carriage forward and much of the subsequent supply of the troops who eventually occupied the operational area was also carried out largely by air. It was a true joint land/air operation and typical of the pattern which was evolving world wide. Great credit was due to both British Services for the speedy and efficient way in which they reinforced and supported the Sultan's forces enabling a large and most important part of his territory to be brought under control with extremely few casualties.

*Not shown on any published map but in general area of Nizwa.

Operations in central Oman – second phase

Within a few weeks it became evident that Ghalib, Sulciman, and probably Talib also, had taken up new positions in the region of Saiq on the 9,500 foot plateau dominating the southern approaches to the summit of the mountain (see Map 5). A determined probing operation was mounted by the Sultan's forces on 25 September, supported by one Shackleton. Good progress was made up to a point on the high plateau about 8 miles short of Saiq, and here the patrol encountered automatic and rifle fire. The Shackleton which had found great difficulty in identifying the friendly forces in the deep, heavily shaded wadis on the mountain slopes was called in to attack the point of opposition. The crew fired fifty rounds from their cannon at what was thought to be the target and this was effective. However, the patrol retired to Tanuf as had been planned, having ascertained that the rebels were entrenched and well supported on the plateau. Dislodging them was clearly going to be difficult. A pause ensued while a loose form of blockade was imposed covering the main approaches and further reconnaissances were organised in an attempt to find better tracks up the mountainside.

This unsatisfactory position gave HMG much concern and, in particular, the likelihood of a long drawn out campaign involving the RAF and possibly other British forces, which could only arouse unfavourable world opinion at a time when the United Nations was in session, with many delegates only too anxious to pillory Great Britain. It was in this atmosphere that the Government appreciating the value of air action in this campaign, first intimated that some form of Muscat air force might have to be formed using British resources but controlled by the Sultan. In this way it was felt that Britain's direct involvement in Oman could be kept to the minimum.

As the weeks went by Talib became more venturesome, leading small parties of his followers out from the security of his mountain fastness and intimidating neighbouring villages on the lower slopes. During one such sortie he would undoubtedly have captured the village of Tanuf had it not been for the entirely fortuitous presence in the vicinity of four Ferret scout cars of the 15th/19th Hussars on a training exercise. It was apparent from these excursions that the blockade of the mountain was ineffective; it was equally apparent that a long term solution such as the blockade coupled with strengthening of the Sultan's forces and forming a Muscat air force was quite unacceptable. Such a solution would probably create more odium for Britain than a short, sharp and decisive campaign using British forces in any strength necessary to ensure the rapid elimination of the rebel leaders. Further more, the rainy season was due to begin at the end of November which, if it did not prevent land and air operations, would certainly limit them, and greatly increase the difficulty of identifying and attacking targets which, under the best conditions, required immense skill and experience. Whitehall was in a dilemma; the Services advocated heavy air attacks after short

warning periods, against the villages known to be harbouring the rebels, particularly Saiq, Sharayah and Habib, while the Foreign Office favoured a more cautious approach without bombing and with the responsibility placed firmly upon the Sultan and his forces.

At this point the Sultan decided upon a further exploratory operation to occupy the village of Habib, on 15 November. Although provided with full air support from Venoms, Shackletons and Pembrokes, his forces were again held up by intense and accurate fire short of their objective, and were compelled to retire down the mountain. In the words of the Commander of the Sultan's forces, the air support was "at its brilliant best", but it was apparent that the difficulties of the terrain were too formidable for the size and calibre of the ground forces. Failure at Habib did nothing to solve Whitehall's problem and only increased the irritation and frustration felt by Ministers and military authorities alike; support for the Sultan was becoming an expensive and politically embarrassing policy but, nevertheless, the importance of maintaining British influence in that part of the Arabian Peninsula was considerable and, in any case, an old and valued treaty relationship could not be abrogated – certainly not as the direct result of the influence of a handful of rebel tribesmen entrenched upon a mountain.

If British land forces were not to be heavily involved – and that remained the firm resolve of HMG – a significant increase in air action against the rebel strongholds, coupled with psychological warfare, medium artillery harassment and further strengthening of the Sultan's forces seemed to be the only alternative. With this in mind, Mr Julian Amery, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for War, headed a mission to the Sultan in January 1958 and discussed not only the future military possibilities, but also the political and economic steps which might be taken to encourage the rebel tribes to revolt against the domination of the three leaders and, in particular, to isolate Suleiman, the sheikh of the Bani Riyam tribe and the principal waverer among the three leaders.

For the next six months a steadily increasing programme of harassment mainly by air, was mounted against the plateau villages and the approaches to them. Two 5.5-inch medium howitzers were provided from Aden and the Muscat forces trained to operate them. Their range of some 17,000 yards was adequate to cover the three main plateau villages from the valley below and a daily firing programme commenced in February. One 'sky shouting' Pembroke was also sent from Aden which, with a campaign of leaflet dropping, provided the psychological pressure to follow the shelling and air attack. As far as air action was concerned, Venoms operating from Sharjah and Shackletons mainly from Masirah carried out a heavy programme of attacks on cultivation and water supplies. Bombing by the Shackletons with 1,000lb bombs was authorised for the first time in these operations, mainly against water tanks, dams and aqueducts upon which villages

on the Jebel depended heavily to irrigate their cultivated areas. So effective was this form of harassment that cultivation and movement by daylight in the villages under attack came virtually to a standstill. Tactics for continuing the bombing by night were developed in conjunction with shelling by the two howitzers in order to maintain continuous but unpredictable pressure on the rebels. In spite of these attacks and steady improvements in the efficacy of the blockade, Talib continued to secure supplies of weapons, ammunition and money from Saudi Arabian sources, sometimes through landings on the Batinah coast and thence up the many wadis on the north side of the Jebel, and sometimes through ports on the Trucial coast in the vicinity of Dubai. Mortars and heavy mines were included in the re-supply with the result that Talib was soon able to mount desultory mortar attacks on the camps of the Sultan's forces, notably at Izki and Kamah. Small parties of his followers became increasingly active in descending the mountain to mine the tracks and wadis, causing a small but steady number of casualties to the Sultan's vehicles.

As the hot weather of 1958 dragged on the stalemate seemed complete. The air attacks were certainly successful and there were a few indications of disaffection among Talib's followers, but his grip on them remained firm and his mining and mortaring activities gave them the heart they needed. He seemed to have adequate funds to recompense them for their agricultural losses. The only apparent effect of the heavy air attack was that he was compelled to retire to the caves with which the slopes of the Jebel were honeycombed. By July there was evidence that, far from being on the verge of defeat, Talib was in fact gaining in popularity and attracting more of the local tribes to his cause. Not for the first time the Commander, BFAP, supported by Sir Bernard Burrows, advocated a full scale operation with British forces as the only way to occupy the formidable Green Mountain, and flush out the rebels. Still extremely reluctant but at last almost convinced, HMG gave authority for such an operation to be planned for the autumn, when the worst of the heat would be over and the rains would not yet have set in on the Jebel.

Under the umbrella of the heavy air attacks, the Sultan's forces which, incidentally had now changed their title from Muscat Armed Forces (MAF) to the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), began to tighten the blockade as a result of their persistent patrol activities in the wadis leading up the mountain side. Furthermore, rebel casualties were increasing, probably due to the fact that steadily improving intelligence was able to give more worthwhile targets to the RAF, particularly in regard to the location of caves in which many of the rebels had taken up residence.

During the planning for an autumn operation, much thought was given to the possibility of dropping parachute troops onto the Jebel and also to that of landing troops by helicopter on the plateau. Considerable

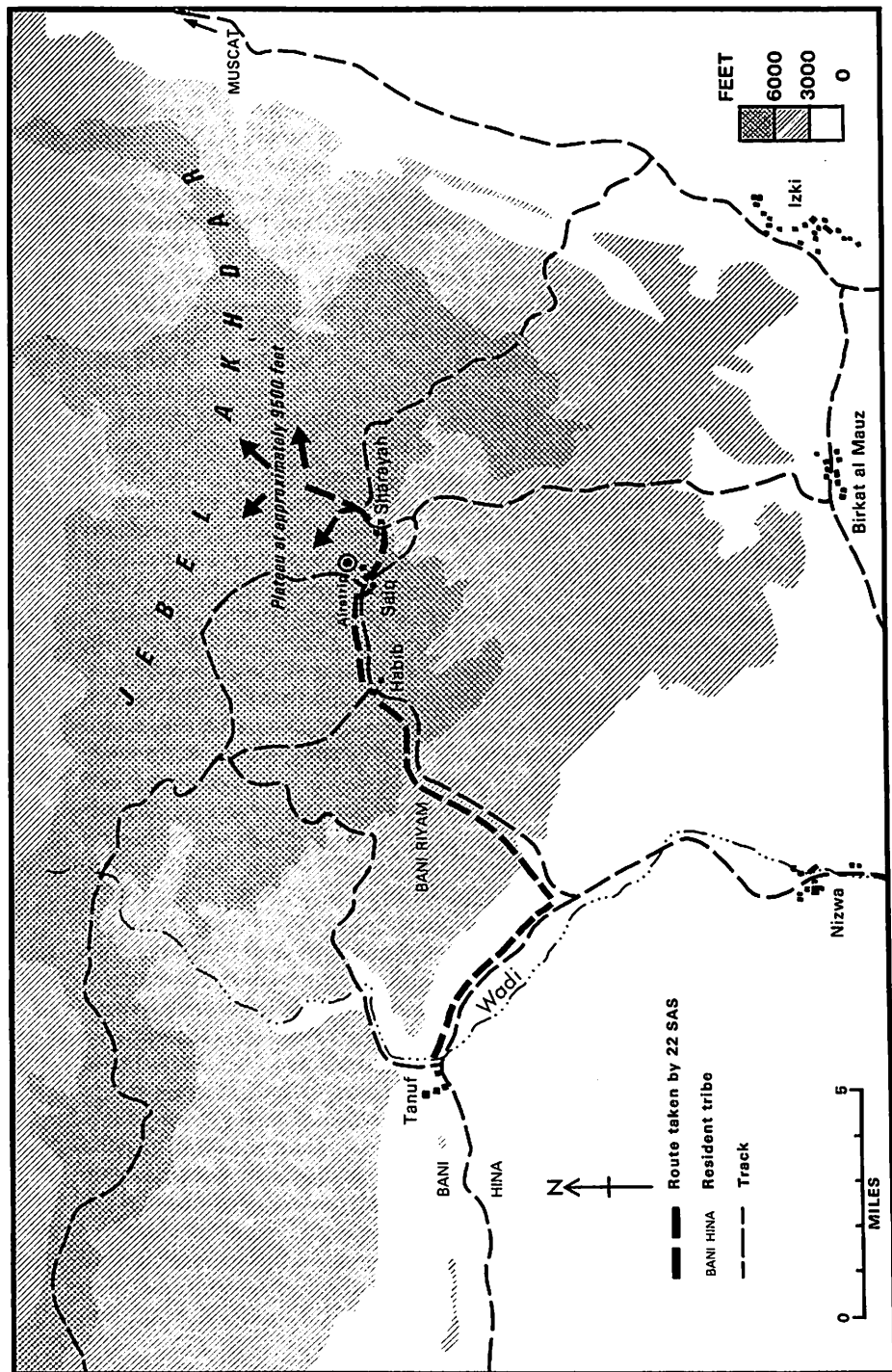
risks were involved in both forms of operation. The altitude of 9,500 feet and hard rocky ground were not propitious for parachute drops using the standard canopy, although the experts decided, after various reconnaissances, that in good conditions with little wind, the risks would just be acceptable. Similarly, lightly loaded helicopters could be used but their vulnerability to rebel sniping would involve considerable risks. The small Sycamore was the only helicopter available within the theatre and its lift under the conditions visualised would be restricted to three soldiers with their equipment. Allowing an interval of thirty minutes between sorties from the foot of the Jebel, a considerable time would elapse before a force of any size could be concentrated on the plateau, during which time both troops and helicopters would be extremely vulnerable to sniping. As an alternative to RAF Sycamores, the use of Royal Navy Whirlwinds was considered, using a commando carrier located in the Gulf of Oman, a slightly more satisfactory proposition from the point of view of numbers if not performance if either *HMS Bulwark* or *HMS Albion* could be made available.

The final plan for the operation was submitted to London by the Commander, BFAP in September, the operation being timed to take place in November. Necessitating, as it did, the use of a brigade of two battalions, artillery and other ancillary land forces, powerful RAF offensive and transport support, and naval participation in the Gulf, it was to be an expensive operation, and it would be seen by the eyes of the world as full involvement on the part of Britain. What was more disturbing, however, was that even on the scale projected there was no certainty of ultimate success. It was not surprising, therefore, that the plan was turned down by the Cabinet in London on 3 October 1958. The reasons were not only those just mentioned but also the indications filtering through from Oman that rebel resistance on the Jebel was at last beginning to falter under the sustained air attack and blockade. As an example, of the weight of this attack; during the week ending 12 September, Shackletons dropped $148 \times 1,000\text{lb}$ bombs; 40 rockets were fired by Venoms and a large quantity of 20 millimetre ammunition expended. During the latter part of this month *HMS Bulwark* arrived in the Gulf of Oman and her full complement of Sea Venoms and Sea-hawks joined in the air attack. In one week, forty-three offensive sorties against the plateau targets were flown from the ships as well as ten reconnaissance sorties. Within the confines of a relatively small target area, air attacks on this scale continuing for week after week against simple agricultural tribes was a terrifying experience and it was not surprising that their loyalty to their own sheikh, Suleiman, and his overlords, Talib and Ghalib, began to waver. There were increasing numbers of reports that villagers were pleading with their Imam Ghalib to go down the mountain and surrender because of the miserable conditions they were being forced to endure resulting from the destruction of cultivation and livestock.

Operations in central Oman – final phase

With the possibility of any large scale operation involving British land forces removed for political reasons, and with the receipt of encouraging reports of the results of the sustained air attack, the Commander BFAP put forward an alternative plan based upon the use of a small number of Special Air Service (SAS) troops to scale the mountain, and to lead the Sultan's forces up to positions on the plateau from which the three rebel dominated villages in particular could be captured. This plan would require full air and artillery support, and in the prevailing circumstances, seemed to offer better prospects for success, with much less publicity, than had the large scale operation. 22 SAS Regiment had recently participated in the Malayan Campaign and although the conditions on the Jebel Akhdar bore no resemblance to the jungles of Malaya, the unit was renowned for its toughness and versatility; it was considered highly suitable for the projected operation, and could be made available. The Commander's plan was approved in Whitehall – with considerable relief at the modest resources needed – and the first squadron of the SAS Regiment was moved into Oman. In the meantime a lull in the air attack was ordered from 29 October, to test out the validity of rumours that the rebel leaders were prepared to negotiate for peace. A letter purporting to have come from Ghalib offered surrender under certain terms which proved upon examination to be quite unacceptable both to the Sultan and to HMG, being far removed from the conditions which had already been made known to the rebels by leaflet and voice aircraft. In consequence the air attack was resumed on 22 November, after a pause of three weeks.

The operation led by the SAS began early in December from posts established at Tanuf and Awabi. Initially this consisted of probing patrols up the lower wadis to flush out opposition and to reconnoitre the many possible tracks leading up to the plateau. The hazards of the terrain were immense and such was the danger of sniping and ambush that the strength of the early patrols had to be doubled for safety with the result that a second SAS squadron from Malaya was sought and approved. The patrolling was supported by heavy Shackleton attacks on caves, sangars, machine gun positions and other targets indicated by the patrols. Each Shackleton carried a load of 12 x 1,000lb bombs, with fuses varied to suit particular targets. Venoms from Sharjah were equally active and gave close support to the troops when held up by rebel fire. In the first ten days, it was estimated that the rebels lost twenty to thirty men and by Christmas Talib's men were thought to be fully extended and showing further signs of weakening. Nevertheless they maintained their mining activities with considerable damage to vehicles at the foot of the mountain, but they inflicted few casualties. The rainy season set in on time in December with the usual result that the airfield at Sharjah had periods of unserviceability which restricted Venom flying to some extent. Masirah on the other hand, was much less



affected by rain and the Shackletons were able to maintain their full effort.

The second SAS squadron arrived from Malaya in the New Year, having been flown to Masirah and quietly infiltrated into Oman by the 'back door'. By the time they arrived, their colleagues in the first squadron had mapped out the passable routes up to the plateau pretty well and cleared the lower slopes of opposition. It is interesting to note that they had been greatly helped in this task by a number of native African trackers who had been brought in from Kenya where their skill during the Mau Mau campaign had proved invaluable. Their ability to move silently and at night in the most impossible country seemed to be just as effective in Oman as it had been in Kenya although the terrain could not have been more different.

All was now set for the second and final part of the operation, namely an assault up the mountainside and capture of the three rebel villages of Habib, Saiq and Sharayah. After a brief postponement due to bad weather, the SAS led the assault on the night of 26/27 January 1959, reaching the plateau before dawn where they met 130 villagers and 6 combatant rebels who surrendered. It transpired that they came from Habib which was found to be virtually empty when the leading troops reached it a little later. After a pause for consolidation on the edge of the plateau, the advance continued and the remaining two villages of Saiq and Sharayah were occupied on 30 January. No opposition was encountered but Suleiman's cave was found to contain only arms, ammunition and documents, showing every sign of hasty and unpremeditated evacuation by the rebel leader himself. Once again the three leaders had escaped the net with a handful of their hard core followers leaving the villagers to face the occupying forces. For several weeks it was not known where the three men had gone. A sweep by the Sultan's forces through those parts of the mountain which were accessible yielded no information, and it seemed likely that the escape had been made down the precipitous wadis to the north east and thence to the coast. It was then expected that they would endeavour to reach Saudi Arabia, and this turned out to be a correct surmise when a report came through from American sources that they had been seen in Dharan. Subsequently it was reported that they had been received by the King at Riyadh and at least two of them had then moved on to Cairo where they were assured of sympathy, if not of active support. Their escape was a disappointment but, bearing in mind the nature of the terrain and the impossibility of imposing an impenetrable blockade on the Jebel Akhdar, it was not surprising. Nor indeed was it as serious as their previous evasions of the Sultan's forces when the welcoming fastness of the Jebel was always available to them. They had now been flushed from the only secure hiding place in the whole of Oman, and were discredited in the eyes of their main supporters, the Bani Riyam tribe who occupied much of the mountain. It was rightly considered that, although their continued free-

dom posed a threat for the future, it was unlikely to reach significant proportions now that the Jebel was in the Sultan's hands.

The first task in consolidating the successful occupation of the plateau was to build, or more accurately to scrape away the stones from a reasonably flat area to form an airstrip. This was completed within a few days at Urquatu near Saiq and was capable of accepting Single Pioneers and, with great care, Twin Pioneers which greatly facilitated the transportation of supplies to enable the troops to continue with their mopping up operations on the plateau, and to bring immediate relief to the villagers who had suffered severely from the sustained air attack. Work also started upon the construction of a track up the mountainside suitable for Land Rovers and the improvement of other tracks suitable only for donkeys, upon which the SAS had mainly relied during their exploratory climbs as well as during the final assault.

On 9 February 1959 all SAS troops were withdrawn from the Jebel to Muscat, leaving the Sultan's forces entirely in control, with small parties of Royal Engineers and The Life Guards with their Ferrets to give specialised support and assistance. Air operations had also virtually ceased by 9 February apart from the routine supply of the forces remaining in the field. The Shackletons and Venoms were able to return to Aden and resume their normal duties. The ninth of February, then, marked the official completion of the Jebel Akhdar campaign. The Commander,, BFAP, Air Vice-Marshal M L Heath reported accordingly to the Sultan and received in reply the following telegram.

"I thank you for your message. Your valuable and prompt assistance in achieving this remarkable success is more than appreciated. My appreciation to all ranks in your Command who took part in the assault.

Signed: Said Bin Taimur

Sultan of Muscat and Oman"

Conclusion

Although February 1959 saw the end of the campaign to oust the rebel leaders from the Jebel Akhdar, they were still at large and, therefore, liable to return at any time to challenge once again the authority of the Sultan. The boundary dispute with Saudi Arabia had not been settled and the expulsion of the Saudis from the Buraimi Oasis still rankled, with the result that diplomatic relations between the United Kingdom and Saudi Arabia had not been resumed. More than six and a half years had passed since the party of Saudis had moved into Buraimi, and the somewhat unsatisfactory outcome of all those years of frustration in a highly charged political climate was that, although the Sultan had re-established his authority in Buraimi and throughout the most formidable dissident area in central Oman, he had achieved it only with considerable military help from Britain and with no guarantee that his authority would not be challenged again in the near future. The most

encouraging aspect was, however, the strengthening of the Sultan's armed forces, including the formation of his small air force. With British leadership, equipment and training, there was some hope that the Sultan would be able to control any future challenge to his authority without the need to call for assistance from British forces.

Little mention has been made of the formation of a Muscat air force. It played little part in the operations on the Jebel Akhdar and the story of its formation is irrelevant to this narrative. Suffice it to say that it was formed, under the title of 'The Sultan of Oman's Air Force' (SOAF) as an integral part of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) and became operational at Beit-al-Falaj (Muscat) in 1959. Comprising initially three-piston engined Provosts equipped with guns and bomb racks, and two Single Pioneers, it was manned by RAF aircrew seconded to the Sultan and the aircraft were maintained by Airwork Ltd under contract to the Muscat Government. The Commander, BFAP⁴ was invited to check periodically the standards and general conduct of this small force which was to become an invaluable adjunct to the Sultan's forces.

The Royal Air Force has not always been given the credit it deserved for the part played in the Oman operations. A summary of the air operations carried out between August 1957 and February 1959 is worthy of study (Fig v). The bulk of the effort was provided by four Shackletons of 37 Squadron operating from Masirah and a detachment of eight Venoms of 8 Squadron from Sharjah. The accuracy of navigation and target location, in view of the rudimentary maps which existed, was astonishing, and there is no doubt that the weight and accuracy of the attacks finally weakened the resolution of the rebels to a point at which they almost welcomed the arrival of the ground forces to release them from the intimidation by which Talib, Ghalib and Suleiman had held their loyalty. After the punishment came the restitution. No sooner had the Venoms and Shackletons stopped their devastating attacks than the Valettas, Beverleys, Pembrokes and Pioneers began a programme of re-supply to make good the losses in food and water which had been destroyed. Perhaps the most important lesson to be learned from this campaign was the lack of publicity with which it was possible to conduct such air operations in a remote region to which the despatch of large numbers of British troops would have inevitably resulted in the world wide criticism which HMG was anxious to avoid. The treaty rights to continue to use the airfields at Sharjah, Masirah and Salalah were safeguarded as far as the RAF was concerned, and these constituted a most important factor in HMG's policy of securing her oil interests in the Persian Gulf area.

Fig V: Summary of air operations in Oman - August 1957 - February 1959

<i>Squadron</i>	<i>Type of aircraft</i>	<i>Sorties</i>	<i>Bombs dropped</i>	<i>Rockets</i>	<i>20mm fired</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
37	Shackleton	429	3,457,670lbs	—	7,000	Main effort by 37 Squadron
42						
224						
228						
Coastal Command						
8	Venom	1,315	—	3,507	271,060	Main weight of attack
249	Venom	163	—	211	—	In early stages
<i>HMS Bulwark</i>	Sea Venom Seahawk Skyraiders	77	9 x 1,000lbs	135	13,000	Sorties flown in two days
8	PR Meteor	101	Photographic reconnaissance			
208						
84	Beverley Hastings Valetta	200 hours per month of logistic air support including 40 dropping sorties on Jebel Akhdar				
RAF Khormaksar	Sycamore	Casualty evacuation and general support				
1417 Flt	Pembroke	Transport and other logistic support				
152	Pembroke	Voice aircraft and leaflet sorties				

Expansion in Aden and Kenya

For the sake of continuity the story of the disputes in Oman, covering some seven and a half years in the 1950s and narrated in the previous chapter, has not been interrupted to describe events elsewhere in the theatre. By the time the Oman campaign was completed in 1959, the Suez crisis of 1956 had come and gone and, although the story of it has no place in this narrative, its repercussions upon British military power in the whole area with which we are concerned were momentous. To do full justice to the events, it is necessary to retrace one's footsteps to the end of 1951, and to Aden in particular.

Two more quiet years in Aden

Although, as previously mentioned in Chapter 3, 1951 saw the end of the 'Quiet Years' in the theatre as a whole, little in fact disturbed the potentially unstable atmosphere of the Colony and its two Protectorates for the next two years: action tended to be elsewhere in the theatre but the forces in Aden were involved in a reinforcing role.

The start of 1952 found Headquarters, British Forces, Aden, commanded by Air Vice-Marshal FJ Fressanges CB with its single resident operational squadron at Khormaksar – 8 Squadron – equipped with eight Brigands in one Flight and four Ansons in a 'Protectorate Support Flight'. The Aden Communications Flight had grown up owing to the heavy calls for scheduled flights within the Command and the need to resupply the route stations frequently. Equipped with eight Valetta C Mark 1 aircraft, it was redesignated 'Aden Communications Squadron'. No 683 (Photographic Reconnaissance) Squadron (Lancasters) was at this time detached from Habbaniya to Khormaksar, engaged upon a survey of Somaliland, Eritrea and other areas adjacent to Aden. Khormaksar which had always been a single squadron station began to suffer from an acute shortage of accommodation: in February 1952 for example, 801 airmen were compelled to fit into barrack accommodation which had been built to the scale approved for only 545 men. This resulted in more than 200 airmen having to sleep on the verandahs of the barrack blocks. Pleasant enough though this might be in the calm, reasonably cool weather from December to about March, it could be excessively uncomfortable for the remainder of the year, and particularly when the dust storms associated with the south west monsoon hit

Aden in mid-summer. As it subsequently transpired this was the beginning of many years of acute discomfort for the RAF personnel at Khormaksar. Although a great deal of accommodation was to be built on the station and much air conditioning installed in the years to come, it constantly lagged behind the expansion of the station with the result that it was not until about 1961 that enough accommodation was available to make the use of verandahs unnecessary. This severe shortage, added to the discomforts of the Aden climate, was instrumental in making Khormaksar one of the most trying, if not the most trying station in the RAF on which to serve.

On 10 March 1952, Air Vice-Marshal D Macfadyen CB CBE took over as AOC from Air Vice-Marshal Fressanges who had completed his two-year tour of duty – a tour which had been fairly uneventful operationally, but which had given him the opportunity to continue with the postwar tidying up of the administration. RAF Steamer Point, in particular, had assumed responsibility for most of the administrative and supply functions for the whole Command and had developed into an efficient organisation which was later to provide a sound basis for further expansion. Steamer Point became, in fact, one of the earliest RAF stations to provide a large number of administrative functions for all three Services on what came to be known as the ‘agency’ system. The RAF had assumed full control of, among other facilities, the supply depot, ammunition storage site, cold store and detention centre, and provided all barrack furniture, POL, marine craft and many other common services. The work in this field which had been virtually started under AVM Fressanges was completed by AVM Macfadyen, and became something of a model for inter-Service administration elsewhere. At about this time the AOC’s administrative responsibilities were somewhat reduced by the withdrawal of British forces from Eritrea in June. The withdrawal involved closing down the RAF staging post at Asmara and transferring 1910 AOP Flight with its Austers, to Egypt. It also meant the loss of the leave centre at Asmara which, for a number of years, had provided useful leave facilities in a cool climate for airmen and their families in Aden. They were thus virtually confined to Aden for local holidays until a leave centre was opened in Kenya at a later date – the Silver Sands Centre on the coast near Mombasa which, if it could not replace the cool climate of the Asmara hills, did at least provide excellent sea bathing and a welcome break from the torrid heat of Aden. Eventually the expansion of Transport Command and the advent of larger and faster transport aircraft made mid-tour home leave a practical possibility for those serving in the overseas commands, and this always tended to be preferred to local leave.

For 8 Squadron at Khormaksar, 1951 was largely a year of training, perhaps the quietest year which that perennially active squadron ever had. Only one small scale operation in the Western Aden Protectorate took place – in August of that year. Sheikh Salal Ahmed of the Ahl

Masina tribe had a long history of looting and ambush on the trade route running through his territory. When, in August, he held up and looted a lorry in the Wadi Hatib and it was learned that it contained the possessions of one of the assistant political officers, the time had clearly arrived for firm action. Brigands of 8 Squadron carried out a series of attacks, after final warning leaflets had been dropped, upon three fortified houses owned by Salal Ahmed in the Wadi Hatib. It was a difficult target for the Brigands as the wadi was narrow, with steep sides rising to 8,000 feet which confined the attack to one direction only. Nevertheless the three houses were rendered uninhabitable after a day long attack with 60lb rockets. No 8 Squadron's almost legendary accuracy suffered somewhat while the Squadron was equipped with Brigands which were far less manoeuvrable and less steady as firing platforms than the single seaters which preceded and succeeded them as squadron equipment. Shortly before this operation the Squadron was unfortunate enough to lose its Commanding Officer, Squadron Leader J W Stephens DFC, who crashed and was killed while practising single engined circuits and landings at Khormaksar. After a brief interval Squadron Leader D B Bretherton DFC assumed command, just in time to suffer the grounding of the whole Squadron when a structural defect in the mainplane came to light and necessitated a modification which could, fortunately, be carried out at Khormaksar. Before the end of the year the welcome news came that 8 Squadron was to be re-equipped with its first jet aircraft, the Vampire. The conversion of pilots from the heavy twin engined Brigand to the single seater 'mini jet' was a considerable but not a difficult task and, for the duration of the conversion flying, the disused airfield at Sheikh Othman was re-opened and a Meteor 7 allocated to allow the dual instruction on jet aircraft to be given to the Squadron pilots while still operating their Brigands. This proved to be a welcome relief for Khormaksar whose main runway was being called upon to accept a constantly increasing amount of traffic, and was proving inadequate for the faster and heavier civil and military aircraft coming into service. There was never any intention of bringing Sheikh Othman back into permanent use. It lay virtually within Khormaksar's circuit, possessed only natural surface runways and had few permanent buildings: its value for the future lay in the fact that it offered a flat, unobstructed space within the confines of the Colony as an alternative to Khormaksar in emergency.

It took 8 Squadron about four months – until April 1953 – to become fully operational on its new Vampires, due partly to the limitations imposed upon the Squadron of having only one Meteor 7 to give conversion dual instruction to all the pilots, and partly due to the time taken to assemble the ground equipment and spares. Greater flexibility was given to the Squadron by increasing its establishment from eight to twelve, and later to sixteen aircraft. It had always been evident that eight Brigands were insufficient to meet the wide ranging commitments

of this Squadron which not only had to cover the theatre from East Africa to Kuwait, but which also had to fulfil a multiplicity of roles. During the conversion period 32 Squadron, based at Deversoir, was available should Aden need reinforcement and, in fact, a small detachment of the Squadron's Vampires flew to Khormaksar for a few weeks in January to assist with two small scale operations in the Protectorate.

In general, however, 1953 proved to be as quiet as the previous year, enlivened by just enough sporadic dissidence to keep the Levies and 8 Squadron operationally interested. The latter had its first opportunity to use the Vampires in anger in May when retaliation for the killing of an APL soldier on patrol in the Wadi Hanuk had to be visited upon the Saidi sheikh. A strike by six Vampires was ordered to attack a fort at Mariba: it was completely destroyed after the usual leaflet warning but, in order to give most of the Squadron's pilots the opportunity to carry out their first operational attack in the Vampire, a further six sorties against the same target were ordered. There were no more operational calls upon the Squadron during that hot weather which gave an opportunity for the unit to go to the Armament Practice Camp at Nicosia for annual training. The absence of the Squadron was also the opportunity which AMDGW needed to re-surface and extend the runway at Khormaksar, the decision having been taken earlier to give it a final length of 3,000 yards. All this work was carried out between August and November when 8 Squadron returned from its Mediterranean interlude, having brought its squadron rocket firing average down to 9.4 yards, and its shallow dive bombing figures to 26.7 yards, much better figures than had been attained with the Brigand. Experience during past years had shown without doubt that, for operations against tribal targets requiring great accuracy to avoid damaging the property of innocent people, the single seater rocket firing fighter was an infinitely more suitable aircraft than the light and medium bomber.

The earlier incident in which an APL soldier had been killed while on patrol had caused some concern to the authorities in that the Levies were being increasingly hampered by hostile tribesmen during their legitimate movement about the Protectorate. It was, therefore, decided to send a column of the APL into the Nisab and Lodar areas and up the Wadi Hatib to secure the trade route running through the region, and to construct an airstrip at Am Ruseis. No air strikes were called for during this operation but 8 Squadron supported the APL by flying a number of flag showing sorties in the vicinity of the newly constructed airstrip. When the work was completed at the end of the year, some of the APL forces were withdrawn to Aden, leaving a small garrison in permanent occupation of the Wadi Hatib.

The Aden operations of 1954 and 1955

After the relative calm of the past two years, which had given 8 Squadron a breathing space in which to re-equip, the pressure of events began

to increase throughout the theatre and the forces in Aden were involved more and more frequently. The Mau Mau campaign in Kenya reached its climax during 1954, and on at least one occasion 8 Squadron was called upon to send down a detachment of Vampires to participate. During April, for example, four Vampires operated for a ten-day period from Eastleigh, firing 12,700 rounds of 20mm ammunition and 111 x 60lb rockets. But it was in the Western Aden Protectorate that the attention of the Aden forces had to be mainly focussed.

The effect of the APL column which had been sent into the Wadi Hatib area during the previous December did not last for long. During the first three months of 1954 there was a recrudescence of sniping at Government forts and a number of raids from across the Yemen border by Dammani rebels of the Audhali Sultanate. The affected area, being within a few miles of the frontier, which was ill defined and in rugged country, lay wide open to attack from raiding parties of dissident tribesmen who could cross the border with impunity. Not only was the frontier open and unguarded, but it was customary for tribesmen to attend the markets in villages on both sides of the frontier quite freely. Dissidents could, therefore, conceal themselves without difficulty among the innocent villagers who were constantly moving backwards and forwards between the markets.

Matters came to a head with a serious raid by sections of the Rabizi tribe against the isolated Government fort at Robat on 2 May, which had to be relieved by an expensive combined Levy and Government Guard operation involving the airlifting of 186 Guards and Levies from Khormaksar to Nisab, followed by a 70 mile march from Nisab to Robat, covered by twenty-one Vampire and Anson reconnaissance sorties. The Government of Aden decided that it was now imperative to bring the dissident sections of the Rabizi tribe to heel, and at the same time to take measures to discourage further raiding from across the Yemen border. The first step to be taken consisted of establishing an Air Control Post (ACP) in Robat Fort for about ten days. Squadron Leader Pollock, the Senior Intelligence Officer in HQ British Forces, was placed in command of this post with one senior NCO and two APL personnel, with the task of calling in Vampires held at immediate readiness at Khormaksar and directing them onto appropriate targets should the fort be attacked again. No targets offered themselves while the ACP was in position but snipers opened up during the withdrawal and their positions were attacked with unknown results by the Vampires. Although the establishment of the ACP was something of an experiment which failed to produce the hoped for results, it did give Squadron Leader Pollock the opportunity to train the Arab officer in charge of the Government Guard garrison of the fort so that he could operate the VHF set himself and direct Vampires onto targets in the future.

Attacks on forts and Government Guard posts continued necessitating further expensive relief operations to relieve the forts at Nisab and

Marwaha. Action was therefore taken to proscribe a large part of the area occupied by the dissident Rabizi tribe and an ultimatum issued to the effect that if the rebels did not submit by 7 June, air and ground action would be taken against the proscribed area. The AOC's plan involved three phases of offensive action. The first phase, to last three days, consisted of twelve Vampire sorties spread over the period, each aircraft dropping two 500lb bombs with thirty minute delay fuses on centres of habitation, on cultivation and water supplies. If these attacks failed to bring submission, phase two would consist of Vampire attacks with instantaneous fused bombs and cannon fire against similar targets, but not against individuals. Finally, if phase three became necessary, it would comprise a campaign of attrition to be maintained for as long as necessary. In addition, the Governor of Aden was authorised to allow 'hot pursuit' of rebels across the frontier into the Yemen by ground forces, but not by aircraft which could, however, take offensive air action right up to the border.

The operation began on 7 June and the first two phases brought no reaction from the tribesmen, making it necessary to embark upon the third 'attrition' phase for an indefinite period. During the month of June the Rabizi rebels attacked Government forces on no less than thirty-five different occasions, and on the frontier, Yemeni regular troops were identified as participating. They were beaten off and chased back over the border by the Aden forces leaving six Yemeni soldiers and a Yemeni sheikh dead. It was clear from this incident not only that the revolt was on a considerable scale, but that it was being actively supported by the Yemen Government. Fortunately 8 Squadron had by then settled down well with its Vampires and was able to mount one of the biggest operational efforts in its history. The detachment which was participating in the Mau Mau campaign had to be withdrawn from Eastleigh, and the month produced a total of 483 flying hours, during which 220 operational sorties were flown, expending 316 x 500lb bombs, 350 x 60lb rockets and 9,000 rounds of ammunition. After a long period of quiescence, 8 Squadron was back in operational business in a big way.

Towards the end of June the Levies in Robat fort reported that the Rabizi, deterred by the daylight attacks, were watering and feeding their cattle by night. In order to deny them this facility in the proscribed area, it was decided to drop a certain number of bombs with six and twelve hour delay fuses. These long delay bombs were mixed with those fused to explode instantaneously, and this passed unnoticed by the tribesmen until they exploded during the following night. It was not practicable for the Squadron to operate by night owing to the extreme difficulty of visually identifying targets which were as often as not very hard to find and identify even in daylight.

Although the innocent inhabitants of the proscribed area were clearly upset and inconvenienced by the air attack, the rebels within their

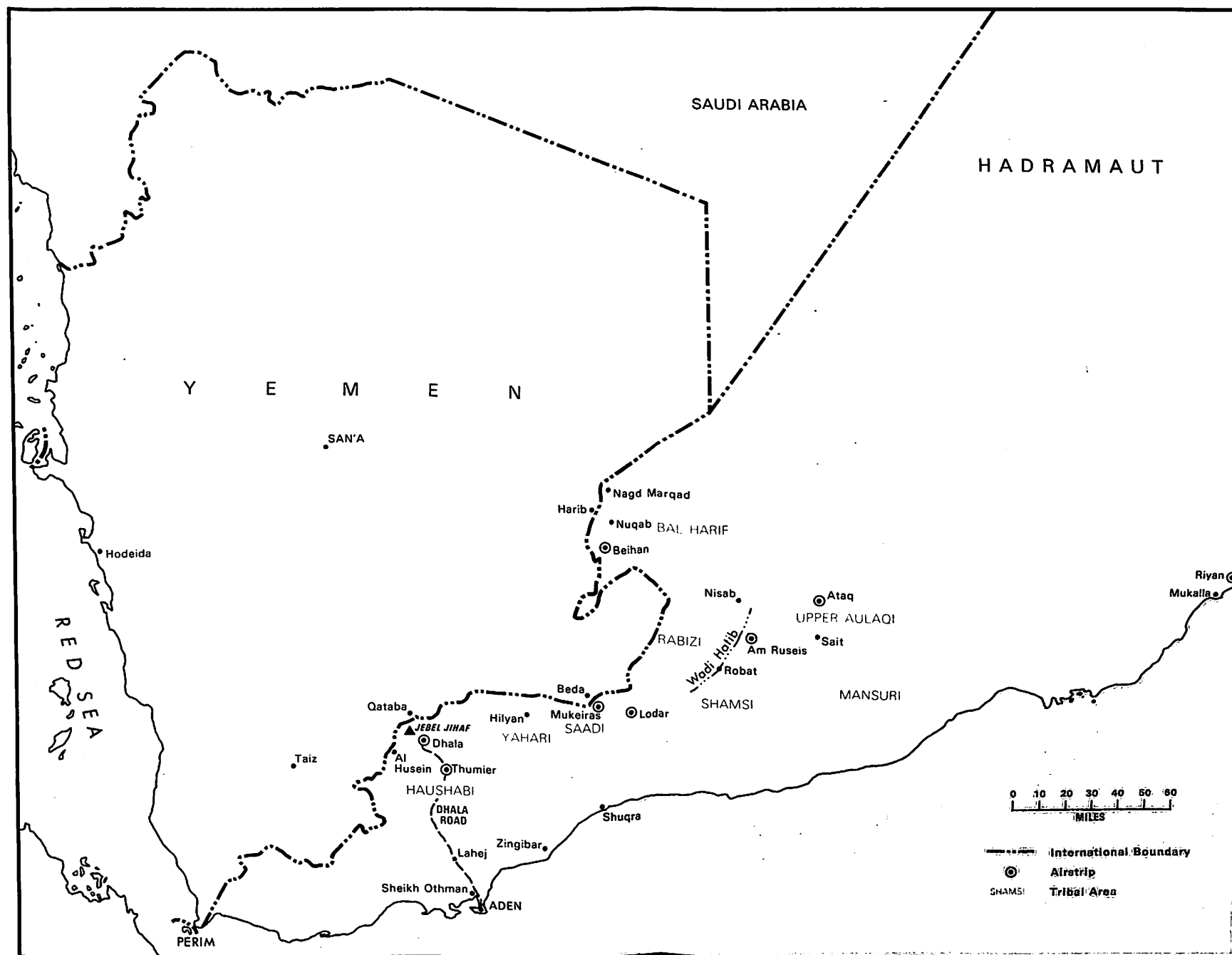
midst showed no signs of capitulating. They mounted fifty-four attacks on the Government forces during the month of July, killing two APL soldiers in the process. The air action continued unabated during that month and throughout August and September, by the end of which the hostile action showed some decrease, as did the activities of Yemeni forces across the frontier. In October, however, the Governor of Aden received a most unexpected invitation to meet the Imam of the Yemen in Taiz, an invitation which was at once accepted and His Excellency flew to Taiz for a meeting on 16 October. After several days of discussion, in an outwardly friendly atmosphere, some limited agreement was reached on frontier observance; and the incursions of regular Yemeni forces ceased. However, it soon became apparent that, whereas raids across the border ceased, Yemeni influence was applied to the internal disorders in Rabizi territory with the result that the dissidence continued, if on a somewhat reduced scale throughout November. By the end of the month one section of the Rabizi tribe, namely the Aboodi sect, had had enough of the constant harassment from 8 Squadron and the APL and sued for peace. This sect was not unfortunately the hard core of resistance, an honour which seemed to belong to the Shamsi section of the Rabizi, who were in no way discouraged, and continued their sporadic attack on Government forces, albeit at a reduced scale, probably due to the fact that they were now getting less support in arms and money from across the frontier.

By the end of the year both the APL and the RAF at Khormaksar could look back upon a year of high operational activity. Of 4,766 hours flown during 1954, 8 Squadron had expended no less than 1,670 on active operations in both Kenya and the Aden Protectorates. The total of weapons used was formidable, namely, 1,684 x 500lb bombs, 2,936 rockets and 121,486 rounds of 20 mm ammunition. The flying hours represented more than 100% of the official squadron task which must be regarded as highly creditable in view of the fact that the Squadron was re-equipped twice during the year, firstly from Brigands to Vampire Mk 1s and later to Vampire Mk 4s. Consequently, a respite from operations in the Wadi Hatib was more than welcome and the opening months of 1955 with a new squadron commander, Squadron Leader A J Houston, were devoted to bringing the training of new pilots up to the high standards of the old hands. Some additional relief to the Squadron was given by a detachment of four Bomber Command Lincolns which had participated in the Mau Mau campaign. Their services being no longer required in Kenya they were held for a further period in Aden against any sudden resurgence of operations against the Mau Mau: during that period they were fully used in the Western Aden Protectorate for armed reconnaissance, as well as further afield, patrolling the disputed Saudi Arabian border in central Oman.

The temporary lull in activity in the WAP lasted only until March 1955, when attacks on the fort at Robat were resumed by the Shamsi,

with further casualties to the APL who had suffered nine Levies killed and eleven injured since the fort was established in January 1954. The time had come to mount a punitive operation against the Shamsi and a plan was drawn up for such an operation in April. A complete wing of the APL moved into the Wadi Hatib area with instructions to round up cattle and flocks of sheep and goats, and to collect stocks of grain and other food belonging to the troublesome tribesmen. The APL were flown up country in Valettas and were supported throughout by 8 Squadron and the Lincolns. As was so often the case in this type of 'denial' operation, it tended to wreak vengeance on the mass of innocent villagers who were being intimidated by the militant few. In consequence, this particular operation, although successful in denying food and livestock to the responsible tribes, did little to subdue the rebel hard core, and the dissident activity continued. An experiment, which was to prove extremely successful, was introduced during this operation, namely, the locating of three RAF Intelligence Officers at various focal points in the WAP. Hitherto civilian Political Officers only had lived out in the field as representatives of the Government of Aden. On the occasions when air strikes had to be directed onto specific targets, it was customary for a pilot, usually from 8 Squadron, to travel out with the ground forces and to act as the Air Liaison Officer. Good though this system was, it was wasteful of valuable pilots who might be away from their squadrons for weeks at a time, all for the sake of a few hours work directing aircraft onto targets. The three Intelligence Officers were trained to act as ALOs when necessary, as well as to advise the Political Officers as to the capabilities and limitations of the various types of aircraft in use. Over the years these officers, who reported back to Aden periodically, became quite invaluable and it is surprising that such a successful scheme was not introduced much earlier. One officer in particular, Flight Lieutenant Shevlin, acquired an immense knowledge of the tribes and the terrain, lived an isolated life deep in tribal territory and spent many years on a job which fascinated him, but which would have proved intolerable for many people.

One of the first occasions on which these Intelligence Officers acted as ALOs arose in May when a number of air strikes took place in the Wadi Mirria. The results were excellent, some 169 sorties being directed onto targets with great skill and precision, clearly showing that an officer who had the double qualifications of knowing the ground intimately and understanding the pilots' problems made the perfect Air Liaison Officer. This particular series of raids was unusual in that it was carried out by a mixed force of Vampires and Venoms, the decision having been made to re-equip 8 Squadron yet again – with the Venom. Satisfactory though the Vampire had been during its short life with the Squadron, the improved performance of the Venom gave the Squadron a more versatile aircraft, with an eventual radius of action, when the Mark 4 version arrived, of at least 240 miles. While the Squadron was



MAP 6: ADEN AND THE PROTECTORATES

converting to the new type – a relatively simple change in this case – it was allowed to retain many of its Vampires and to operate a mixed force. This proved to be a blessing as another serious incident occurred in the Wadi Hatib in June. A Government force marching to relieve the garrison at Robat fort was heavily attacked by the Shamsis, resulting in the death of two British officers, one Arab officer and five Levies. Not only did this reveal increased dissidence, but also evidence of renewed assistance from the Yemen, nullifying the agreement made during the previous October between the Governor of Aden and the Imam.

Robat fort was exacting too high a toll: its very existence seemed to provoke the Rabizi rather than to provide the calming influence which had been the original intention behind its occupation eighteen months earlier. A major expedition to relieve it and to withdraw the garrison permanently was decided upon, using British troops to reinforce the Levies. It was thus hoped that a great show of military force together with abandonment of the fort might be the means of calming the area.

Part of 51 Brigade including the 1st Battalion Seaforth Highlanders was flown down to Aden from Fayid and an operation mounted from the airstrip at Ataq, which was the nearest reasonable airfield to the scene of trouble. Participating were the Seaforth, the APL, one squadron of the RAF Regiment, Ferret scout cars of The Life Guards, supported by all the aircraft at Khormaksar which, at the time, included Lincolns from 49 Squadron in Bomber Command. It must be borne in mind that July is about the hottest and most unpleasant month of the year in Aden, with the dust and sandstorms associated with the south west monsoon at their worst, reducing visibility considerably. Fortunately for both troops and aircrew, neither the heat nor the sandstorms were quite as severe up country in the operational area, and the sweep through the Wadi Hatib went according to plan and without excessive discomfort. Ninety-four pairs of Venoms and Vampires escorted the convoys into the Wadi, followed by an intensive programme of bombing on pre-selected targets. For the first time Venoms dropped a number of marker bombs for the Lincolns, thus making use of their intimate knowledge of their home territory for the benefit of the visitors. Also for the first time in this theatre Sycamore helicopters were used for casualty evacuation. Although their range was very small and their carrying capacity extremely limited, they were nevertheless the first helicopters to be sent to Aden and their presence was warmly welcomed as it was no longer necessary to carry injured men on long and painful journeys to the nearest airstrip.

The forces were withdrawn from the Wadi Hatib area and Robat fort evacuated by the end of July which was the signal for the Shamsi to move in and reduce it to rubble. In some respects these events could be regarded as capitulation to lawlessness by the Government of Aden, but that would be the wrong view to take in the circumstances. The Government had shown the dissidents that it now possessed sufficiently

powerful land and air forces to make life intolerable for them at any time and with little warning, in any part of the Protectorate. Furthermore it could do this without maintaining provocative garrisons such as that in Robat fort. That this lesson had been learned by the Rabizi was shown by the fact that the Wadi Hatib area remained untroubled for the second half of the year, and no further operations of any significance were necessary. Periodic flag waving sorties to remind the tribesmen that the RAF was ever present and watchful were flown as a matter of routine and, of course, to keep aircrew fully conversant with the terrain. During this quiet period a change of AOC took place in September when Air Vice-Marshal LF Sinclair GC CB CBE DSO became Commander, British Forces, Aden, taking over from Air Vice-Marshal SO Bufton who had completed a busy and successful tour of duty. It is interesting to note that, during his tour, the level of air activity at Khor-maksar had continued to mount with the result that aircraft movements reached the high figure of 2,500 per month. The relatively quiet period in the Protectorates continued in 1956, and it is perhaps an appropriate time to switch attention to the policy developments which were under discussion in Whitehall, and which were to have an immense effect on Britain's military strength and dispositions in the Arabian Peninsula and East Africa.

Strategic developments

For a number of years after World War II – until about 1953 – the attention of Britain's defence authorities was focussed upon the northern or Mediterranean area of the Middle East. The Palestine problem, the increase of Russian influence in the countries bordering the Eastern Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf, and the growing hostility of Egypt towards British occupation of military bases in the Canal Zone were the principle matters which concerned the military planners during that period. They were thankful to be able to ignore the southern and eastern parts of the theatre where the relatively minor problems of the Arabian Peninsula and the East African territories could be handled by the meagre sea, land and air forces which were retained there.

From about 1954 onwards the situation began to change: those areas which had previously been virtually neglected demanded increasing attention, but unfortunately the problems of the Eastern Mediterranean littoral grew no less. Furthermore the increasing hostility of Egypt to the Canal Zone bases coupled with a gradual withdrawal of the RAF from Iraq created what eventually became loosely known as the 'air barrier' between the two areas of the Middle East Command. Although this 'barrier' never became absolute and could always be circumnavigated, it was a political obstruction which made communication and reinforcement between the two areas extremely difficult. Beyond the barrier, the Mau Mau campaign, unrest in Somaliland, the incursion of Saudi Arabia into the Buraimi Oasis, the dissid-

ence in central Oman and in the Aden Protectorates were all events which were creating a need for additional forces beyond the usual pattern of short term reinforcement from the Mediterranean or from the United Kingdom. Fortunately transport aircraft were getting larger, faster and more numerous and airfields on trunk routes more plentiful, all of which offset to some extent the need to maintain expensive garrisons in isolated places where they might be needed only occasionally. In spite of this bonus, it was becoming increasingly clear in London that the Middle East Command, with its current organisation centred on the Mediterranean, was becoming unmanageable.

It was probably the unexpected ferocity of the Mau Mau campaign which started a new train of thought in Whitehall about the future disposition of forces. It had for some time been the intention to close down the RAF station at Eastleigh in 1958 when the new Kenya civil airport at Embakasi was completed, relying thereafter upon the latter for the provision of any facilities which the RAF might need, but with no intention of maintaining any flying units permanently there. Pursuing this line, but with the lesson of the Mau Mau operations very much in mind, the Air Ministry informed the Colonial Office in March 1955 that the facilities which it would need at Embakasi consisted of a hangar, apron space, dispersal areas, technical and explosive sites, fuel storage and office accommodation. It was also hoped that the Kenya Government would pay the cost of these facilities. None of the East African Governments rose to this last suggestion and no offers of contributions towards the cost of maintaining such facilities were forthcoming. Far from offering to pay, the East African Defence Committee stated its own requirements of the RAF which can be summarised as, firstly, the means to carry out a rapid reinforcement of East Africa and the reinforcement of other territories including Mauritius from Kenya: secondly, the provision of a communications flight to enable the C-in-C, East Africa and his staff to cover their territory and, lastly, the facilities necessary to build up rapidly an air force of the type which had been required for the Mau Mau troubles.

While these somewhat unprofitable discussions were going on, the War Office in London was giving serious thought to the future location of Britain's Strategic Reserve. This force had been formed to be stationed in the United Kingdom for rapid deployment, mainly by RAF transport aircraft, to any part of the world. The creation of the 'air barrier' and the increasing instability in areas of British interest beyond it caused the planners to consider the desirability of locating part of the reserve force beyond the 'barrier', to the East of Suez. Aden and Kenya were two obvious areas which merited consideration and, although Aden might have some strategic advantages due to its position, the factors of space and climate, not to mention training areas and accommodation, greatly favoured Kenya. However, the reserve force was much less likely to be needed in Africa than in the Arabian Peninsula or

Persian Gulf, and it would clearly be unwise to isolate it in Kenya without the ability to fly it north at very short notice. This postulated the need for transport aircraft to be available in Kenya at very short notice and, furthermore, gave rise to a requirement for suitable aircraft to give the soldiers the type of training with the RAF which they would normally receive if located in the United Kingdom.

Although Transport Command, with the advent of the *Britannia* and the prospect of the *Beverley* and *Argosy* in the offing, was developing a formidable lifting capacity, there was a justifiable reluctance to reduce the potential of this force by locating part of it in East Africa where the need for it was likely to be intermittent. As strategic airlift could clearly be made available in Kenya from the United Kingdom within about twenty-four hours, the inclination of the Air Ministry was to provide, for both Kenya and the Arabian Peninsula only freighter aircraft and medium range passenger aircraft, namely *Beverleys* when available, *Valettas*, *Pembrokes* and *Twin Pioneers*. This would permit the retention of the strategic transport force, in the shape of *Britannias*, *Comets*, *Hastings* and *Argosies* in one compact force in the United Kingdom.

As the policy for detaching part of the Strategic Reserve to Kenya evolved, consideration was also being given to the needs of Aden in the light of the rising tide of operational activity throughout the Arabian Peninsula. The resources of the Aden Protectorate Levies and the single day fighter/ground attack squadron, which had held the fort in the theatre for so long, were being stretched beyond endurance, and it was becoming increasingly necessary to reinforce them, sometimes with RAF Regiment squadrons, sometimes with *Lincolns* from Bomber Command, or with fighters from the Canal Zone. Quite apart from the increasing difficulty of getting reinforcements to Aden through Nasser's 'barrier', the climate and terrain in the Peninsula were such that piecemeal reinforcements were neither acclimatised nor conversant with the operational conditions and, in consequence took time to reach full efficiency on arrival. The changing circumstances made it apparent, by mid-1956, that Aden needed a larger land and air garrison to meet its commitments.

All these considerations crystallised into a decision taken in mid-1956 to station one British battalion permanently in Aden, not only for internal security and operations in the Protectorates, but to be available to reinforce other areas of the Peninsula as well as British Somaliland if the need arose. This decision was welcomed by Air Ministry as it would permit the withdrawal of some RAF Regiment units, whose primary role was airfield defence, and not infantry type operations. At the same time the Air Ministry expressed its intention to provide *Twin Pioneers* and, when available, *Beverley* freighters for Aden. The stage was now set, not only for the expansion of Aden as an Arabian Peninsula base, but also for the building up of forces again in Kenya and the retention of

Eastleigh for a longer period than the RAF had previously intended.

If the thoughts of a military build up East of Suez were somewhat tentative in mid-1956, the events of the second half of that year certainly caused them to crystallise rapidly into firm policy. Not only did the Suez campaign and the closure of the Canal isolate Britain's garrisons beyond the Canal even more effectively than before, but the repercussions of the crisis in Egypt endangered Britain's oil interests in the Gulf and increased anti-British sentiment among the Arab countries. The Suez crisis gave both the Yemen and Saudi Arabia an opportunity which was well justified in their eyes, to foment dissidence in the Aden Protectorates and in Oman. Bahrein and Kuwait were, to put it mildly, jittery, Somaliland was unstable and the Mau Mau campaign in Kenya was in its concluding phase. There was no doubt in the minds of the Chiefs of Staff that, when the aftermath of Suez had been cleared up, the centre of gravity of Middle East military power would have to be shifted from the Mediterranean to Aden, and placed under a command which was controlled directly from London instead of from Cyprus.

By the end of 1956 commitments had already necessitated some expansion of the RAF in Aden, and the force then consisted of:

8 Squadron (16 Venoms)

78 Squadron (6 Twin Pioneers)

1426 Flight (4 Lincolns) – a permanent development from the Bomber Command detachments

Aden Communications Squadron (8 Valettas and Pembrokes, and 2 Sycamores)

20 Wing RAF Regiment with 58 and 66 (Field) Squadrons under command.

The years 1957 and 1958 saw the plans for expansion East of Suez come to fruition. Although the Suez Canal was reopened, and supplies could again reach Aden by the short sea route, the 'air barrier' remained a constant political threat. 'Overflying rights' became a political bargaining counter, the total unpredictability of which caused many problems for the RAF, particularly in regard to short range aircraft which could not always take the long circuitous routes through Turkey and Iran, or through Central Africa. The need to be self-sufficient East of Suez except for strategic transport aircraft became paramount. Command of the newly styled British Forces, Arabian Peninsula (BFAP) was taken over by Air Vice-Marshal M L Heath CB CBE in 1957, and a considerable rationalisation of the RAF took place during his tour in command. No 8 Squadron retained sixteen Venoms but was given a sizeable reserve in the theatre to offset the difficulties of replacement by ferry flight. Five of these were regarded as immediate reserves, the remainder being stored at Eastleigh. Furthermore the Squadron acquired an additional flight of four Meteor FRGs, for visual and photographic reconnaissance. These aircraft were to prove invaluable in the Protectorates and in Oman: they freed the Venoms from the

reconnaissance tasks, permitting them to concentrate upon ground attack and operational stand-by duties. In place of the Lincolns of 1426 Flight, a small squadron of five Shackletons was formed – 37 Squadron. Although the Shackleton was basically a maritime reconnaissance aircraft, those of 37 Squadron became 'maids of all work'. With a similar bombing capability to that of the Lincoln, the Shackleton also contained the equipment for long range search and rescue, a role which the Squadron was frequently called upon to play, mainly to assist shipping in distress along the Arabian coastline. Armed with guns and equipped with cameras, and with the ability to carry a fair load of passengers, there were few roles that 37 Squadron could not, and indeed did not, undertake. Some rationalisation of the theatre transport force also took place. No 78 Squadron retained its six Twin Pioneers, but the Valettas, which had previously belonged to the Communications Squadron, were formed into a squadron of twelve aircraft – 84 Squadron – a fine old Middle East number plate which reappeared in the theatre once again. Having lost its Valettas, the Communications Squadron acquired ten Pembrokes; and three rescue Sycamores were incorporated into the Khormaksar Station Flight. Finally a detachment of two Beverleys from Abingdon completed the complement of Khormaksar during 1958 at the height of the Oman operations described in the last chapter.

Meanwhile in East Africa, the new Kenya national airport opened at Embakasi in March 1958, agreement having been reached for the RAF to retain the use of Eastleigh for at least a further two years. But the need for facilities in Kenya had now been increased by the expansion of the RAF in Aden and the gross overcrowding at Khormaksar which inevitably resulted. Whereas Khormaksar could control and operate the increased number of civil and military aircraft which needed to use its single runway, the servicing of them had created a major difficulty. Hangar space was totally inadequate and, furthermore, working on an aircraft inside a hangar was, for a large part of the year, almost intolerable. It was once said that Khormaksar was no more than 40% efficient. This may sound a gross slander, but in fact, 40% was a not inconsiderable achievement in view of the conditions under which airmen had to work and the fearful technical problems with which the climatic conditions presented them. If much of the major servicing of the larger aircraft and storage of reserve aircraft could be handled by Eastleigh, it became apparent that not only would an immense burden be lifted from Khormaksar, but the work would be carried out more expeditiously and more efficiently. With this possibility much in mind a mission led by the Director of Organisation at Air Ministry was sent to Kenya in September 1958, to examine the available facilities in relation to the needs of the RAF in the theatre as a whole. This proved to be a valuable mission, and in its report, it recommended the combined use of Eastleigh and Embakasi, using the former mainly for technical servicing,

storage, administration and for the accommodation of all Service personnel, and the latter for operational flying. It must be borne in mind that the red murram runways of Eastleigh which had been adequate for previous generations of aircraft would not stand up to the frequent operation of Britannias, Comets and most of the range of jet aircraft entering service. In addition the approaches to Eastleigh, which is bounded on three sides by the suburbs of Nairobi, were becoming hazardous. The report by the Director of Organisation was accepted by the Air Council and an agreement drawn up by the Secretary of State for Air with the Kenya Government during a visit to Nairobi early in 1959. The RAF was welcome to remain at Eastleigh for as long as it wished and to enjoy facilities at Embakasi, all for a peppercorn rent.

The agreement entered into by the Secretary of State did not, however, signal the completion of the RAF expansion in Kenya and Aden. Repercussions from the Suez crisis continued to threaten the security of Britain's interests throughout the whole area of responsibility of BFAP, from Kuwait to Dar-es-Salaam. Among these interests, the security of Persian Gulf oil transcended all others with the result that plans to reinforce the Gulf and to intervene in Kuwait in support of the Anglo-Kuwait Treaty were constantly rewritten and strengthened from 1959 onwards with the inevitable consequence that more readily available forces were needed East of Suez. The single infantry battalion of the Strategic Reserve which had already been deployed to Kenya was regarded as insufficient and it was considered prudent to increase this element to a Brigade Group comprising HQ 24 Brigade, two infantry battalions, with the usual brigade elements of artillery, engineers, signals etc. Although to be located in barracks yet to be built outside Nairobi, the primary role of these forces was to act as the spearhead of reinforcements for the Persian Gulf should the oil security plans need to be implemented.

The whole pattern of RAF deployment was affected by this further expansion of ground forces and the revision of theatre plans. A limited amount of pre-stocking of equipment for 24 Brigade could be undertaken in its operational area of the Gulf, notably at Bahrain. This type of stockpiling was however an expensive and uneconomic policy: not only did it call for much double provisioning, but the conditions under which equipment had to be held in the Gulf were highly unsatisfactory and the most severe deterioration was inevitable. So bad was the condensation and corrosion at Bahrain, that it proved almost impossible to maintain radio equipment in a serviceable condition if stored for any length of time. This problem accentuated the need for more heavy lift freight aircraft capable of lifting the Brigade's equipment at short notice. In addition, more aircraft for training the Brigade in Kenya were essential, in the form of short range transport aircraft for reconnaissance training. The Brigade would rapidly stagnate in Kenya if denied the air support and co-operation essential to maintain operational efficiency and to

exercise in the role which it might be called upon to assume in the Persian Gulf at a few hours' notice.

In the first instance, an additional DF/GA squadron was deemed essential. For many years 8 Squadron had met all the calls for close support and ground attack throughout the Command: its size had gradually increased with the additional calls upon it until it had reached the optimum size for such a squadron with sixteen Venoms and four Meteor FRGs. Revised operational plans now called for at least two DF/GA squadrons to be readily available, and so it was decided to give BFAP a second fighter squadron. No 142 Squadron was reformed on 1 February 1959 and sent to Eastleigh, equipped initially with eight Venom FB4s and two Vampire T11s under the command of Squadron Leader R Ramirez. On 1 April this Squadron discarded its original number plate, and took over the standard and number of 208 Squadron which had served for many years in the Canal Zone and in Cyprus. The new 208 Squadron was built up to twelve Venoms and remained stationed at Eastleigh/Embakasi throughout its stay in BFAP. As will be seen later in this narrative, it featured frequently in operations in Aden, Oman and the Gulf and, while at its home base in Kenya, afforded valuable training for the units of 24 Brigade.

No 78 Squadron, the Twin Pioneer squadron at Khormaksar, was kept fully occupied with operations in the Protectorates, and a decision was therefore taken to form an additional squadron for deployment in Kenya with the primary task of working with 24 Brigade. No 21 Squadron, which had previously been equipped with Canberras in Bomber Command, was reformed at Benson with four Twin Pioneer CC Mark 1 aircraft under the command of Squadron Leader W J Bishop MBE. After some initial training on Salisbury Plain, the Squadron flew out to Eastleigh in September 1959. The Twin Pioneer was not ideal in Kenya as its single engine performance when operating from airstrips above 6,000 feet in the training areas of 24 Brigade was marginal. However, as Kenya was not to be the operational area for the Squadron, these limitations were accepted, the aircraft being highly suitable for its role in all other respects.

Finally, the provision of heavy freight and vehicle lift for the Brigade had to be considered: the choice fell upon the Beverley which was performing well in operational service at Khormaksar. It was the only aircraft capable of lifting the type of load needed to give adequate mobility to 24 Brigade although the distances involved in the BFAP area were far greater than those for which the Beverley was designed. Its extremely slow speed meant that one return flight between Nairobi and Bahrein used up all the flying time allocated to one aircraft for a month, namely thirty hours. However, the immense lifting capability and the ability to fly vehicles, guns and heavy equipment into small, rough airstrips far outweighed the disadvantages of slow speed. No 30 Squadron, equipped with six Beverleys was transferred from Dishforth

in Transport Command to Eastleigh in November 1959, by which time 84 Squadron was also receiving Beverleys at Khormaksar. When fully operational, these two squadrons improved the mobility of the forces at the disposal of CBFAP immeasurably. To be able to fly a squadron of Ferret scout cars from, for example, Khormaksar directly into Nizwa in Oman, or into Ataq in the Western Aden Protectorate, in a single lift gave the Command an entirely new reinforcement capability. In addition, the administrative bonus which accrued from the introduction of the Beverley was considerable: supplying the route stations, and in particular Masirah, by air at times when monsoon conditions made supply by sea out of the question now became possible. For the first time it was practicable to fly in such items as replacement fire fighting vehicles, or delicate generating and radio equipment. Finally, if a landing was impossible, the Beverley was able to drop vehicles, guns and any heavy equipment which was sufficiently robust to be lashed onto a stressed dropping platform. Many were the indignities heaped upon the Beverley by virtue of its huge size and somewhat ungainly appearance: some alluded to it as the 'furniture van'; others, less polite, called it a 'loosely assembled collection of spare parts', but the fact remains that it rapidly became indispensable in the Arabian Peninsula. It was pleasant and easy to fly, relatively simple to maintain, and possessed an astonishing short take off and landing performance. David Shepherd, the contemporary artist, painted several well known pictures of Beverleys operating from up country airstrips in the Western Aden Protectorate. One such picture, owned by 84 Squadron is reproduced as the frontispiece to this book and it is a graphic tribute to the tough resilience of this famous aeroplane, an example of which is preserved for posterity outside the RAF Museum at Hendon.

In the space of three years between 1956 and 1959, the strength of the RAF under the Commander, BFAP, had grown from one fighter squadron at Khormaksar and a handful of communications aircraft divided between Aden, Nairobi and Bahrein, into a force of some nine squadrons. The centre of gravity of the Middle East Command had certainly shifted under the pressure of events from the Eastern Mediterranean to the Arabian Peninsula, and the Air Ministry could justifiably feel satisfied that steps had been taken to circumvent the 'air barrier' and to provide a force located beyond it which was capable of meeting the increased threat to Britain's interests.

But the rapid expansion of both army and RAF units had outstripped the accommodation, both domestic and technical, which was available on all the stations in the Command, and particularly that at Khormaksar, Eastleigh and Bahrein – the stations which had borne the brunt of the expansion.

Expanding the administration

When the RAF had virtually completed its build up to about nine

squadrons during the second half of 1959, the only facilities which could be described as adequate for the operation of the force were the available runways and supplies of aviation fuel. By that time the main stations at Khormaksar and Bahrein possessed concrete runways of international standards, as did Embakasi which was to handle RAF operational flying in East Africa. The route stations at Riyan, Salalah and Masirah had 2,000 yard natural surface runways, similar to Sharjah. These had a good bearing surface and were adequate for limited use by all RAF aircraft at that time. In addition there were airstrips and emergency landing grounds throughout the theatre, usable by most of the lower performance aircraft. Finally there were a number of diversion airfields such as Djibouti in French Somaliland which, although outside the jurisdiction of BFAP, could always be used by RAF aircraft on a diversionary basis. Djibouti, for example, was a particularly valuable diversion when, for any reason, aircraft could not get into Khormaksar. Supplies of fuel in the theatre were adequate for all purposes, mainly due to the recent completion of a BP refinery at Little Aden. The shipping of fuel to the route stations created some difficulties, but they were chiefly those concerned with handling large numbers of 40 gallon drums rather than those of supply itself.

In almost every other respect the facilities for operating and administering the enlarged force were totally inadequate: the comprehensive plans which had been drawn up and approved in London would take many months to translate into steel and concrete in the theatre itself. This was the position when Air Vice-Marshal DJP Lee CB CBE assumed command from Air Vice-Marshal ML Heath in September 1959, one month before the new unified command, fully described in Chapter 2, came into existence and Air Vice-Marshal Lee became the AOC, Air Forces, Arabian Peninsula (AFAP), the first of the three subordinate single Service commanders under the Commander-in-Chief.

Although priority for building up the support facilities had obviously to be accorded to those concerned with achieving the maximum operational efficiency, it was nevertheless the appalling lack of domestic accommodation, particularly in Aden, which caused the greatest concern, and gave rise to the greatest criticism. The tour of duty in Aden had always been limited to two years, mainly by climatic considerations, but even so, it was an 'accompanied' posting and enough married accommodation had always been found for the small numbers of married officers and airmen who required it prior to 1956. By 1959, however, the situation had changed completely. Not only was the RAF garrison in Aden increasing rapidly, but the proportion of married men in the Service as a whole was going up by leaps and bounds. The proportion of airmen who were married had jumped from 20% to almost 70% in a few years, and the proportion of married officers was over 80%.

The question which is often asked about this period is "why was Aden

not made an 'unaccompanied' station and the tour reduced to one year, as in the case of Sharjah and the route stations?" Had it then been possible to look forward and see that British forces would be out of Aden altogether within eight years, such a decision might have been made although it would have created a great deal of domestic hardship, and adversely affected efficiency – never very high in Aden under the best of circumstances. Such an early British withdrawal was not, however, anticipated at that time and the arguments for continuing to class Aden as an 'accompanied' station were strong. In the first place, the climate, although trying at times, was healthy and perfectly acceptable for families. Secondly, the Colony was law abiding and peaceful: in 1959 there was no indication of the internal violence which was to break out in the mid-1960s, and finally, a minimum tour of two years was most desirable if reasonable continuity was to prevail among the many units which went to make up AFAP. There was, in short, no justifiable reason for denying the RAF the company of its families, particularly at a time when recruiting was difficult and every possible inducement was needed to keep men in the Service.

In consequence, no change was made in the status of Aden, and entitled personnel were permitted to take their families and 'find accommodation for them'. This was where the greatest dissatisfaction and criticism arose. The few official married quarters were always fully occupied and it was left to the majority of airmen to find private accommodation, mainly in the Crater and Maala areas. Flats and houses which conformed to European standards were almost unobtainable with the inevitable result that, by mid-1959, many RAF families were living in quite unacceptable discomfort, and even squalor. Aden simply did not possess sufficient houses to accommodate the large influx of Service families. A plan for the construction of blocks of flats in Maala by speculative builders, to be rented as 'hirings' for a specific number of years, had been approved and was in process of implementation. But the limitations of the building industry in Aden, and the priority which had to be accorded to many technical projects, meant that this building programme could not hope to satisfy the demand for family accommodation for several years.

A considerable outcry arose over living conditions which was taken up by the Press and which eventually reached the level of a debate in the House of Lords. In most respects this outcry did no good at all, and may even have delayed the building programme which was going ahead as fast as the limited skills and resources of the Colony allowed. However, it did result in the AOC obtaining additional funds from the Air Ministry with which to subsidise airmen's rents and enable them to live in better private accommodation than they could afford from their own pockets. This enabled the AOC to set certain standards for private accommodation, and to have it inspected before being rented by an airman. If found to be below standard, the airman was assisted from the new funds

to pay a higher rent for a better flat which met the laid down criteria.

The speculative building programme gained momentum during 1960 and 1961 and, with the addition of extra married quarters built at Khormaksar and Steamer Point, enabled the back of the housing shortage to be broken. Private accommodation in the worst areas, namely the Crater and Sheikh Othman, was the first to be relinquished, the less salubrious flats and houses being given up as quickly as possible. Nevertheless and in spite of the energetic building programme, several years of acute discomfort were suffered by officers and airmen alike, the only saving grace being that they were spared the loneliness of enforced separation from their wives, many of whom were very young and unable to cope without the head of the family.

Even building on the scale which was approved was not fully adequate to house all airmen who wished to take their families to Aden, such was the increase in the married strength of the RAF at that time. It became necessary, in 1961, to devise a scheme whereby mixed 'accompanied' and 'unaccompanied' tours were introduced. A number of key tradesmen, mostly NCOs, were asked to undertake a two-year tour for the sake of continuity in their appointments, and they were classed as fully 'accompanied' tours. Other airmen, in positions where continuity was less important, were offered one year 'unaccompanied' tours. Although this mixed policy reduced the load on married accommodation, schools, clinics, etc, it was never popular or entirely satisfactory: it created some friction and jealousy which was not conducive to harmony on the Aden stations, and was certainly not a policy to be recommended elsewhere. Nevertheless the conditions in Aden at the time were exceptional and demanded exceptional measures.

If married accommodation was difficult in Aden, that for single officers and airmen was little better. Both at Steamer Point and Khormaksar, the few open-plan non-air conditioned barrack blocks, dating back to the 1920s were appallingly overcrowded with, as we have seen, hundreds of airmen forced to live on the wide verandahs of these old fashioned buildings. Airmen could not be billeted out as there were few, if any, European homes which could take them. The European civil community in Aden was minute, and lived mostly in rented flats and bungalows. Under these conditions detachments to Kenya or to the Persian Gulf or Oman were welcomed, if only for the relief they afforded to the overcrowded barrack blocks. This was where the value of Eastleigh was recognised, drawing off as it did three of the AFAP squadrons and some of the major servicing personnel for the larger aircraft. Although overcrowding at Eastleigh also created problems, they were more bearable in the pleasant Kenya climate and in any case billeting in Nairobi was a practical proposition.

A large programme for providing new air conditioned barrack blocks in Aden was approved, and went ahead rapidly. Space for these, particularly at Steamer Point posed quite a problem if recreational space was

not to be sacrificed, but sites were found and by the end of 1961, all airmen were off verandahs and comfortably housed. At Khormaksar the new blocks were supplemented by some excellent light alloy Twynham huts which were easy to air condition and which proved extremely popular. Somewhat concerned at the doubtful security of tenure in Aden during the later phases of the expansion, the War Office erected a number of transportable barrack blocks for army units. As these were prefabricated in the United Kingdom and shipped to Aden, they cost more in the end to erect than those of local construction and, when the time came to leave Aden, the ravages of corrosion and climate had rendered them virtually immobile with the result that they were left in situ as a monument to false economy.

Mention must be made of the immense task of furnishing and equipping the new accommodation. The supply of barrack equipment for all three Services in the Command was the responsibility of the RAF. There were no local sources of supply or manufacture and all furniture had to be imported. Much of it came from the United Kingdom but considerable contracts were placed as far afield as Singapore and Hong Kong. No 114 Maintenance Unit at Steamer Point set up a large barrack store as a separate entity and proceeded to furnish the new hirings, married quarters, barrack blocks and offices as fast as they were built. At the height of the programme, in 1960 and 1961, as many as five hirings a day were being fully equipped with everything from beds to clothes pegs. This was a most efficient operation which reflected great credit on the overworked RAF supply organisation.

The problems of providing more domestic accommodation at Eastleigh and Bahrein, the two other RAF bases chiefly affected by the expansion, were much easier to solve than in Aden. In both cases, the stations were adjacent to large towns which offered plenty of rented houses and flats for families. At Eastleigh, a good deal of accommodation was thrown up by East African Airways who moved to Embakasi on the opening of the new airport. The old buildings were renovated and turned into excellent living and working space for 30 Squadron: it must have been the only RAF squadron which had its aircraft standing conveniently outside its own barrack blocks. As one wag said, "if 30 Squadron is really pushed, there is plenty of room in its own Beverleys to house the whole Squadron". Bahrein was much less affected by the expansion than either Aden or Eastleigh at this time; its particular problems arose much later, during and after the Kuwait crisis of 1961 when the centre of gravity of the Middle East Command again shifted, this time from Aden to the Persian Gulf.

If domestic accommodation was difficult, that for technical and administrative services was little better. At Khormaksar, the runway was excellent but apron and parking space was woefully inadequate for the increased numbers of aircraft – the Beverleys and Shackletons in particular requiring a great deal of space. Although the natural surface at

Khormaksar possessed a good bearing strength, the problem was dust and sand: every movement of an aeroplane filled the air with clouds of highly corrosive, salt laden dust. Tarmac and concrete were needed more to reduce the dust hazard than to provide a bearing surface. To the RAF's troubles were added the expansion of the civil airport at the eastern end of the runway. Unlike Nairobi, no separate airport could be built in the Colony; traffic was increasing rapidly and airliners growing ever larger with the result that, just when the RAF needed all the space available, it was being steadily squeezed down the runway by the civil interests. During the course of 1960 and 1961 almost the whole of the southern side of the 3,000 yard runway was converted into hard standings for both military and civil aircraft, together with a long taxi track between the tarmac and the runway which was designed, if an emergency caused the closure of the main runway to be used as a subsidiary landing run. It was narrow and obviously hazardous but a useful emergency facility and reasonably safe for the smaller and slower aircraft.

There was no question of keeping any of the squadron aircraft permanently in hangars: the few that were available had to be reserved for major servicing repairs and other work which could not possibly be carried out in the open. But the Beverley – at that time the largest aircraft in service anywhere in the RAF – would not fit into any hangar either at Khormaksar or Eastleigh until an ingenious invention helped to solve the problem. The tops of the twin rudders were more than 50 feet above the ground, and these would not pass into any existing hangar. A trolley-mounted hydraulic jack was designed to cradle and lift the nose wheels, whereupon the rudders were depressed by several feet and the aircraft could be towed into a hangar provided that the twin rudders were allowed to pass on either side of the roof beams. These trolleys were provided for Khormaksar and Eastleigh and proved invaluable for 84 and 30 Squadrons, although extreme care and no little skill was needed to avoid damage to the Beverleys. A couple more hangars were erected at Khormaksar in 1961 but it was never practicable to protect the aircraft from the effects of the Aden climate with the result that they all required far more servicing than would have been necessary in other theatres. Even a fresh water washing plant had to be provided, an almost unique facility, in an endeavour to keep corrosion within bounds.

Many other technical facilities had to be provided, notably air conditioned and temperature controlled buildings for servicing armament and radio equipment, and for storing aircraft and MT tyres, the latter being particularly prone to rapid deterioration in Aden.

A few only of the many facilities which had to be provided to support the expanded force have been singled out for description here. Much more could be said about, for example, one of the largest schools in the RAF built at Khormaksar which was too small before it was even opened. No 114 Maintenance Unit became so crowded and congested

in the small space, which was all that could be spared for it, that it became a major fire hazard. 'X' Site, as the explosives storage depot was called, was located in the crater of an extinct volcano and became so filled with bombs and ammunition that safety regulations and distances had to be relaxed until, in desperation, much of the army ammunition was moved out into the open desert at Little Aden under permanent guard.

The general introduction of air conditioning created a demand for a much increased electrical supply which far outstripped the capacity of Aden's single power station, and an immense new generating station had to be built in the Colony. Although Bahrein had possessed air conditioned living accommodation for years, it had never been universally approved for Aden. Admittedly temperatures did not reach those regularly experienced in the Gulf during the period June to October, but nevertheless, the consistently high temperatures and humidity made Aden, in many ways, the worse climate. With the new building programme, air conditioning was approved, on the limited scale of an air conditioning unit for one bedroom in each flat or house initially, followed later by a more general application. Barrack blocks were fully air conditioned and this allowed designs with smaller rooms and lower ceilings than had been possible with the old style buildings which depended for cooling upon the free circulation of air through large rooms with high ceilings and wide verandahs. Therefore, although air conditioning brought extra costs in equipment and power supplies, it also allowed considerable economies in building to be effected, and it certainly made Aden a much more comfortable place in which to live and work.

Some strange anomalies arose as a result of the fact that the older buildings could not, because of their design, be readily converted for air conditioning. At one time in 1961 both the AOC and the GOC were living in small nineteenth century bungalows with one bedroom fitted with window frame air conditioning units while NCOs and airmen nearby had new, fully air conditioned married quarters. However, the airmen's electricity bills were higher than those of the AOC in consequence! Many millions of pounds were poured into Aden, Kenya and the Gulf stations during the short period from 1959 until about 1962, by which time the new Middle East Command with its greatly expanded forces of all arms was fully equipped and independent of support from the Mediterranean.

This period of expansion and consolidation coincided with a number of changes in the organisation of the Command, and these have already been described in Chapter 2. The most important of these changes was undoubtedly that which took place on 1 March 1961, when Aden became the headquarters of the new unified Middle East Command, under Air Marshal S C Elworthy CB CBE DSO MVO DFC AFC who had assumed overall command from Air Chief Marshal Sir Hubert Patch in

August 1960. Air Vice-Marshal DJ P Lee remained as AOC of the newly styled Air Forces Middle East (AFME). These changes in the command structure were to be the last in the line of organisational developments which had started at the end of World War II and which had largely been dictated by events in the Eastern Mediterranean. The new Middle East Command underwent no further changes, other than the internal move of the Flag Officer, Middle East, from Bahrain to Aden, during the remaining years of Britain's stay in the Arabian Peninsula.

Operational activity during the expansion

It was fortunate that, during the period of expansion there were no operational crises of sufficient magnitude to interrupt the intensive programme of building up and training the new air force. Operations there were, in plenty, but of a type and on a scale to which the Command was well accustomed and could thus take in its stride. For as long as anyone in Aden could remember, rarely had a day passed without some operational sortie being called for somewhere in the Command. The result was that operations room and intelligence staffs, aircrew and technical personnel were all kept in constant practice. It was rarely necessary to invent unrealistic exercises to maintain operational efficiency, as was so often the case in other RAF commands.

It will be recalled from the previous chapter that the years 1957 to 1959 saw the campaign in Oman reach its peak, and move on to a successful conclusion on the Jebel Akhdar. The Aden squadrons, notably 8, 84, 78 and 37, participated actively and their operations have already been described. Flying mainly from Sharjah and Masirah, but occasionally direct from Khormaksar, the various squadron detachments gained invaluable experience but were not so hard pressed that they had to neglect training and the building up of sound technical backing and servicing schedules for the new aircraft. Beverleys, Shackletons and Twin Pioneers were all new and untried aircraft in AFAP and they needed considerable modification to adapt them to the arduous conditions in Arabia. For example, severe overheating problems initially affected the Leonides engines of the Twin Pioneer, rapid corrosion of the Beverley mainplanes behind the engines set in, and the wear of some of the standard tyres was excessive on the rough airstrips from which the aircraft were compelled to operate. These, and other operating problems quite unknown in the United Kingdom arose, and were satisfactorily solved. It is also interesting to note that the pattern of spares consumption in the Command for these aircraft was totally different from that calculated for the same aircraft elsewhere. It was sometimes difficult for the provisioning staffs in Air Ministry to believe that the requirements for a Venom squadron in Aden could be so fundamentally different from those of a similar squadron in Fighter Command. But experience proved this to be so and some basic recalculation

of provisioning scales had to be made. It was not always easy to change these scales in the case of an aircraft such as the Beverley, of which relatively few had been ordered for the RAF, and they had been provisioned for their expected life. In some respects, therefore, the Oman operations did a good service to the AFAP squadrons by revealing clearly, if brutally, the heavy consumption of all forms of equipment which such operations exacted.

Those aircraft which were not participating in Oman during this period 1957 to 1959 were kept occupied in the Western Aden Protectorate where sporadic dissidence continued almost without pause. A catalogue of the operations carried out would be long, repetitious and somewhat dull as they conformed to a well known pattern of 'flag waves', rocket strikes at small tribal targets, bombing by Shackletons, photographic reconnaissance by Meteors and supply dropping. Perhaps the most significant feature of this period was the constant support given by the Yemen to dissident factions in the Protectorate, revealing a clear determination on the part of the Yemen to provoke the maximum internal opposition to the Aden Government. This support was particularly troublesome in the Dhala and Beihan areas close to the frontier, and it was accentuated by the deployment of a number of field guns which the Yemenis concealed close to the border, and which fired intermittently at targets in the Protectorate. Whenever they were located these guns were attacked from the air, but throughout 1957 and 1958 they were a constant irritant. The field guns were often protected by anti-aircraft guns and, on one occasion in July 1958, a Venom of 8 Squadron crashed in Yemen territory near Harib, killing the pilot, Flight Lieutenant Foster. It is almost certain that he was shot down by a 12.7mm anti-aircraft gun while attacking a nearby field gun. He crashed into his target and destroyed it. Although fortunately very few aircraft were destroyed in this type of engagement, many were hit by small arms fire, often by shots from the hillsides while aircraft were flying along the wadis. The Meteor FRGs of 8 Squadron were particularly prone to damage, probably because their photographic or visual reconnaissance missions required them to fly more steadily and at a slower speed than the Venoms. The other aircraft were usually at higher altitudes in target areas, and thus out of effective range of rifle fire although it was not uncommon for a Twin Pioneer to collect a bullet hole when coming in to land at Dhala or some other forward strip.

During 1959 dissident activity was confined to the Bubakr bin Farid tribe in the Upper Aulaqi area around Sait.* This proved to be a particularly intransigent, if small scale, problem. The Bubakr were being financed and supplied from over the border, and also received some supplies from outside the Yemen which were thought to have come from Egypt through the port of Jeddah. Various areas were proscribed

*See Map 6.

as the rebels moved from one set of caves to another. Eventually the unrelenting pursuit and attack by the APL and RAF caused their capitulation, but resistance continued well into 1960.

In the meantime, it had been decided to re-equip 8 Squadron, and later 208 Squadron, with the Hunter FG9 and a number of pilots were sent to the United Kingdom to convert onto the type and to bring back to Aden two dual Hunter T7s. The conversion of the whole of 8 Squadron commenced in October 1959, and was completed without incident by the New Year. The Hunter was the first aircraft to be stationed in Aden capable of breaking the sound barrier, and it soon became necessary to introduce suitable regulations to protect the Colony from sonic bangs at irregular intervals. 'Boom Flights' were introduced during which Hunters were permitted to go supersonic only above 30,000 feet and while pointing out to sea after notifying Air Traffic Control. Some practical use was made of this phenomenon. Tribesmen could not readily distinguish between a sonic bang and the distant sound of a 1,000lb bomb exploding in a neighbouring wadi. A few well directed sonic bangs during a bombing attack could, and indeed did, give the impression of a heavier scale of attack than had in fact been carried out. This illusion was used from time to time and proved quite effective. As soon as 8 Squadron was fully operational on the Hunter, 208 Squadron also re-equipped, but in this case, it was judged expedient to send the whole squadron home to Stradishall to convert, and to fly out its new aircraft to Nairobi. This was accomplished in June, 1960 after which 208 Squadron sent one Flight at a time to Khormaksar to carry out armament training, there being no suitable range for the purpose in Kenya.

And so, during the course of 1960, the two fighter squadrons became fully operational on their Hunters, and the remainder of the AFAP force more or less completed the build up of its technical and administrative facilities. This was just as well, because the security of Persian Gulf oil was beginning to cause increasing concern. More and more priority was being accorded to the plans to safeguard the oil and, as will be seen in the next chapter, the expansion and preparation of the new Middle East Force for operations in the Persian Gulf did not come a moment too soon.

The Kuwait crisis of 1961

For some years after World War II Britain's primary reason for maintaining a military presence in the Arabian Peninsula was the need to safeguard the main sources of her oil supplies, which lay in the Persian Gulf. These were not exposed to any great risk until Arab hostility to the Palestine settlement created antagonism towards Britain, notably in Egypt, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. This development not only caused Britain to strengthen her ties with other Arab oil producing states with which she fortunately had treaties but also to take additional measures to safeguard the routes by which oil reached the United Kingdom in view of the unreliability of the Suez Canal. Of the oil producing states with which Britain was concerned, Kuwait was by far the most important in the postwar period, and it was to her treaty relationship with Kuwait that Britain attached the greatest importance.

Historical background

Kuwait is an independent and fully sovereign Arab state, situated in the north western corner of the Persian Gulf. It is an undulating desert country of 7,400 square miles with a population estimated in 1962 to total about 733,000, bounded in the north and west by Iraq, in the south and south west by Saudi Arabia and by the Gulf in the east.*

Although the history of Kuwait as an independent state goes back to the 16th Century, British influence and interest may be regarded as starting in 1899 when an Exclusive Agreement between Kuwait and Great Britain was signed. Oil was discovered in the early 1930s and a seventy-five year concession granted to the Kuwait Oil Company (a joint Anglo-American undertaking) in 1934. The interruption caused by World War II delayed large scale oil production until 1946 when 800,000 tons were exported. Such was the expansion however, that by 1968 Kuwait was the sixth largest oil producing country in the world with reserves assessed at 16.5% of the world's total reserves. In addition, the cost of production in Kuwait was then thought to be the lowest in the world.† Since its emergence as an independent Arab state, Kuwait has always been ruled by the Sabah dynasty and, to date, twelve members of that dynasty have succeeded to the throne.

**Brassey's Annual 1962* (pp. -35).

† *The Times*, 25 February 1971 (Kuwait - Special report).

Independence from its powerful neighbours, Iraq and Saudi Arabia, has been of great importance to Kuwait's rulers who were only too pleased to place that independence in the safe keeping of Great Britain at a time when trade was Britain's chief interest in the Persian Gulf. It was entirely fortuitous that Britain's small ally should later become one of the richest oil producing areas in the world. Such potential riches were hardly likely to go unnoticed and during the 1950s the covetous eyes of neighbours began to look towards Kuwait which had hitherto been beneath their notice. As her protector – and a very unpopular one with her neighbours at that – Britain could not ignore the signs which undoubtedly spelled danger for Kuwait.

By 1961 it had become clear that the 1899 Agreement was no longer consistent with Kuwait's international status and negotiations for its termination began. On 19 June 1961 an Exchange of Notes* was signed in which the new relationship between HMG and Kuwait was defined.

In view of the gravity of the events which followed, it is worth recording the four conclusions which were contained in the Exchange of Notes. They were as follows:

- a. The Agreement of the 23rd January 1899, shall be terminated as being inconsistent with the sovereignty and independence of Kuwait.
- b. The relations between the two countries shall continue to be governed by a spirit of close friendship.
- c. When appropriate the two Governments shall consult together on matters which concern them both.
- d. Nothing in these conclusions shall affect the readiness of Her Majesty's Government to assist the Government of Kuwait if the latter request such assistance.

On 25 June 1961, six days after the Exchange of Notes, Iraq, through the mouthpiece of General Kassim the Prime Minister, claimed that Kuwait properly belonged to Iraq on the grounds that, under the old Ottoman Empire, it was part of the province of Basrah – which was indisputably part of Iraq. This claim, which was repeated on 14 July, was accompanied by the movement of troops and armour south from Baghdad towards the Kuwait border. These were the background events which led up to the subsequent British action in Kuwait during July and the months that followed.

Plans for intervention

During the years leading up to 1961, a succession of plans for British military intervention in Kuwait under varying circumstances was formulated. With the advent of the new unified Command based on Aden, the Commander-in-Chief was given full responsibility for Kuwait planning. In November 1960, Air Marshal S C Elworthy, the C-in-C at that

*Cmmd. 409.

time, produced a Reinforced Theatre Plan – code name VANTAGE – which, with small changes and some updating, proved to be the plan which was put into operation when the crisis arose in July 1961.

There were certain features peculiar to Kuwait which had to be taken into account in any plan for intervention. In the first place, Kuwait was relatively isolated and far from British bases, some 1,500 miles from Aden and a similar distance from Cyprus via the only practicable air routes. Secondly the small area of Kuwait and its proximity to Iraq made it extremely vulnerable to surprise attack over terrain which is excellent for tanks and wheeled vehicles. Consequently, intervention plans had to provide for extremely rapid initial movement and subsequent build up of forces on the ground in Kuwait. Additional features were the shallow and confined waters at the head of the Gulf which created restrictions and hazards for naval and military shipping, the intense heat and frequent sandstorms at certain times of the year, lack of fresh water, and from an air defence point of view, total lack of any form of early warning radar.

It was necessary for plan VANTAGE to satisfy two requirements – to deter aggression from across the Iraq border, or to restore internal security should the Ruler lose control. However, the independent status of Kuwait and the terms of agreement with the United Kingdom placed considerable restrictions on the ability of British forces to intervene and, for these reasons, the plan provided for intervention in support of the Ruler under certain specified circumstances.

In order to meet different contingencies the Middle East Command formulated two separate plans within VANTAGE. Plan A was designed to put into Kuwait a force suitably composed to meet the threat from Iraq. In view of Iraq's need to concentrate armoured forces in the area of Basrah before any invasion of Kuwait was practicable, it was assumed in this plan that a few days warning would be available. Plan B, on the other hand, called for very rapid intervention, with those forces which were immediately available, to restore internal order, and then to build up a force suitable to meet an Iraqi invasion should this materialise. Bearing in mind that VANTAGE was prepared before the expansion of forces in the new Middle East Command was complete, frequent updating as more forces became available was necessary. In fact a new edition of the plan, with the code name BELLRINGER was in course of preparation when tension increased so dramatically following General Kassim's claim in June 1961.

Events leading to the crisis

Prior to this date, no threat to the security of Kuwait had materialised to an extent that required more than routine revision of the plans for intervention. Even as late as 12 June, intelligence assessments considered an attack by Iraq upon Kuwait as unlikely. If however, such an unlikely attack materialised, it was thought that it would be preceded

by an attempted insurrection and some warning could, therefore, be expected. These assessments prompted the conclusion that, provided authority to intervene was given in time, the United Kingdom forces deployed in and adjacent to the area had the capacity to protect Kuwait against all likely threats.

General Kassim's strongly worded statement had to be regarded seriously coming as it did so soon after Britain's recognition of the full independence of such a small and vulnerable state, possessing so much potential wealth. A new situation had developed overnight, and its assessment by both political and military authorities in London and Middle East Command was not easy. The statement from Iraq contained one great imponderable: did Iraq intend to use force against Kuwait or was the announcement merely intended to reserve Iraq's claims following the Anglo-Kuwait agreement of 19 June? As no significant attack could be mounted without moving troops and armour south to the Basrah area, from their normal locations, it was hoped that such movement would be detected, thus giving the four days of warning upon which the British plans were based. What could not, however, be anticipated in planning circles was the timing of a crisis to coincide with a military parade in Basrah to mark Iraq's National Day on 14 July, an occasion for which it would be quite normal for troops and armour to move to the Basrah area. Troops and armour in about brigade strength were reported moving towards Basrah from the Baghdad area at this critical time. The British Ambassador to Iraq considered aggression to be unlikely, although not out of the question. As any precautionary step to place British forces on the alert at this stage would clearly give General Kassim a propaganda advantage and might encourage him to act, the British Government decided to watch and wait for the time being, fully realising that the four days of warning which the plans required were being whittled away. Meanwhile the Ruler of Kuwait received further assurances of help should he need it.

Command arrangements

As tension mounted during the last days of June, a particularly hot, dusty and unpleasant June at the head of the Gulf, it is important to understand the command organisation in the theatre, and also the long and complicated routes by which any intervention in Kuwait would have to be carried out.

Not only was the security of Kuwait the most important task of Middle East Command, but it was one of the main reasons why the Command had been constituted as it had. It was fortunate that the Command staff and Air Marshal (by now Sir Charles) Elworthy himself had been in office for a sufficient period before the Kuwait crisis erupted to have assimilated the problems of intervention, and to have ensured that adequate plans were drawn up. To assist him in these tasks, the Commander-in-Chief had his three single Service subordinate com-

manders who were, at that time Rear Admiral Fitzroy-Talbot (Flag Officer, Middle East), Major-General Robertson (General Officer Commanding) and Air Vice-Marshal Lee (Air Officer Commanding). The Command was so organised that the GOC and AOC worked from the Command Headquarters in Aden, but the FOME was based in Bahrein with his headquarters in the naval shore establishment, *HMS Jufair*. This unusual separation of subordinate commanders was a temporary relic of the days before the advent of a unified Middle East Command, when the main naval interest in the area lay in the Persian Gulf. In certain respects this turned out to be fortuitous. As intervention in Kuwait was the largest and most important commitment for which the Command was responsible it had always been the intention of the Commander-in-Chief to move his operational headquarters from Aden to Bahrein. Not only was it important for him to conduct the operation in close co-operation with the Political Resident, Persian Gulf who was located in Bahrein, but the existence there of the Flag Officer, Middle East, and the Military Committee, Persian Gulf provided a ready made nucleus for an operational headquarters.

Explanation of the command arrangements would not be complete without some indication of the difficulties of reinforcement due to the distances involved, and the inadequacy of communications to support a rapid build up of forces and their subsequent maintenance. It is not always appreciated that the Arabian Peninsula has no railways (unless one can count a miniature line on Masirah Island built to transfer supplies from the unloading quay to the RAF station). Nor are there any trunk roads in that whole vast area of desert and mountains from Iraq to Aden. All men and materials have to be moved by sea or by air: the following table shows the immense distances over which all forces and supplies for Plan VANTAGE had to travel:

Table of distances

<i>To Kuwait from:</i>	<i>Nautical miles</i>
UK via Cyprus, Turkey, Iran	3,790
Cyprus via Turkey, Iran	1,770
Nairobi direct	1,940
Singapore via Gan	4,235
Aden via Salalah, Bahrein	1,560
Bahrein direct	225

To these physical difficulties must be added the political problem created by the need to obtain overflying rights. Sensitivity to overflying, particularly by military aircraft, was a fairly recent political development which many newly independent countries saw as a useful form of pressurisation to apply to the larger nations. Unfortunately laws appertaining to airspace comparable to the freedom of the high seas have

never been internationally agreed. The ban on overflying certain Middle East countries necessitated long and circuitous routes via Turkey and Iran for all aircraft flying into Kuwait from Cyprus, Europe or the United Kingdom – unless an even longer route via Central Africa and Aden was followed. Saudi Arabia could not be overflown from Aden or Kenya and even the recently independent and hitherto co-operative Somalia was sensitive about being overflown by military aircraft travelling from Nairobi to Aden. Additional time consuming stops for refuelling were, in the event, necessitated by compulsory diversions from direct point-to-point routes. Overflying had, therefore become an extremely important factor in formulating plans for bringing rapid aid to Kuwait. In fact, when the physical difficulties of surface communications were added to the political problems of overflying, Kuwait became one of the most difficult places in the world to reinforce speedily and in strength. These difficulties were not only to play an important, even crucial, part in the crisis when it arose, but were also to test the flexibility of Plan VANTAGE to the extreme.

Every plan has to be written with the adequacy of telecommunications, radio and radar facilities closely in mind. There were no land lines of any significance in the Peninsula and military point-to-point radio communications, although adequate for normal routine tasks, had insufficient capacity to accept a level of high priority traffic inseparable from an operation on the scale of VANTAGE. As already mentioned, Kuwait possessed no air defence radar, so that early warning of attack could not be provided by radar means until or unless some form of mobile or shipborne radar could be provided. Because of these shortcomings the military planners were always conscious of the risks inherent in trying to defend an area so close to a frontier without adequate warning radar, and also of the need which would inevitably arise to exercise a strict control over telecommunications traffic if the inadequate systems were not to become grossly overloaded.

Availability and readiness of forces*

On 26 June 1961, the day following Kassim's provocative claim to Kuwait, all the forces in the Command which were earmarked for VANTAGE were standing at four days readiness for the operation, except for a few which were at a higher state for other commitments within the theatre. This was a fairly relaxed state of readiness which was fully justified by the current intelligence assessments already mentioned. A quick review of the disposition of the Command resources revealed the following availability.

Royal Navy

Of the three Persian Gulf frigates, *Loch Alvie* was at her base in Bahrein,

* Much of the narrative which follows is based upon the subsequent report on the operation by the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East.

Loch Ruthven in East African waters and *Loch Fyne* in process of docking at Karachi for maintenance. The Amphibious Warfare Squadron, comprising the HQ ship *Meon* and LCTs *Striker*, *Redoubt*, *Bastion* and *Parapet*, was at Bahrein, with a half squadron of Centurion tanks of the 3rd Carabiniers embarked in *Striker* and due to be relieved by another half squadron in a War Department LST on 4 July. The LST was already in the Persian Gulf preparing for the handover. The commando ship, *Bulwark*, with most of 42 Commando Royal Marines embarked was at Karachi on passage to the Persian Gulf to undertake certain hot weather trials.

Army

All army units were at their normal peacetime locations. HQ 24 Brigade Group with the 1st King's, 1st Royal Inniskillens and Group elements were in Kenya, two companies of the 2nd Coldstream Guards in Bahrein, 11th Hussars, 3rd Carabiniers and 45 Commando Royal Marines in Aden, and small detachments of these Aden units were at Sharjah and elsewhere.

Royal Air Force

Nos 8 and 208 Squadrons (Hunters) were at Aden and Nairobi respectively, while the AFME medium range transport force (twelve Beverleys and six Valettas) and the short range force (five Pembrokes and sixteen Twin Pioneers) were engaged on their routine tasks. No 37 Squadron (four Shackletons) was at its base at Khormaksar.

Stockpiled weapons and equipment were an important feature of the plan. Eight Centurion tanks and ammunition were held in Kuwait itself, and in Bahrein, considerable stocks of armoured cars, soft skinned vehicles, aircraft equipment, guns, ammunition, tentage, radio equipment and food were held in readiness for the rapid build up of forces in Kuwait once the initial wave had established itself there. Finally, additional reserves, mainly of food, were held back in Kenya.

Of these forces available within the Command, *HMS Bulwark* with 42 Commando on board was the only bonus as, quite fortuitously, she was very close to the Gulf when the emergency arose. It was also fortuitous that it coincided with a routine change of the half squadron of Centurions which for some months had been maintained afloat in LSTs in the Gulf without their crews, who could always be flown up from Aden in less time than it would take to offload the tanks. Thus the presence of a whole squadron of Centurions was a valuable additional bonus.

For the longer term build up of forces needed for plan VANTAGE, the Commander-in-Chief depended upon reinforcement from outside his Command – a parachute battalion and PR aircraft from Cyprus, a Canberra strike squadron from Germany, transport aircraft and other resources from the United Kingdom. These reinforcements were all available and held at appropriate states of readiness, but the isolation of

Kuwait and the problems of transporting forces to the head of the Gulf meant that any build-up in Kuwait subsequent to the initial entry was bound to be relatively slow. The scarcity of accommodation and the rudimentary facilities available in the Command made it impossible to hold forces there additional to the normal complement for any length of time, and it was clear that Britain would always be at a considerable disadvantage in protecting Kuwait from any large scale determined attack, particularly from her immediate neighbours. It was with this availability of forces in mind that Sir Charles Elworthy received telegrams from HM Ambassador and the Military Attaché in Iraq on 27 and 28 June indicating that Kassim intended to move forces south to the Basrah area with the capability and possibly the intention of launching an attack upon Kuwait.

Although no request to implement the treaty of protection had been received from the Ruler, it was decided to initiate certain preparatory moves on 29 June. In addition to ordering *Bulwark* to leave Karachi and proceed direct to Kuwait, which he had done on the previous day, FOME ordered the headquarters ship *Meon* and *Striker* with the half squadron of tanks embarked to move to Kuwait but to remain out of sight of land. HQ 24 Brigade was brought to a higher state of readiness in Kenya, the tank crews of the 3rd Carabiniers were despatched to Bahrain to link up with their embarked tanks and the stockpile at Bahrain was opened up.

As the initial defence of Kuwait against Iraqi tanks and other armoured vehicles, and against air attack, was to be the responsibility of the RAF, not a moment could be wasted in getting the two DF/GA squadrons as close to the scene of potential operations as possible. The AOC decided to move both squadrons to Bahrain on 30 June, and this was accomplished within the day. It presented no great problem for 8 Squadron as the flight of 1,300 miles from Khormaksar to Bahrain was within the range of their Hunters at cruising speeds and altitudes with long range tanks. No 208 Squadron however, had to cover almost twice the distance and this could only be achieved by refuelling at Aden. The Squadron covered the 1,000 miles from Embakasi to Khormaksar in two hours during the morning, refuelled and took a sandwich lunch in their flying kit, and set off for Bahrain in company with 8 Squadron, cutting the corners across central Oman as closely as was prudent. It was a magnificent flight without incident and the whole force of Hunters not only landed and were dispersed at Bahrain during the afternoon, but were serviced, armed and by nightfall were fully operational with a variety of weapons to meet any attack on Kuwait. The distance from Bahrain to the Kuwait-Iraq frontier was just within the operational radius of action of the Hunter which meant that, if Kuwait were to be invaded before the Ruler had invited the British forces in, 8 and 208 Squadrons could operate in a severely restricted fashion direct from Bahrain.

Further preparatory moves were authorised which mainly shortened the readiness of naval and army units, but the move of a Canberra B(I) squadron with Mk 6 or 8 aircraft from Germany to Sharjah was ordered and two Shackletons from 37 Squadron moved from Aden to Bahrein. In addition to their bombing and rescue roles, the Shackletons were well suited to night reconnaissance being equipped with flares and cameras and having the endurance to remain over the operational area for several hours at a time. The Canberra squadron from Germany which had to be located somewhat unsuitably at Sharjah due to lack of space at Bahrein provided the strike potential to reinforce the Hunters and to attack concentrations of armour and ammunition beyond the battlefield area.

The AFME transport force of Beverleys and Valettas was more than fully occupied during these preparatory moves and it was necessary for the AOC to commandeering one of the UK-Singapore Britannias as it passed through the Command and also to charter a Comet 4 and an Argonaut from East African Airways to assist with the lift of HQ 24 Brigade to the Gulf. Rarely, if ever, had fighting troops gone to war in a jet airliner attended by stewardesses who gave them the full civilian passenger treatment: the harsh realities of Kuwait, when they eventually reached it, took a good deal of the gilt off that gingerbread! Thus by the evening of 30 June, the Commander-in-Chief was able to report to the Chiefs of Staff that all forces had been called forward to concentrate in Bahrein in accordance with the appropriate part of Plan VANTAGE, and only an invitation from the Ruler of Kuwait was awaited. This in fact was received on the same evening, and an instruction to 'implement VANTAGE' was issued. The only point upon which the C-in-C could not obtain clear guidance was the extent to which he could use his air striking force, notably the Canberras, for counter offensive action against Iraqi forces in rear areas between Basrah and the Kuwait frontier. The fact that no authority was forthcoming gave the C-in-C some impression that HMG did not contemplate aggression by Iraq very seriously. Although this was to some extent comforting, the omission of detailed instructions to cover all contingencies revealed a lack of firm Government direction for the active use of its forces.

The first landings

The Commander-in-Chief's appreciation of the situation at this time was that:

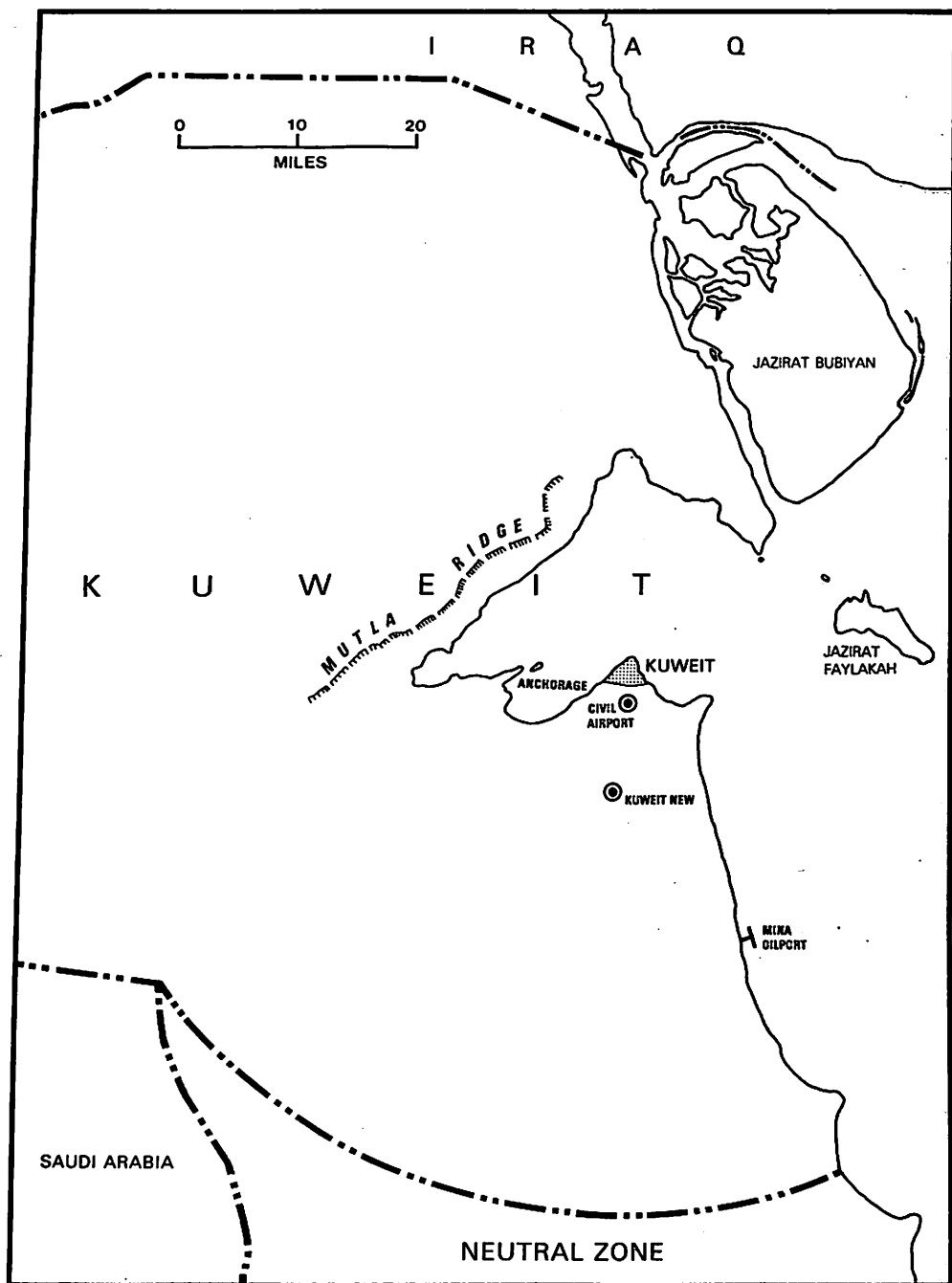
- a. An Iraqi attack on Kuwait seemed imminent.
- b. Sufficient teeth forces must be built up in Kuwait quickly to repel such an attack, or if it materialised as early as 1 July, to delay it while forces were built up.
- c. The Ruler's request indicated that British landings would be unopposed and there would, therefore, be no requirement for a parachute drop.

- d. The initial force should comprise two infantry battalions, a squadron of tanks, a squadron of armoured cars and two squadrons of RAF Hunters. This force should be complete in Kuwait by dawn on 2 July.

The forces which the C-in-C saw as being able to meet this deadline of 2 July were 42 Commando in *HMS Bulwark* then entering the Gulf, the 2nd Battalion The Parachute Regiment in Cyprus which could be flown directly into Kuwait by Transport Command aircraft, a squadron of Centurions from those embarked in *Striker* and those stockpiled in Kuwait, part of a squadron of armoured cars from the Bahrein stockpile, manned by personnel flown from Aden, and finally 8 and 208 Squadrons. The initial task of this force would be to secure the airfield, Kuwait New, and then to move forward to meet an attack north west of the town. With the help of the Kuwaiti Army, this was the minimum force thought capable of delaying an Iraqi advance until more substantial reinforcements could be flown in.

At this crucial point a totally unexpected factor presented itself – one which had not been allowed for in the plan and which took both Whitehall and the Middle East Command completely by surprise. Both Turkey and the Sudan refused permission for the RAF aircraft carrying forces to Kuwait from Cyprus and the United Kingdom to overfly their countries. The shock of this decision was all the greater, coming as it did, from two countries well disposed towards Britain who had never in the past put any obstacles in the way of overflying. The immediate effect of these bans, which were made known to the C-in-C during the night of 30 June/1 July, was that he could no longer count upon the parachute battalion arriving from Cyprus in time for the initial entry into Kuwait. Two of the three possible routes available for Transport Command aircraft were knocked out at a stroke, leaving only the long route via Central Africa, necessitating a flight of at least 7,000 miles from the United Kingdom to Kuwait. Although overflying problems had arisen in the past, and particularly during and after the Suez crisis of 1956, this was the first occasion on which a specific British operation had been affected by such a problem. There clearly had to be a first time and, with the advantage of hindsight, it probably came at a good time as it ensured that all future operational plans relying upon the transportation of troops by air had to include adequate allowances for the denial of authority to overfly certain countries, even if they have hitherto raised no objections. The realisation that here was a political weapon of considerable value had spread through many newly independent countries, and no longer could the great Powers fly over them with impunity.

This unexpected development placed Sir Charles Elworthy in a quandary. He was faced with the choice of either seeking authority to delay the entry into Kuwait on 1 July, or sending in only 42 Commando



Map 7: AREA AROUND KUWEIT

and a squadron of Carabiniers together with the two Hunter Squadrons. The nearest additional forces were 45 Commando in Aden and two companies of Coldstream Guards in Bahrein, neither of which had the transportation to arrive in Kuwait on 1 July. The first course was unthinkable as the Ruler had requested the assistance which he had for so long been promised. Fortunately, within a few hours of imposing the ban, the Sudanese Government lifted it and, in spite of the difficulties which this presented to Transport Command, their long range aircraft began to reach Aden earlier and in greater numbers than required by the plan, thus making it possible to speed the entry into Kuwait of some of the later units, notably 45 Commando. It did, however, mean that some of the Britannia and Beverley crews had to make a quick turn round at Khormaksar and fly full loads straight on to Kuwait after a long and tiring flight from the United Kingdom. They far exceeded the permitted hours on duty, but this was an operational emergency which justified breaking the rules.

The overflying ban imposed by Turkey was lifted, but not until after midnight on 30 June/1 July, and even then overflying by night only was authorised. Although an improvement over a total ban, it produced a situation whereby it was impossible even for a Comet to fly from Cyprus to Kuwait and return during the hours of darkness. Not only did this almost halve the utilisation of the transport aircraft on that route, but it compelled aircraft to remain at Kuwait exposed to attack during daylight or, as an alternative, to fly empty to the greater safety of Bahrein, to await the return over Turkey at nightfall. Whichever course was adopted, it added to the congestion at Kuwait or Bahrein and complicated the movement plan considerably.

The decision was made to go ahead with the initial landings and to make good deficiencies in the first wave of forces as rapidly as transport would permit. Consequently, at 0900 hours on 1 July the first Royal Marine Commandos from *Bulwark* were landed at Kuwait New airfield in the helicopters of 848 Naval Air Squadron, in very bad visibility due to dust storms. Shortly afterwards the Hunters of 8 Squadron flew in from Bahrein, and came to immediate readiness. Right up to the time that the Hunters were airborne from Bahrein, it had been intended to use the old Kuwait civil airport until Kuwait New was ready. Only at the last moment was it learned that the latter was usable, although not completed, and the plan was changed. Meanwhile some difficulty was being experienced in getting the tanks from *Striker* ashore. The 'hard'* in Kuwait harbour, which was the designated landing point, had been removed during the previous week. An alternative landing area was found with great difficulty by the Amphibious Warfare Squadron, but it was unsuitable for the landing ships and craft to beach, and all tanks and vehicles had to be unloaded using a Rhino ferry which had been

*A specially prepared concrete landing ramp suitable for LSTs to unload heavy tanks.

brought along for just such an eventuality. The blowing sand and dust created as many difficulties for those landing from the sea as it did for those further inland who were arriving by air. And so, somewhat thin on the ground, the first forces were in Kuwait according to plan and, within a few hours, 42 Commando had moved up to the Mutla Ridge, a feature to the north west of Kuwait which faced the Iraq border, and which was already occupied by the Kuwait Army.

The air transport plan

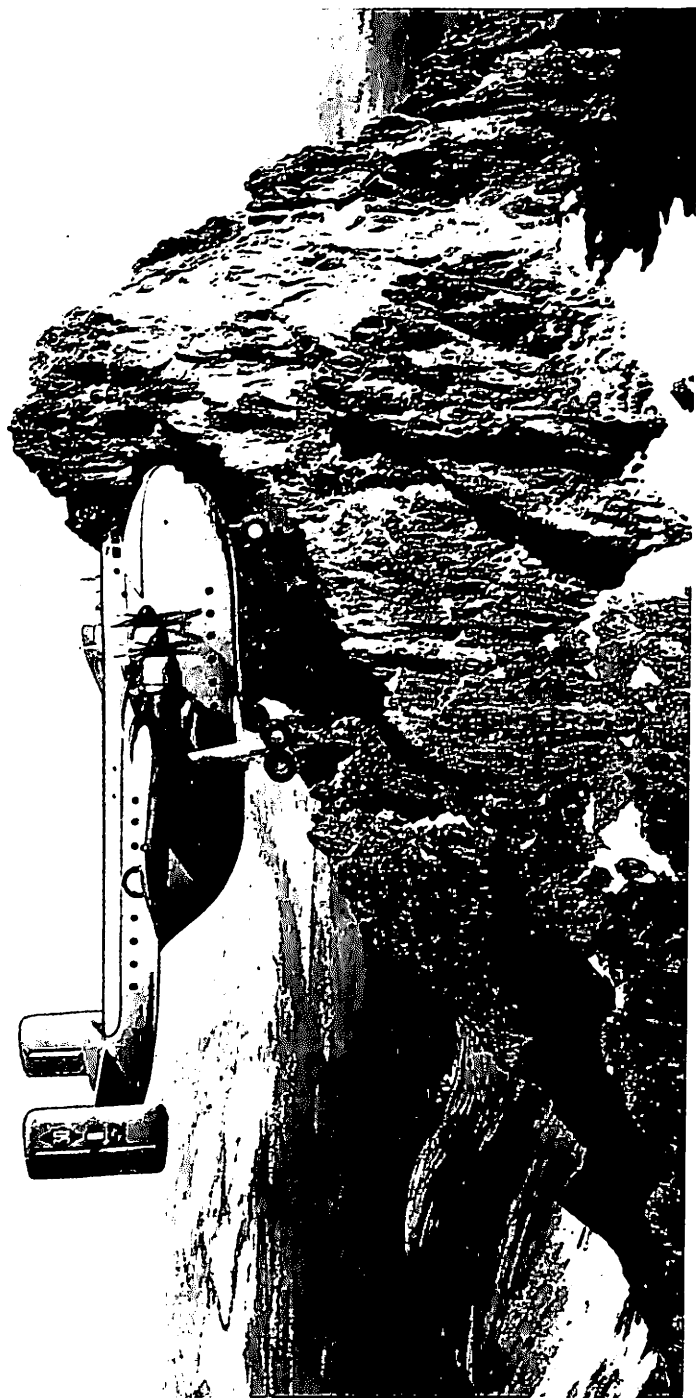
Back in Aden Air Vice-Marshal Lee, the AOC, was re-arranging the air movement tables of the plan, which had been thrown into complete disarray, firstly by the sudden ban on overflying Turkey and the Sudan, and secondly by the lack of the four days warning period upon which VANTAGE was based, and during which transport aircraft had been planned to concentrate at various locations to be ready to lift troops and equipment from Nairobi, Aden, Cyprus and the United Kingdom as soon as the operation was initiated.

The Chiefs of Staff had, on 1 July, decided to despatch the first five Britannias to Aden via the El Adem-Nairobi-Aden route. They had originally been intended for the lift of the parachute battalion in Cyprus but, as it was temporarily impossible to fly that unit into Kuwait, they were despatched to Aden with RAF personnel and a Parachute Regiment light battery. While these Britannias were on their way to Aden, the C-in-C decided that the first part of the VANTAGE plan must be scrapped, and that the highest priority must be given to getting fighting troops of any category into Kuwait by any means possible to support 42 Commando and the squadron of Centurions. No 45 Commando was the first and obvious choice, together with the 11th Hussars in Aden and the two companies of Coldstream Guards in Bahrein. As soon as the five Britannias reached Aden, this lift began, each aircraft being reloaded at Khormaksar and pushed on to Kuwait. In addition the Royal Rhodesian Air Force was asked to assist and immediately provided three Canadair aircraft which proved invaluable in starting the lift of 24 Brigade units from Nairobi direct into Kuwait. During the night 1/2 July the AOC had a long and valuable teleprinter conference with the Ministry of Defence which resulted in a complete re-arrangement of the programme for the Britannia force to enable the air lift of the parachute battalion to be carried out over the Turkish route from Cyprus during the following night, 2/3 July.

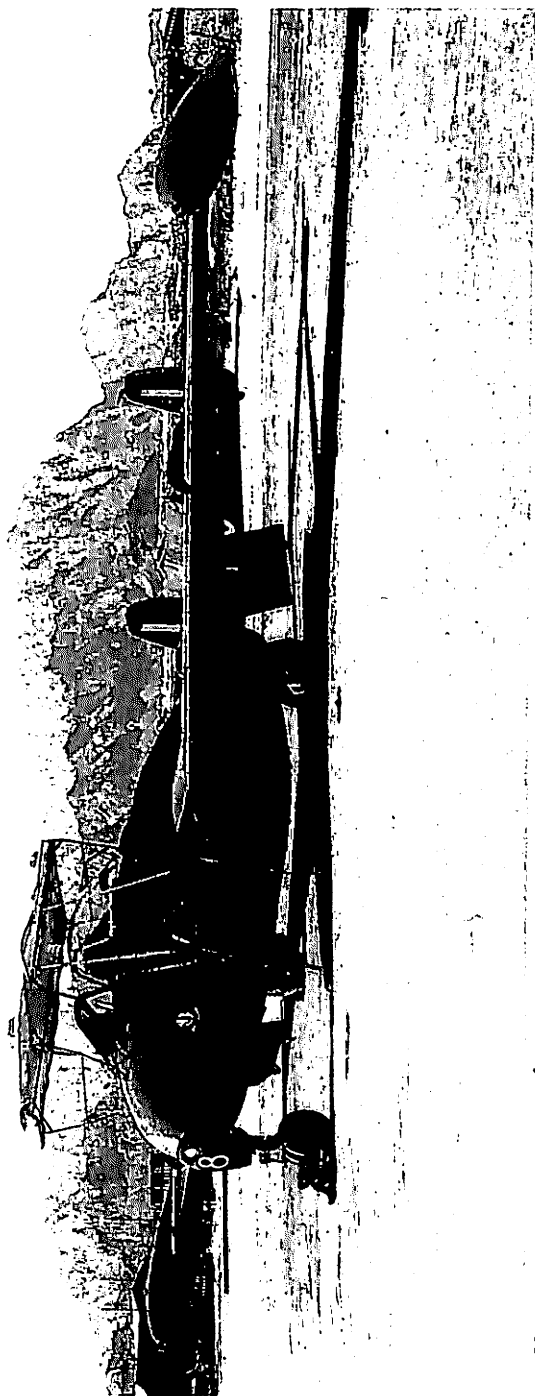
All these changes of plan caused some difficulties for the tactical commander in Kuwait, Brigadier D G T Horsford, Officer Commanding 24 Brigade. He had been promised a balanced build up of forces to complement the resources of the Kuwait Army and to enable him to meet any attack across the Mutla Ridge with suitable troops and supporting weapons. To achieve this balance, he required most of the units of his own Brigade to be flown in from Nairobi at a very early stage and



19. Ceremonial troop of the Aden Protectorate Levies and RAF Police escorting the Commander-in-Chief in Aden, 1959.



20. Beverley of 30 Squadron over the peak of Mount Kenya.



21. Venom FB1 of 8 Squadron with improvised sun canopy.



22. Hunter F-4Gs of 208 Squadron with Mount Kilimanjaro (19,265 feet) in the background.

this was indeed contained in the plan. Under the circumstances, however, the C-in-C had no option but to despatch the first fighting troops who were available at the expense of a sound balance.

The flexibility shown by Transport Command in switching aircraft and routes to suit the changed circumstances was quite outstanding with the result that, by 4 July, the maximum number of transport aircraft had been concentrated where needed and committed to the airlift. This force comprised fourteen Britannias, twelve Beverleys and twenty-seven Hastings of Transport Command; three Royal Rhodesian Air Force Canadairs and two Argonauts chartered from East African Airways as well as the twelve Beverleys and six Valettas of the AFME force. The AFME aircraft were largely employed in shuttling between Bahrain and Kuwait so that Bahrain could be used as the main terminal for the long range aircraft and thus reduce the congestion at Kuwait New, where the two Hunter squadrons occupied a great deal of the limited hard standing area. This congestion, as well as the need to avoid exposing transport aircraft to the risk of attack, necessitated some extremely complicated and detailed movement schedules in and out of the airfield. Indeed, the whole airlift proved to be a magnificent exercise for Movement Staffs who, throughout the whole operation, were never able to return to the cut and dried Movement Tables incorporated in the original VANTAGE plan.

Command arrangements

It had always been the intention of the Commander-in-Chief to exercise command of operation VANTAGE from Bahrain, partly to be some 1,200 miles closer to Kuwait and thus reduce the load on communications between the Gulf and Middle East HQ in Aden, but mainly to join the Political Resident, Persian Gulf, and thus have expert political advice at hand. Thus, on 2 July, when he was satisfied that his presence in Aden was no longer essential, the C-in-C moved to Bahrain with a skeleton secretariat, accompanied by the GOC, Middle East Land Forces. The AOC remained in Aden until 5 July to ensure that the main airlift was properly co-ordinated and then he too moved to Bahrain. The Flag Officer, Middle East, placed his shore headquarters, *HMS Jufair*, at the disposal of the C-in-C and a joint headquarters was formed to control the whole operation. A Joint Operations Centre (JOC) set up in Bahrain was manned only as an information centre because tactical command was exercised in Kuwait itself by the Commander 24 Brigade (for land forces), the Senior Air Staff Officer, AFME (Air Commodore T B de la P Beresford) for air forces, and the Captain, Amphibious Warfare Squadron (for naval forces) until *HMS Victorious* arrived later on with a flag officer aboard. This chain of command worked very well indeed, any difficulties which arose being largely due to overloading the inadequate communication facilities, and not to any fault in the organisation. The C-in-C and his three subordinate commanders were able to

visit Kuwait daily from Bahrein, if they so wished, the distance between Bahrein and Kuwait being less than 300 miles. This relieved Kuwait of all the paraphernalia inseparable from a command headquarters but enabled the C-in-C to keep in the closest personal touch with day to day developments in Kuwait and to return to his centre of policy direction where the best communications to Aden and London were available, in little more than an hour.

It was at one time suggested in London that this would be an excellent opportunity for HQ 38 Group, recently formed at Odiham, to take over at least tactical air command in Kuwait, the Group having been specifically established to tackle 'brush fire' conflagrations in remote parts of the world. This suggestion was heavily frowned upon by both the C-in-C and the AOC on the grounds that their own staffs had planned and lived with VANTAGE, knew its details intimately and were experienced in the terrain and operating conditions. Many of the mobile facilities available in 38 Group were indeed used. For example, Mobile Air Movement Staffs (MAMS) proved indispensable to the small and hard pressed Movements cells in Middle East Command. But there was no shortage of experienced operational commanders for tasks such as Commanding Officer of Kuwait New which was filled by Group Captain Joel (the CO Eastleigh), and it would have been most disadvantageous to have introduced strangers into positions of responsibility within an overseas command which possessed all the necessary expertise and experience, but merely lacked certain operational and administrative ingredients.

The build up

The plan for securing Kuwait was to deploy two battalions along the Mutla Ridge supported by British and Kuwaiti tanks and artillery; to hold a further battalion with a squadron of British tanks as a counter-attack force; to keep a fourth battalion in Kuwait Town as a mobile reserve, with a fifth back in Bahrein. The screen between the Ridge and the frontier was to be provided by British and Kuwaiti armoured cars. The force was to be supported by the two squadrons of Hunters and some Twin Pioneers at Kuwait New airfield, a Canberra squadron at Sharjah, half a squadron of Shackletons and two squadrons of Beverleys at Bahrein, and also some photographic reconnaissance Canberras.

On 1 July, the first four Canberra B(I) 8s of 88 Squadron reached Sharjah from Germany, to be joined twenty-four hours later by eight B(I) 6s of 213 Squadron, also from Germany. An interdiction plan for the counter-air phase was drawn up in Bahrein and co-ordinated with the staff of HQ NEAF in Cyprus to ensure that the squadron at Sharjah and the Canberra squadrons in Cyprus were allocated targets in southern and northern Iraq respectively, which would cause maximum dislocation of the Iraq Air Force. The inadequacy of the airfield at

Sharjah once again showed up, as it had done so often in the past, under the operation of jet aircraft. The Canberras with a full load not only cut up the airfield badly, but had considerable difficulty in getting airborne safely from the rutted surface. Sharjah became an anxiety throughout the operation, and it was this experience which subsequently influenced the decision to provide it with a hard topped runway.

As the concentration of transport aircraft built up at Aden from the United Kingdom, Cyprus, Singapore and Rhodesia, it became possible to accelerate the flow of troops into Kuwait in accordance with the C-in-C's revised priorities. The whole of 45 Commando Royal Marines had left Aden by the evening of the 2 July, and on the same night, the lift of the 2nd Parachute Regiment from Cyprus commenced and was completed in three nights. Thereafter the main effort was utilised in moving the units of 24 Brigade in from Kenya and, finally, the reinforcements from the United Kingdom were flown in. Considering the distances which had to be covered by the transport aircraft, it was remarkable that the build up was completed by 9 July, by which time the total strength of personnel in Kuwait was Navy 23, Army 4,112, Royal Marines 960, RAF 596; a total of 5,691. In addition, many hundreds of tons of equipment, ammunition and rations had also been flown in or lifted by sea.

Air defence and communications

Probably the two greatest problems which arose were those of providing early warning for air defence purposes in the initial stage of the operation, and arranging enough communication channels for all purposes. Neither of these problems was unforeseen: suitable equipment simply did not exist in the theatre either to serve the Hunters in their air defence role, or to satisfy the colossal demands for joint service communications between the operational area and Bahrein and between Bahrein, Aden, Cyprus, Nairobi and London. Although on a relatively small scale, VANTAGE was a highly complex and fast moving operation in a primitive area where very few indigenous resources could be relied upon.

As already mentioned, Kuwait possessed no radar of any kind and, therefore, any early warning equipment had either to be transported in and erected, or reliance had to be placed upon shipborne radar which has a limited performance over land. The only sophisticated mobile early warning radar in use by the RAF was contained in large assemblies of vehicles known as 'Convoys'. The Type T Convoy, for example, required about ten Beverleys to transport it and it had never been designed for a rapid 'brushfire' type of operation such as VANTAGE. Furthermore none of these so-called 'mobile' radars existed in Middle East Command. The only transportable radar which did exist in the theatre and which had recently arrived in Bahrein for incorporation in a later version of VANTAGE was a Type SC787 radar. This was a light-

weight equipment, lacking a height-finding capability and with an inferior performance to the Type T Convoy, but a great deal better than no radar at all. It was flown into Kuwait at an early stage and there manned by an operating crew flown out from the United Kingdom. Having been pressed into use before its planned date, and before even the essential test equipment for it had arrived, it is not surprising that considerable difficulty was experienced in erecting and calibrating it, and it was not fully operational until 18 July. Fortunately however, the radar of *HMS Bulwark* proved to be effective up to a range of 80 miles and she stood in close to shore during daylight hours, returning south during the night as a precaution against air attack. By 9 July, *HMS Victorious* and her escorts arrived from the Far East and were able to provide much improved radar cover, and also to contribute her Sea Vixens to the air defence of the area.

Although the Iraqi air threat was not regarded as unduly serious, there is no doubt that until *HMS Victorious* arrived, followed by the installation of the Type SC 787 radar, the air defence capability was extremely limited, and could have posed almost insuperable problems for the two Hunter squadrons. Fortunately the appalling flying conditions, which will be described later and which made visual identification of anything on the ground extremely difficult, applied equally to the Iraq Air Force: they would have found accurate air attacks on forward position, armour and aircraft on the ground almost impossible to achieve, particularly for the first few days after the British arrival.

Long before the operation took place, it was known that the communications throughout the Arabian Peninsula were inadequate, and would be severely tested if VANTAGE ever had to be carried out. It has to be appreciated that none of the military and RAF bases between Nairobi in the south and Bahrain in the north were connected by landline. Distances were, on the whole, too great for radio telephone, and all military point-to-point communications depended upon teleprinter links, W/T, or simply air mail letters. Projects for improving the long range facilities, particularly at Aden and Bahrain, were in hand when VANTAGE was implemented, as part of the expansion of supporting facilities in the Command as a whole, but they were incomplete, and the existing communications were quickly overloaded by the flood of operational traffic. At least a six channel link was needed between Aden and Bahrain.

The first signs of overloading came early in the preparatory phase when precedences started to be upgraded indiscriminately in an endeavour to get instructions and messages through. Even the highest Flash precedence was much abused and it became necessary for the C-in-C to ask for a procedure known as Minimise to be introduced. This was an emergency censorship procedure on all messages and it was applied on 2 July to all communications affecting the Middle East Command. Although the need to introduce the Minimise procedure appeared to in-

dicating a complete breakdown in communications discipline, it must be remembered that VANTAGE was not only a highly complex movements problem, made even more complicated by the unexpected need to change the operational build-up fundamentally, but it also required many administrative changes, the order for which could only go through the limited operational channels. It is difficult to believe but, at one time, the AOC was bundling up packets of Immediate signals and despatching them to Bahrein from Aden by special aircraft! His own Canberra was sometimes used for this unusual purpose: being able to complete the journey in two and three-quarter hours, it could usually deliver Immediate messages considerably earlier than would have otherwise been possible. To give some indication of the signals traffic; during a 25-day period the RAF Communications Centre at Aden handled 397 Flash, 541 Emergency and 8,799 Operational Immediate messages. None of these was a tactical enemy contact report and the majority were, therefore, strictly an abuse of precedence rules. In addition to this abuse, there was much over-classifying of messages and documents, many addressees were sent information copies and undue verbosity proved the point that 'it takes much longer to be brief'. Had the operation lasted longer, doubtless all these communication irregularities would have been brought under control, but they did illustrate the need for the strictest adherence to correct procedures when facilities are as sparse as they were in these circumstances.

In the operational area, the headquarters ship of the Amphibious Warfare Squadron, *Meon*, played an important role by acting as a Communications Relay Ship, providing rear links to Bahrein and radio links from the ship to Brigade HQ and other points ashore in the initial stages. This could only be a substitute until normal Army/RAF signals facilities could be established ashore, but a most valuable substitute at the time. The intense heat and blowing sand combined with the fact that much of the radio equipment, batteries and re-charging sets had been held in the Bahrein stockpile under unsuitable conditions, caused a lot of unserviceability, and did nothing to facilitate the installation of battlefield communications. There were a number of other technical signals difficulties caused by the fact that procedures for joint operations involving the three Services had not yet been perfected. For example, RAF aircraft were still operating with VHF R/T sets whereas naval aircraft were by then equipped with UHF. Similarly IFF Mark 10 was not a universal fit in all aircraft: these differences in equipment created communication and identification difficulties and necessitated some improvisation. None of these problems was insurmountable, however, and the Kuwait operation probably did more to accelerate the co-ordination of inter-Service operating techniques than could have been achieved by years of painstaking staff work. The School of Land/Air Warfare at Old Sarum was very quick to send out a team to study the shortcomings of the operation. Their studies eventually bore fruit in the

shape of improved Army/RAF operating procedures and techniques, worked out and practised by HQ 3 Division (the Strategic Reserve) and HQ 38 Group RAF.

Operating conditions

Little has so far been said about the conditions under which the forces in Kuwait had to live and work, although it may already have been gathered from the narrative that they were far from comfortable. General Kassim had chosen the hottest and most humid time of the year to make his provocative statement. July at the head of the Persian Gulf frequently sees temperatures well above 120°F, with very high humidity and frequent dust and sandstorms – a more unpleasant mixture could hardly be imagined, and July 1961 produced all the ingredients for this mixture. From the outset of the operation, flying conditions were extremely difficult: high humidity and blowing sand kept visibility down to 400 yards or less at ground level for much of the time and the Hunter pilots had the greatest difficulty in identifying forward positions on the Mutla Ridge and other pin points. This caused the death of one Hunter pilot, Flying Officer F N Hennessy of 208 Squadron, who spun into the ground in the forward area, and it was fairly evident that he had become disorientated in the bad visibility while trying to maintain visual contact with ground positions.

In the circumstances it was remarkable that this was the only serious flying accident during the operation. These conditions did cause the death of one other airman at Kuwait New. Blinded by sand, he unfortunately walked into the propellor of a taxiing Britannia which he was marshalling at night. There were several instances of aircraft landing at the wrong airfield due to bad visibility and the pilot of one Britannia, arriving with a full load of troops, actually landed in the open desert under the impression that he was on a runway. Undismayed and doubtless contrary to all Transport Command regulations, he took off again and landed in the right place. So bad were the conditions during the initial stages of the operation that the helicopters from *Bulwark*, bringing in 42 Commando, made several attempts to locate the unfamiliar Kuwait New airfield before they were successful.

If the flying conditions were bad, those on the ground were no better. Both air and ground crews suffered greatly from the heat. It was necessary to maintain a Hunter Flight constantly at fifteen minutes readiness: cockpit readiness was intolerable under these conditions and a crew room close to the aircraft was arranged in which the pilots could remain in their flying clothing during their period on standby. Even by installing window box air conditioning units in this room, the temperature remained up at around 112°F during the hottest time of the day. Cockpit temperatures in aircraft on the ground often exceeded 140°F, the only possible shade being provided by hastily improvised canvas awnings. No shade existed in which to service aircraft and it was fortunate that

the majority of the technical NCOs and airmen belonged to Middle East Command and were, on the whole, acclimatised to these conditions. Even so, the prescribed antidote to heat exhaustion was up to fifteen salt tablets a day and a cool drink at intervals of about fifteen minutes while working in the open. A small number of airmen had been flown into Kuwait straight from the United Kingdom and the unaccustomed heat bore very heavily upon them. They stood up to the conditions remarkably well with the result that the cases of heat exhaustion were far less than might have been expected, and were cured by a few hours in an air conditioned room with more liberal doses of salt. *HMS Bulwark* played a most helpful role in taking off parties of two hundred men at a time for twenty-four hours relaxation and recuperation in her air conditioned accommodation. There was, at this time, a great deal of exaggeration in the British press about the incidence of heat exhaustion among the troops. Although extremely irritating to the men who were standing up to the conditions so well, these inaccurate reports had the beneficial effect of creating such concern among Ministers in London that a deputation was sent hot foot to Kuwait with powers to authorise every possible comfort and facility that could be provided in the time available.

Redeployment and withdrawal of forces

No sooner were the planned forces complete in Kuwait than questions began to be asked regarding Britain's future intentions. It was natural that ill disposed persons should question the need for so many British troops when no Iraqi attack had materialised, and to speculate as to whether Britain was using this episode as an excuse to remain permanently in Kuwait. The British Government and the Commander-in-Chief fully understood the need to begin to withdraw forces as soon as it was prudent. Britain's prompt reaction to the Ruler's call for assistance had certainly thwarted any intention, if intention had existed – of an invasion by Iraq. No move was considered wise before 14 July which was the Iraqi National Day – a day which might perhaps seem one of destiny to an unpredictable personality. After that, however, the C-in-C felt able to recommend some redeployment of his forces in Kuwait, bearing in mind particularly that two lightly equipped Royal Marine Commandos were still filling the role of infantry battalions. He was also able to propose some limited withdrawal as defensive positions had been fully established, communications set up and all the necessary measures to meet an attack taken.

It was decided to re-embark 42 Commando in *Bulwark* which was required to sail for the Far East, withdraw the 2nd Parachute Regiment to Bahrein and return 45 Commando to its home station, Aden. These moves were carried out between 20 and 22 July, leaving in Kuwait HQ 24 Brigade and its two infantry battalions, one and a half squadrons of tanks, two squadrons of armoured cars, a field regiment less one

battery and a troop of Royal Engineers. As far as the RAF was concerned, 8 Squadron remained at Kuwait New with some Twin Pioneers of 78 and 152 Squadrons, with the Type 787 radar, while 208 Squadron flew its Hunters back to Bahrain from where they could reinforce 8 Squadron again in an hour or two if needed. Twelve Beverleys of 30 and 84 Squadrons remained at Bahrain ready to fly the 2nd Parachute Regiment back to Kuwait in an emergency and detachments of 37 Squadron (Shackletons) and 13 Squadron (PR Canberras) also stayed on in Bahrain. The Canberra strike aircraft at Sharjah were released back to Germany, but another Canberra squadron was held at readiness in Cyprus to fly to the Gulf should the Kuwait situation deteriorate. When these moves had been completed, the AOC was able to release most, but not all, of the Britannias, Hastings and Beverleys which had come from outside his command and in particular, to return with gratitude the Royal Rhodesian Air Force Canberras. *HMS Victorious* and her escorts remained in the Gulf until 31 July when she was relieved by *HMS Centaur* whose aircraft and escorts took over the air defence role. The crisis was now regarded as over and the forces left temporarily in Kuwait were judged fully capable of handling any eventuality. The C-in-C was able to move his own headquarters back to Aden, leaving command in the Gulf once again in the hands of the Commanders Committee (Persian Gulf) under the chairmanship of the Flag Officer Middle East.

During the course of the next few months the units which had been left in Kuwait were gradually withdrawn but, as will be described in a later chapter, the Army and RAF garrisons at Bahrain were maintained in greater strength than had been the case before VANTAGE, and a revised plan for intervention was drawn up taking full cognisance of the lessons learned during VANTAGE. The Arab League introduced a small force into Kuwait which, although it had but a fraction of the capability of the British forces, was politically more acceptable and provided at least a deterrent to any adventures which Iraq might still contemplate. Steps were also taken to strengthen the Kuwait Army and, in due course, a Kuwait air force was formed.

In retrospect

The crisis over Kuwait produced what could well be described as 'the operation that never was'. The plan for VANTAGE was fully implemented but not a shot was fired and in the event it turned out to be perhaps the most comprehensive, realistic and valuable movement exercise ever carried out by the three British Services. Much has been written about it, and it has had many critics, but wisdom after the event and hindsight are the characteristics of many writers and commentators. Weaknesses there were in plenty but they were due more to the unavoidable complexity of the operation and to the lack of political resolve in the

preparatory stages when quick decisions were essential if the planned timetable was to be achieved.

Two major questions have always remained unanswered and, indeed, are probably unanswerable. The first question is whether Kassim ever intended to follow up his provocative claim to Kuwait by mounting an invasion, and the second is whether the forces initially introduced could have successfully held such an invasion in check while the build up was taking place. Any answer to the first question is really unimportant: even if Kassim had no serious intention of invading Kuwait, his statement left Britain with no alternative but to take it seriously and to implement VANTAGE as soon as the Ruler of Kuwait invited her forces in. Iraq could undoubtedly have occupied an unprepared Kuwait in a matter of days, or even hours and, faced with such a *fait accompli*, her forces would have been extremely difficult to eject, and it would certainly have led to widespread conflict.

The answer to the second question, namely whether the initial forces could have contained an attack successfully, is problematical: it is probably in the affirmative, and would certainly have been in the affirmative if circumstances had enabled the preparations and initial entry of the VANTAGE forces to go according to plan. Even as events turned out, 8 and 208 Squadrons which were well established at Kuwait New very early on in the operation would have been effective against enemy armour and vehicles. They were two of the most accurate and experienced ground attack squadrons in the RAF, kept constantly in practice in the Aden Protectorates. The weather conditions in Kuwait were bad, and would admittedly have made the identification of ground targets difficult, but this difficulty would have equally affected the Iraq Air Force, which, had it attacked Kuwait New or any other target, would have immediately brought upon itself retaliation from the Canberras and Shackletons in the Persian Gulf and in Cyprus. However, an Iraqi attack under the conditions which prevailed would not have been easy to contain, and the reasons why these conditions arose were twofold.

In the first place, the 'four days warning' assumption written into the plan was designed, based on intelligence estimates, to permit certain preparations, such as the concentration of transport aircraft, to be put in hand. In the event these vital four days were whittled away by political hesitation with the result that there was virtually no interval between the receipt of authority to prepare, and the order to go into Kuwait. As the Commander-in-Chief has said in his report, the forces required for the operation were not at a sufficiently high state of readiness, considering the circumstances. But it must be said that it would have been exceedingly difficult to have held them at any higher state of readiness. VANTAGE was only one, albeit the most important, of more than thirty Middle East Command plans for various contingencies, many of which were in fact more likely to be required than VANTAGE.

Had the VANTAGE forces been maintained at a very high readiness, not only would Middle East units have been virtually prevented from carrying out their normal duties, but transport aircraft combat squadrons and units of the Royal Navy and Army, which were in the plan but not stationed in the Middle East, would have been similarly restricted. The state of readiness at which all these forces were being held would have been adequate 'had proper advantage been taken of the four day warning period built into the plan'.

Secondly, the unexpected overflying ban imposed by Turkey and the Sudan threw a large spanner into the works at the most crucial moment of the whole operation – the initial phase. This has been used by some critics to claim that it was unwise to depend upon air transportation for such an intervention operation. This is a biased and totally unfounded claim when the location of Kuwait is considered. Unless deliberately maintained in the immediate vicinity, or fortuitously close at hand as in the case of *HMS Bulwark* and her embarked commandos, no forces could possibly have reached Kuwait by sea or land in anything approaching the time taken to introduce them by air, even after allowing for the delay imposed by the overflying ban. It needs to be emphasised that *HMS Bulwark* was deliberately excluded from Plan VANTAGE. Her world wide commitments were such that she might have been anywhere when VANTAGE was required to be carried out, and she could only be regarded as a bonus which, in the event, turned out to be a most fortunate bonus as she was in Karachi when the crisis developed. Had she been in Far Eastern waters with *HMS Victorious* at the time, as she might well have been, she could not have reached Kuwait until at least D + 8, and the C-in-C would have been compelled to find some other solution for the initial landing. However, if a little misfortune in the form of an overflying ban was countered by some good fortune in the availability of *Bulwark*, a balance might be said to have been restored; and all operational plans depend to some extent upon fortune.

What the overflying ban did prove was not that air transportation was an unsound operational concept, but that a political 'barrier' did exist in the Middle East area, and that the stationing of adequate transport aircraft on the right side of a potential air barrier, or deliberate overflight without permission, is essential if an airlift is to be carried out successfully.

The initial inadequacy of air defence has already been mentioned: the need for a light, mobile and easily erected early warning radar was paramount, the cumbersome Type T convoy being quite inappropriate for a quick reaction type of operation. Fortuitously, considerable use could be made on this occasion of shipborne radar for air defence but only because the flat coastal terrain made its performance over land good enough to provide limited cover, and because the absence of hostile ships and aircraft made it possible for naval units to remain close to Kuwait during daylight hours. The overloaded communications would

undoubtedly have broken down if the Minimise procedure had not been introduced early on in the operation. It is difficult to apportion blame for the clear abuse of precedences and security classifications which took place. So many authorities, from the Ministry of Defence down to individual squadrons, used the available communication links, and so rapid was the sequence of events in VANTAGE, that a heavy load of signals traffic was inevitable. It is easy to say with hindsight, but perhaps this intense pressure on communications should have been foreseen and stringent restrictions placed upon their use from the moment preparations started. With aircraft flying almost hourly between Aden, Bahrain, Kuwait and Nairobi, some form of 'by hand of pilot' courier service could have been incorporated into the plan, thus permitting many messages to be conveyed by letter or postagram – or even in signal form – with consequent easing of the load on the sparse radio communications. Admittedly a form of courier service was instituted but not before the congestion had made it essential.

The supply organisation learned many lessons which were to prove of immense value for the future. It was the first occasion upon which the stockpile at Bahrain had to be used in earnest, and the near impossibility of maintaining many delicate items of equipment in a serviceable condition under the circumstances was clearly demonstrated. Not only did radio equipment suffer badly from corrosion, but the high humidity in the Gulf seriously affected stocks of blankets and clothing as well as such perishable items as tyres. If stockpiling was inevitable, VANTAGE proved not only that it had to be restricted to the minimum holdings, preferably of non-perishable items, but also that all items in a stockpile needed to be turned over at fairly short intervals. This latter requirement was very difficult to meet as, for example, in the case of Hunter long range fuel tanks. The Bahrain stockpile contained a huge 'wall' of several hundred tanks in wooden crates, some of which would certainly have been needed had Hunters been required to operate at extreme range from Bahrain. The normal peacetime consumption of such tanks was small as they lasted indefinitely if not dropped, and it was therefore impossible for two squadrons to turn over several hundred tanks economically. Hindsight again showed that the provisioning of these tanks had been on far too lavish a scale.

The type of container used for stockpiled equipment came in for review at this time. Most of the Bahrain stockpile had been built up in a leisurely fashion by sea, necessitating robust cases and shockproof packing for the more delicate equipment – and this applied to the majority of it. However, when brought into use, much of the equipment needed to be moved on to Kuwait by air when the heavy cases proved a great waste of valuable airlift. Repacking of heavily cased equipment within the stockpile was not only a waste of manpower, but it also exposed material to the elements and tended to destroy much of the proofing which had been originally applied. Experiences such as that provided by VANTAGE

enabled great advances to be made by the supply organisation in light-weight but shock-proof packing of all kinds of equipment. Not only the packing but also the marking of cases created a number of problems from which sound lessons were learned. The planning of VANTAGE, like any other operation, had called for strict security but there was an inevitable tendency to overdo this, and to allow the security to penetrate right down to the most mundane matters. Every case packed for VANTAGE had a complicated set of coded letters and numerals stencilled on it, indicating its contents and the part it played in the Movement Tables. Before unpacking or moving every case, therefore, a long classified coding list had to be consulted to check details of the particular crate. This was a lengthy and time consuming procedure, one example of which illustrates how unnecessary much of it was. In the heat of the initial move, one supply officer at Kuwait New had temporarily mislaid his list of code references, and it was necessary to open no less than 130 cases in order to find some cutlery for the airmen's mess. There was obviously no reason why details of such items could not have been stencilled on the case, but the imagination needed to visualise the situation which arose was lacking in the remote atmosphere of a planning office, with the result that everything had the same security grading applied to it.

In retrospect, intervention in Kuwait was as realistic a test of the new Middle East Command as could possibly have been devised. It was highly satisfactory in that it complied fully with the terms of Britain's agreement with Kuwait and brought assistance to the Ruler quickly and efficiently. It may have prevented the annexation of Kuwait by Iraq, although that will never be known with certainty. The operation was less satisfactory in that it exposed many weaknesses in the plan, some of which such as the inadequacy of communications and radar were foreseen, but others could have been avoided. However, no operation in history has ever been without its shortcomings and it would have been remarkable if VANTAGE had been the exception. In view of the location of Kuwait, the political sensitivities which abounded and the rapidity with which succour had to be provided, the three Services came out of the operation with great credit, and it amply demonstrated that they could work admirably together. The Royal Air Force played a notable part, particularly in providing the high degree of mobility demanded and many of the administrative and supply services which were required. If early vindication of unified command was needed it was without doubt provided in this operation by Air Marshal Sir Charles Elworthy and his headquarters.

A breathing space

This chapter has been entitled 'A breathing space', not because it covers a period of no operational activity in Middle East Command – there never was such a period in the whole history of the Command – but because it describes a brief interlude of relatively low activity between serious episodes which required the participation of all the forces available. The period falls between the end of the Kuwait crisis in August, 1961 and the beginning of large scale operations in the Radfan area of the Western Aden Protectorate, coupled with serious internal disorders in Aden Colony some two and a half years later. The period is also one of consolidation in that it saw the virtual completion of the plans for accommodating and operating the units which had poured into the Command, as described in Chapter 8, between 1957 and 1960. The term 'consolidation' has more than a hint of irony about it as events were to show that, no sooner had a balanced force been built up in the theatre and brought to a peak of operational and administrative efficiency, than the rising clamour for independence in East Africa and South Arabia, and political pressures in the United Kingdom began to foreshadow the end of Middle East Command. However, these events must not be anticipated, and the RAF and its sister Services had much to occupy them during the last decade of British military involvement in the area.

We have already seen how events in Egypt, culminating in the Suez crisis of 1956, caused the centre of gravity of the Middle East Command to shift from the Eastern Mediterranean to Aden. In some respects, the Kuwait crisis may be said to have caused a further shift – to the Persian Gulf – to the extent that a higher proportion of the RAF units in the Command were permanently retained at Bahrein after the crisis. Bahrein, or Muharraq as the RAF station was then renamed, was never again without at least a detachment, if not a whole squadron, of Hunters drawn from the resources of 8 and 208 Squadrons. Similarly detachments of transport aircraft, usually including some Beverleys, were maintained at Muharraq in addition to the resident 152 Squadron with its mixed complement of Twin Pioneers and Pembrokes.

One of the lessons learned at Kuwait was the need to reorganise the two Hunter squadrons, comprising a total of thirty-two Hunters and four Meteors as a tactical wing to facilitate the despatch of many mobile

detachments to various parts of the Command, either for operations, fire power demonstrations or simply flying displays. Such a reorganisation had not been feasible while 8 Squadron was based at Khormaksar and 208 at Nairobi, a thousand miles apart: nor had it been necessary as Aden and central Oman had hitherto been the only two areas in the Command which had needed Hunters for active operations. The Kuwait crisis, however, established a need to maintain some DF/GA aircraft permanently in the Gulf within easy reach of Kuwait which, in effect, meant at Muharraq or Sharjah. Apart from operational considerations, no single RAF station had had the accommodation to house, maintain and operate a wing of two large squadrons in addition to other commitments, and it was mainly for this reason that 208 Squadron had been located in Kenya although its operational role lay in the Arabian Peninsula.

By the autumn of 1961 the building programme in Aden, and Khormaksar in particular, was making such good progress that room could be found for a wing headquarters and the base facilities to support two squadrons, provided that a proportion of the wing was detached elsewhere for most of the time. This fitted in well with the need to maintain a detachment of up to one squadron in the Gulf for the Kuwait commitment. The 'Khormaksar Wing', as it was called, was formed in late 1961 under the initial command of Wing Commander C R G Neville, who was highly experienced, had served in Kuwait during the crisis and had also been Wing Commander (Operations) at Khormaksar before that. The expertise of both Headquarters 38 Group at Odiham and the School of Land/Air Warfare at Old Sarum was fully tapped in deciding upon the exact establishment and equipment required by this new wing. From its inception 8 and 208 Squadrons rotated between Khormaksar and Bahrain at roughly monthly intervals, the squadron at Khormaksar carrying out all commitments in the Aden Protectorates and East Africa, while that at Bahrain stood by for any renewal of the threat to Kuwait. By the end of the year time had been found for the personnel of 208 Squadron to return to Nairobi on leave, to pack up the residue of the unit equipment, pay a few outstanding bills and to move families into new accommodation at Aden. The Squadron said goodbye to the pleasant climate of Kenya with no little regret, as nobody could describe Aden as a good exchange from that point of view, but the Squadron was again united and fully employed in its proper role, which had seldom been the case during its earlier days in Kenya. The move meant that the brigade in Kenya – temporarily 19 Brigade from the United Kingdom while 24 Brigade was otherwise occupied in Kuwait – suffered some loss of training with fighter aircraft, but this was partially remedied by periodic detachments of Hunters from Aden. Most of 21 Squadron's Twin Pioneers had remained at Eastleigh during the crisis and they continued to provide the bulk of the Brigade's training together with the Beverleys of 30 Squadron as they

gradually returned to Eastleigh from the Gulf.

The last quarter of 1961 was thus devoted to sorting out the forces which had been so rapidly thrown into Kuwait, replenishing the stockpile at Bahrein and assimilating the lessons learned during VANTAGE. In particular a vigorous drive to improve communications throughout the Peninsula was undertaken, spurred on by the knowledge that the threat to Kuwait had not disappeared, but only receded into the background. Plan VANTAGE was completely rewritten during this period on the basis of even more rapid reaction than previously. The return of the Commander-in-Chief and his operational headquarters from Bahrein to Aden also coincided with the completion of Air Vice-Marshal Lee's tour as AOC and, in August, he handed over to Air Vice-Marshal F E Rosier CB CBE DSO. As he departed home to become Commandant of the RAF Staff College at Bracknell, AVM Lee could look back on a busy and rewarding tour during which the new Middle East Command and his own Command, AFME, had been born out of the old Arabian Peninsula organisation. Much of his tour had been devoted to supervising and accelerating the huge administrative and technical expansion needed to support the greatly increased forces, culminating in the valuable test provided by the Kuwait crisis.

Development in East Africa

As foreshadowed in earlier years, the desire for independence among the colonial territories of East Africa had continued to grow, particularly within the East African High Commission which comprised Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika and Zanzibar. Somalia had become an independent nation on 1 July 1960 as promised by the United Nations. The former territories of Italian and British Somaliland were welded into the new state and its emergence was peaceful, causing no more than a ripple on the waters of international politics. This development was of little consequence to the RAF whose only airfield in the area had been Hargeisa. It had always been a rough and stony airfield, usable by most piston engined aircraft with care, but disliked because of the considerable risk of damaging a tailplane or fuselage with stones flung up by the wheels. It had been used from time to time when aircraft from Aden had been detached to 'show the flag' in connection with tribal troubles concerned with Ethiopia's possession of the Ogaden area. Hargeisa also had some small value as a refuelling stop for short range aircraft en route from Kenya to Aden, although it was often preferable to route such flights further to the west, and use better facilities in Ethiopia, or at Djibouti where the RAF was always assured of a warm welcome and often a 'vin d'honneur' to go with it. Various plans for improving Hargeisa had existed for many years, but its importance had never been such as to justify the expense; and 'making and mending' had been the order of the day until the final withdrawal of British forces.

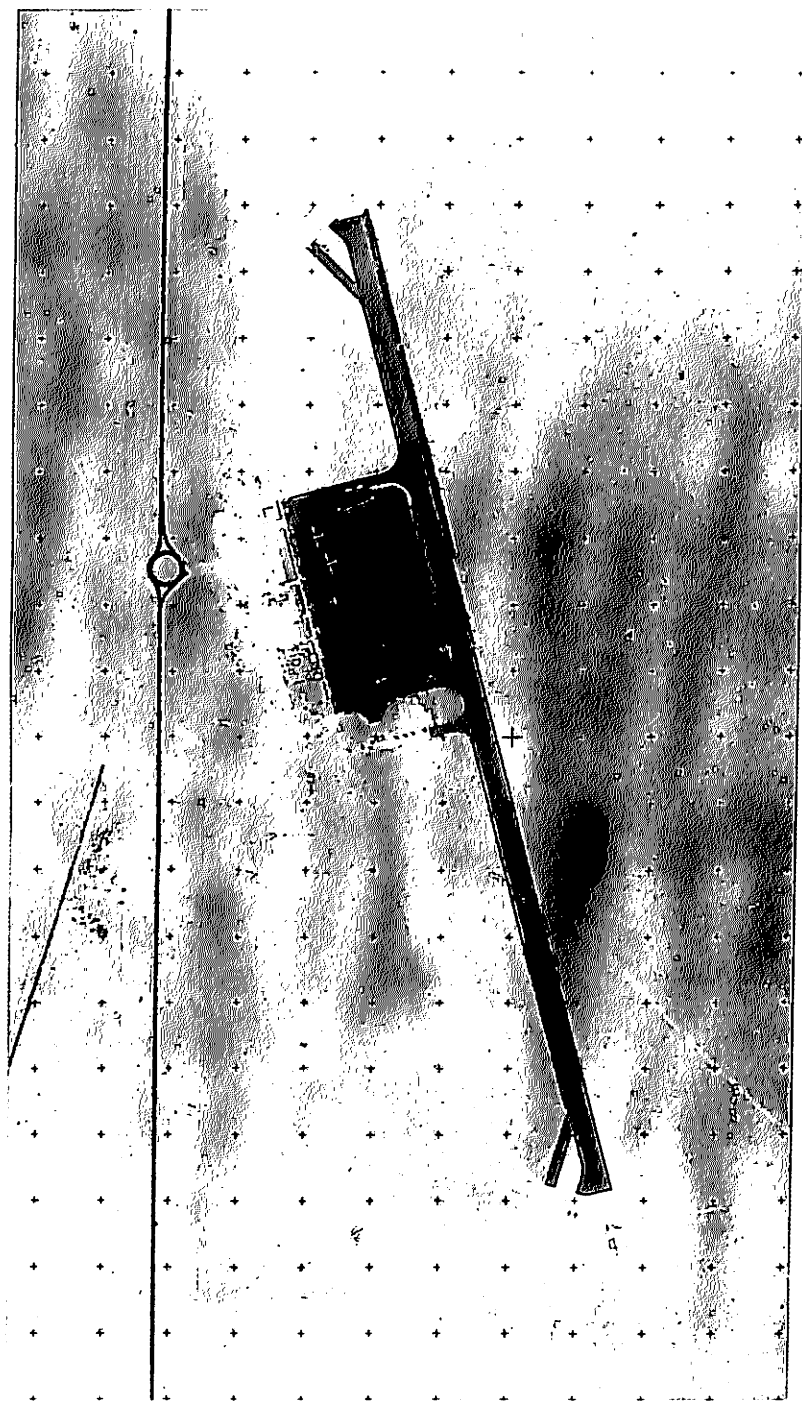
Not unnaturally the granting of independence to Somalia quickened

the desire of her neighbours for similar treatment, and the British Government found itself being pushed along with unseemly haste. The problems of granting independence to Tanganyika and Uganda were relatively straight forward: both countries were internally stable and successive British governors had made sound preparations for self-government in the administrative and legal training which had been given to native officials over many years. Kenya was less well prepared and was split by the same political factions which had caused the Mau Mau rebellion. The wounds received during those unhappy years were too recent to have healed completely, and the prospect of a stable government – one of the essential requirements for independence – seemed remote. In addition, Kenya possessed a far larger European population than either of the other two countries, and it was essential that this minority should be fully safeguarded. Kenya had depended almost entirely upon the white settlers for its development and prosperity: they were only just returning to normal after the Mau Mau horrors and, naturally enough, viewed any possibility of a hasty independence agreement with the greatest misgivings. There were no British Army or RAF installations in Uganda or Tanganyika, and never had been. The only future requirement from these two countries, which it was firmly expected would remain in the Commonwealth, were the rights to overfly and stage through on the rare occasions when it might be necessary to move forces or aircraft to the southern part of the continent. No great difficulty was anticipated in negotiating these requirements and, in the event, they were agreed perfectly satisfactorily.

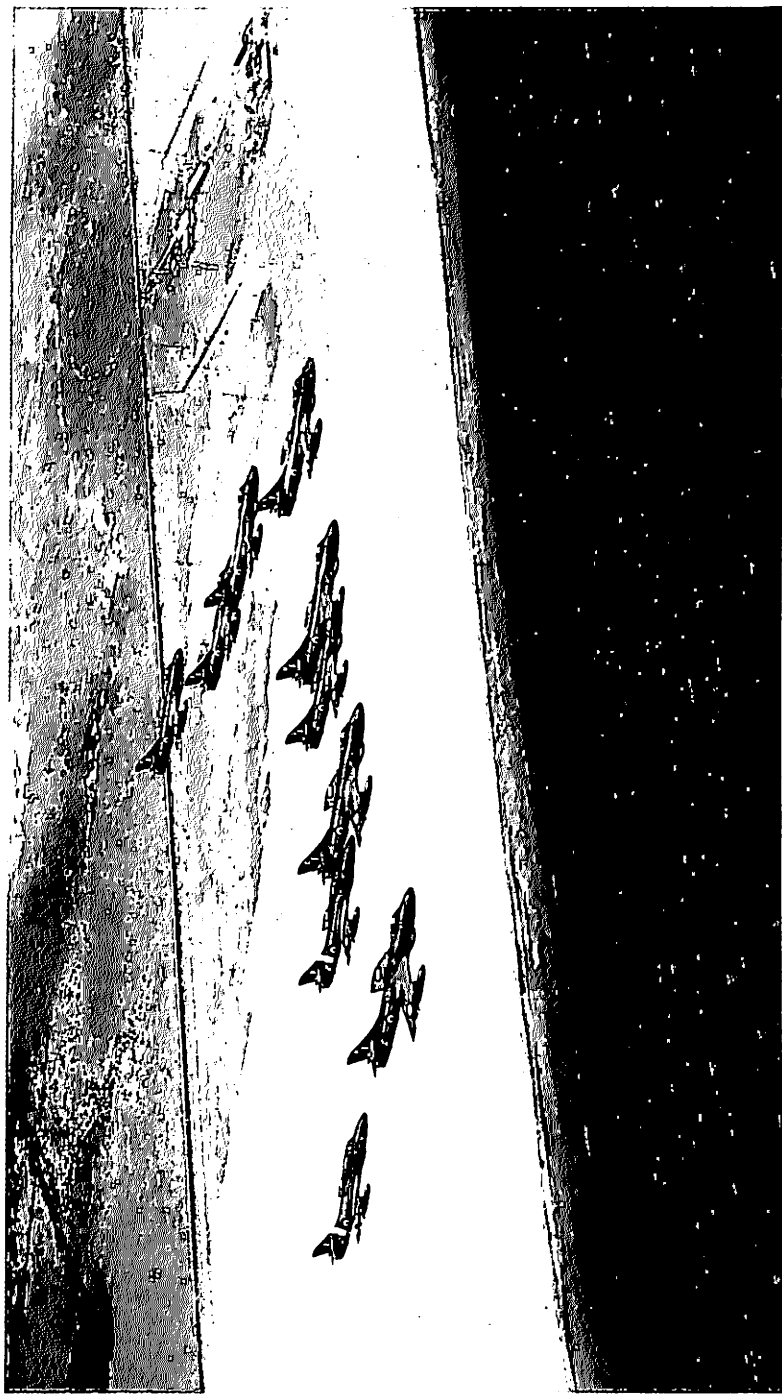
The installations which Britain had built up in Kenya were in contrast, extremely important. Several millions of pounds had been expended during the previous five years: for example, the Templer Barracks outside Nairobi, which had only just been completed for the Strategic Reserve units of 24 Brigade, had cost about £3,000,000. Similarly, the new Communications Centre at Eastleigh had been built at considerable cost as an important link in the world wide military communications network: satellite communications were not expected to come into operation for at least another ten years. To the RAF, the relief which the two airfields at Nairobi afforded to Aden, notably by taking some of the strain off the overburdened Khormaksar, was immense. Consequently it was sincerely hoped throughout Middle East Command that any Kenya independence agreement would contain provision for the retention of at least some forces and installations there. Today that may seem to have been wishful thinking; perhaps it was, but it must always be remembered that the tide of nationalism and the clamour for independence swept through Britain's colonial possessions like wildfire, gaining additional momentum with every new independence agreement. If a backward and almost primitive country like Somalia could attain independence in 1960, the argument went, then there was no justifiable reason for withholding it from Kenya. The fact



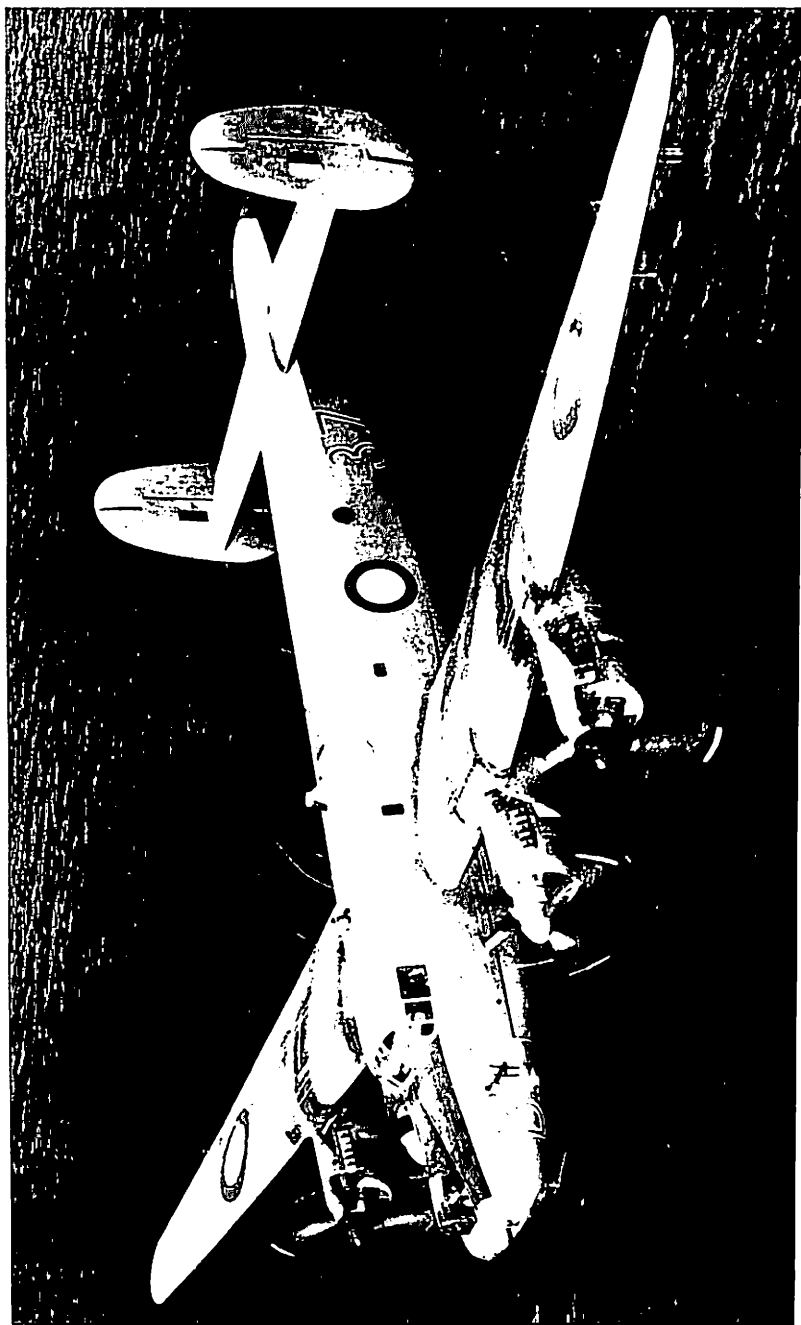
23. The Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, 1961 – Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Elworthy.



24. Kuwait New airfield - 125°F in the shade - no shade!



25. 8 Squadron leaving Aden for Kuwait.



26. Shackleton of 37 Squadron patrolling off Kuwait.

that the colonial power had great interest in Kenya, but almost none in Somalia, was clearly no argument to be used for delaying the former's independence.

Nor, to be fair to Britain, did she delay negotiations in any way when it became clear that Kenya was firmly set upon her course, and had a capable leader at the helm in Jomo Kenyatta. The constitutional conference at which the independence negotiations were completed was held in London in February 1962. It was not an easy meeting owing to the differing demands of the two main political parties in Kenya. Because of the threats of violence, progress had to be slowed down so that independence was not finally achieved until 12 December 1963 – almost two years after the conference had taken place. In the meantime, Tanganyika came to independence on the last day of December 1961, and Uganda in October 1962.

While the political negotiations were in progress, the Chiefs of Staff were considering how best to redeploy the army and air force units located in Kenya after independence. It soon became clear that Britain could not hope to continue to use Kenya as a base for the Arabian Peninsula or to keep units of her Strategic Reserve permanently there. At best a few facilities might be retained plus the temporary retention of a few units to assist with internal security until Kenya's new government was firmly in the saddle.

The problem was somewhat simplified for the RAF by the incorporation of 208 Squadron in the new Khormaksar Wing and the need for both Hunter squadrons to be kept up in the Peninsula. This left the Beverleys of 30 Squadron and the Twin Pioneers of 21 Squadron still based at Eastleigh, and it was decided that both squadrons were essential to the training and mobility of 24 Brigade for as long as any of its units remained in Kenya. By April 1962, the last of the 30 Squadron Beverleys was released from its Kuwait commitments and returned to Eastleigh from the Gulf, thus reuniting the Squadron on its old station for the first time in nine months. No 30 Squadron, under its Commanding Officer, Squadron Leader T C Waugh DFC deserved great credit for its work during VANTAGE. Operating more than 2,000 miles from its base, carrying the heaviest and most unmanageable loads in very trying conditions of heat, humidity and turbulence, the Squadron had maintained excellent serviceability, freedom from accident and splendid morale. But it was a great relief for the airmen to get back to Eastleigh and tackle the wear and tear inflicted on their giant aircraft which became painfully apparent in the clear light of Nairobi. As each Beverley was washed on its arrival, the red murram surface of Eastleigh was heavily overlaid with good Arabian sand as clear evidence of what the aircraft had been up to!

The return of 30 Squadron coincided with the end of a large scale famine relief operation which had been necessary during the 1961–62 winter months. Excessive rain fell throughout Kenya during the last

two months of 1961, and even Nairobi, which is not one of the wettest areas, recorded 19 inches during the month of November – more than half the annual rainfall in England. The rain caused severe flooding in the Tanu river basin to the north of Mombasa. Crops were ruined and famine was imminent when 21 Squadron was called in to fly supplies of grain and other food to the affected area. The rain continued and the Twin Pioneers could not possibly cope with the commitment unaided. Four Beverleys were sent out from Abingdon and were joined by four Royal Rhodesian Air Force Dakotas, and four Sycamores to undertake casualty evacuation. This small force carried no less than 3,000,000lbs of food into the stricken area during the month of November alone. By the time the floods subsided in January 1962, 5,000,000lbs had been lifted and the RAF at Eastleigh received the publicly expressed thanks of HE the Governor, Sir Patrick Renison. This humanitarian operation engendered a great deal of goodwill and did much to endear the RAF to the people of Kenya. It was perhaps fortuitous that the area of the operation was one in which RAF aircraft were not frequently seen, as their normal duties rarely took them up the coast to the north of Mombasa.

By the time the famine relief operation was over, the Air Council had come to a firm conclusion on the future disposition of RAF units in Kenya, always provided that political developments did not upset the plans. It had for some time intended to deploy one of the newly formed Argosy squadrons to Kenya to improve the capability of the AFME medium range transport force which had depended so heavily, and indeed so successfully, upon the Beverley: this intention was dropped as also was a plan to move 30 Squadron from Eastleigh to Embakasi. In the uncertain political climate, it was decided to leave 30 Squadron at Eastleigh where it had settled down excellently in the accommodation adapted for its use, and where the servicing facilities were also good. Furthermore the Beverley, despite its size and weight inflicted far less damage on the red murram runway at Eastleigh than did most of its contemporaries. It had also been intended to re-equip 21 Squadron with Wessex helicopters when these eventually became available but, here, again, it was decided not to embark on such re-equipment while the Squadron remained at Eastleigh, but to await its eventual redeployment to Khormaksar. And so, both 30 and 21 Squadrons remained with their Beverleys and Twin Pioneers at Eastleigh and, as will be seen later, they stayed until well after Kenya's independence was an accomplished fact.

The movement towards Kenya's independence progressed slowly throughout 1962 and 1963 and the future for British military interests remained uncertain. The passionate desire for immediate freedom from the 'colonial oppressor' was tempered by the apprehension created by some very real threats to the country's stability. Internally the conflict between the two major political parties, Kanu and Kadu, was bitter

and widespread, exacerbated by a high level of native unemployment. Externally, the newly independent Somalia demanded the incorporation of the north eastern territory of Kenya which was largely populated by Somalis and the possession of which had been a source of contention for many years. As Somalia also considered that French Somaliland and the Ogaden area of Ethiopia belonged to her, the Horn of Africa was in a turmoil which posed something of a threat to Kenya as she approached her own independence. This situation created a serious conflict of opinion when the future of British forces in Kenya was discussed. On the one hand the desire to be rid of British bases and troops was politically overwhelming: on the other hand, Kenya's small force of the King's African Rifles and the Police could not be expected to maintain internal stability and to contain a threat from the north alone and unaided. What Kenya therefore wanted was the continued presence of British forces for internal security purposes but not for Kenya to continue to provide the base for a British strategic reserve intended for use outside the country, notably in the Arabian Peninsula. This conflict of requirements was eventually settled by a form of compromise.

Britain fully understood that Kenya's political aspirations would not permit the retention of strategic land and air force units, but she was not prepared to leave a large force in Kenya merely to maintain internal stability in a country which had, perhaps, pressed for independence more rapidly and vociferously than was prudent. As it happened, dissidence among the Somali population in the northern territory, aggravated by flood and famine, broke out during 1963, necessitating the despatch of British troops, supported by 21 and 30 Squadrons, to support the civil power. In order to add some teeth to the support of army units, the Twin Pioneers of 21 Squadron were armed during 1963 with bomb racks and machine guns, much as the Harvards had been during the earlier Mau Mau troubles. The adaptation added a useful potential to the Squadron's capability and, if the need had arisen to take offensive air action, it would not have been necessary to call for Hunters from Aden. The dissidence in the north continued up to and beyond the date of independence – 12 December, 1963 – and demonstrated to the new government that the retention of some British forces would be essential, at least for a period, even if some concession had to be made about their use outside Kenya in deference to Britain's strategic requirements. The final position when HRH The Duke of Edinburgh arrived in Nairobi to preside over the ceremony of independence was that British forces would be phased out within one year, ie by the end of 1964, by which time it was hoped that Kenya's own forces would have been strengthened to the point of self-sufficiency. The Royal Air Force staged an impressive display during the celebrations, and also escorted Prince Philip during his tour of the country which embraced a visit to Lake Rudolph. As Zanzibar had also gained her independence on 10 December, the end of 1963 saw all four countries of the East African High

Commission set on their own individual courses, but still within the Commonwealth and still well disposed to Britain which had ruled them for so long.

Development in Aden

By a stroke of good fortune the preoccupation of most of Khormaksar's aircraft with the crisis in Kuwait coincided with a relatively quiet period in the two Protectorates. That is not to say that there was no operational activity at all – a state of affairs which was virtually unknown – but the level was such that it could comfortably be handled by the few aircraft left behind, without recourse to reinforcement from outside the Command. The most significant incident occurred in the Eastern Aden Protectorate where, on 19 July 1961, a part of the Hadrami Bedouin Legion (HBL) was ambushed and suffered fifty casualties, including sixteen killed. Why this ambush was set remained something of a mystery and it was so unexpected that the HBL were clearly not as vigilant as would have been the case if dissident activity had been customary in the area. The Commanding Officer at Khormaksar immediately despatched to Riyan one Meteor FR9 and one Twin Pioneer with a Ground Liaison Officer to support the HBL. The tribe responsible for the ambush was easily identified by the HBL. One Shackleton operating from Khormaksar and several Hunters detached to Riyan carried out continuous attacks on the selected targets during the last two weeks of July, and this was quite sufficient to restore the situation. It was swift and severe retaliation for what was probably an isolated incident of banditry, but it demonstrated the need for constant and unremitting vigilance, even in a Protectorate area which was regarded as relatively law abiding.

Almost as if to celebrate the return of the squadrons to Khormaksar after the Kuwait episode, 1962 opened with a renewal of operations in the Western Aden Protectorate. These were aimed at removing a dissident leader, Musi Hammud, and bringing the tribes in the Yahari and Saadi areas under control as part of the policy of the recently formed South Arabian Federation – the imaginative but largely unsuccessful attempt to unite Aden Colony and the tribes of the Protectorates. After the usual warning by leaflet, attacks on villages and crops by Hunters and Shackletons continued until 23 January, by which time 115 × 1,000lb bombs and 1,146 × 20lb fragmentation bombs had been dropped. After a short pause for more warning leaflets to be dropped, which were ignored by the tribes, the attacks continued until late in February when the tribes capitulated.

During these operations a Sycamore helicopter penetrated into the Upper Yafa territory for the first time and landed the Deputy British Adviser at Hilyan where he conducted the negotiations for peace. It had for a long time been the ambition of the Western Aden Protectorate office in Aden to develop an airstrip in Upper Yafa territory in order to

be in a position to bring authority to bear much more rapidly in this particularly unstable and troublesome part of the Protectorate. The Sycamore landing revived these ambitions and in May 1962, a serious attempt was made to realise them. The Officer Commanding 5004 (Airfield Construction) Squadron, carried out a reconnaissance in a Shackleton of 37 Squadron and found a likely looking site at Hilyan, although the Shackleton collected a bullet through one of its wheel bays during the flight. As it was not discovered until after landing back at Khormaksar, nobody could say whether the shot had been fired in the Hilyan area or elsewhere. It soon became fairly obvious that tribesmen at Hilyan were the culprits when, a few days later, a Beaver of 653 Light Aircraft Squadron of the Army Air Corps landed on the selected site and was promptly fired at while on the ground, being hit three times in the engine cover and cockpit. This was in spite of the fact that a pair of Hunters of 208 Squadron were overhead at the time but could not identify the source of firing. Fortunately the Beaver was able to take off hurriedly and return safely to Aden, but the dream of the WAP office had become a nightmare: instead of building an airstrip, punitive action was taken against Hilyan. This isolated and quite unimportant incident vividly demonstrated not only the immense difficulty of opening up the Protectorate peacefully by constructing roads and airstrips, but also the magnitude of the task which the Aden Government had undertaken in bringing the tribes into the new Federation.

Operationally these first few months of 1962 were uneventful with enough activity in support of the Federal Regular Army – the new title for the Aden Protectorate Levies and the various categories of frontier guards – to keep the squadrons in training. It was, however, a period of continued activity on the administrative front. The immense building programme had gained momentum, and 1962 saw the virtual completion and handing over of most of the projects which had been started in earlier years. For example, in March the Right Honourable Harold Watkinson, the Minister of Defence, formally opened the one thousandth married quarter at Khormaksar. It seemed almost unbelievable that, less than six years earlier, the station had housed only 8 Squadron and possessed considerably less than one hundred married quarters. Its total strength now exceeded three thousand officers and airmen, making it one of the largest and most complex stations anywhere in the Royal Air Force, handling on its single runway five thousand aircraft movements a month and moving immense numbers of passengers and huge quantities of freight. Quite apart from the complications of operating aircraft in almost every role known to the RAF, Khormaksar posed a most serious security problem. Its single runway was highly vulnerable and the tangle of technical and administrative buildings caused many anxieties, being not only an attractive target for sabotage but a dangerous fire hazard. Rarely, if ever, has a Command had to depend so heavily upon one station as did the Middle East at that time. Con-

sequently the station defence and fire plans were extremely comprehensive and frequently practised. One major headache was caused by the 'joint user' role of Khormaksar whereby the civil airport, although situated at one end of the runway, could not be separated from the RAF facilities, many of which were shared: and this juxtaposition greatly increased the security risk to the RAF part of the airfield. Group Captain J F Davis OBE DFC AFC was the Officer Commanding during 1961-62 and it was at this time that the AOC, Air Vice-Marshal Lee, was heard to say "Anybody who can command Khormaksar successfully, can command anything". Some consideration was given to re-activating the disused airfield at Sheikh Othman, but it could have been made suitable for modern aircraft only at great expense, and then its proximity to Khormaksar – it lay literally within the circuit – would have created unacceptable dangers. The 75 square miles of Aden colony, into which were crammed 220,000 inhabitants, simply could not accommodate a second airfield of any significance, and anywhere outside the Colony was far too dangerous to be contemplated.

Completion of much of the building programme in mid-1962 eased the congestion and improved the efficiency of the station so significantly that it was felt possible to increase the capability of the Command's medium range transport force. The four-engined, twin boom Armstrong Whitworth Argosy had entered RAF service and was performing well at Benson in Oxfordshire. As the advent of Kenya's independence ruled out the original intention of forming an Argosy squadron at Embakasi, Khormaksar became the alternative choice with the result that the first five Argosies of 105 Squadron arrived there from the United Kingdom on 17 June 1962, and immediately began to work up. It was an immense relief to 30 and 84 Squadrons, whose twelve Beverleys had borne the heat and burden of the past few years and were much in need of some comprehensive repair and overhaul which was beyond the capacity of the Command's resources. Corrosion had affected large areas of the metal skin, particularly on top of the mainplane, and a programme of re-skinning was badly needed. The new addition to the force allowed the Beverleys to be returned one at a time to the manufacturers at Brough where the condition of some of them was regarded with horror not unmixed with pride at the clear evidence of their durability under the toughest conceivable operating conditions.

The Western Aden Protectorate continued to be fairly quiet until September 1962. On 19 September, the Imam of the Yemen, Ahmed, died and was succeeded by his son, Muhammad-al-Badr. A week later, however, Badr was overthrown by an Egyptian-inspired republican revolution and a republic was proclaimed under the presidency of General Sallal. Immediately, hostile propaganda from the Yemen was stepped up with fierce attacks on the radio against Britain and the Federation, together with repeated calls to the inhabitants of South Arabia to rebel against their Government. The main pro-Yemeni elements in

Aden were led by the Peoples Socialist Party (PSP) which had been formed earlier in the year by Abdulla-al-Asnag, leader of the Aden Trades Union Congress. Encouraged by Sallal's call, the PSP staged a number of demonstrations in the Crater district of Aden. Although there were calls from the Federal rulers for strong action by Britain against the PSP, and demands for the Yemen frontier to be closed, none of these measures were taken at the time although several additional security measures were put into effect.

On 22 October a number of unidentified aircraft crossed into the WAP from the Yemen and fired rockets at villages in the Nuqab area, near Beihan, killing one child. For some time thereafter the Hunters of 8 and 208 Squadrons maintained dawn to dusk patrols over the frontier, but the incursions were not repeated. In addition, PR Canberras from 13 Squadron (Akrotiri) and 58 Squadron (Wyton) were attached to Khormaksar and proceeded to photograph the Yemen ports daily as it was suspected that arms were flowing in from Egypt. The opportunity was also seized to send a Valiant, which was on a training flight from 90 Squadron in Bomber Command, to demonstrate along the frontier close to Beihan.

On 9 November, President Sallal (as he had now become) made his subversive intentions and ambitions all too clear in an address reminiscent of General Kassim of Iraq before the Kuwait crisis fifteen months earlier: he declared*

"I call on our brothers in the occupied South to be ready for a revolution and for joining the battle we shall wage against colonialism . . . they must follow the example of their northern brothers . . . Britain's ageing and ailing empire . . . We have been patient too long towards Britain's plotting against us."

Such words did not encourage the British Government to try to come to terms with the republican regime in the Yemen, and yet this was a course which they now had seriously to consider. It was a significant 'moment of decision' for Britain in the Middle East. Two conflicting forces now confronted each other throughout the Arab world, and Britain had to choose between them. On the one side were the autocratic rulers of the past, with whom Britain had long been associated and to whom she was bound by treaties and tradition. On the other side, and irrevocably opposed to them, were the new revolutionary forces of nationalism led by Nasser. Britain had already found herself opposed to nationalism once, when she fought Nasser at Suez in 1956 – with unhappy results. Now the choice had arisen again – this time in the Yemen.

The dilemma was resolved in the House of Commons on 13 November 1962, when it was decided that Britain would not recognise the republican regime in the Yemen, but would continue to support the

*Extracted from *Last Post – Aden 1964-1967* by Julian Paget.

Federation of South Arabia and the plans to incorporate Aden Colony in it. This was undoubtedly a major policy decision and a turning point in Britain's foreign affairs, for it proclaimed throughout the Middle East that she was not prepared to bow before the nationalist 'wind of change' that was blowing with increasing strength across the Arabian sands. Initially this policy of firmness seemed to be respected with the result that, on 18 January 1963, Aden Colony finally joined the Federation, and changed its title to that of 'Aden State', becoming the twelfth member of the Federation and, because of its comparative wealth and importance, being permitted to have a much larger representation in the Federal Council than the states of the hinterland.

Relations with the Yemen continued to deteriorate during 1963. Britain was ordered to close her Mission in Taiz in February, thus depriving her of any diplomatic representation in the Yemen. Shortly after this, a party of all ranks from HQ Middle East became lost while on an adventure training expedition in the mountains near the frontier. The party, which included members of the Women's Services, strayed across the frontier unwittingly and were fired upon: four were killed and two wounded; eighteen escaped back into Federal territory and twenty-one were captured. The casualties and prisoners were escorted by Egyptian officers to Taiz, whence they were released ten days later, but only after intense diplomatic activity. This unfortunate, and indeed careless, incident exacerbated already strained relations but, in the light of what was to come, was not of any great importance. It was so obviously an accident that even Egypt and the Yemen were not able to make much propaganda capital out of it.

Throughout 1963 the Yemen border patrols were maintained from Khormaksar at varying degrees of intensity, depending upon the intelligence information. There were, however, no major incidents although it was constantly apparent that the Yemen was giving every support and encouragement to dissidence and sporadic attacks against the Federal Regular Army. The RAF was further strengthened at this time by the arrival at Khormaksar of two Belvedere helicopters – the advance guard of 26 Squadron. This large, twin rotor aircraft of Bristol design had come into service in the United Kingdom, and its considerable lifting capacity was thought to be eminently suitable for operations in Aden. The Squadron was slow to work up to full operational standards as the Belvedere was still in short supply and suffered from a number of teething troubles owing to its complex technical design. But it was clearly going to be of great value to the Army in transporting guns and light vehicles into areas where no facilities for fixed wing aircraft existed and where dropping was impracticable.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Elworthy completed his tour as Commander-in-Chief in May 1963. It had been a long tour and a busy one for him since he had to implement the Command's most important plan – VANTAGE – as well as supervise the massive build up of forces and

their logistic facilities. The East African territories were either coming, or came to independence during his time and that involved much diplomatic activity in the southern part of his Command. As he left for home, and was succeeded by General Sir Charles Harington, the squadrons at Khormaksar paid tribute to him in the form of a flypast in 'E' formation. Command in the Middle East thus passed to a soldier in conformity with the policy of rotating the appointment through each Service in turn. There can be no doubt that, under Sir Charles Elworthy, the first of the unified commands was severely tested, both administratively and in operations. It stood the test extremely well and showed conclusively that the three Services could work efficiently and harmoniously together under a single Commander-in-Chief, and with an economical pooling of resources and facilities.

As 1963 wore on, it became abundantly clear to the authorities in Aden that the coup in the Yemen, fostered and encouraged by Egypt was to have serious repercussions for British responsibilities in South Arabia. The breathing space which had lasted since the end of the Kuwait crisis, eighteen months earlier, was coming to an end. Intense opposition to the South Arabian Federation – 'the puppet of Britain' – was being actively fostered among the tribes in the Aden hinterland and among the white collar workers in Aden State. The breathing space had been welcome as it had permitted the RAF to complete most of the technical and administrative facilities so badly needed by the expanded force which was now well prepared for any increase in the level of operational activity.

Little has been said in the chapter about developments in the Gulf and in Muscat and Oman during this brief period. There was little upon which to comment. Muharraq's commitment to house the detachments of Hunters, Shackletons, PR Canberras and transport aircraft which were needed for any sudden requirements was gradually reduced as Kuwait returned to normal: the squadron of Hunters became a flight; the Shackleton detachment was reduced to a single aircraft and 30 Squadron returned with its Beverleys to Eastleigh. No 152 Squadron, the resident Twin Pioneer/Pembroke unit at Muharraq, restarted a permanent detachment at Sharjah where the Trucial Oman Scouts needed greater mobility than could be provided by their own transport. But their territory, and that of the Sultan of Muscat, remained quiet, exhausted perhaps by the long campaign which had finished on the Jebel Akhdar. The newly formed Sultan's Air Force (SOAF) had developed into a useful and efficient little force, equipped with piston engined Provost and Single Pioneers, flown by RAF crews loaned to the Sultan and serviced by Airwork Ltd.

With no significant distractions elsewhere in the Command, the RAF was well able to devote its attention to the rising tide of trouble in the Federation, and it is with this trouble that the next three chapters are concerned.

Radfan operations

Following the Yemen revolution of September 1962, Egypt took every opportunity to support the Yemen claim to South Arabia by stirring up subversion against the Federation and against British rule in Aden State. A virulent programme of 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. Even more susceptible than the inhabitants of Aden to these blandishments and exhortations were the tribes of the hinterland whose very existence had always depended on fighting, either among themselves or against some form of authority. In particular, the 'wolves of Radfan' had for centuries relieved their poverty by carrying on an extensive protection racket at the expense of the caravans which wound their way through the mountains to the Yemen and on to Mecca, Petra, the Levant and Europe along an ancient trade route. The part of this route which ran through the Western Aden Protectorate was the Dhala road where the Quteibi tribe had always laid first claim on the traffic. Although the Amir of Dhala was the nominal head of all the tribes in this area, his control and authority over many of them were negligible. Particularly intransigent were those which occupied the Radfan, a pitiless region where the accepted rule was 'an eye for an eye', and where feuds and vendettas passed on from one member of a family to another, until honour was satisfied. The Radfan contained five main tribes, totalling some 35,000-40,000, within which could be counted 6,000-7,000 fighting men; experts in guerrilla warfare, courageous even under air attack, and competent snipers with any firearms they could obtain.

Back in 1961, British action to curb the 'toll collecting' by the Quteibis, which had then reached the level of looting and pillaging the caravans passing through the Radfan, had to be taken, causing a resentment and bitterness which had never diminished. Consequently the Radfan tribes provided excellent material for Yemeni and Egyptian propaganda to work upon. The subversion increased throughout 1963 and, despite frontier patrols and air action against dissidents, the infiltration of arms and money steadily increased and suitable tribesmen were invited into the Yemen for free training courses at the end of which they were provided with gifts of rifles and ammunition.

Subversion in Aden State was also on the increase, through the medium of the trades union dominated PSP. The incident which finally brought matters to a head occurred on the apron of the civil airport at Khormaksar on 10 December, 1963. A large official party had formed up to bid farewell to the High Commissioner, Sir Kennedy Trevaskis and several Ministers of the Federation who were to attend a constitutional conference in London. As they stood chatting before boarding the plane, there was a gentle thud and a small dark object rolled across the tarmac towards the High Commissioner. In the split second before the grenade exploded, the High Commissioner was pushed aside by his Assistant, George Henderson who himself received the full blast intended for his master. Henderson died of his injuries several days later, an Indian woman was killed and fifty-three people were injured, including the High Commissioner himself, several Ministers and officials. George Henderson was posthumously awarded his second George Medal for gallantry, the first having been gained in 1956 when, as Political Agent for the Western Aden Protectorate, he had fought off ten tribesmen by whom he had been ambushed up country.

As can be imagined, this outrage was more than British Authority could tolerate, and reaction was immediate. A State of Emergency was declared throughout South Arabia, the frontier with the Yemen was closed and 280 Yemeni 'undesirables' were deported from Aden. The constitutional conference which was to have taken place in London was postponed, and fifty-seven members of the PSP were arrested on suspicion of being involved in the bomb incident. These measures, swift and severe though they were, could not of themselves solve the problems facing the authorities who were now brought to the point of decision over military action. To date, they had been on the defensive, trying without much success to seal off the frontier against infiltration and to curb subversion within South Arabia. They now had to declare whether to use the stick or the carrot against the insurgency which was becoming a real threat to the future of the Federation.

There were three possible forms of action which could be taken. Briefly they were:

- a. Air control b. Civil action c. Military action

Air control had been used in earlier years to control the Protectorates, as it had previously been used in Iraq. It was excellent for quelling tribal dissidence in a swift, economical and humane manner. But it clearly had its limitations when it came to maintaining security along a closed frontier, or countering subversion in a populated area, such as Aden State. Air control alone was, therefore, ruled out as impracticable in the circumstances which prevailed. So also was civil action in the form of a crash programme to 'win hearts and minds'. Although perhaps the best long term solution, it could not be initiated overnight, would be extremely costly, and as a prerequisite, needed a degree of law and order in which to operate: such an environment did not exist. In short, it was

too late to achieve stability for the Federation by civil measures alone: nor could they meet the short term requirement of the British Government, namely, to put an end to the increasing subversion from external Powers, and to establish the authority of the Federal legislature. This left military action as the only course left to adopt: this meant an offensive operation on a considerable scale by land and air forces with such naval assistance as could be suitably used.

As the dissident elements among the Radfan tribes were the greatest trouble makers and were receiving most encouragement from their masters across the frontier, they were selected as the target for a large scale operation to teach them that they could not challenge the authority of the Federal Government with impunity. There were many critics of this decision, largely because there was no long term plan as to what was to be done to settle the area once the military task had been completed; no intention, for example, to drive a road into the region in an attempt, by peaceful penetration, to influence the 'hearts and minds' of the rebels. Nevertheless the view of those who considered that the bomb incident at Khormaksar necessitated immediate and firm action prevailed, and it was decided to mount a three battalion operation early in the New Year of 1964 to teach the Radfan tribes a proper lesson, and one which it was hoped would have a salutary effect upon the subversive elements in Aden itself.

The beginning of 1964 found the RAF in Aden at its maximum strength and well equipped and prepared to support the type of operation contemplated. With a new AOC in the person of Air Vice-Marshall J E Johnson CBE DSO DFC who had taken over the command of AFME in October 1963, from Air Vice-Marshall Rosier on completion of the latter's two-year tour of duty, the final expansion had been completed. It is worth summarising the RAF squadrons and units located at Khormaksar prior to the Radfan operations as they represented an all-time peak on what, at that time, was undoubtedly the busiest and most crowded station in the RAF. The operational units permanently located at Khormaksar on 1 January 1964, were as follows:

8 Squadron	12 Hunter GA9
43 Squadron	12 Hunter GA9
208 Squadron	12 Hunter GA9
26 Squadron	7 Belvedere HC1
37 Squadron	4 Shackleton MR2
78 Squadron	8 Twin Pioneer CG1
84 Squadron	6 Beverley C1
105 Squadron	10 Argosy C1
233 Squadron	6 Valetta C1
1417 Flight	4 Hunter FR10
SAR Flight	3 Sycamore HR14
<hr/>	
<i>Total</i>	<i>84 UE aircraft</i>

Nine squadrons and two flights was a formidable resident force to house on one station with a busy civil airport and only one runway. It says much for the station in general and the air traffic controllers in particular that, in spite of the congestion on the ground, and the widely differing traffic patterns created by the multiplicity of aircraft types, it was never found necessary to refuse or even restrict visiting aircraft such as 'V' bombers on 'Lone Ranger' flights from the United Kingdom. While discussing statistics, it is not inappropriate to mention that the personnel establishment of the whole of AFME at this time was 7,274 with a manning level of 94.9%. Thus a force of less than 7,000 airmen located throughout a Command some 3,000 miles in length was operating and maintaining about thirteen squadrons in all. One cannot help but recall the Iraq Command which, shortly after World War II, contained more than 20,000 personnel but did not possess a single operational squadron. This is not, of course, a fair comparison but it does indicate dramatically how streamlined and economical the RAF had become during the previous fifteen years.

Operation NUTCRACKER

The expressed aim of operation NUTCRACKER was 'to carry out a demonstration in force in the area of Radfan with a view to compelling the withdrawal from the area of twelve named dissidents, and convincing the tribesmen that the Government had the ability and will to enter Radfan as and when it felt inclined.' There were two subsidiary aims; the first, to provide a show of force in the Wadi Misrah (see Map 8), the main stronghold of the Quteibi tribe, the second, to convert the existing rough track through the Wadi Rabwa into one usable by Jeeps, so that it would be possible to enter the Wadi Taym whenever considered necessary in future. This was the area thought to be dominated by the dissidents, and the political assessment was that no serious opposition was likely to be offered to the large force of three battalions with its associated air support.

Three infantry battalions of the Federal Regular Army with its armoured car squadron and some British tanks, artillery and engineers assembled at Thumier, about 60 miles from Aden along the Dhala road, where an airstrip suitable only for light aircraft existed. The plan was for one battalion to be lifted by helicopter from Thumier to picquet the heights on both flanks of the Wadi Rabwa and also the high ground dominating the entrance to the Wadi Misrah which overlooked Thumier. Once this was completed the main force was to advance up the Wadi Rabwa and secure the high ground overlooking the Wadi Taym. Thereafter this force would swing south east along the Bakri Ridge.

The RAF was to play a major role in the operation, not only in giving close support to the advancing ground forces, but in lifting many of them into their initial positions and re-supplying them thereafter. Belvederes of 26 Squadron, assisted by four Wessex helicopters of 815

Squadron RN from the aircraft carrier *HMS Centaur*, were to be responsible for most of the airlift within the operational area, under cover provided by Hunters and Shackletons. A Brigade Air Support Officer (BASO) was located at Thumier with HQ 24 Brigade to control all air support required by the Brigadier, and he had two Forward Air Controllers (FAC) located with two of the battalions to select targets and direct aircraft onto them.

NUTCRACKER began, as planned, on 4 January 1964 with the lift of FRA troops onto picquet positions above the Wadi Rabwa. The second helicopter sortie struck trouble: as the *Belvedere* approached the picquet position, a series of 'bumps' was heard by the crew from the vicinity of the main cabin. This was thought to be troops dropping their equipment but, as the last troops left the aircraft, there was a loud crack and a hole appeared in the port side of the main cabin, four feet behind the co-pilot. The pilot accelerated away and it was then found that the *Belvedere* had been hit five times by rifle fire, one bullet passing through an engine bay and puncturing the front fuel tank. No irreparable damage had been done, but the vulnerability of the large helicopter in this confined area full of angry tribesmen was clearly revealed. However, the operation had started and, after a brief pause to reconsider tactics, the placing of the picquets continued. Using Thumier as its base, the helicopter force reconnoitred and arranged a number of landing points, denoted H1, H2, H3 etc along the route of advance, and these were used for landing reinforcements and supplies as the operation progressed. Carrying the 105mm howitzers of the RHA and lowering them into firing positions provided 26 Squadron with some of its more difficult feats of airmanship but, with a little practice, it was even possible to lower the guns so that they pointed approximately in the correct direction, thus saving the gun crews a good deal of difficult manhandling on the precipitous mountain sides. This was certainly the first time that artillery had been moved up by helicopter in this type of operation, enabling the guns to be fired from advantageous positions which were totally inaccessible by any other means. In fact, the use of helicopters in NUTCRACKER was on a much larger scale than on any previous occasion in Aden. Several of the picquets along the Wadi Rabwa came under attack and were pinned down, with minor casualties, for short periods. As always in this type of country, the difficulty lay in identifying the location of individual snipers. If and when found, cannon fire from Hunters could be called for within minutes and was usually highly effective, but well concealed tribesmen firing intermittently were extremely difficult to spot and could keep a patrol pinned down for appreciable periods. Nevertheless, the main force of the FRA was able to advance up the Wadi Rabwa and clear it, enabling the Royal Engineers to begin building the road with locally hired labourers, some of whom as the Force Commander put it, "were almost certainly shooting at us last week".

With the Wadi Rabwa securely in FRA hands, their third battalion moved through and advanced up the Bakri Ridge to a point where it overlooked the Wadi Dhubsan (see Map 8). During this advance splendid support was given by the Belvederes and Wessex and picquets, guns and supplies were moved continually to keep up with the advancing troops. No 208 Squadron distinguished itself with some very accurate strikes against identified dissident positions, being controlled competently by the Arab ACPs whose personnel had previously been trained at Khormaksar. The sweep through this western part of the Radfan was completed on 15 January when most of the force returned to Thumier. The new Rabwa road was opened two weeks later and the force started a new operation to extend military control into the Danaba basin and Wadi Taym. It was successful and virtually unopposed, but it was to prove a mistake in that it extended the operation into a commitment that the FRA was unable to maintain. However, NUTCRACKER had been a success; it greatly enhanced the power and prestige of the FRA for whom it was the first experience in the use of helicopters on a significant scale. The confidence of the Arab soldiers in 'the father of the grasshoppers' (Wessex) and 'the father of two fans' (Belvedere)* was firmly established and the only difficulty for the future was likely to be that there would never be enough helicopters to satisfy all demands. The FRA lost five killed, and had twelve wounded during the operation and had inflicted an unknown, but probably much larger number of casualties on the dissidents.

Unfortunately, as was mentioned earlier, no political purpose emerged and the presence of troops in the Radfan was thus of short term value only. By March it had become evident that the FRA was being strained beyond its resources: it could not continue to garrison Radfan and at the same time carry out its normal tasks of manning the frontier against Yemeni incursions. It was decided that the risk and problems of continuing to maintain a force in Radfan were too great, and that the FRA should withdraw from the Wadis Taym and Rabwa, but maintain a base at Thumier. Nobody was surprised when this withdrawal was followed immediately by the reoccupation of the Radfan by the dissidents, an event of which Egypt took full advantage by proclaiming it as a great victory over the "puppet imperialist forces" in the first battle of the war for the liberation of the 'Occupied' South Yemen. As a result dissident morale rose again and the rebels became increasingly active and aggressive with every encouragement from across the frontier.

The encouragement included a number of flights across the border by Yemeni aircraft and one raid by an armed helicopter escorted by two Mig type fighters. The village of Bulaq near Beiha was attacked with bombs and machine guns, as were a Frontier Guard post in the district and livestock, camels and tents nearby. Immediate retaliation was

**The Times*, 5 January 1965.

ordered which took the form of a highly destructive rocket and bomb attack by eight Hunters on Harib fort in Yemen territory across the frontier near Beihan on 28 March. Photographs taken before and after the raid revealed that the stone built fort was almost completely destroyed, and certainly made totally uninhabitable. An anti-aircraft gun beside the fort was thrown from its mounting and a number of vehicles wrecked. So good were the photographs taken by a Hunter FR10 that the warning leaflets which had been dropped on the fort fifteen minutes before the attack could be clearly seen lying in and around the fort. As expected, the Yemen referred this act of 'aggression' to the United Nations and it resulted in a resolution calling upon both countries to keep the peace. Although it had the effect on the Yemen of stopping further flights over the border, the incitement of the tribes to stir up every possible form of trouble continued unabated. Attacks on merchants and convoys on the Dhala road increased, and it was reported that some five hundred dissidents, well armed and equipped, were being led by a hard core of two hundred Egyptian-trained guerrillas. Furthermore, whether from fear or from the prospect of a better livelihood, the tribes began to support the dissidents in increasing numbers and took up arms against the Government.

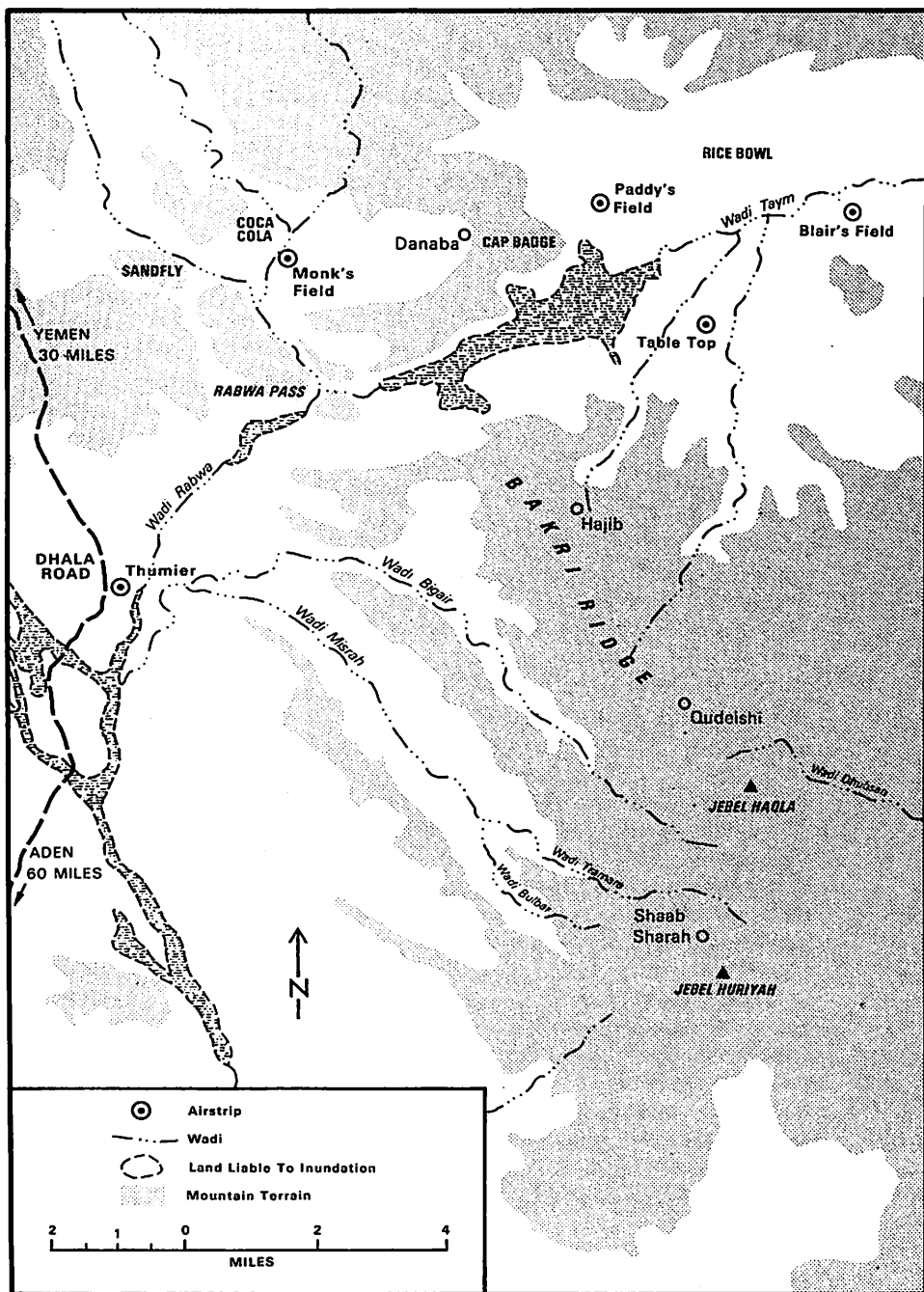
With some dissension from the two Federal Government Ministers most concerned, namely those for Defence and Internal Security who favoured air action, it was decided that still further military ground action was essential to quell the insurgency before it got out of hand. The dissenting voices argued that "ground action would be less effective, more wasteful and probably more dangerous than air action; that the presence of British troops in Radfan could well excite far greater opposition than would otherwise be the case; that the casualties which they would most certainly incur would delight our enemies and cause doubt and dismay in Britain". It is interesting to note that Sir Kennedy Trevaskis, has commented in his book* "in every respect, they were proved right."

Brigadier R L Hargroves, who had recently been appointed as the garrison commander in Aden was nominated by the GOC to command the operation, for which purpose he set up a small operational headquarters with officers drawn from various units and staffs in Aden.

Radforce 1964

The land forces which were allocated to Brigadier Hargroves, and which became known as the Radfan Force (shortened to Radforce), comprised 45 Commando Royal Marines with a company of the 3rd Battalion Parachute Regiment under command, two FRA battalions, an armoured car squadron, a RHA battery of 105mm light guns and a troop of Royal Engineers – in all a light scale brigade group. The air

**Shades of Amber* (p. 208).



MAP 8: AREA OF RADFAN OPERATIONS

support available consisted of the Hunter and Shackleton squadrons, the Twin Pioneers of 78 Squadron, four and later six Belvederes of 26 Squadron, two Scout helicopters and a few Austers and Beavers of the Army Air Corps. There were no naval helicopters available at the beginning of this operation, but the availability of forces changed continually as time went on. There were two other RAF changes at this time, namely the replacement of the four SAR Sycamore helicopters at Khormaksar by a similar number of Whirlwinds which greatly improved the capability of the rescue facilities; and the disbandment of 233 Squadron whose Valettas had reached pensionable age and had virtually been replaced in AFME by the Argosies of 105 Squadron.

The military aim of this new operation was "to end the operations of dissidents in the defined area" – a simple enough but somewhat vague aim as the 'defined area' consisted of a number of map squares, thought to contain the main rebel centres. As, however, there never had been any precise intelligence on the strength and location of the dissidents, it was, as in the case of *NUTCRACKER* earlier, impossible to give the Brigadier any exact objectives to secure or areas to occupy, and it was left to him to decide how to 'end the operations of the dissidents'. On this occasion, however, a fairly precise political aim was set out, namely, to prevent the tribal revolt from spreading; to reassert the Federal Government's authority and to stop attacks on the Dhala road. This was a helpful directive as it also indicated the extent of the pressure to be exerted on the tribes. It was a relief to the forces to know, for example, that fire was never deliberately to be directed at areas containing women and children, and villages were not to be shelled or attacked from the air until adequate warning had been given by leaflets.

The first plan to be formulated was bold and imaginative but, unfortunately, it called for more helicopters than could be made available. The area selected for denial to the enemy was the fertile region of the Danaba Basin and the Wadi Taym. As can be seen from the map (Map 8) this area is dominated by the great hill mass dividing these two regions. The plan submitted to the GOC was to fly in 45 Commando by helicopter and seize the dominant high ground and, at the same time cut the route used by the rebels to escape to the Yemen. In the absence of naval Wessex at the time, the total helicopter resources were four Belvederes (rising later to six) of 26 Squadron, two Scouts of the Army Air Corps and any of the four SAR Whirlwinds which could be released from their primary duties. As the strength of the opposition was unknown, it was imperative to put the Commando in quickly, and the available lift was inadequate for that purpose. The GOC had reluctantly to discard this bold concept and turn to a second plan which was based upon an advance into the same area on foot with the helicopters in a support and supply role. It was intended to occupy the 'Rice Bowl' area of the Wadi Taym after an advance by night and also to seize 'Cap Badge' by means of a night parachute drop, having pre-

viously brought guns up the Wadi Rabwa to a point at which they could bring fire to bear on 'Cap Badge'. The tribesmen were unaccustomed to fighting by night and disliked any form of night operation. Neither was there any precedent for an advance by night, on the scale contemplated, by British or FRA troops in this difficult country. If successful, surprise would clearly be absolute but it was essential to occupy the high ground by first light, or else the Government forces would be in a highly disadvantageous position.

This second plan was approved, and timed to begin on the night 30 April/1 May when 120 men of 3 Para were to be dropped near 'Cap Badge' from two Beverleys. But the DZ had to be marked and, for this purpose, a small party of 22 SAS Regiment was despatched on 29 April to locate a suitable DZ and guide the Beverleys in. The party was flown at last light by Scout helicopters to a point some 5,000 yards into dissident territory and overlooked by features thought to be occupied by dissidents. Artillery fired on the likely rebel positions, ceasing fire as the Scouts came in to land, resuming for one minute during the unloading and ceasing again for the take off. This procedure was repeated for each of the three sorties needed to land the SAS party, the whole operation taking twenty minutes.

The party set off as darkness fell and travelled all night, but were about two miles short of their final objective at daylight and had to lie up in a sangar on a hillside. It transpired later that they had lain up in the middle of an enemy area and a shepherd, stumbling upon their hiding place by chance, gave the alarm, bringing sniper fire down upon them from all directions. The enemy numbering 40-50 men, crept closer and closer and their fire became increasingly heavy. As surprise was by now completely lost the SAS used their radio to call for air support. This was immediately forthcoming from the Hunters of 43 and 208 Squadrons which maintained continuous attacks on the reported rebel positions throughout the remainder of the day. Eighteen sorties were flown and the subsequent SAS report stated that the attacks were extremely accurate and prevented the enemy from firing at the beleaguered men. The Hunters fired 127 rockets and 7,131 rounds of ammunition before darkness compelled them to break off. During the following night, the SAS party broke out of their cover but lost two of their number, including their Commanding Officer, during the running fight which ensued. It was impossible for the party to mark the DZ for the Beverleys that night in accordance with the plan, and a second SAS party which attempted to do so by helicopter had to return after being fired upon and receiving one bullet through a petrol tank and a second through a tail rotor.

By the morning of 1 May, it was quite clear that the operational area was more heavily populated with extremely militant rebels than had been anticipated. Even the advance up the Wadi Rabwa to position the 105mm guns within range of 'Cap Badge' had needed large scale Hunter

support directed against continual sniping from the hillsides. 45 Commando was already on its way up the Wadi Boran but, as the parachutists had not been dropped ahead of them, it was stopped and instructed to hold the 'Sand Fly' and 'Coca Cola' areas while the Force Commander reconsidered his plan.

The main objective was still the 'Cap Badge' feature which completely dominated the fertile areas of the Wadi Taym. Another British infantry battalion, the 1st East Anglians, had now become available, having been released from internal security duties in Aden and Thumier, and it was decided to push them forward to relieve 45 Commando at 'Sand Fly' and 'Coca Cola', thus releasing the latter to tackle 'Cap Badge'. By a fine feat of mountaineering, the Royal Marines occupied this rugged feature at night without opposition and without a shot being fired. The 3rd Parachute Regiment were then required to move through to the Wadi Taym under the cover of 45 Commando firmly ensconced above them on 'Cap Badge'. This proved an arduous task with constant harassment from rebels. The paratroops were hampered by lack of artillery support as the guns of the RHA were at extreme range, and much of their route lay within dead ground as far as the Commandos above them were concerned. The most effective support came from the Hunters which strafed rebel positions to within 150 yards of the paratroops and kept up a ceaseless attack all day. So close and accurate was this support that one soldier was injured by a spent cartridge case ejected from a Hunter. After thirty hours of continuous action which included an eleven hour march and a ten hour battle, the battalion reached its various objectives on the slopes of the 'Cap Badge' feature overlooking Wadi Taym. Thus by the evening of 5 May, Brigadier Hargroves had achieved all his objectives for the loss of two killed and ten wounded. He was firmly established in the heart of enemy territory and was in a position to reassert Government authority. This was achieved by proscribing various areas of the Danaba Basin and the Wadi Taym and enforcing the order by air action and vigorous patrolling.

The difficulties which had been encountered in completing the first phase clearly showed that settling the Radfan was going to be a long and arduous business. Suitable preparations for a lengthy campaign were initiated. A regular brigade HQ – 39 Brigade – was flown out from Northern Ireland to assume command at Thumier from Brigadier Hargroves scratch staff which had controlled the opening phase so well. The airfield at Thumier was extended to 1,000 yards and made suitable for Beverleys: this took an immense load off the Twin Pioneers which had been the only fixed wing aircraft other than Austers and Beavers able to bring troops and supplies forward from Aden by air. *HMS Centaur* arrived back in Aden and her Wessex helicopters were a welcome addition to the short range transport force. Six Wessex were detached to Khormaksar on 24 May and went into action the same day to relieve the Belvederes which were suffering considerably from engine

trouble due to the ingestion of large quantities of sand at Thumier and at the various landing zones in the forward area. So serious was the sand ingestion problem that the Belvederes were using engines at the rate of two per week and a severe shortage of Gazelle engines arose. The problem was eventually alleviated by treating landing pads with oil to damp down and consolidate the sand, but the Belvedere always remained susceptible to sand swallowing and was, in spite of its valuable lifting capability, somewhat too delicate for the rough conditions of the WAP. Nevertheless, it must be said that it was quite indispensable; nothing else could have deployed the 105mm guns to such firing points as the top of the 4,000 foot 'Coca Cola' peak.

Handing over control of operations to HQ 39 Brigade marked the end of Radforce which had proved to be a masterpiece of improvisation, and a considerable success. A brief pause for consolidation ensued during which the new Force Commander, Brigadier CH Blacker OBE MC and his brigade staff prepared plans for what can be described as the second half of the Radfan campaign.

Operations continue

A number of new units were added to the force with the arrival of 39 Brigade, notably 1st Royal Scots and the remainder of the 3rd Parachute Regiment. These, with most of the Brigade HQ staff, needed time to become acclimatised, as the hot weather was getting well under way in the Radfan and it was only on the higher features at night that any respite from intense heat could be obtained. Another factor which dictated a pause was the need to reduce dependence upon helicopter lift which, as we have seen, had placed an immense strain on the few available. Virtually all supplies to forward troops had so far been delivered by helicopter and this could clearly not be maintained as larger bodies of troops were pushed further and further forward. The road through the Wadi Rabwa and the Rabwa Pass, which had been built with such effort by the Royal Engineers during NUTCRACKER had been largely destroyed by the tribes. By 17 May, however, rough tracks which were just about usable by $\frac{1}{2}$ -ton vehicles, were opened through both the Wadi Rabwa and Wadi Boran. A fine piece of ingenuity, based upon naval principles, enabled a 1,700 foot cable lift to be built to carry stores to the top of 'Cap Badge': it worked very well although on at least one occasion it was struck by lightning. At the same time two airstrips suitable for light aircraft such as Twin Pioneers were constructed in the Wadi Tayn - Paddy's Field and Monk's Field (see Map 8).

None of these improvements was carried out without opposition, and it was clear that the dissidents were still aggressive and confident. They seemed to be most active on the Bakri Ridge and in the Wadi Misrah, and so it was upon these two areas that Brigadier Blacker decided to concentrate. He was conscious of the need for offensive action without too much delay in order to demonstrate the authority of the Govern-

ment and convince the dissidents of the futility of their struggle: but it was equally important that there should be no setbacks or serious casualties.

The Bakri Ridge was made the primary objective as it was thought to be strongly held by the rebels, but it was deemed prudent to delay any operation to occupy it until 25 May, the date upon which the Wessex helicopters from *HMS Centaur* would be available to strengthen the force. *Centaur* was also bringing from Singapore two 5.5-inch guns of the RHA which would greatly extend the range of the available artillery. Until 25 May, therefore, aggressive patrolling took place and a number of areas were 'proscribed' for attack from the air. These areas which were given code names such as 'Carthorse', 'Ramrod', 'Buffalo', etc were subsequently designated 'air control areas' and a large measure of freedom was given to Khormaksar's Hunters and Shackletons to attack fortified buildings, watch towers and sangars within them. Villages, livestock and crops were not to be attacked except with the usual leaflet warning and in co-operation with forward troops in the area. The Shackletons of 37 Squadron, reinforced by two similar aircraft from Gibraltar, took over the task at night from the Hunters and helped to maintain round the clock harassment of the designated areas. The overall aim of this 'air control' phase was to maintain continuous and unrelenting pressure on the rebels, to make life impossible and oblige them to remain outside their home territory.

Although 25 May had been the earliest date on which it was deemed wise to assault the Bakri Ridge, the situation was dramatically changed by news from a patrol of 3 Para, sent up to reconnoitre the Ridge, that it was not being held as strongly as had been expected and, furthermore, that a relatively easy route up on to it had been found. Brigadier Blacker reacted swiftly to this development and, while proscription continued unabated in the areas around the foot of the Ridge, he sent a 'reconnaissance in force' of 3 Para up to its backbone with orders to penetrate as far as Hajib, if possible. In spite of the fact that no helicopters could be made available to lift supplies up on to the Ridge, and the troops had to hump their own requirements up a precipitous and difficult ascent, the patrol made good progress and reached the Hajib area in two days before they lost the element of surprise and encountered opposition. It was not, however, severe until the patrol reached the area of Qudeishi, the highest point of the Ridge. The rebels appeared to have decided to make a determined stand on this high ground – and determined it proved to be.

About fifty tribesmen had taken up positions in what subsequently transpired to be a bewildering maze of caves and tunnels cut into the solid rock of an escarpment. In spite of intense fire from some of the guns of the RHA which had been literally manhandled up the Ridge to within range of Qudeishi, the rebels maintained a hostile barrage of fire. A series of Hunter strikes was laid on which, although extremely

accurate, failed to subdue the fire for more than a few seconds at a time. Even when the Hunters completely demolished a small fort, fire continued unabated from a second fort only 50 yards away. The courage of the tribesmen and their ability to withstand modern firepower were impressively demonstrated in this engagement but they also behaved as true guerrillas, in that they fought boldly only so long as they held the initiative. As soon as they saw that an attack was being pressed home, they would withdraw to fight elsewhere on another day. Thus by 24 May, 3 Para were in full possession of the Bakri Ridge and had successfully invested an area of more than 200 square miles. With the Khormaksar aircraft maintaining vigorous air control of the designated areas around the Ridge, a considerable penetration of the Radfan had been made and the picture for the future looked hopeful.

The Force Commander's sights were now set on occupying the formidable Jebel Huriyah, a 5,500 foot peak which had never been climbed by a European and which dominated the whole of the Radfan. Before an assault upon it could be mounted, however, it was necessary to clear the Wadis Misrah and Dhubsan of opposition, the latter being a particularly deep, narrow and thoroughly inhospitable ravine where dissidents were known to be entrenched in some strength. No problems arose in the Wadi Misrah and guns were taken to positions in it from which they could fire over into the Wadi Dhubsan. By means of a brilliant climb by night down a precipitous track which included one sheer drop of 30 feet, a company of 3 Para scrambled down into the Wadi carrying all their spare ammunition and other supplies. They captured the first village in the Wadi at dawn on 26 May, occupied the small Jebel Haqla without opposition and then encountered stiff resistance from higher up the Wadi. Concentrated and accurate fire from an estimated thirty to fifty of the enemy, equipped with at least six light machine guns in addition to rifles, poured down upon the troops in the bed of the Wadi, resulting in a number of casualties. One Scout helicopter had managed to spiral down into the ravine – 'rather like flying down a chimney' – as the pilot put it. The Commanding Officer of 3 Para decided to use this Scout to carry out a personal reconnaissance, and immediately came under heavy fire. Bullets tore into the helicopter, wounding one of the occupants, but the pilot managed to swing it round and, losing height rapidly, just held it in the air until he reached the comparative safety of the leading troops. The Scout had been hit eleven times, but was patched up sufficiently to be flown out a little later.

In the meantime, the Hunters had been called in and once again provided magnificent support. At considerable risk they flew at ground level along the bottom of the narrow Wadi, attacking the rebel positions as they were identified. As on a previous occasion, their support was so close that troops were hit by spent cartridges as the Hunters passed over their heads firing at the enemy beyond. These attacks proved too much for the dissidents who gave ground, allowing 3 Para to gain their

objective in what was clearly the most strongly held and fiercely contested enemy stronghold so far encountered. The cost was one killed and seven wounded against an estimate of at least six rebels killed. All was now set for an assault upon the final objective – Jebel Huriyah.

The capture of Jebel Huriyah

As the Hunters and Shackletons continued to maintain a round the clock surveillance and harassment of the various 'air control areas', a plan to occupy the Jebel was devised for early June. Although the Wadi Misrah had been reasonably well cleared of rebels, no chances were taken and it was decided that the 1st East Anglians* would picquet the sides of the Wadi to allow one heavy troop of the 4th Royal Tank Regiment to clear the Wadi as far as the junction with Wadi Tramare. This preliminary advance was completed without incident on 1 June. The advance continued for three more days until the foothills of the Jebel were reached where the force, now joined by the 2nd Battalion of the FRA, paused to mount their final assault on the peak.

On 7 June the advance towards the village of Shaab Sharah, situated on the slopes of the Jebel, commenced and, as events turned out, led to the main battle of the whole operation. Hardly had the advance started at dawn when the leading elements of 2 FRA came under fire from forty to fifty dissidents firmly established on a ridge in the line of advance, a ridge which became known as FRA Ridge. The enemy were in a strong position, firing across a deep valley so that any attack put in against them meant for the assaulting troops a 400 foot descent to the floor of the valley and then a steep 600 foot climb, all under fire. The battle continued all day with intense and accurate attacks from wave after wave of Hunters, assisted by the 5.5-inch and 105mm guns of the RHA which had been brought into positions behind 2 FRA. But the dissidents clung grimly to their positions and were not to be dislodged although they suffered heavy casualties. For the first time in the campaign they forsook their guerrilla tactics and seemed prepared to stand and fight, a clear indication of the importance they attached to Jebel Huriyah. The pressure was maintained by all arms until darkness fell, when it was certain that no major attack could be mounted that day.

At the first light on the following day, 2 FRA moved cautiously forward and were surprised to find Shaab Sharah deserted. The dissidents had withdrawn, not only from the village, but also apparently from the dominant ridge to which they had clung throughout the previous day's fighting. And so, the whole area of the ridge was occupied by 1430 hours that same day – 8 June. The extent of the defeat suffered by the rebels was not fully known as the Force Commander made his plan for the capture of the peak of the Jebel. It was naturally thought that they had withdrawn to the upper regions in the face of the intense

*Granted prefix 'Royal', 1 September 1964.

attacks, and would stand again in fresh positions. A complete battalion assault was, therefore, planned to minimise the risk of any defeat at this decisive stage.

The night of 10/11 June was dark and moonless as the soldiers moved towards the start line which was crossed at 0200 hours. It was rough and difficult going, but made easier by Shackletons which dropped a continuous succession of flares to the south and beyond the Jebel, lighting it up and silhouetting it for the benefit of the troops, giving them the effect of hazy moonlight. They reached the summit at 5,500 feet well before dawn with no opposition of any kind and were immensely cheered to see the satisfying sight of the lights of Aden flickering some 40 miles away.

The battle of Shaab Sharah had been the decisive battle of the campaign, and a serious mistake by the dissidents. They had allowed themselves to be brought to a pitched battle, where their mobility was lost, and where they were forced to fight under conditions most unfavourable to them. As a result, they suffered very severe casualties, mostly from the concentrated air attack, and were unable subsequently to defend the peak of the Jebel. This action was the climax of the campaign and the dissidents never offered any organised resistance for the remainder of 1964. They had been forced to admit that the Government forces could and would penetrate into the innermost fastness of their rugged country.

This did not, of course, signal the end of operations in the Radfan – far from it, as Government forces and the RAF were occupied at varying degrees of intensity in that region for a further two and a half years. But it was the decisive completion of the deliberate campaign to penetrate the rebel area and demonstrate the capability of Government forces to seek out and destroy rebel tribesmen at will. Such dissidence as continued in the Radfan was at a much lower level, more in consonance with the general tide of unrest which was rising throughout the whole of the Federation.

Radfan in retrospect

After the successful occupation of Jebel Huriyah the tempo of operations slowed: air control of the designated areas was continued throughout July, August and September and ground forces were retained in the area. The harassment of the tribes was not, therefore, relaxed and as the time for harvesting the crops approached, it became apparent that the air control was so effective that the tribes began to emerge at night to work in their fields, a move which was countered by the Shackletons dropping flares and a number of bombs at irregular intervals to add to the general discomfort of proscription. One by one the tribes began to come in to sue for peace with the Political Officers. As this progressed, so the air control areas were reduced in size until, in October, only one small area remained. This area was in the Wadi Taym in the vicinity of

Blair's Field against which night attacks were frequently made by a hard core of dissidents in the surrounding hills. Some of their hideouts were identified and Hunters were sent in to destroy them with rocket and cannon fire early in November. On 18 November, the Ibdali tribe which had defied government control to the end, capitulated and sued for peace. On the same day, all offensive action in the Radfan ceased, at least for the time being.

Although the Radfan tribes had had enough, the deliberate and persistent policy by Egypt of subversion and infiltration from the Yemen was in no way discouraged by tribal reverses in a remote mountain valley. The FRA strengthened by a British military presence under the ever watchful eye of Khormaksar's aircraft, remained in the Radfan as a vigilant garrison for the duration of Britain's stay in Aden. The need to remain in the area did nothing, however, to denigrate the success of the campaign which had been waged. The military and political aims given to the Force Commander had been achieved with the minimum loss in lives and equipment. The campaign had been conducted on a shoe string, and a slender one at that. Planned to last three weeks at battalion strength, it had lasted three months and had expanded to brigade group strength. Even so, the margin of safety had always been small and, at times, only the determination, fortitude and skill of the land and air forces prevented things from going seriously wrong.

The terrain and, initially, the total lack of any roads forward of Thumier meant that the campaign had to hinge on the correct use of the air. Maps were so unreliable that almost every move had to be surveyed in advance by the commanders from the air, making heavy demands upon flying time. The movement of troops, guns and supplies needed all the air lift available: in certain categories, notably helicopters, it was inadequate and placed a tremendous strain on the few Belvederes, Scouts, Whirlwinds and Wessex which were outstanding. For example, five army Scout pilots carried out no fewer than 7,200 high altitude landings (an average of one every 8½ minutes) between April and September. On several occasions Belvederes positioned 5.5-inch guns on precipitous firing points at altitudes well above their recognised ceiling for such loads, by skilful flying and airmanship. When the Wessex from *HMS Centaur* joined in on 25 May, they carried out ninety sorties on their first day in spite of the fact the pilots and navigators were mostly strangers to the Radfan.

Much has been said about the strike aircraft already, but their work was summed up in Julian Paget's book – *The Last Post – Aden 1964–1970* when he said on page 106:

"The strike aircraft of the RAF were superb, brilliantly handled and always on the spot within minutes. The closest liaison was established with the ground forces, who had complete confidence in the air support provided."

The effort expended by the strike and transport aircraft of Air Forces,

Middle East, during the first two intensive months of the campaign is shown in an accompanying table (Fig VI). When studied against the paucity in numbers of some of the aircraft types, eg four to six Belvederes, the figures reveal an intense and sustained effort on the part of Khormaksar, where all the aircraft mentioned in the table were stationed. The fact that the area of operations was only 50 miles from the station was, naturally, a great advantage. Not only did it permit a very high sortie rate for a relatively small number of flying hours, but it also avoided the need to locate aircraft forward at Thumier or to refuel them in forward areas, both of which would have been expensive and time consuming diversions from the all out effort. One disadvantage of such a

Fig VI: AFME effort during Radfan Operations, 30 April – 30 June 1964

<i>Aircraft</i>	<i>Sorties flown</i>	<i>RP 2-inch</i>	<i>Cannon 20/30mm</i>	<i>1,000lb bombs</i>	<i>20lb bombs</i>	<i>Flares</i>
Hunter MK 9	527	2,508	176,092			
Hunter FR 10	115		7,808			
Shackleton	85		18,195	14	3,504	445

<i>Aircraft</i>	<i>Sorties flown</i>	<i>Pass- engers</i>	<i>Casevacs</i>	<i>Freight (lbs)</i>
Beverley	9	407		112,084
Twin Pioneer	324	3,697	161	399,887
Belvedere	1,027	1,798	48	1,110,515
Whirlwind	57	95	26	41,140
RN Wessex*	409	2,096		192,659

*Between 24 May and 26 June only.

high sortie rate was the effect on aircrews and ground crews. The need for aircrew to be briefed and debriefed several times a day, to climb in and out of cockpits and flying clothing in conditions of intense heat and to fly most of the time at low altitudes, was extremely exhausting. For servicing personnel, short sorties inevitably meant shorter intervals between refuelling, re-arming and between-flight inspections. More faults requiring rectification occur and the general wear and tear is

much greater. In consequence, Khormaksar badly needed the respite afforded by the gradual reduction of operational tempo towards the end of 1964. Other distractions, even closer to Khormaksar than the Radfan were beginning to cause concern, and it is to those that the next chapter will be devoted.

Terrorism in Aden State

The swift and effective counter action taken in 1964 prevented the situation in the Radfan from gaining momentum and spreading throughout the Protectorate. Thwarted by this setback in what might loosely be described as the rural areas, Yemen and Egyptian pressure was switched to the urban areas and a mounting wave of subversion and terrorism swept through Aden State itself, leading directly to the withdrawal of all British forces some three years later. In 1964 the British Government announced that South Arabia would now be granted independence "not later than 1968", and that Britain intended to maintain the military base in Aden thereafter. This announcement clearly created a deadline for the attainment of nationalist aims with the inevitable result that impetus was given to the mounting tide of terrorism.

Urban guerrilla warfare is not an activity in which an air force can play a major role and, because this is a history of the Royal Air Force, it has been necessary to describe the campaign of terrorism in Aden State as seen through RAF eyes. The campaign was largely waged by the infantry and armoured units of the Army, Royal Marine Commandos and some RAF Regiment units. The primary tasks of the RAF were to secure Khormaksar against attack so that both military and civil airports could continue to operate their aircraft unimpeded, to continue to provide air support for operations up country, to maintain the airfields along the South Arabian coast and in the Gulf, to keep wireless and radio communications functioning efficiently and to assist in the protection of the many military administrative establishments scattered throughout Aden. Khormaksar was Aden's lifeline to the outside world and had to be safeguarded at all costs. It was far more important than the port which could never be made entirely secure with its vast area of commercial installations and the constant movement of marine traffic. Khormaksar, on the other hand, was situated on an isthmus, with water on two sides and British forces located in camps on the other two sides. It was relatively easy to secure against any significant scale of attack, although not from isolated incidents of sabotage and terrorism.

In order to understand the situation which developed from late 1964, it is essential to have some knowledge of the political factions which competed for control in Aden, each with different aspirations, but all

united in their hostility to Britain and Federal Government rule. There were three nationalist organisations with confusing histories of growth, amalgamation and, finally, separation. In somewhat over-simplified form these boiled down to:

South Arabian League (SAL). This was founded as far back as 1951 and was based on the State of Lahej, whose Sultan had strong nationalist leanings, and a personal ambition to establish his power over other States. SAL advocated an independent South Arabia as a unitary state, rather than a union with the Yemen. It was a moderate, middle class party, which after various vicissitudes, tended to fade into the background in the presence of more militant organisations. It did not participate in terrorism, and latterly had little influence on the outcome of events.

National Liberation Front (NLF). This was the leading terrorist group and the most formidable organisation as far as the Security Forces were concerned. Based originally in the Yemen, it was founded in 1963 and pledged to drive the British out of South Arabia and to establish Egyptian influence and control. Murder and intimidation were its main methods of operations, it was well organised, had excellent intelligence services and was quite ruthless. As it gained power, it tended to sever its connections with Egypt, and eventually took over complete power in South Arabia.

Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen (FLOSY). This third organisation sprang from Al Asnag's Peoples Socialist Party (PSP) which has already figured in this narrative. Unlike the NLF, it favoured political action rather than terrorism to achieve its aims which were the unification of Aden State, the Federation and the Yemen as one country. Although a not inconsiderable influence in the events which were to follow, FLOSY was eventually compelled to bow before the sheer terrorist power of the NLF.

As with all nationalist movements, there were various splinter groups, but it was these three parties, and the NLF and FLOSY in particular, which dominated the Aden scene from the end of 1964 onwards.

Until November, 1964, there had been very little terrorist activity in Aden State since the bomb outrage at the civil airport almost twelve months earlier in which Mr George Henderson had been killed while saving the life of the High Commissioner. (See page 203). But a campaign of grenade throwing now started up and the festive season of 1964 became known as 'Black Christmas'. One of the worst tragedies was to affect the RAF when, on 23 December, a grenade was thrown into one of the officers' married quarters at Khormaksar just as a private teenagers' dance was ending. Gillian Sidey, the sixteen-year-old daughter of Air Commodore E S Sidey, the Principal Medical Officer at Middle East Command, was killed and four other young guests injured. Gillian had flown out from England only two days before to join her parents for the Christmas holiday. On Christmas Day itself, an Arab Special Branch

officer was shot down by gunmen in Crater and these two tragic events closed a year in which there had been thirty-six incidents, which caused thirty-nine casualties, all occurring during the last two months. No more evidence was needed to show that Aden had become the main target for terrorism.

Some redistribution of RAF units was made in an effort to reduce personnel strengths and to move out any squadrons or administrative units which were not essential to the internal security operations which were now beginning in earnest. Instead of moving from Eastleigh to Khormaksar, as had been intended, 30 Squadron, still equipped with six Beverleys was deployed to Muharraq, from where it could undertake the routine supply of the Gulf and South Arabian coast stations. No 84 Squadron, which remained with the Beverley second line servicing at Khormaksar, detached two of its Beverleys to Eastleigh to carry on the residual work of 30 Squadron. An additional RAF Regiment unit, 37 (Field) Squadron, was transferred from Cyprus to Khormaksar to join 16 (Field) Squadron in the highly responsible task of defending the airfield. Although an air attack on Aden from the Yemen was considered unlikely, the occasional violation of the frontier by Egyptian-flown Mig fighters was sufficient cause for concern as Aden was little more than ten minutes flying time from parts of the frontier. Mobile radar installations were, therefore positioned at Mukeiras and 303 Signals Unit deployed to the Command to operate an early warning system in conjunction with a battle flight of Hunters held at readiness at Khormaksar. This permitted a cumbersome Type 'V' radar convoy to be removed back to Masirah where it could remain as a command reserve and also provide general radar cover and watch over air refuelling operations, which were becoming more frequent along the Far Eastern route through Gan.

At this time Aden housed more than nine thousand Service dependents, mostly in quarters and hirings which were fairly well concentrated in the Steamer Point, Maala and Khormaksar areas. The Gillian Sidey tragedy naturally caused the utmost concern of all these families and a general order was issued to the effect that all personnel not on duty were to be in their homes by midnight. Private entertaining was greatly curtailed and the Aden Brigade, which was responsible for internal security, strengthened the guards on those areas where the families lived. These were unhappy changes for a community which had hitherto enjoyed complete freedom of movement and a high degree of safety. The strict Mohammedan code of honesty and abstinence had always made Aden a place with a low crime rate and high moral standards. The Chief Justice had occasionally been heard to say that there was insufficient crime in Aden to occupy him fully. Unfortunately the activities of the NLF and FLOSY were in process of changing his opinion radically.

As 1965 opened the future for the British presence in Aden looked bleak indeed: individual acts of terrorism, mainly grenade throwing and

sniping increased steadily with a mounting toll of casualties. Fortunately women and children were not, on the whole, the main targets although their presence in such large numbers was intensely worrying to the Security Forces. British and Arab personnel of the Special Branch constituted a principal target. Both FLOSY and the NLF were fully aware of the importance to the British authorities of good, up to the minute information, and both were highly competent at denying such information by intimidating the native population and by direct attacks on those officers and men who were trained to obtain and process it. Throughout the whole campaign in Aden this difficulty of obtaining information about the terrorists was undoubtedly the greatest hurdle to be overcome and despite the appointment of a single senior intelligence chief and other steps taken to strengthen the organisation, it was never fully overcome.

On 20 January 1964, Sir Richard Turnbull took over as High Commissioner, having voluntarily come out of retirement to take up the unenviable appointment. He was a strong and resolute man with immense experience of East Africa during its difficult and stormy transition to independence. He had served in Kenya during the Mau Mau emergency, and had been the last Governor of Tanganyika. He was, therefore, under no illusion about the problems facing him in Aden. One of his first responsibilities was to appoint a new Chief Minister of the Aden State Government and, under the terms of the constitution the post had first to be offered to the member who commanded most support within the Legislative Council. This turned out to be one Aboul Qawi Mackawee, the leader of the Opposition, whose views were so militant and nationalistic that he was later to become the leader of FLOSY. Mackawee accepted the appointment, and any faint hope that he might co-operate with Britain in order to achieve his ends was soon dispelled. He became as difficult and obstructive as it was possible to be and, if he did not actively encourage terrorism, he certainly condoned it and made the work of the Security Forces as difficult as he could.

The AOC had introduced a comprehensive system of Alert procedures involving four colour code states of Alert and the measures to be taken when each state was announced. As far as Khormaksar was concerned this was becoming particularly necessary. The congestion on the airfield was such that even the most highly organised security net could not guarantee that isolated acts of sabotage would not occur and cause extensive damage. For example, mortar bombs could be fired into the station from considerable distances under cover of darkness in an indiscriminate attempt to damage aircraft. Consequently the Alert procedures contained a plan for dispersing Khormaksar's aircraft if the threat to the airfield intensified. Broadly this amounted to transferring the light aircraft, such as Twin Pioneers and helicopters to Falaïse, an Army Air Corps airstrip which had been constructed at Little Aden; sending the Beverleys up to Riyan, with Shackletons further afield to

Masirah or Sharjah. This would clearly be highly inconvenient as the distances were so great, eg a dispersal of no less than 900 miles to Masirah, but the paucity of airfields left no alternative if the procedure had to be adopted. It left the Hunters, well dispersed, at Khormaksar where they had to remain for defence purposes. In the event, it never became necessary to put this plan into action, so well secured was Khormaksar by the Army and RAF Regiment, but it was kept amended and up-to-date until the end.

These were not the only policy changes decided upon by the AOC at this time in the light of the increasing emergency. A number of decisions affecting squadrons and their equipment were also made in conjunction with the Air Force Department. No 78 Squadron was planned to give up its Twin Pioneers, which had given long and valuable service, and to re-equip with nine Wessex helicopters, aircraft which, in the hands of the Navy had already proved to be well suited to the Aden terrain. No 21 Squadron was to retain its Twin Pioneers and to move from Eastleigh to Khormaksar when its work with the remaining army units in Kenya was finished. No 26 Squadron was to disband after 78 Squadron had received its Wessex, and the Belvederes redistributed elsewhere outside the Command. The number of Twin Pioneers in 152 Squadron at Muharraq was to be increased to seven, including one aircraft as a command reserve. Finally the Middle East Communications Squadron was to receive two VIP Andovers as soon as they became available.

Even the hot weather of 1965, which was quite as unpleasant as usual did not curb the activities of the terrorists with the result that, in June, Sir Richard Turnbull felt obliged to introduce emergency regulations in order to give himself and the Security Forces certain additional powers, such as detention without trial for up to six months, and even longer if a specially constituted board so recommended after considering a case. This had become essential because intimidation of the population was so widespread and effective that it was virtually impossible to find any civilian witness of an act of terrorism who was willing to bear testimony in a court. The new regulations also allowed the High Commissioner to 'proscribe' as a terrorist party any organisation, which he believed to be engaged in subversive activities and violence against the Government. Under this rule, the NLF was duly proscribed despite the furious opposition of Mackawee, who was, by now, clearly using the office of Chief Minister to flout the authority of the High Commissioner and the Federal Government at every point. He flatly refused to permit the entry of a Constitutional Commission which the Federal Ministers were anxious to receive from London, describing its members as 'undesirable immigrants', and he was then so unco-operative at a conference in London, that it broke up without making any progress. With his indirect encouragement, if not open support, terrorism continued to increase with incidents too numerous to catalogue, including for example, the complete destruction of an RAF Dakota while standing on the apron of

the civil airport at Khormaksar. These acts reached a peak in August and September when, firstly, a British Superintendent of Police, was killed in Crater and, secondly, Sir Arthur Charles, the British Speaker of the Aden State Legislative Council, was shot dead by a gunman while leaving the tennis club in Crater. Even these dastardly acts brought no condemnation from the Chief Minister, but only protestation at the curfew which Sir Richard Turnbull promptly clapped upon Crater. Demands for Mackawee's dismissal from office became insistent and, on 26 September, acting on HMG's instructions, the High Commissioner removed him from his post, dissolved the Aden Government and took over its responsibilities.

Direct rule had come to Aden at last after much forbearance and every effort to find a workable form of government. Mackawee departed to Cairo where he could be sure of finding sympathy for his wild accusations against the British, and the Federal Ministers once again felt some hope that they might eventually be able to govern a Federation which would include Aden State. The curfew, originally imposed upon Crater was extended to the whole of Aden, both the FRA and the Federal Guards were brought in to deal with demonstrations in Crater, and a firm, uncompromising line was taken against known extremists which resulted in the arrest of 760 suspected persons. To the Security Forces, whose hands had been tied during Mackawee's administration, all this was most encouraging although it was now crystal clear that a long, grim struggle against terrorism lay ahead. Although direct rule had become inevitable, the act of declaring it meant that HMG had accepted a direct confrontation with Arab nationalism, and thereby laid themselves open to attack in the United Nations and elsewhere as 'enemies of democracy'.

The effect of these political developments upon life in Aden was to add to the restriction on free movement and to make the hot weather months of 1965 even more burdensome than usual. Being unable to go out in the relative cool of the evening due to the curfew was one of the greatest hardships. Schools and places of entertainment had to be closed for fear of heavy casualties from bomb attacks. Large numbers of airmen were needed to supplement the Army and RAF Regiment in guard duties, and this bore heavily upon Khormaksar, whose airmen already had a full time task in servicing the aircraft for the operations up country which continued at a steady pace. Indeed, an attack on the village of Marquad and a nearby Frontier Guard post near Beiham by two Mig fighters in June caused the death of two Arab women and injury to three other villagers. This incident necessitated the re-introduction of the Beiham Air Defence Patrol by pairs of Hunters, a wasteful and time-consuming commitment which could not be avoided if any sort of protection was to be offered to the frontier villages. Despite the fact that all the Radfan tribes had sued for peace, and had been thoroughly chastened by the successful operations in 1964, it did not stop the steady

infiltration of Egyptian and Yemeni sponsored dissidents who maintained a constant harassment on the Government forces who were valiantly endeavouring to pursue some kind of 'hearts and minds' policy by assisting the tribes to build schools, roads, wells and other agricultural facilities. But it was too little, and much too late: a great deal of the good work was undone by hostile infiltrators before it was even completed. The dropping of hundreds of tons of cement, pumping machinery and other equipment from Beverleys and helicopters was largely a waste of time, and the exposure to sniper fire of young Royal Engineer soldiers while helping the villagers, resulted in a number of casualties among them.

More and more army units had to be diverted to internal security duties in Aden State so that, by September, 1965 the force deployed had increased to three full scale battalions from the original single infantry battalion. In addition there were two, and occasionally three RAF Regiment squadrons which were almost entirely confined to the defence of Khormaksar. A number of imaginative ways of making greater use of aircraft in the internal security duties was devised. The occasional Twin Pioneer was used to drop leaflets in potentially troublesome districts, such as Crater. Helicopters were used to move small bodies of troops to incidents with as little as three minutes warning. On one occasion, a whole company of the 1st Royal Anglians was lifted from its camp by ten Wessex and landed in the Crater area in less than four minutes. As 1965 drew to a close, Crater was becoming the focal point of terrorist outrages. The dense mass of tightly packed houses and narrow streets and alleyways made the old town ideal for hit and run tactics, particularly when no householder dare refuse to give sanctuary to a terrorist on the run. Because of the particular dangers of Crater, a total of 237 family hirings occupied by Service families were given up in October and, with much relief, the families were rehoused in safer areas.

At Khormaksar 26 Squadron was disbanded on 30 November, and most of its Belvederes were flown onto *HMS Albion* and ferried to the Far East where they joined 66 Squadron and went on to play a notable part in the Borneo campaign. The Belvedere had had a chequered career at Khormaksar. As will already have been realised, it was invaluable in the Radfan campaign of 1964. Without 26 Squadron the campaign would not only have been protracted, but casualties would undoubtedly have been higher. The accurate positioning of heavy guns on the most unlikely firing points was, perhaps, the highlight of the Belvedere operations. Technically, however, the aircraft was far from trouble free. Although rugged in construction, it was an advanced and complicated design which needed more sophisticated servicing and rectification than it tended to receive in the conditions of Aden. A number of design faults, notably those concerned with the starting system and yaw cables had not been eradicated and, although it subsequently achieved a high rate of serviceability in the Far East, the engineering staff in AFME had

undoubtedly found it a difficult aircraft to maintain. The Belvedere thus provided another example of the importance of thorough development of airframes and engines, and the specialised training and employment of ground personnel before a new design is deployed to an overseas command.

As 26 Squadron disbanded, the detachment of 84 Squadron's Beverleys, which had been maintained at Eastleigh for a considerable period, was finally withdrawn. The newly formed Kenya Air Force had received a number of Canadian Caribou aircraft and could take over the Beverley's tasks. For a brief period, the whole of 84 Squadron was stationed at Khormaksar, the first time that the Squadron had not been required to keep a detachment away from base for many years.

Before the end of the year, Air Vice-Marshal Johnson completed his tour of two years as AOC, AFME, and was succeeded on 20 December, by Air Vice-Marshal A H Humphrey CB OBE DFC AFC. No AOC in Aden ever had an easy tour, but that of 'Johnny' Johnson had been particularly arduous, with the heavy responsibility of supporting the Radfan campaign on the one hand, and the anxieties of security in Aden on the other.

1966 – Terrorism on the increase

The beginning of 1966 brought from the British Government a new decision on South Arabia. A Defence White Paper, published on 22 February 1966* set out the conclusions of a Defence Review which the Government had put in hand on taking office in October 1964. Paragraph 23 stated:

"South Arabia is due to become independent by 1968, and we do not think it appropriate that we should maintain defence facilities there after that happens. We therefore intend to withdraw our forces from the Aden base at that time . . ."

The shock to the Federal rulers was profound. They now saw themselves being left with an independence which was almost unwelcome to them. The whole basis of the Federation had always been that it would be supported by a treaty with Britain after independence, whereby Britain would provide such military backing as was needed until the Federation was fully self-sufficient. Now the rulers saw themselves highly vulnerable to their enemies. For Nasser, for the Yemen and for the nationalists, on the other hand, the White Paper came as a welcome surprise and an encouragement. Nasser, who had been on the point of pulling his forces out of the Yemen, now declared that they would remain there for five years, if necessary, to ensure the final liberation of South Yemen. For the Security Forces also, the announcement was an unhappy one. Not only was it clear to them that the tempo of terrorism must increase, but it also meant that they could no longer expect any local support and that the loyalty of

*Cmmd 2901.

the FRA, the Police and other Arab authorities would be under intense strain. Every indigenous man and woman in Aden would now look to the day – no more than two years ahead – when the British had left them to any reprisals and recriminations which extremists might wish to exact. So intense was the indignation and sense of hopelessness that the High Commissioner could find only six volunteers to fill the twenty-four seats on the Federal Government Council which were allotted to Aden State.

In this atmosphere it was not long before the acts of terrorism, and consequently the casualties, began to mount alarmingly – at a rate of about 50% per quarter. In fact, by the end of 1966, there had been 480 casualties during the year. Not only did the frequency of the incidents increase but the methods and weapons used became more sophisticated and thus more effective. Rocket launchers became unpopular as they were difficult to conceal but mortars were used in increasing numbers. Khormaksar was particularly vulnerable to mortar attack and a comprehensive system of perimeter patrolling had to be introduced to prevent parties from Sheikh Othman stealing up to the airfield boundary after dark and setting up a form of delayed action mortar attack. Fortunately many of the mortar bombs failed to explode – nineteen out of twenty on one occasion – and Khormaksar suffered little damage. Nevertheless, the most intense vigilance was needed, and it became necessary to use all the personnel on the station for guard duties to help out the hard pressed Army and RAF Regiment units. During 1966 the airmen were engaged in various forms of guard duty on about one day in every six, in addition to their normal technical or administrative duties.

Facilities for dispersing aircraft at Khormaksar were negligible. So crowded was the airfield, and so cramped the hard standing areas that aircraft had to be parked almost wing tip to wing tip, and were thus extremely vulnerable to indiscriminate mortar fire or grenade throwing. Vast quantities of 40 gallon fuel drums had accumulated on the station over the years, and it was decided to use these to construct revetments to give at least some protection to aircraft from shrapnel and splinters. Each shelter was constructed from a double row of drums, and the height of the wall depended upon the size of the aircraft to be protected. When completed the drums were filled with water by the Fire Section to lend weight and stability to the structure. Although offering less protection than sand, it was quick and easy to fill the thousands of drums needed with water, and they could be emptied and moved more easily when necessary.

The loss of confidence in Britain by the Federal Government was further exacerbated by an incident at the end of July 1966. A small number of Egyptian flown Mig fighters crossed the border from the Yemen on 30 July, and attacked the house of the Sharif of Nuqab, some ten miles north of Beihan (see Map 6). After a short but intensive attack with cannon and rockets, a number of tribesmen were left seriously

injured and several houses destroyed or damaged. The Sharif of Beihan, who had always been one of the most powerful of the Rulers, and also staunchly pro-British, demanded reprisals in accordance with his Treaty with Britain. To his and other people's amazement, Britain would take no military action against this flagrant violation and referred the matter to the United Nations. This brought forth no more than a resolution calling upon both sides to keep the peace. This incident and the lack of retaliatory action further disillusioned the Rulers, and weakened their confidence and resolution noticeably. The RAF immediately re-instituted the Air Defence Patrols along the border and, for the first time, a pair of Hunters was maintained at five minutes readiness during the hours of daylight on the airstrip at Beihan. This strip had recently been extended to 1,800 yards, with good undershoot and overshoot areas and was found to be adequate for the Hunters. The border patrols were flown for several months, usually three times a day under control of the radar located at Mukeiras. It was a wasteful form of activity but essential if some degree of confidence was to be maintained among the tribes. Although no hostile aircraft were ever encountered during these patrols, they undoubtedly acted as a deterrent as very few violations occurred thereafter. The cost was high as will be seen from the number of sorties flown, namely, 186 in August, 98 in September and 151 in October 1966.

There is little point in describing in detail the continuous air support given to the forces which continued to police the Radfan throughout this year. They were almost entirely supplied by air, the brunt of the task being borne by the Twin Pioneers, Beverleys and Wessex. Strikes and flag waves by the Hunters were called for spasmodically but the tempo of operations generally remained slow. It cannot be said that the Government forces were getting on top of the guerrillas nor that the dissidents were achieving any marked success – a somewhat wasteful stalemate predominated. One innovation was introduced by Air Vice-Marshal Humphrey at this time, namely a more positive and clear-cut policy for controlling the aircraft supporting the land forces. This had for long been a bone of contention as both Army and RAF had considered that they must control aircraft in a battle area. The AOC laid down that, in all operations where army troops were being lifted in helicopters, there was to be only one air commander, who might be either Army or RAF. This officer would control the operation while the troops were airborne and, as soon as the first soldier set foot on the ground, control of the troops automatically became the responsibility of the ground force commander. Such operations were designated 'Joint Service Troop Lift Operations'.

The loss of confidence in Britain became more and more apparent as the year wore on. In particular, it began to affect the reliability of the Police, an extremely serious development as it was essential to pass information about terrorist activity to Police headquarters if the Police

were to take action. However, it became apparent that information was liable to reach the ears of the enemy through this channel, and worse even than that was the discovery that two police constables had been involved in grenade throwing incidents. The Security Forces were thus compelled to take on more and more responsibility for internal security which, in turn, gave the NLF and FLOSY additional material for virulent propaganda against the British. The situation deteriorated steadily and even the announcement that the United Nations was to send a mission to South Arabia in 1967 to try to find a solution to the problem, did little or nothing to restore confidence. Amnesty International carried out an investigation into alleged brutalities in the Aden Interrogation Centre. The International Red Cross had full access to detainees, and Amnesty's report produced no conclusive evidence of ill-treatment. The Foreign Secretary, on receiving the report, pointed out that 115 Arabs were detained in Aden for political or terrorist activity compared with 2,000 in the Yemen where some of them had been executed. HMG asked Mr Roderick Bowen QC to conduct a similar investigation. He was unable to find any evidence to support the Amnesty findings and, in his report, made the following statement:

"The main strain of protecting the population and dealing with the terrorist falls upon military personnel and the police. I certainly gained the impression that generally speaking they discharge their onerous duties with great restraint."

This closed the matter as far as HMG, and most of the civilised world was concerned but the investigations had created the greatest difficulties for the Security Forces. The terrorists now knew that they had nothing to fear at the hands of Government interrogators and – from that moment – information for the Security Forces completely dried up. In the field of propaganda and in the denial of intelligence, the enemy had the upper hand and there is no doubt that these events of 1966 dealt a blow to the British authority in Aden from which it never recovered. By October the terrorist incidents in Aden had risen to their highest point, eighty-four incidents during the month, and the outlook was grim indeed. Casualties among the RAF were mercifully light, largely due to the concentration of RAF personnel within well-guarded localities such as Khormaksar and Steamer Point. Those who had to work in exposed or isolated areas, such as the Communications Centre at Salt pans, were escorted to and from work or even taken in and out by helicopter. The nine thousand families were becoming an ever-increasing headache with the result that a firm decision was made in November to accept no new families in Aden, and to start evacuating all those in Aden from March 1967. Very few casualties had been suffered by Service families, but the risk was great and the restrictions which had to be placed upon their freedom of movement were such that life had become most unpleasant for them: schools remained closed, clubs and restaurants were out of bounds and armed guards and patrols were everywhere.

Britain had announced that her days in Aden were numbered – ‘out by 1968’ was the official dictum. By the end of 1966, it was quite clear that, unless some extremely strong and resolute measures were taken, probably involving heavy casualties, 1968 would certainly not see any British forces still in Aden. Various policy announcements had destroyed the last vestige of confidence which the Federation had in its ability to carry on after independence. It would receive no further British backing and, with insufficient time to build up its own Security Forces, had no hope of combatting the militant forces ranged against it which enjoyed the powerful support of Egypt and the Yemen.

Departure from Aden

At the beginning of 1967, the policy of HMG towards South Arabia remained as stated in the 1966 White Paper on Defence, namely to grant independence to the former Colony and Protectorates by 1968, and to withdraw all British forces from the military base at Aden either at that time, or very shortly thereafter. For want of any more specific information, it was assumed for planning purposes that Independence Day would be 1 January 1968, but no assumption could be made about the date for the final withdrawal of forces, a date which it was becoming increasingly important to know in view of the many thousands of personnel and huge quantities of equipment and supplies which would have to be phased out of Aden.

It had however, been decided that the British forces stationed in the Persian Gulf would be increased from those withdrawn from Aden, although the residual total would be no more than one third of those in the Command prior to withdrawal. It was considered that this force, located at Bahrein and Sharjah would be adequate to implement the continuing British commitment to safeguard Kuwait against external aggression, and to maintain surveillance over the oil routes through the Gulf and out into the Arabian Sea. It would also support the various treaties which Britain still had with the Sultan of Muscat and the Trucial States. The accommodation of this increased force would clearly require more land for military development at both Bahrein and Sharjah. Negotiations with the respective Rulers were conducted towards the end of 1966 and resulted in considerably higher rentals being paid by HMG for the increased facilities. At Bahrein more land around the perimeter of Muharraq airfield was obtained, mainly for army accommodation, and this ensured that both Army and RAF would be located together, and well away from the main island of Bahrein – advantageous from the viewpoint of security. At Sharjah there was no difficulty in obtaining a further slice of desert from the Ruler which would ensure that the British Army, Trucial Oman Scouts and RAF were well concentrated, and that the somewhat exposed airfield and its installations could be economically guarded.

With no specific withdrawal date available the only other preparation for leaving Aden which could be initiated by Middle East Command at this stage was a thinning out and reduction of stocks of all kinds. The

RAF had thousands of tons of bombs and ammunition in the Explosives Storage Depot in the Crater; far more than could possibly be required by Khormaksar, and most of it, eg 1,000lb bombs, unsuitable to be transferred to any future South Arabian air force, should one ever materialise. Further supplies from the United Kingdom were stopped and a programme was drawn up to transfer some stocks by sea to the Gulf stations and to Masirah, to dump obsolete or dangerous items at sea, to ship back to UK surplus quantities of valuable items, such as 20 or 30mm ammunition, and to retain the minimum amount required for about one year's expenditure. Similarly, 114 Maintenance Unit began a suitable reduction in its holdings of stocks of major aircraft components, furniture for married quarters, office equipment and other surplus material which could be shipped out at leisure before the final stages of withdrawal began. The RAF Equipment staff was all too conscious of the fact that, when the exodus of married families took place more than 3,000 furnished flats and houses would have to be emptied of furniture speedily, before they could be looted. Not only would this have to be accomplished in a period of about three months, and probably at considerable risk from terrorists, but the complete contents of the quarters would then have to be catalogued, packed and shipped out of Aden. The RAF was quite determined that no valuable and desirable equipment should be left behind when the final departure took place. Many millions of pounds worth of new accommodation, technical buildings and facilities would in any case have to be left with no prospect of compensation, and this made it doubly important that every movable fitting and piece of equipment should be taken away, and the plans which the Command Headquarters drew up to ensure that this was accomplished were extremely detailed and highly proficient.

As if to encourage the preparations for withdrawal, the acts of terrorism continued to increase during the early months of 1967, with 96 incidents in January and 140 in February which resulted in 13 killed and 86 injured, and 38 killed and 154 injured respectively. Whereas previous incidents had mostly consisted of grenade throwing and rocket and mortar attacks, small arms now began to be used extensively and the incidents were increasingly directed at the Security Forces in the hope that stronger retaliatory action and more repressive measures would provide good propaganda material for the nationalist cause. The most significant feature of these early 1967 incidents was the cumulative effect upon the Police who were finding increasing difficulty in maintaining law and order and, furthermore, were beginning to suffer unacceptably heavy casualties themselves: it says much for their courage and training that they remained loyal to the British cause for so long in the face of such intense provocation. Their difficulties became so serious that the High Commissioner was compelled to make a policy decision to the effect that in the event of serious trouble, the Army would take over primary responsibility for internal security, with the Police in support, instead of

the reverse. This was a serious measure in what was a predominantly political confrontation, but the only alternative open to Sir Richard Turnbull would have been to disband the Civil Police – a step to be avoided if at all possible.

In an endeavour to give more assistance to the security patrols at night, Khormaksar experimented with the fitting of a searchlight to a Wessex of 78 Squadron and an internal machine gun firing through the door opening. This proved to have some deterrent value, notably for patrols around the airfield perimeter to discourage mortar attacks against the parked aircraft. Although no great successes were claimed, there is no doubt that these Wessex patrols in conjunction with the RAF Regiment kept the airfield remarkably free from night attacks – not only was Khormaksar the most desirable target in Aden but it lay between Crater and Sheikh Othman, which were focal points of terrorist activity.

In order to make the fullest possible use of Khormaksar's resources, the Command issued a Joint Standard Operating Procedure which laid down all the forms of air support which could be made available to assist with internal security. This was a most unusual document, but one of great value in listing in detail the types of assistance which could be called for and the time taken to make such help available. It indicated, for example, that a Wessex could be airborne within fifteen minutes to carry out a search by day or by night. By night its searchlight would illuminate an area the size of a football pitch from 100–300 feet, or an area 500 yards in diameter by dropping a 4-inch flare. Among a wide variety of other tasks, the helicopters could undertake casualty evacuation, troop lifts, leaflet dropping, photography and reconnaissance. With the exception of the Shackletons, which were the aircraft least likely to be needed in the circumstances, Khormaksar held one or two of each of the other types at a few minutes notice for activation through the Station Operations Centre if called for by the Security Forces. The document containing details of this procedure is of historic interest in more ways than one. It probably created a precedent in combining under one cover the various ways in which a considerable number of aircraft types could be used for internal security duties in a very restricted and densely populated area. It also demonstrated the harmonious working of the joint staff at Middle East Command in that the document was signed on behalf of Admiral Le Fanu by a lieutenant-commander for use by the Royal Air Force in supporting what was primarily an army task.

The 11 February 1967, was the eighth anniversary of the founding of the Federation – 'The Day of the Volcano' – as it was called by both terrorist organisations who decided to use it to mount a large scale and violent demonstration to discredit the Federal Government, and to show that the British authorities could only rule through repression and brutality. As the demonstration was well advertised, the authorities had time to take appropriate measures, with the result that it became the first

test for the new policy of the Army taking over responsibility from the Police. Aden Brigade was deployed in strength to such trouble spots as Sheikh Othman and Crater, a strict curfew was imposed, all passenger-carrying traffic was stopped and people were advised to stay at home. In consequence, the day of violent demonstration turned out to be a damp squib and no less than 705 curfew breakers were arrested. So furious were the nationalists that they called for a general strike on the following day and the curfew was reimposed, resulting in the arrest of a further 150 law breakers. After this, Aden slowly returned to normal, but Service families had been confined to their homes for four days, the Army had been attacked on sixty-six occasions with casualties of eight killed and sixty-four wounded. The whole operation was a success for the Security Forces, and a vindication of the new internal security policy, but the price paid was high. Two British wives were killed and eleven British civilians injured during the February incidents and the risk to life in Aden was rapidly becoming unacceptable.

Britain was now showing signs that she wished to pull out of Aden even earlier than the announced January 1968 deadline for independence. Although no earlier date was mentioned at this stage, the signs were such that Middle East Command accelerated its plans to run down stockholdings, and began to think seriously in terms of leaving Aden by about November 1967. The rival nationalist organisations, NLF and FLOSY, scenting this intention and realising that they had but a few months left to decide who was going to control South Arabia after independence, turned viciously upon each other and gave the Security Forces a short respite while they fought each other, notably in Sheikh Othman. The respite was much needed as both the Federal Regular Army and the Police were being increasingly infiltrated by terrorists and were thus less trustworthy, which put an additional strain upon the British military resources.

The deterioration was not confined to Aden; guerrilla warfare continued up-country, and Khormaksar was kept fully occupied in flying daily air defence patrols along the Yemen border, and supporting the FRA and British units in combatting widespread dissident activity in the Radfan and in the Dhala area where, on 19 February for instance, a party of forty dissidents attacked a British and FRA camp with rifles, machine guns, mortars and bazookas, causing three casualties. The terrorism spread even further afield, to the island of Socotra, where a body of twenty-eight tribesmen attempted to supplant the Sultan and his Council. Socotra was regarded as part of the Eastern Aden Protectorate, administered from Mukalla and so four Beverleys of 84 Squadron were despatched to Riyan to fly a force of the Hadrami Bedouin Legion and the Mahra Armed Constabulary to Socotra. This force rapidly overwhelmed and captured the rebel party, and remained in the island, supplied by the Beverleys, for a short period to restore the situation.

One small but important relief to Khormaksar at this time was the transfer of responsibility for providing the detachment of Shackletons at Majunga in Malagasy to Coastal Command squadrons, followed by AFME handing over to FEAF the responsibility for the Mozambique Channel blockade of the port of Beira as part of the sanctions imposed on Rhodesia. The Shackletons of 37 Squadron now released from the Majunga commitment, could not be of much assistance in the Aden situation and they spent most of 1967 in the Gulf, either at Sharjah or Muharraq where they carried out some useful anti-smuggling operations. Although 37 Squadron only boasted four Shackletons, they were too large, valuable and vulnerable to remain permanently at Khormaksar if their presence was not essential.

United Nations Mission

Throughout the Radfan Campaign and during the terrorism in Aden which followed, the various Resolutions passed by the Security Council of the United Nations had been totally ineffective; neither Egypt nor the Yemen nor the nationalist elements in Aden had taken the slightest notice of them. It was, therefore, with some reluctance that HMG agreed to a visit to Aden by a UN Mission, timed to take place in April 1967. Britain accepted the Mission in the faint hope that it might produce some sort of solution where all her own efforts had so far failed. Conversely, refusal to allow the Mission to visit Aden would place yet another propaganda weapon in the hands of Britain's opponents.

The visit of the Mission has variously been described as a tragedy and a comedy. Consisting of three members, from Venezuela, Afghanistan and Mali respectively, it visited London and Cairo en route for Aden which was reached on 1 April; the Mission intended to stay for three weeks. No arrival could have been less propitious; it coincided with the worst storm ever recorded in Aden. After nine hours torrential rain, Aden was flooded to a depth of several feet, power supplies were interrupted and vehicle movement was impossible for a considerable time. It must be remembered that rain falls in Aden on an average of only once or twice a year, and the drainage was not designed for the kind of storm which heralded the arrival of the Mission. On this occasion the flooding was so bad that airmen were seen swimming across the sports pitches from their barrack blocks to the dining hall at Steamer Point, holding their cutlery and drinking mugs above their heads.

The NLF and FLOSY had long made their attitude to the UN Mission clear. Both claimed that they were the true representatives of the people of South Arabia, and refused to deal with the Mission unless their claims were recognised. When these were rejected, they not only boycotted the Mission but set out to show that neither the Federal Government nor the British was in proper control of the country and did not have the support of the people. To prove this the two factions vied with one another in instigating riots, strikes and violent demonstrations.

Under these circumstances the High Commissioner had the unenviable task of giving the Mission as much freedom of movement as possible, and at the same time, ensuring the safety of its members. Both British brigades were fully deployed throughout Aden, and the peak of the trouble came on the day following the Mission's arrival. A completely effective general strike started, and in spite of the constant breaking up of demonstrations by the Army, the demonstrators reformed again and again in different areas. During the day there were twenty-four attacks on the Security Forces in Crater alone, 108 rioters being arrested, and the total number of incidents for the day reached a record figure of seventy-one.

The Mission took one look at the situation, had lunch at Government House after a helicopter flight there for safety, and retired to their hotel for forty-eight hours. On the third day of their stay a visit was arranged to the Detention Centre, as the Mission understandably wished to see the detainees. However, the prisoners had received their instructions from the NLF and FLOSY to support the boycott of the Mission, and they refused to talk to the delegates, greeting them with jeers and abuse. Outside the Detention Centre noisy demonstrations and gun battles took place throughout the visit. Furious and frustrated, but beginning to realise the magnitude of the problem, the delegates retired to their hotel once more. The final incident of this abortive visit came on 6 April when the head of the Mission asked permission to broadcast to the country, to state their case. The only available broadcasting facilities were those of the Federal Government, which the Mission had refused to recognise. However the Federal Ministers did agree to their facilities being used, until the text of the proposed speech was seen. As it denied the legal existence of the Federal Government whose broadcasting facilities were to be used, it was too much to stomach and the broadcast was banned. At this point the Mission decided to leave Aden as soon as it could be arranged. On the following day, the delegates left, not however without a final stormy scene in which they refused to submit to the routine security search at the airport, whereupon the VCIO captain refused to take them. After an hour of argument they reluctantly agreed to be searched and finally shook the dust of Aden from their shoes. The abortive mission was over, having lasted seven days instead of three weeks. It achieved nothing and stirred up even greater violence which only increased the difficulties of the hard-pressed Security Forces, and added more casualties to the steadily mounting toll.

In the wake of the UN Mission came Lord Shackleton, who spent two weeks in Aden, trying to repair some of the damage done by the Mission and to assess the situation for the British Government. In particular he was searching for some new basis for negotiation on which HMG might continue planning for independence by 1968. The main outcome of this visit was a decision to send out Sir Humphrey Trevelyan as High Commissioner in place of Sir Richard Turnbull. Sir Richard had shown

the greatest determination and firmness and his handling of internal security had probably saved many casualties. The Security Forces were extremely sorry to see him go but understood that any new approach to the intractable problem was worth trying, and Sir Humphrey might bring fresh ideas and a different form of diplomacy as a result of Lord Shackleton's observations.

Repatriation of families

As far back as November 1966, the decision had been made to repatriate all Service families during the three months period from 1 May to 31 July 1967. Lists had been drawn up and families notified by January 1967. The notification had taken the form of announcing a fourteen-day period to each family, at some point during which it would be repatriated. This gave adequate time for appeals to be entered by families which had special problems, such as pregnancies or school examinations which might dictate a time for repatriation different from that laid down in the original plan. Considerable flexibility was allowed, but only within the May to July period; no families would be allowed to remain after 31 July for any reason.

At first it was intended to evacuate families both by sea and air but the outbreak of war between Israel and Egypt and the closure of the Suez Canal in June put paid to any sea movement except for heavy luggage, which would have to be despatched by the Cape route in company with all the military equipment which was destined for the United Kingdom. And so Plan *RELATIVE*, as it was appropriately named, was amended to one of air movement only, using the strategic aircraft of Air Support Command, namely VC10s, Britannias and Comets, and a number of chartered VC10s of British United Airways. As a precaution against acts of terrorism making the use of Khormaksar unacceptably dangerous as a turn round point for the UK aircraft, an additional plan was formulated under which all families could be ferried across to Djibouti in French Somaliland in Argosies and Beverleys of 105 and 84 Squadrons. The UK aircraft would load at Djibouti and thus avoid the risks inherent in landing at Khormaksar. In the event, this precautionary plan was not needed, but nothing was left to chance in getting the families safely away.

On 1 January 1967, there were 9,296 dependents in Aden but, by the time the repatriation started on 1 May, this number had been reduced to 6,605 by normal end of tour departures. A control cell was set up in HQ Middle East which worked on the lines of an operations centre, and functioned extremely well. Families were called forward and transported to the airfield at the appointed time, and despatched at the rate of about two hundred a day. It was not an emergency evacuation and there had been plenty of time to plan it in detail which was just as well as an immense amount of complicated documentation was needed, much of it for use when the family reached home and had to be accommodated

suitably. Arrangements were made to hold families in the safety of Khormaksar if their departure should be delayed by up to forty-eight hours. On only two occasions were these facilities needed owing to temporary aircraft unserviceability.

Most of the families were flown to Gatwick where reception was in the hands of a detachment from the Joint Services Air Trooping Centre, Hendon. In a number of cases it was possible to send a family on to the station or unit to which the husband was to be posted when he subsequently returned to the UK. This could only be done when the officer or airman concerned was due home within about three months and his next appointment could be determined. However, great efforts were made to avoid unnecessary turbulence for the families, and a surprisingly large number of advance postings were promulgated. Other families, not so fortunate, were allocated surplus married quarters often in areas of their own choice in order to be close to relatives or friends. A number made their own arrangements to stay with relatives until the husband rejoined them. The whole operation worked extremely smoothly and most families were escorted to their new homes in England within twenty-four hours of being called from their quarters in Aden. So smoothly, in fact, did it work that the programme was accelerated and completed on 20 July, ten days earlier than planned. This was a wise move as the dangers and risks to families in Aden were steadily mounting and the Security Forces feared that a major tragedy might occur if families remained much longer; their safe departure, although much regretted, was a great relief to all those who had been responsible for their safety. The Commander-in-Chief was full of praise for the AOC and his staff for the way in which Operation RELATIVE had been carried out.

Effects of the Arab-Israeli War

While the departure of the families was in progress, the six-day war between Israel and Egypt took place – between 3rd and 9th June. Israel's victory over Nasser in less than a week came as a shattering blow to the Arab community in Aden. An immediate but short-lived wave of anti-Jewish violence broke out with the looting and burning of Jewish property, particularly in Crater. From an anti-Jewish reaction it became anti-British as the opinion gained hold that Britain had supported Israel and, therefore, contributed to Nasser's defeat. A widespread strike closed the port and all supplies to the British forces, including fuel to Khormaksar, were cut off by the nationalists. A number of food ships bound for Aden had to be diverted to Red Sea and other neighbouring ports, dumping their cargoes at such places as Djibouti and Assab. The Beverleys of 84 Squadron made full use of their great lifting capacity and started a shuttle service, ferrying into Khormaksar the food which had been off-loaded elsewhere. Within a very short time the Royal Navy organised a new supply line using its royal

fleet auxiliaries to bring in food from as far away as Singapore and Mombasa.

The shortage of fuel was even more serious as flying had to be restricted to urgent operational missions among which of course, were included the refuelling of the civil and military aircraft taking out the families. The proximity of the BP refinery to Khormaksar had always been a justifiable reason for limiting the fuel storage capacity on the airfield. Now, at a time when large quantities of fuel were needed, the lack of storage capacity became a great embarrassment and the Station quickly exhausted its stocks. Once again the Beverley came to the rescue and a supply line to Djibouti was arranged. The internal fuel system of the Beverley was so constructed that Nos 3 and 4 tanks could be isolated from the remainder of the fuel system thus allowing either Avgas or Avtur to be carried in these two tanks without risk of contamination. Although great inconvenience was caused, and even more hard work for Khormaksar's hard pressed airmen, all essential tasks were carried out and shortages of food and fuel had no serious effects.

The closure of the port did, however, necessitate a take-over by the Services and, on 19 June a Military Port Organisation was set up, not so much to facilitate goods entering Aden as to ensure that the evacuation of military stores and equipment continued uninterrupted. This new organisation ran the docks right up to the final withdrawal, unloading and refuelling ships up to 12,000 tons, reaching an output of more than 7,000 tons a week which was reckoned to be better than any civilian force could have achieved, and six times better than the normal rate of work by the local Arab dockers.*

While the passive reaction to the Arab-Israeli war took the form of a general strike, a much more active and violent manifestation took the form of a confrontation between the terrorists and the Security Forces in the area of Sheikh Othman and Al Mansoura, to the north of Khormaksar, but uncomfortably close to its perimeter. The terrorists were most anxious to obtain control of this area because it was virtually open to the north, whence their reinforcements came and they could not be bottled up as in the case of Crater. Possession of the area would give them an excellent position from which to launch attacks on the airfield which they fully recognised as being the most important target in Aden. Suffice it to say that the 1st Parachute Regiment quickly got control of the situation after hard and bitter fighting, with the loss of one soldier killed and four wounded. The regiment moved into Sheikh Othman from its barracks, and remained in firm control, despite the most violent reactions, until the area was handed over to the South Arabian Army in September. 'South Arabian Army (SAA)' was the new title adopted by the Federal Regular Army and the Federal Guard from 1 June 1967, in preparation for independence.

* *The Times*, 12 October 1967.

At this point the infiltration of the Police, and the Armed Police in particular, began to have serious repercussions. The Security Forces could not regard the Police as 100% reliable, and this lack of trust soured the relationship, particularly when the Security Forces were compelled to assume control of internal security over the heads of the Police. The newly styled SAA were themselves not free from infiltration and tribal susceptibilities. All these factors led to a serious incident on 20 June when a riot flared up among some apprentices of the SAA in Lake Lines (see Map 9). Shots were fired which led to a mutiny in the Police barracks at the nearby Champion Lines. The Police had heard the shooting and mistakenly concluded that their Arab colleagues down the road were being attacked by British troops. An entirely innocent unarmoured three-ton truck conveying nineteen soldiers of the Royal Corps of Transport past Champion Lines was attacked and eight of the soldiers were killed, and eight wounded. This situation was brought under control by a strong force of British troops with several more casualties but, unfortunately, rumours had spread to Crater, causing near panic in the large barracks of the Armed Police there. In the absence of their Commanding Officer, the police rushed their own armoury and obtained weapons with which to defend themselves. The NLF took full advantage of this incident, creating as much disturbance as possible. An extremely dangerous situation developed which the battalion responsible for Crater was quite unable to control. One of its company commanders, with another major, a warrant officer and six men in two Land Rovers were caught in the intense rifle and machine gun fire from the Armed Police barracks (usually one of the safest spots in Crater). All but one were killed and their vehicles set on fire. Several attempts were made during the day to recover the bodies but they were all unsuccessful, so intense was the fire that met the rescuers on each occasion, even after nightfall.

An appalling dilemma faced the authorities. A full scale military attack could be mounted and it would undoubtedly be successful, but it would probably decide the fate of South Arabia for the future. The Federal Government, supported by the British, was the official authority even if its power had been gravely undermined by the terrorists. A British attack on the Armed Police and the South Arabian Army would finally undermine that tenuous authority and lead to the final collapse of the Federation, and all that had been achieved over the years would be irretrievably lost. On the other hand, nine British servicemen had been killed, and their bodies still lay in the main street of Crater and a further twelve had lost their lives in various rescue attempts and other incidents during the day. It says much for the steadfastness and responsibility of the troops that they accepted a decision from their commanding officers not to launch an immediate attack but to wait until the following day in the hope that a less damaging solution could be found.

As dawn broke on 21 June, terrorists and snipers were cleared from

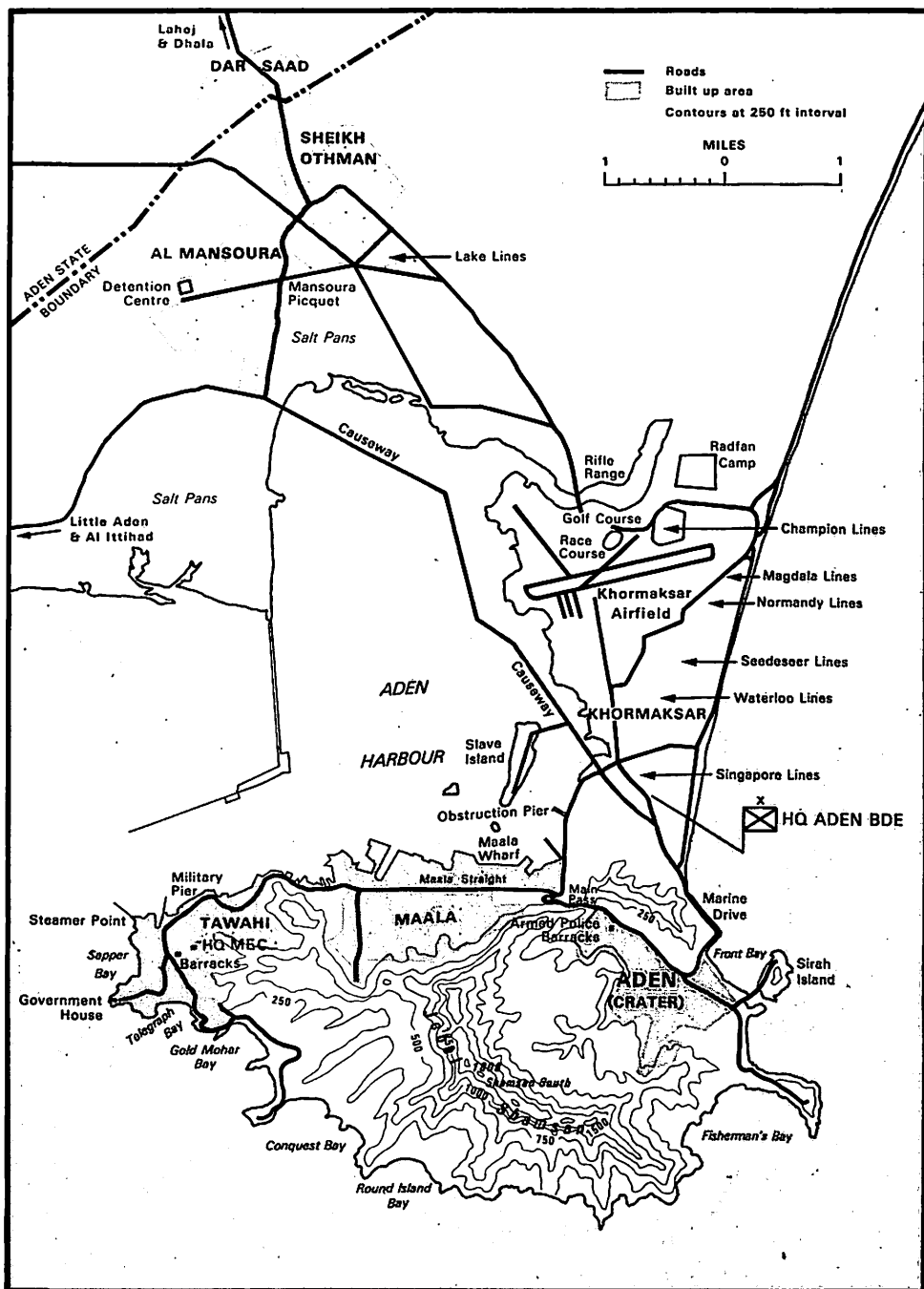
vantage points surrounding Crater and permission was given for the first time to use the 76mm guns of the armoured cars. During the day, the full implications of what they had done was borne in upon the Armed Police, and their sense of shame was intense. They collected, at considerable risk from terrorists, the British bodies and brought them out to the city perimeter and handed them over to the Security Forces. But Crater was in a state of siege and the fury and frustration of the British troops was at danger point. More than a week passed, the troops being somewhat pacified by the courage of the GOC who took full responsibility for not permitting a fighting return to Crater, but promised that they certainly would return in due course.

After much careful intelligence gathering and the infiltration of spies into the city, an operation was planned for the night of 3/4 July. It was highly successful and not a life was lost. The inhabitants of Crater were awakened on the morning of 4 July by the pipes and drums of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders playing Reveille on the roof of the Chartered Bank. This brought to an end what had undoubtedly been the most anxious and explosive situation so far experienced in Aden; it had tested the restraint and conduct of the British forces beyond all reasonable limits, and they had come through it with immense credit.

All these incidents of violence – in Sheikh Othman, Al Mansoura, Lake Lines, Champion Lines and Crater could not be directly attributed to Arab chagrin at the outcome of the Arab–Israeli war, but there is no doubt that it fanned the flames of violence in Aden and led indirectly to a crucial turning point in the affairs of South Arabia. The failure of the Federal Government to show effective leadership finally revealed its basic weakness, and even its own followers began to realise that it could never control an independent country. Thus more and more turned towards the nationalists who were encouraged to become even bolder in their bid for power.

Planning for withdrawal

Although the British Government had steadfastly refused to announce a firm date for withdrawal from Aden it had become quite clear by the beginning of June that such a date could not be far ahead. When the results of the terrorist incidents in June were assessed, the total reached the terrible figure of 492, higher than the total for the whole of 1966. Sixty-one people had been killed, a figure which included twenty-eight servicemen and 113 had been injured, among whom were thirty-nine servicemen. For the first time it had been necessary to close the airfield for two hours on a day when RAF Regiment patrols on its perimeter had come under heavy attack. The Federal Government was rapidly losing what little control it had to the terrorists and, after the pitched battles between the NLF and FLOSY in Sheikh Othman, it was becoming apparent that the NLF was getting into a dominant position to assume control after independence. Any prospect of handing over to a stable



MAP 9: ADEN AND SHEIKH OTHMAN

Federal Government, backed by the South Arabian Army on 1 January 1968, had now disappeared completely; Britain could only hope to withdraw in good order and without heavy casualties at as early a date as possible.

The broad concept was to bring all remaining British forces back into Aden from up-country and outlying parts of the Federation after handing over to the South Arabian Army, but affording the latter continued air support from Khormaksar for as long as the RAF remained there. This would include periodic air defence patrols by Hunters along the whole of the Yemen border to discourage any infiltration by Egyptian or Yemeni aircraft which might endanger the security of Aden itself at a particularly vulnerable time. Within Aden State, it was intended to close down Steamer Point, Little Aden and all outlying units and to concentrate upon Khormaksar for the final stages of the departure which would be both by sea and by air under final cover afforded by the Royal Navy and Fleet Air Arm. The plans were kept sufficiently flexible to permit considerable variations in the final date of departure but the general opinion was, at this stage, that it would turn out to be during November.

As selected forces were to be transferred to the Persian Gulf and as Middle East Command would close down in Aden, some strengthening of the existing command structure in the Gulf would be needed commensurate with the increased responsibilities, but well below the scale of a full command headquarters. It was decided to appoint a Commander, British Forces Gulf (CBFG) who would take up his appointment at Bahrein on 1 September 1967. The three single Service headquarters under him were not, however, to form until 1 October, on which date AFME would close down in Aden and control of all air forces would be transferred to Headquarters, RAF Persian Gulf, which would then assume the new title of Headquarters, Air Forces Gulf commanded by an air commodore with the title of Commander Air Forces Gulf (CAFG). Until shortly before the final departure from Aden, however, a small residual RAF staff would remain to advise the AOC, and thus the Commander-in-Chief until their withdrawal. In order to permit the closure of the Middle East Command Headquarters and all other establishments at Steamer Point, the plan allowed for a very small residual command headquarters to operate from Khormaksar during the final few weeks.

From July onwards a steady transfer of responsibility to Bahrein took place beginning with the Organisation, Personnel and Engineering staffs of AFME. Certain staff officers moved to Bahrein ready to assume responsibility while others remained in Aden to supervise the closing down of units and sections. One of the first RAF installations to be affected was the Aden Supply Depot which had always been somewhat isolated from the remainder of the RAF, being located in Maala close to the dock area. This unit was deployed in July to Khormaksar where it set

up a temporary and much smaller depot to hold rations which, by this time, were mainly being flown in to the airfield or shipped in by royal fleet auxiliaries. With this move and the departure of the families from the flats along the Maala Strait, the whole of this dangerous area was virtually clear of British inhabitants and thus became less of a security problem although access through it had to be safeguarded, as it was the only link between Steamer Point and Khormaksar. (See Map 9).

The RAF radar installation located up country in a tented camp at Mukeiras was becoming something of a hostage to fortune although still fully occupied in controlling the daily air defence patrols by Hunters. A decision was made to bring the UPS 1 installation and 303 Signals Unit into Aden and set it up temporarily at Fort Morbut, a promontory overlooking the harbour at Steamer Point. This was not a satisfactory position for maintaining surveillance of the Yemen border, but it was the best location that could be found to provide a measure of early warning of hostile aircraft approaching Aden without endangering the safety of the radar unit itself.

Consideration had now to be given to the future of Khormaksar's squadrons and the order in which they were to be deployed elsewhere, or disbanded. The indications were that the future needs of the Gulf would be for fighter/ground attack aircraft, to satisfy the needs of the Kuwait commitment, for short and medium range transport aircraft to give support to land forces in the field and to maintain supplies and communications to outlying stations and, finally for helicopters for a variety of tasks including search and rescue. Bearing in mind that 30 Squadron (Beverleys), 208 Squadron (Hunters) and 152 Squadron (Pembroke/Twin Pioneers) were already stationed in the Gulf, a plan was devised for the deployment of Khormaksar's aircraft which would result in a balanced and appropriate force of modern aircraft for the Gulf. The plan, which was implemented with a few small alterations during the next few months, was as follows:

21 Squadron (Andover/Twin Pioneer/Dakota). To disband at Khormaksar, most of its aircraft being re-allocated to other squadrons.

8 Squadron (Hunter FGA9). To move to Muharraq and form a fighter/ground attack wing with 208 Squadron.

37 Squadron (Shackleton). To disband at Khormaksar, the aircraft being returned to the UK.

43 Squadron (Hunter FGA9). To remain at Khormaksar until completion of the withdrawal and then to disband, its aircraft being redistributed to 8 and 208 Squadrons or returned to the UK.

84 Squadron (Beverley). To move to Sharjah and to re-equip with Andovers in due course.

105 Squadron (Argosy). To move to Muharraq and to disband at a later date when 84 Squadron had re-equipped with Andovers.

78 Squadron (Wessex). To move to Sharjah on completion of the withdrawal from Aden.

1417 Flight (Hunter FR10). To disband, the fighter reconnaissance tasks being absorbed by 8 Squadron at Muharraq.

When these moves were completed a well balanced force of two experienced fighter ground attack squadrons containing a fighter reconnaissance element, two medium transport squadrons, one light transport and communications squadron and one helicopter squadron would be located at Muharraq and Sharjah. Apart from the Wessex helicopters of 78 Squadron, which would have to be transferred to the Gulf by sea, the force would be operational in the Gulf during the final stages of withdrawal from Aden where the Hunters of 43 Squadron would maintain an air defence capability until the last moment. Many of the technical and equipment resources of Khormaksar and 114 MU would be needed on the Gulf stations to support the expanded force. A start was therefore made as early as July to move equipment by sea using the War Department LSTs, and this allowed the complex and overcrowded 114 MU to rundown its stocks at an early stage. The opportunity was taken at the same time to stock up Salalah and Masirah fully as these two route stations were destined to remain under the control of CAFG, unlike Riyan which would have to close when the British forces left the Eastern Aden Protectorate.

In spite of the vicissitudes of life in Aden, the AFME planners produced most excellent plans to cover every contingency and to ensure that, as far as was humanly possible, the mass of valuable equipment could be removed in toto making full use of all available sea and air lift.

The struggle for power

The complete failure of the Federal Government to control its own forces during the June mutinies, and the clear evidence that Britain was making increasingly rapid preparations to leave Aden, caused both the NLF and FLOSY to realise that they had but a short time in which to settle their own power struggle if one of them was to emerge as the new authority in South Arabia. As was to be expected, it was the NLF which took up this challenge, issuing to all and sundry, including the original UN Mission which had returned to life and was deliberating in Geneva, an arrogant and unequivocal declaration of its aims. In doing so, the NLF took on three opponents, the Federal Government, Britain and FLOSY and as will be seen, eventually emerged triumphant from all three conflicts.

The first significant move by the NLF was against the Federal Rulers, a number of whom had gone to Geneva at the end of July to see the UN Mission. In their absence the NLF moved in and took over control of some of their States. It was astonishing that the Rulers had taken no precautions against such an obvious development and had even left their families and their wealth at the mercy of the terrorists. By mid-August it was announced by the Supreme Council of the Federation that no less than eight States were in the hands of the NLF. By the end of the

month a further four States had succumbed and the Sultan of Lahej, who had retreated into Aden, was the only Ruler left in the country – and his State was in the hands of the NLF. The other Rulers turned down every entreaty from the High Commissioner to return from Geneva, the Federal Government no longer existed as an effective authority, and the Federation lay in ruins.

With this great victory over the Federal Government securely in its pocket, the NLF turned its attention to FLOSY after setting up a headquarters openly at Zingibar 25 miles from the Aden State frontier, and declaring that it was now the true representative of the people. In a final attempt to stem the NLF tide, FLOSY issued a belligerent statement, with the result that fierce fighting broke out between the two factions at the beginning of September. It centred on Sheikh Othman and for five days British troops watched with amazement, keeping their own heads well down, while FLOSY and the NLF fought it out. With screaming bodies falling from rooftops, gun fights in every street and bazooka and mortar attacks destroying many buildings, Sheikh Othman was not unlike a scene from a Hollywood western. The battle reached its climax on 10 September when 1,000 Yemenis arrived to support FLOSY. A bitter battle ensued with many casualties on either side until the SAA decided that it must intervene to prevent the whole country disintegrating in bloodshed. In spite of blandishments from all sides, the SAA had remained firmly independent, concerned only with the well being of their country, even after the virtual collapse of their masters, the Federal Government. Their unarmed and courageous intervention in the battle of Sheikh Othman brought the fighting to a halt and resulted in a breathing space while negotiations were conducted.

It is necessary to jump forward more than six weeks before the final outcome of the NLF/FLOSY confrontation was settled. Although it had been evident for some time that Britain would withdraw before the date of 'early 1968' originally announced, it was not until 2 November that the Foreign Secretary let it be known that the date would be brought forward to late November 1967. This announcement prompted both nationalist parties to resume their struggle for power in a final round which lasted only three days, from 3rd to 6th November. Once again the struggle was most violent in Sheikh Othman where the SAA had assumed control from British forces. After three days of slaughter, the SAA decided that they must once again intervene to prevent widespread civil war. But on this occasion they declared their support for the NLF, ordered a cease fire and began to enforce it with great firmness. It was a momentous decision and made the SAA the decisive factor in the situation. They now held the key to the future of South Arabia and, although it was feared that the declaration for the NLF might split the SAA, only some ten officers who supported FLOSY resigned and returned to their own tribal area. The remainder of the SAA formed a

stable and authoritative element around which the people of South Arabia rallied as the British forces completed their final plans to depart.

The withdrawal gains momentum

While the NLF and FLOSY were slogging it out, and while the British Army was steadily handing over its responsibilities in outlying areas to the SAA, the RAF was maintaining vigorous support for the up-country operations (which were in no way reduced by the handover to the SAA), and implementing the plans for the deployment of squadrons and other units. No 21 Squadron was disbanded at Khormaksar during July, some of its Twin Pioneers being flown to Muharraq for future use by 152 Squadron. No 21 Squadron had been twice reformed, once on Canberras at Scampton and once on Twin Pioneers at Eastleigh, and twice disbanded during a period of thirteen years but, as was the case with so many fine old squadrons, there were not the resources in a contracting RAF to keep it in being. It had filled an immensely valuable role in Kenya where it had provided the main air support and battlefield training for 24 Brigade during the whole of the period when the Brigade had provided the Strategic Reserve reinforcement for Middle East Command. When its task in Kenya came to an end and the Kenya Air Force was well established, the Squadron had moved straight into operations in the Western Aden Protectorate where, in fact, it continued to give a great measure of support to 24 Brigade in new surroundings.

Also in July, 105 Squadron started its planned move to Muharraq. Six of the Argosies flew up to the Gulf with the Squadron headquarters, leaving a detachment at Khormaksar to carry out the medium range transport duties in East Africa and the Federation with the Beverleys of 84 Squadron. During its short period in Aden, 105 Squadron had brought much relief to the overworked Beverley squadrons. Being much faster and possessing longer range, the Argosy had been particularly valuable in relieving the Beverleys of most of the long haul tasks, such as famine relief in East Africa, conveying army reinforcements to Basutoland, supporting the Shackleton detachment at Majunga and maintaining the route stations. This left the Beverleys free for the heavy lift, short haul commitments, often on rough airstrips, for which they had been designed and were particularly suited.

The thinning out process continued throughout August, which turned out to be a particularly active month for Steamer Point and Khormaksar. This month produced an all time high in terrorist incidents during which seven servicemen were killed and forty-seven injured during the course of 821 attacks with small arms, rockets and grenades. The Service casualties unhappily included five airmen killed while off duty, filling their cars and motorcycles at local filling stations. As a result of these incidents, even closer restrictions had to be placed on movement, and airmen had to be confined to secure areas except for organised shopping expeditions at specific times when extra guards

could be mounted in the shopping areas. The only mortar attack on Khormaksar which could be described as at all successful also occurred in August. The bombers managed to elude security patrols and fired a number of mortar bombs into the aircraft parking areas. The revetments of oil drums proved their value and absorbed much of the blast, but two Shackletons were damaged by splinters and flying debris. The damage was not serious, and the remarkable fact was that this was the only attack which damaged aircraft on the airfield throughout the terrorist campaign.

There was an audible sigh of relief from the Equipment staff in Middle East Command when 114 Maintenance Unit closed down at the end of the month. It had been the most congested and vulnerable establishment in Aden and a terrible fire hazard even before the advent of terrorist activity. Its location quite close to the naval pier at *HMS Sheba* greatly facilitated the loading of the equipment and obviated the need to transport millions of pounds worth of stores through dangerous areas to the civilian dock area. As 114 MU closed the final equipment requirements of the Services were moved into the Equipment Section at Khormaksar.

The few Argosies of 105 Squadron which had remained at Khormaksar moved to Muharraq and joined the advance party of the Squadron. The Argosies were to play a major role in the final evacuation from Aden and their concentration in the Gulf in August gave the Squadron a few weeks in which to achieve maximum serviceability for the task ahead. The time had also come for some reduction in the Hunter force at Khormaksar. Nos 8 and 43 Squadrons and 1417 Flight were still there and, although commitments to support the SAA up country would be accepted to the end, the force could with safety be somewhat reduced. As 43 Squadron was planned to remain and eventually to disband, and as the Hunter FR10s of 1417 Flight might possibly be left for a South Arabian air force, 8 Squadron was the unit to move. This Squadron had been based at Khormaksar for forty years with hardly a break. It had operated from Iraq to Rhodesia and from Cyprus to Somaliland. Its aircraft must have been familiar to almost every tribesman in the Arabian Peninsula, and many had cause to know that its rocket accuracy was measured in feet where other squadrons measured theirs in yards. There could have been hardly a day, except the occasional Christmas Day, in those forty years when the Squadron was not carrying out active operations somewhere in the Command and it was understandably an emotional moment when 'the pieces of 8' as one junior officer disrespectfully called them, flew out of Aden for the last time. On its way to Muharraq the Squadron paused at Masirah where it remained for a few weeks, partly to stay within easy reinforcing distance of Aden should it be needed in the final stages of withdrawal, and partly to carry out some training away from the congestion of Muharraq which was becoming increasingly crowded. The departure of so many of

Khormaksar's operational aircraft left space for 3 Wing of the Army Air Corps to come into Khormaksar from Little Aden where it had been based on the Falaise airstrip. This Unit was equipped with a mixed bag of aircraft, namely Beavers, and Sioux and Scout helicopters. Little Aden was transferred to the SAA and the concentration of British forces upon Khormaksar continued. Falaise had proved to be a most valuable airstrip during the few years it had been in operation. In particular it enabled the Army Air Corps light aircraft and helicopters to support the up-country operations from an Aden base without being involved in the heavy fixed wing traffic of Khormaksar. A few helicopters under strict control were acceptable at Khormaksar, but a large number such as the combined resources of the RAF and the Army mustered would have produced a complex and dangerous traffic pattern.

And so, as August moved into September, the administration continued to run down, more and more equipment was shipped and flown out and more units disbanded. Of these, 37 Squadron deserves a mention. This small Shackleton Squadron had been one of the most versatile of all the squadrons in the Command. Although its complement of aircraft had not exceeded four, it had introduced into the Royal Air Force a new role – the colonial policing role, as it was commonly called. This was really a development of the old general purpose role which had been well known in overseas commands in the 1920s and 1930s. So much in demand had 37 Squadron been for bombing, reconnaissance and photography that it had rarely had any time to practise the maritime reconnaissance role, for which it was primarily intended. Like the Beverley, the Shackleton was an extremely robust aircraft, being a direct descendent from the Lancaster and Lincoln. Its Griffon engines were well proven and the combination undoubtedly stood up to the exacting operating conditions of the Middle East with immense credit. The aircrews did likewise, as the Shackleton was heavy and tiring to fly at low level in turbulent conditions of intense heat and these were the very conditions in which the crews were constantly being asked to operate for as much as eight hours at a stretch. Even on the Squadron's last operational sortie on 3 September an engine was damaged by a bullet during a search and rescue operation and so there was no doubt that 37 Squadron remained operational to the end.

In spite of the run-down of squadrons, no less than 142 sorties by Hunters were flown in support of the SAA during the month of September, the highest number since the Radfan campaign. The reason was not an upsurge in the fighting up-country, but the introduction of a new policy whereby a pair of Hunters remained overhead whenever an RAF or AAC aircraft was on the ground at any of the up-country strips. The Hunters would make their presence known by flying low over the airstrip initially, and then patrol in the vicinity at high altitude to conserve fuel. This was a sensible precaution against the grounded aircraft being unexpectedly attacked; all British troops had been with-

drawn and the reliability of the SAA could not be accepted entirely without question. As it was vitally important to be seen to be giving full air support to the SAA to the end, Beverleys and the helicopter force were fully engaged with supply tasks to the various SAA outposts, but the Hunters remained on the alert to intervene if they were ambushed or fired upon. In fact there were no untoward incidents involving aircraft during these last difficult weeks in South Arabia. The tribesmen sensed that the British aircraft would soon withdraw as the army had already done and the SAA displayed the fine training which they had always received, and assumed control with admirable efficiency which reflected great credit upon their British Commander, Brigadier Dye, who continued in command until the last few days. The SAA deserved the greatest sympathy for the impossible position in which they found themselves. The small force having started as the highly trained and disciplined Aden Protectorate Levies, became the Federal Regular Army with high hopes of being the much respected armed forces of a great national Federation. Finally, they had become the South Arabian Army, compelled to recognise an admittedly nationalist but nevertheless terrorist organisation, the NLF, with no further prospect of support from the British who had trained them. The future for the men of the SAA did not look bright, and it was surprising that only a handful of them left the force and returned to their tribes. Independence should have been for them a joyous and happy event, but in September 1967, it looked as if it would be anything but that. However, that month did bring some relief from unpleasantness. Although the first half of the month produced 259 incidents with two British servicemen killed and fifteen injured, a dramatic change took place when the NLF and FLOSY ordered their supporters to cease fighting while more negotiations took place. An uneasy calm descended upon the State which continued throughout October with only isolated and sporadic outbreaks of violence. In no way did it permit the Security Forces to relax their vigilance but it did allow the withdrawal to continue without interference.

The Middle East Command plans were working out well. In particular, the transfer of authority from Aden to Bahrain gave rise to no difficulties in spite of the 1,300 miles which separated the new Command from the operational scene. Thanks largely to the great improvement in communications which had been made since the Kuwait crisis of 1961, Air Commodore JG Topham, who was now firmly in the saddle as Commander, Air Forces, Gulf (CAFG), found no difficulty in working with the AOC and the rump of AFME during their last few weeks in Aden. If a grave emergency had arisen in Aden during that period the AOC could at any time have reassumed full control and brought back to Aden units which had departed to the Gulf. The plans were flexible enough to allow for such a contingency.

Support of the SAA up-country continued at a high level during

October with 164 operational sorties being flown by the Hunters, mostly providing air cover for RAF and AAC aircraft on the ground. The need for such vigilance was illustrated on 13 October when a DC3 of Air Djibouti was forcibly detained by the NLF when it landed at Riyan, which the RAF had by then handed over to the SAA. No 43 Squadron kept discreet high level observation on the movements of the civil aircraft during the next five days. The aircraft flew at least twice to Ataq, one of the old Western Aden Protectorate airstrips, before flying openly into Khormaksar on 18 October. For what purpose it was used was never discovered, but it appeared to be almost the original case of 'hijacking'.

It now became the turn of 84 Squadron to leave Khormaksar. Not only was it due to move but also to re-equip with the Andover which had entered service some time earlier, and was proving to be an excellent STOL transport. Three of the Squadron's six Beverleys were flown back to the United Kingdom while the Squadron moved to Sharjah with the remaining three, where it prepared to participate in the final air lift out of Aden, and then re-equip at Sharjah with Andovers.

Khormaksar was now left with the Hunters of 43 Squadron to maintain the air defence standby and the Wessex of 78 Squadron which would continue to meet the search and rescue commitment and carry out internal security patrols until embarking in one of the naval vessels during the last days in Aden and then move to the Gulf. As the last RAF aircraft left Khormaksar, the plan was for Buccaneers and Sea Vixens from *HMS Eagle* to take over the air defence role while RN helicopters from *HMS Albion*, provided the final link with Khormaksar. The naval task force would then remain close to Aden for about twelve hours after withdrawal before finally departing.

The AOC, Air Vice-Marshal A H Humphrey, transferred his flag to Bahrein on 27 October and handed over command in Aden to his Senior Air Staff Officer, Air Commodore FB Sowrey CBE AFC. The AOC's departure signalled the end of AFME which had by then transferred its responsibilities to CAFG. Air Commodore Sowrey commanded the remaining RAF personnel in Aden from a small command cell at Khormaksar. During October, therefore, a complete reversal of command took place, Bahrein assuming overall command with Aden as the operational outpost instead of vice versa. The early move of the AOC to Bahrein was designed to enable him to supervise the final airlift out of Aden which was to be controlled from Bahrein.

By 31 October concentration of the remaining units and sections into Khormaksar and its immediate surroundings was almost complete. The skeleton of Middle East Command Headquarters established itself in the vacated secondary school on the Station which allowed the whole of Steamer Point to be evacuated. After the steady rundown of forces and administrative units which had lasted for several months, the scene was set for the final stage of departure.

Date of withdrawal

Much confusion reigned throughout 1967 as to the exact date of the final departure. Until June it will be recalled, the British Government did not commit itself to anything more specific than 'shortly after independence at the beginning of 1968'. In June, however, the Commander-in-Chief was officially told to plan on 20 November as the final day. That day was thereafter referred to as 'W' Day and the various planning studies emerged with the requirements for a minimum of twenty-eight days warning if 'W' Day was to be changed. On 2 November the Minister of Defence changed 'W' Day to 30 November and, finally as late as the 14th of that month, he brought it forward by twenty-four hours to 29 November and that date remained unchanged. None of these alterations incommoded the planners who, appreciating the need for great flexibility, kept a number of options open.

A massive airlift

The operational requirement was to keep peace in the territory until the moment of departure, and then to leave in good order. However, every contingency had to be taken into consideration including a fighting withdrawal in the face of terrorist opposition. The latter contingency was a real possibility, particularly if the UN talks in Geneva broke down at the last moment. It was essential, therefore, to maintain a strong and effective force until the end so that Khormaksar, which was the key to a successful withdrawal, could be securely held until the last man had flown out. For this purpose, two battalion groups were regarded as the minimum force needed. This force would hold a close ring around the airfield on 'W' Day and be lifted out well before dark with air cover provided from the Naval Task Force at sea which would have allowed the last RAF fighters to leave from a still secure airfield.

As the Suez Canal had remained closed since the six days war in June, and as Aden port was virtually at a standstill through strikes and terrorist activity, any question of evacuating personnel by sea had been discarded earlier in the year. Everybody, with the exception of Royal Marine Commandos and some naval personnel would leave by air. An air lift second in size only to the Berlin airlift of twenty years earlier was therefore planned, starting at a leisurely pace and accelerating towards 'W' Day with plenty of scope to speed it up if the situation deteriorated. Muharraq was to act as a 'hinge' around which the main lift from Khormaksar to the United Kingdom pivoted, the leg from Khormaksar to Muharraq being flown by the medium range aircraft of Air Support Command augmented as necessary by the AFME force, and that from Muharraq to the UK by the strategic transports of Air Support Command assisted by a few civil charter aircraft. Admittedly Nasser had given permission for aircraft carrying evacuees to overfly Egypt on the direct route from Aden to the UK and a few such flights were made. But

there was too much uncertainty about this route to depend upon it, and the plan concentrated upon the longer but more dependable route via the Persian Gulf.

The main lift was concentrated into the seven days before 'W' Day, which remained as 29 November. An Air Support Command force comprising VC10s, Belfasts, Hercules and Britannias assembled at Muharraq, with three VC10s from British United Airways, a few days prior to 'W'—7, and the small Movements Section at Muharraq was reinforced with Air Support Command staff to handle the onward flow to the UK. There were approximately 3,700 people to be brought out of Aden and, with the transport force available, this left a good margin of capacity to accelerate the withdrawal. One rule which was introduced for the last few days was that all aircraft flying out of Khormaksar should have a good three engine ferry performance, including the ability to take off with one engine out of action, but without a load. This was to avoid having to leave an aircraft at Khormaksar which needed merely an engine change. For the Hercules, which had been in operational service for only a few weeks, this was the first significant task and its performance was watched with great interest. From the pilot's point of view this was excellent, but much abuse was levelled at it by the passengers who found it noisy, uncomfortable and cold. This was no real criticism of the Hercules which was intended as an operational transport aircraft in the fullest sense, and was never intended to provide luxury transport for passengers who had perhaps become somewhat spoiled by the comforts of the VC10, Comet and Britannia.

Although the number of flights per day out of Aden varied, it was generally of the order of four Britannias arriving from Muharraq, spending about forty minutes on the ground and each leaving with 110 passengers; seven Hercules flights followed the same pattern but carried both freight and passengers, and two Belfast flights carried freight only.

All passengers were made up into 'chalks' of twenty-five men each, normally drawn from the same regiment or unit. Each 'chalk' was fully documented before leaving Khormaksar and remained together right through Muharraq to Lyneham, which was the UK destination. The average stay at Muharraq was about three hours, during which the 'chalk' remained together, had a meal, bought last minute gifts and then continued by VC10 or Britannia. Each aircraft carried a specified number of 'chalks', eg four in a Britannia, and the whole procedure was as quick and efficient as it was possible to be. An example will help to illustrate this efficiency: a 'chalk' from the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders was on duty in Crater until 11.30 pm one night, when they were pulled back into Khormaksar after handing over to the SAA. After documentation they were flown to Muharraq in the early hours of the morning by Britannia where, after a three-hour pause, they transhipped to a VC10 and reached Lyneham a bare twenty-four hours after coming off duty in Crater. Not a detail was overlooked even to the extent of a

British Rail timetable of the trains from Swindon being included in their final briefing.

The lift proceeded smoothly. Very little unserviceability was experienced and, as the weather over the whole of the Arabian Peninsula is generally good in November, there were no diversions to interrupt the plan. The final two days were the tactical phase of the withdrawal and potentially the most fraught with danger as the thinning out of defences had reached an advanced stage. On 'W' -1, 1,000 servicemen with about 350 civilians were moved out using some twenty aircraft. This left 875 to be flown out on 'W' Day with nearly as many more Royal Marines to be ferried out by naval helicopters to the waiting ships of the Task Force. Turn around times at Khormaksar were reduced to thirty minutes, each aircraft keeping one engine running throughout to provide the electrical services and arrivals at Muharraq were speeded up to one every half hour to ensure that darkness on 'W' Day did not catch anybody still on the ground at Khormaksar. Two reserve Hercules circled the airfield during the final phase in case unforeseen unserviceability necessitated a quick rescue operation. None of these elaborate precautions was needed and the lift was completed as planned, using in addition to AFME's own transport force, three RAF VC10s and three BUA VC10s, fourteen Britannias, fifteen Hercules and two Belfasts of Air Support Command.

Last days in Aden

As the airlift rapidly reduced the forces remaining in Aden from mid-November, a number of operational commitments were either handed over or discontinued. Air defence patrols along the Yemen border were continued by 43 Squadron until 7 November by which date *HMS Eagle* had joined the Task Force assembling for the final phase of departure. Sea Vixens and Buccaneers from *Eagle* took over the protective task from the Hunters and the ship's radar provided the necessary early warning cover, allowing 303 Signals Unit to dismantle and ship its radar out to Bahrein. At the request of the SAA the last Hunter ground attack sorties were flown on 9 November against ground targets of dissidents in the Kirch area which brought to an end four year's service by 43 Squadron at Khormaksar. It had come from Cyprus to help out 8 and 208 Squadrons in an emergency and had never returned. The last Hunters to leave were the FR10s which had belonged to 1417 Flight, but which were finally added to 8 Squadron but held back as a detachment at Khormaksar at a time when it was still thought that a South Arabian air force might be interested in taking them over. In the event this was not so, and the FR10s flew to Muharraq on 'W' -1 to join 8 Squadron.

The only 'ceremonial' connected with independence took place on 28 November ('W' -1). Sir Humphrey Trevelyan, who had vacated Government House and spent the previous night aboard *HMS Eagle*, flew in from the ship during the morning and, accompanied by the

Commander-in Chief, Admiral Sir Michael Le Fanu, inspected a Joint Services Guard of Honour, in which the Royal Air Force was represented by the RAF Regiment. A solitary verse of the National Anthem coincided with the last of the Hunter F105s flying overhead in their farewell salute as they left for Muharraq – forty-eight years after the RAF first came to the colony. As Sir Humphrey stood on the steps of the RAF aircraft due to take him to England, the Royal Marine Band from *Eagle* struck up – not *Auld Lang Syne* but *Fings Ain't Wot They Used To Be*. It was hardly traditional but its appropriateness was not lost on those who heard it. As the High Commissioner departed, the Joint Headquarters on the airfield closed down, bringing to an end Middle East Command which had existed first in the Mediterranean and then in Aden, for as long as most servicemen could remember. At the same time 45 Commando was flown out by helicopter to the waiting Task Force after no less than seven years continuous service in Aden. In fact this unit had spent twenty-one of the past twenty-six years overseas, most of them being in the Middle East. Its departure left only 42 Commando Group, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel 'Dai' Morgan in control of airfield security assisted by armed Wessex patrolling overhead. Four senior officers, including Air Commodore Sowrey, took their leave of a few officers of the South Arabian Army, headed by their Commander, who had come to see them off, and boarded the last transport aircraft to leave for the UK.

The final scene took place on what had been the 12th green of the Khormaksar Golf Club when, at 1450 hours, the last 120 men of 42 Commando were withdrawn from seven defensive positions and flown by helicopter to *HMS Albion*. Major-General Tower, the GOC, then followed and the last to leave Aden was Lieutenant-Colonel Morgan who formally handed over command to Rear Admiral Ashmore in the Naval Task Force. The ships remained in territorial waters for a further nine hours, until midnight, when South Arabia became officially independent. Perhaps the RAF had the last word: two large ships' buoys, painted with red, white and blue roundels were left high up on the barren rocks as a farewell helicopter-borne memento.

A moment of reflection

The 29 November 1967, brought to an end 128 years of British rule in Aden and for the Royal Air Force, forty-eight years of occupation of Khormaksar and Steamer Point. The final departure from most overseas stations, which became a fairly frequent occurrence for British servicemen between 1950 and 1970, was usually accompanied by many regrets and a certain nostalgia. It is doubtful whether any soldier or airman regretted leaving Aden. An uncomfortable and exhausting place at the best of times, the last few years had been grim, dangerous, frustrating and almost intolerably restricted. Having said that, however, it is impossible to ignore the sense of satisfaction which many,

indeed most servicemen obtained from having carried out a tour of duty there. It was the satisfaction which comes from completing a hard and challenging task, something to be talked about, an experience to be recounted, often with much exaggeration and boring detail. There is no doubt that service in Aden gave immense experience and a certain maturity to the men and women of the Royal Air Force. The conditions under which they had to work tested their skill and initiative, and often called for considerable feats of improvisation. Aircraft and equipment of all kinds were subjected to the most rigorous stresses and strains which quickly found weaknesses and flaws in design and construction. The loss of Aden was, therefore, the loss to the RAF of a unique testing ground for both men and materials and, to that extent, it was a cause for regret.

However regrettable the grim story of the last years in Aden may be, the one redeeming feature which will always stand out, was the steadfast courage, efficiency and remarkable restraint of the British serviceman whether sailor, soldier or airman. He was abused and provoked, ambushed and sniped at by a ruthless and often unseen enemy. He was not above criticism from his own countrymen who had no conception of the conditions under which he had to live, work and fight. The final withdrawal without a shot fired or a life lost must rank as one of the best planned and executed operations in British military history.



27. Wessex of 78 Squadron positioning a 75mm howitzer on a firing point in Wadi Taym.



28. Convoy entering the Radfan on the Dhala Road near Thumier.



29. Pilot Officer I C Crawley (left) and Flight Sergeant P J Maunder BEM of 37 (Field Squadron, RAF Regiment, defending Thumier airfield.



30. Belvedere of 26 Squadron resupplying the Royal Marines in the Radfan.

Withdrawal from the Persian Gulf

Britain's intervention in Kuwait in 1961 has been fully described in Chapter 9. It was successful to the extent that Iraq was deterred from carrying out her threat to invade her neighbour: it was also rapid in view of the isolated position of Kuwait at the head of the Persian Gulf. However, it was not rapid enough, and Britain fully realised that her forces would have been in a most difficult position if Iraq had crossed the Kuwait frontier in strength with armoured units early in the operation. Dependence upon forces in Aden, Cyprus and the United Kingdom, assisted by such naval units as were in the vicinity of the Gulf at the time, was unsatisfactory and could not be relied upon to fulfil the guarantee of security which the Ruler of Kuwait was entitled to expect from his agreement with Britain. This agreement was vitally important, in view of Britain's dependence at that time upon Kuwait oil, and prompt implementation of the agreement constituted HMG's highest priority commitment in the Middle East. There were two ways in which the lessons learned from the 1961 episode could be put to good effect, and improve Kuwait's security. The first was to form a Kuwait air force, using part of the country's newly acquired oil revenue, and to equip and train it to provide at least a measure of self defence until British forces could take over. The second was to hold more British forces in the Persian Gulf so that any future intervention could be more rapid, particularly in the early stages than it had been in 1961. Both of these solutions were in fact adopted but it is only with the second that this narrative is concerned.

Expansion in Bahrein and the Gulf stations

Prior to 1961, Bahrein had for some years been the base for a small inter-Service force comprising three or four frigates of the Persian Gulf Squadron, a company of infantry from one of the Strategic Reserve battalions in Kenya, and 152 Squadron with its mixed complement of Pembrokes and Twin Pioneers. Politically it had not been acceptable to the ruling family of Bahrein for larger British forces to be maintained on the island, an understandable situation when it is remembered that Britain's relations with Saudi Arabia had been bad and Bahrein was dependent for much of its budget on refining oil for Saudi Arabia. The Ruler of Bahrein had, therefore, something of a tight-rope to walk if he

was to maintain his friendship with both nations. Even the slightest change in the numbers of British Service personnel, and every attachment of aircraft, had to be negotiated with care and tact. In particular, the presence of fighter aircraft was regarded with some disfavour, and only brief attachments of such types were acceptable.

The Kuwait crisis altered this situation completely. Britain had kept her word and rushed to the help of another small, friendly Arab country. Furthermore, this quick action had found favour with Saudi Arabia with whom Britain's relations improved immediately, particularly when the latter showed her willingness to leave Kuwait as soon as the emergency was over and some of her responsibilities could be assumed by Arab League troops, who were mainly Saudi Arabian. The embarrassment of having British forces garrisoned in his country was lifted from the shoulders of the Ruler of Bahrein with the result that the Political Resident, Persian Gulf, had little difficulty in negotiating for additional units to be maintained in Bahrein against the possibility of further threats to Kuwait. The only condition made by the Ruler was that they should all be located on the island of Muharraq where the existing RAF station lay. This condition was quite acceptable as there was sufficient land around the airfield for any army and RAF expansion which might be contemplated. Muharraq was separated from the main island of Bahrein by a narrow causeway which could be and, on two occasions was, blocked by civil disturbances, thus isolating the British base temporarily. However, this occasional disadvantage was offset by the ease with which Muharraq could be secured during times of unrest when the international airport would be an important target for saboteurs. On balance, therefore, Muharraq suited Britain well as her military base. When negotiations with the Ruler were completed, it was mutually agreed to re-title the British base which had hitherto been called 'RAF' Bahrein'. From 1 December 1963, it became 'RAF Muharraq', a style which possessed less controversial political connotations.

The immediate requirements, if a further intervention in Kuwait should be necessary, were for air defence, and the means of moving a battalion or its equivalent into Kuwait within a matter of hours. In addition some form of surveillance of the Kuwait-Iraq frontier area was essential to obtain the maximum warning of any build-up of Iraqi forces – and in particular armour – on the Iraq side of the border. The surveillance requirement was met by a detachment of two PR Canberras from 13 Squadron, the detachment being located more or less permanently at Muharraq. The Canberras flew a daily sortie at high altitude over the Kuwait-Iraq frontier area and, in conditions of good visibility, were able to detect any unusual military movement well inside Iraq. No 13 Squadron was based at Akrotiri and the detachment was maintained by rotating crews once a week which provided the opportunity for the aircraft to be flown back to Cyprus for second line

servicing. As the daily reconnaissance did not utilise the full effort available from the two Canberras, an opportunity was taken during 1962 and 1963 to survey some of the more remote parts of Oman which, as we have seen in earlier chapters, were so inadequately mapped that it is no exaggeration to say that recourse had sometimes had to be made to sketch maps produced by Wilfred Thesiger* during his travels across the Empty Quarter many years before.

The more relaxed political atmosphere in Bahrein made it possible to locate one of the two Hunter squadrons in the Command at Muharraq, and thus bring a fighter squadron permanently within thirty minutes flying time of Kuwait. No 208 Squadron had left Nairobi and joined 8 Squadron to form the Tactical Wing at Khormaksar towards the end of 1961, and these two Squadrons shared the duty at Muharraq, each Squadron spending about two months in the Gulf before rejoining its families in Aden and handing over to its sister squadron. Some variety was added to this pattern of rotation when two Hunter squadrons of 38 Group in the United Kingdom, 1 and 54, were given the opportunity to gain experience of the Middle East by providing some of the Bahrein detachments. An armament practice camp was established in the desert close to Sharjah, with firing and rocket ranges which enabled the Hunter squadrons to combine their Gulf detachments with live firing practice under conditions which were entirely different from those which they normally experienced in Aden, and much more like those which could be expected in Kuwait. It must be remembered that, with a maximum tour length of two years, the turn-over of pilots in the Hunter squadrons was fairly rapid so that, in spite of the frequency of operations in the Aden area, there was a constant flow of new pilots to be trained.

Whereas one company of a British infantry battalion had been judged adequate for Bahrein before the 1961 crisis, a full battalion was stationed there subsequently, and this required the necessary lift to return to Kuwait quickly. It was supplied by a Beverley detachment, usually of three aircraft, which was drawn from 30 and 84 Squadrons in the Command. As in the case of the Hunters, the responsibility for this detachment was occasionally allocated to one of the UK based squadrons at Abingdon, particularly if the Middle East squadrons were busy elsewhere. For some considerable time after the crisis, the resident battalion at Muharraq was one or other of the units of the Parachute Regiment and the presence of the Beverleys enabled them to obtain their full quota of parachute training. No 152 Squadron completed the RAF order of battle at Muharraq, divided into a Pembroke Flight and a Twin Pioneer Flight, the latter being permanently detached to Sharjah to provide training and communications not only for the Trucial Oman Scouts, but also for a new British unit which was established there – the 9th/12th Lancers, equipped with Ferret scout cars.

*The author of *Arabian Sands*.

The introduction of these additional units to the Gulf necessitated a considerable programme of new building, both at Muharraq and Sharjah. Fortunately the Gulf remained quiet throughout 1962 and 1963, enabling the work to go ahead without interference and the new units to settle in. Muharraq doubled in size and the RAF strength in mid-1962 was only a few short of one thousand officers and airmen. They had to endure particularly trying hot weather that year: as early as May the temperature reached 110.9°F on one day, the highest May temperature since records began in 1933, and only two degrees below the absolute record of 113°F recorded on 5 August 1956. Consequently, it was a great relief when new, fully air conditioned barrack accommodation became available, together with a very fine new club, named the Elworthy Club, as a tribute to the Commander-in-Chief who had worked hard for the improvement of living conditions on the Gulf stations.

At Sharjah, one of the most important effects of the Kuwait crisis was to accelerate construction of a new, hard topped runway. The natural surface runway which we have seen going out of action, either through flooding or heavy wear and tear, constantly throughout this narrative, finally became almost unusable under the heavy pounding of fully loaded Canberras and other jet aircraft during August and September, 1961. As soon as it became clear that Sharjah must play an even more important role in the future, work on a new runway began. It was laid down alongside the old runway and no interference with flying was caused during the time it was being built. A tarmacadam surface with taxiing and turning loops at either end was provided with a bearing strength adequate for all types of aircraft. On completion, the old sand runway was left intact and, with the minimum of maintenance could still be used if an emergency caused the new strip to be obstructed. For the first time in its long history, Sharjah now had an all weather capability.

Masirah also began to be affected by the general strengthening of forces in the Gulf area, and its hitherto simple role of a small staging post and route station took on greater importance as the centre of gravity of British military power in the Middle East shifted from Aden and East Africa to the Gulf. The comparative security of Masirah, for which a renewed lease of ninety-nine years had been obtained from the Sultan of Muscat after the successful completion of the Oman campaign, had always been one of its greatest attractions. Under the circumstances prevailing after the events of 1961 in the Gulf, it was a 'natural' for further development as an operational RAF station as well as a staging post. It had however, always suffered from the same disadvantages as Sharjah, namely, natural surface runways which would not stand up to intensive use. Masirah was, therefore, given the same treatment in 1962 as Sharjah and a 9,000 foot asphalt runway was constructed alongside one of the old runways, the latter being retained for emergency use. Even before the end of 1962 Masirah had received and turned round a

Comet 4C, its first big jet aircraft, and accepted the first night landing by seven Hunters of 8 Squadron. The new runway was to be but the beginning of a big development which was to include, during the next couple of years, the complete rebuilding of the Station at a cost of £3 million, the provision of a bulk fuel storage installation, a new water distillation plant and a communications centre. If, when Middle East Command was at its zenith, anybody had asked which RAF station could outlive all the others, one doubts whether the answer would have been Masirah. But that is in fact what happened and perhaps it is not so surprising when the strategic position of the island is considered, and account taken of the fact that its isolated, offshore location made its continued occupation by the RAF much less embarrassing to Arab nationalism than most other stations.

The quiet after the storms

As so frequently happened in this Command, a period of violence and operational activity was followed by a reaction – almost a recovery period. Thus the long campaign in Oman which ended in 1959 and the Kuwait crisis of 1961 were followed by a period of peace and quiet throughout the Gulf in 1962 and 1963. Nothing could have been more welcome, coinciding as it did with the rebuilding programme already described, consolidation of the strengthened British forces and the opportunity to train them in their new environment. For the first time Headquarters, RAF Persian Gulf possessed a reasonably well balanced force of fighter/bomber, medium and short range transports and a PR detachment. It was not, as in the past, entirely dependent upon the attachment of units from outside to lay on exercises, demonstrations and co-operation with naval and land forces. Throughout 1962 and 1963 the Political Resident, Sir William Luce was able, as never before, to demonstrate to those with whom Britain had treaty relations in Muscat, the Trucial States, Bahrein, Kuwait and elsewhere, the strength and value of those relationships. The Beverleys dropped the parachute battalion in many exercises in Oman to keep potential dissidents fully aware of the proximity of the same British forces which had flushed them from the fastnesses of the Jebel Akhdar. Anti-smuggling surveillance with the Royal Navy was stepped up in the Gulf where illicit arms running was rife. Fire power demonstrations were mounted by the Hunters throughout the area, the Sultan of Muscat's expanding air force at Beit-al-Falaj was given every assistance, and all the landing grounds and airstrips were visited regularly and kept in usable condition.

There were no operations of any significance during these two years but plenty of routine work and a few incidents which are worth recounting. No 152 Squadron had maintained an excellent accident-free record with its Pembroke and Twin Pioneers but, on 18 April 1963, that record was shattered by a particularly serious and tragic accident to one of the Twin Pioneers of 'B' Flight at Sharjah. The aircraft was

approaching to land at Bu Hafafa, an oil company strip to the south west of the Buraimi Oasis when it crashed in circumstances which were never fully explained. The pilot, Flight Lieutenant Bull, his navigator, Flight Lieutenant Evans, Major Lewis and Trooper Brierley of the 9th/12th Lancers and four Arab soldiers of the TOS were all killed. One other Arab soldier escaped with injuries. The Twin Pioneer, with its STOL characteristics was always regarded as a particularly safe and reliable aeroplane, a fact which made this accident unusually surprising and tragic.

The new technique of flight refuelling involved Muharraq increasingly at about this time. A Valiant tanker force was being built up in the United Kingdom as many of the original 'V' bombers were converted to tankers, and this enabled more ambitious reinforcement exercises to be carried out with short range fighters, notably Javelins at the time. Also, owing to the overflying problems in the Eastern Mediterranean and the congestion and risks at Khormaksar, the Far East route via Bahrein and Gan was used more and more. Muharraq was suitable in all respects to act as a tanker base in the centre part of the route, as well as being a good half-way house for fighters en route for Singapore. One of the first of these reinforcement exercises using Muharraq took place in April 1963, when the Javelins of 64 Squadron with Valiant tankers and Britannias made full use of the airfield during a flight to India and back. From then on, tankers and their 'sucklings' became a familiar sight in the Gulf as Javelins, 'V' bombers and, later, Lightnings flew East without the need to follow circuitous routes in order to find suitable airfields for refuelling at short intervals.

Signs of more unrest

Early in 1964 a change of Commander, RAF Persian Gulf took place when Air Commodore E G L Millington CBE DFC arrived on 8 January to relieve Air Commodore E W Tacon who reached the end of what had been a fairly uneventful tour from an operational point of view although he had been fully occupied with the rebuilding and expansion programmes. The new CRAFPG was fortunate enough to be able to move his headquarters into a new building within the compound of *HMS Jufair*, and close to the Residency. For years HQ RAFPG had been housed in one of the less attractive buildings tucked away in a corner of the compound. The new building not only provided greater space and comfort with modern air conditioning but more important, it was far better served with communications and a modern operations centre, all of which had been less than satisfactory hitherto. This was a timely improvement as the almost traditional instability of this part of the Command was again becoming evident after a couple of relatively quiet years. The training and arming of Omani rebels which was thought to have re-started in the Damman area of Saudi Arabia, as shown by

isolated incidents throughout Oman, and also by the discovery of a number of caches of mines and small arms along the desolate Trucial coast was having some success. Some of the more serious incidents took place in Dhofar, the Omani province around Salalah on the South Arabian coast. Potentially this had always been a troublesome region although it had not hitherto been the scene of much active dissidence against the Sultan's authority. In August of 1963, however, a number of land mines were laid on roads and tracks around Salalah, one of which destroyed an RAF vehicle carrying supplies from the port to the airfield and an NCO driver was killed. The Sultan immediately reinforced Salalah with his own forces, and Beverleys of 30 Squadron flew six Ferret scout cars of the 9th/12th Lancers there from Sharjah to assist with a punitive expedition into the hills behind Salalah airfield.

After the long drawn out and costly Oman campaign of the previous decade, Britain was naturally anxious that there should be no repetition of it in the 1960s, and efforts were redoubled to publicise the presence of British Army units and the RAF throughout the territory by means of exercises, flag waves and firepower demonstrations in support of the Sultan and his forces. A series of detachments to Sharjah by Canberra B16 aircraft from the squadrons in Cyprus was inaugurated, partly to boost the number of RAF aircraft in the skies over Oman and partly to keep the Canberra squadrons in touch with their role of reinforcing the Gulf in the event of any resurgence of a threat to Kuwait. Six B16 Canberras at a time maintained these detachments, making full use of the range facilities at Sharjah which had been developed to a standard almost as high as that on the old Middle East range at Nicosia which had been in existence for many years.

The system of detachments from the two Beverley squadrons and the Hunter squadrons to Muharraq, which had been rotating between the Gulf and Khormaksar and Eastleigh for more than two years, was finally discontinued. Both 30 Squadron and 208 Squadron made Muharraq their permanent base, allowing their families to join them from Eastleigh and Aden respectively. The administrative and technical advantages of this stabilisation were immense. Many unproductive flying hours previously used up in changing detachments were saved and Muharraq was able to settle down to a period with three resident squadrons and a personnel strength which had risen to about 1,200. This produced the unusual situation in June 1964, when the Radfan campaign started in Aden, of Muharraq having to reinforce Khormaksar with Hunters and Beverleys instead of vice versa. No better indication that the centre of gravity of the Command was slowly shifting from Aden to the Gulf was needed. No 208 Squadron had an unhappy start to its permanent move to Muharraq when two of its Hunters collided at low level over the Sharjah ranges. One pilot, Flying Officer Willcocks was killed, but his colleague managed to gain a little altitude and eject safely, being picked up uninjured by helicopter. It was a most unusual type of

accident for such an experienced squadron and it is probable that the intense glare and heat haze prevalent around Sharjah in June contributed to the cause.

Before the end of 1964 some concern was felt about Kuwait once more. Surveillance by the PR Canberras of 13 Squadron, which had been maintained almost on a daily basis, revealed concentrations of Iraqi armour close to the Kuwait border. Manoeuvres were thought to be the reason but, nevertheless, precautions were taken to bring 208 Squadron to thirty minutes readiness, with long range tanks filled. Beverleys of 30 Squadron were prepared for a rapid troop lift of the Parachute Regiment, and six Hunters from one of the Aden squadrons were despatched to Masirah to act as an immediate reserve. One additional PR Canberra arrived from Akrotiri to strengthen the surveillance. The assessment that the Iraq Army was engaged in manoeuvres turned out to be accurate and, after four days, readiness was relaxed. It had, however, been a useful reminder that the threat to Kuwait had not disappeared, but only receded, and there was a reality about the incident which helped to keep the Gulf forces on their toes.

The incidents of 1964 showed clearly that the tide of Arab nationalism, never far below the surface, was again beginning to rise. Doubtless there was some resentment that the successful squeezing of British military power out of Aden was only resulting in strengthening it in the Gulf.

1965 saw the continuation of, and some increase in the unrest of the previous year. There were widespread disturbances in Bahrain and Manama in March organised by Nasserite nationalist elements. The rioting was ostensibly concerned with redundancies in the Bahrain Petroleum Company (BAPCO) although the majority of the rioters had no connection with the Company whatsoever. The police handled the situation firmly and it caused no more than inconvenience to the RAF. The disturbance did, however, once again draw attention to the dependence of Muharraq upon the causeway joining it to the main island for fuel and all other supplies. This tenuous link was the price that had to be paid for the isolation and relative security of the airfield.

The most serious development during 1965, however, was a determined attempt by the Arab League to influence the Rulers of the seven Trucial States to terminate their treaties and friendship with Britain. Parties of Arab League officials actively campaigned up and down the Trucial coast, causing Sir William Luce to use up a large slice of 152 Squadron's flying task in an endeavour to keep one step ahead of the officials. For Britain, the situation at Sharjah was the most serious and on one occasion – 16 June to be precise – it was necessary to close the airfield for a few hours in order to deny its use to a party of Arab League officials who were having some success with the Ruler of Sharjah. Fortunately the Ruler, a harsh and unpopular man, was deposed and succeeded by his cousin who quickly restored the situation to normal, an

act which had its influence upon the remaining States, four of which were quick to re-affirm their loyalty to HMG.

The third area of concern was, once again, Dhofar. Salalah was threatened by marauding bands from the hills and, on two occasions during the year, a platoon from the Parachute Regiment had to be flown from Bahrein to protect Salalah airfield. The Sultan of Muscat reinforced the area and despatched part of his air force to operate from Salalah in support of his troops. It began to look as if the Sultan could become committed to a long and difficult campaign of guerrilla warfare in this desolate mountainous area inland from his summer capital – Salalah. So far the RAF had not been called upon to provide air support other than that needed to move in reinforcements to secure the RAF station. The Provosts and Beavers of SOAF were, for the moment, able to provide all the support needed and the value to the Sultan of his small air force was becoming increasingly apparent.

This year saw no change in the disposition of RAF squadrons in the Gulf, but it was notable for a steady increase in the air traffic in transit through Muharraq. The mounting scale of violence in Aden was putting a severe restriction on the use of Khormaksar for non-essential traffic and Muharraq was taking more and more of the former station's share of training flights by 'V' bombers, through flights to the Far East as well as the flight refuelling exercises already mentioned. Furthermore, hostilities between India and Pakistan broke out in September 1965 with the possibility of a large scale evacuation of British nationals through Bahrein to the United Kingdom. Two Britannias were positioned at Muharraq ready to initiate such an evacuation. In the event no such operation was needed but the situation greatly increased traffic passing through the Station. With three squadrons resident there, parking space became a problem on the RAF apron although the natural surface of Muharraq had a good load bearing strength which would accept most types of aircraft. As in the case of all the airfields in the Arabian Peninsula, blowing sand was the greatest hazard to aircraft on the ground and this could only be minimised by large expanses of well swept concrete. In earlier years the RAF had been able to park some visiting aircraft on the civil apron, but the airliners using Muharraq were getting larger and more numerous, and the civil airport authorities could no longer be so generous.

The difficulties of this situation are well illustrated by an incident on the airfield which occurred in May, 1965. A turbine locking plate from an Avon engine was found lying on the runway. It was thought to have come from a Hunter, although it could possibly have come from a civil aircraft or even from a Canberra. All the Hunters of 208 Squadron were inspected as far as was possible without stripping down engines and they all appeared to be in good order. As, however, the locking plate might have come from an area of the engine which could not be inspected, guidance was sought from the Command. The result was that ten

engines had to be changed – all the Hunters which were available to 208 Squadron that day – and history does not relate whether one of the engines was found to be defective when returned to the UK. Nor is it known whether a civil airliner continued to fly minus a turbine locking plate. All that is known for certain is that a vast amount of extra work, accompanied by much bad language, was created for the servicing personnel at Muharraq.

As 1965 gave way to 1966, it was the deteriorating situation in Dhofar which gave cause for most concern in Bahrein. The last thing that the British authorities wanted was further large scale dissidence in Oman, and the actions of the Dhofar rebels in defying the Sultan gave every indication that another long drawn out struggle was pending. Had this situation developed some years earlier, Aden would have been better placed than Bahrein to handle the military aspects of it. Dhofar was, in general, closer to, and more accessible from Aden: but by 1966 the situation in Aden was such that any operations in Dhofar would have to be conducted from the Gulf. There was ample evidence that arms were being run across the Empty Quarter to the Dhofar rebels from Damman in Saudi Arabia, which had become almost a traditional training ground for Omani rebels. The Sultan had strengthened his garrisons around Salalah, and SOAF was maintaining a small detachment on the airfield there. Despite this, the rebels mounted an attack on a SAF patrol guarding a waterhole at Mudhai, causing some casualties. SOAF attacked the rebel party, with its Provosts and destroyed two vehicles. However, undeterred by this counter-attack, the rebels ambushed a SAF patrol some days later, killing four SAF personnel, including a British officer, and wounding six others. These incidents were well planned and skilfully executed in typical guerrilla fashion, causing casualties out of all proportion to the numbers of rebels involved – usually parties of no more than ten to fifteen men.

The security of the airfield was a constant worry to the RAF where the small staging post complement of two officers and about fifty airmen was exposed and vulnerable. In consequence a platoon of the Parachute Regiment had to be maintained there for long periods at a time as it was not desirable to leave the RAF personnel entirely in the hands of SAF for protection. In May, yet another ambush caught a SAF column unawares and a further British officer and seven Arab soldiers were killed. It subsequently transpired that, in the fighting which had ensued, the rebels lost a notable leader, one Amir Ghanim, but the Sultan's forces were becoming somewhat demoralised by these setbacks. So much so that an ugly incident occurred during the same month as the ambush. The Sultan was inspecting a ceremonial guard of his Dhofar Regiment when the whole guard mutinied, severely wounding their Commanding Officer and killing a subaltern. The Sultan himself was unhurt but the incident focussed his attention very sharply on the gravity of the situation around his own summer capital. His old protagonist, the Imam

Ghalib, had been identified as the influence behind the Dhofar dissidence, and it was becoming only too clear that the Sultan was going to need all the resources of his army and air force which Britain had helped him to reconstitute since the Jebel Akhdar campaign finished in 1959.

Faced with this situation the Sultan, who spent most of his time in his Salalah palace and thus found the dissidence on his own doorstep far from welcome, continued to move his forces down from the Muscat area to reinforce Dhofar. Throughout the hot weather months the dissidence continued and built up into a campaign similar to that of the Radfan. In October another successful rebel ambush caused the death of three more SAF soldiers with four seriously wounded and four slightly injured. Britain was extremely reluctant to become involved in this campaign other than in a purely protective role to secure the airfield, but the last incident persuaded HMG to send at least a punitive expedition in to the affected area, partly to encourage and support the Sultan's forces, and partly to implement the treaty with him. A brief cordon and search operation in the Hauf area was carried out by elements of the 1st Irish Guards, landing on the Dhofar beaches from *HMS Fearless*. It had a temporarily pacifying effect and showed the dissidents that, as in the case of the earlier Oman campaign, British forces were still available to intervene if the situation became too serious.

The RAF was not called upon during 1966 to carry out any offensive operations against the Dhofar rebels; its activities were confined to transporting troops to and from Salalah and to flying occasional reconnaissance missions in an endeavour to identify caravans carrying arms to the rebels across the Empty Quarter – a hopeless search for a needle in a haystack. It was a year of routine work and training for the Gulf squadrons. A useful school for training both British and Arab officers as Forward Air Controllers (FAC) and Air Contact Teams (ACT) had been established at Sharjah and, in association with the school, live firing facilities were set up on Yas, an uninhabited island off the Trucial coast. No 208 Squadron, whose Hunters had just been equipped with the SNEB rocket in addition to the normal 3-inch RP, was in process of training pilots in the use of the new weapon. In so doing they provided excellent opportunities for the FAC school to put in live practice in directing the fighters onto targets on Yas island. A number of old vehicles were landed there by the Navy and set up as realistic targets for both Hunters and the embryo controllers to use.

Another important exercise, which took place in July under the code name *SANDFLY*, was designed to test the search and rescue organisation. A simulated PR Canberra crew was positioned by the Trucial Oman Scouts in the desert in Oman thirty miles south west of Jebel Dhanna, and equipped with a Sarbe beacon. The crew was found after twenty-three hours of searching by a Beverley, and a helicopter directed to the position. The exercise brought to light a number of short-comings in the survival equipment installed in some of the aircraft, and some extremely

valuable lessons were learned from it. It was found that the Hunter did not carry enough water to last a pilot for even twenty-four hours in the tropical desert conditions. The Beverley survival pack contained only one identification panel for laying out on the ground, and that was too small to be clearly seen by search aircraft. Finally the day/night flares were of little use in conditions of blowing sand as they burned too fast and blew away. All these and other deficiencies were rectified under the direction of the Rescue Co-ordination Centre (RCC) at Bahrain. Although rescue at sea in the relatively confined waters of the Gulf followed a well tried and proven pattern in conjunction with the Navy, desert rescue posed in many ways a more difficult problem. The areas to be searched tended to be much larger and, owing to the difficulties of the terrain, land forces could not give as much assistance as could the Navy or civilian shipping during a sea rescue. The Gulf was now crossed by many hundreds of airliners each year and these placed an additional responsibility upon the RCC, as so many more lives were involved than in the average military aircraft. Consequently the RCC had become a large and extremely important unit which was kept fully occupied throughout the year.

Air Commodore E G Millington completed his tour as CRAFPG and handed over command to Air Commodore J G Topham DSO OBE DFC on 27 June, 1966. This was a good time for a change of command as 1966 virtually marked the end of the consolidation in the Gulf which had resulted from the lessons learned during the Kuwait crisis. The new CRAFPG would be faced with the many problems which would inevitably arise during the forthcoming withdrawal from Aden, and his arrival in mid-1966 gave him plenty of time to gain experience of his command before having to face these problems. He arrived in time for 208 Squadron's 50th Anniversary. This milestone in a famous Squadron's long and distinguished history was marked by the presentation of its Standard by Air Vice-Marshal Sir Geoffrey Bromet KBE CB DSO who had been its first commanding officer in 1916. This was a singular honour as there cannot be many RAF squadrons whose first CO has been available to present his Squadron with its Standard fifty years later.

Further expansion in the Gulf

1967 must go down in history as a most important year in the Middle East, and for Britain's position in the region. Not only did it see the hasty withdrawal from Aden some months earlier than HMG originally intended, but it also saw the publication of a Supplementary Statement on Defence Policy* which outlined Britain's future defence policy worldwide. If this statement published in July 1967 did not specifically indicate an intention to withdraw military forces from the Gulf, there was a clear implication that Britain would no longer provide expensive

*Cmmd 3357.

bases and facilities on the same scale as before. It was recognised that many States, which had hitherto depended entirely upon Britain for defence, were building up with Britain's help their own defence forces and should be better able to take care of themselves, with the possible exception of the more sophisticated weapons and equipment. The Supplementary Statement went on to say that the advent of long range transport aircraft had given vastly improved mobility to Britain's forces and, because of this and other developments, she would in future depend more upon reinforcing threatened areas from the United Kingdom instead of maintaining costly garrisons around the world. If the Persian Gulf was not mentioned by name in the Statement, the Far East most certainly was – a stated intention to withdraw within a few years from Singapore and Malaya. Such a withdrawal would clearly reduce the value of the Gulf stations as staging posts on the route to the Far East. The writing was on the wall: it spelt out a major reduction of forces in the Gulf, if not complete withdrawal from it, within a few years. But before that happened a further 'expansion' of the forces stationed in the area, albeit transitory in nature, was to take place consequent upon the withdrawal from Aden in November 1967.

The early months of that year were quiet throughout the territory of the Gulf Command, all eyes being on the developments in Aden, the outcome of which was likely to influence nationalist activities in the remainder of the Peninsula. With the exception of 152, the Gulf squadrons had supporting roles to play in the final operations in Aden, and they trained and prepared themselves thoroughly during these first few months of the year. In particular, 208 Squadron, which remained at a high state of readiness to fly to Khormaksar, practised long range night cross-countries, landing and refuelling at Masirah before returning in darkness to Muharraq. Much attention was given to flying with 230 gallon drop tanks during this period as most of the Squadron's operational tasks, notably in Kuwait, Aden and Oman, called for sorties of long endurance which necessitated economical flying and good navigation. On 18 April, the Squadron had left Muharraq to fly down to Aden as part of a reinforcement exercise when an incident occurred in Kuwait which necessitated the instant recall of the Hunters. An Iraq Army patrol entered an area of disputed territory between Iraq and Kuwait and removed two Kuwaiti tents. This caused Kuwait to declare a general alert, 208 Squadron being brought to immediate readiness as it landed back at Muharraq, with Beverleys of 30 Squadron alerted to move the Parachute Regiment if necessary. On the following day, some Iraqi aircraft crossed the Kuwait frontier but took no hostile action and the atmosphere cooled down. Iraq stated that the original incident had been due to a mistake, which was as close to an apology as Kuwait was likely to receive, and the matter was forgotten. Incidents such as this one showed the need for constant and close surveillance of the Iraq forward areas, a task which the Canberra PR aircraft detached from the

Mediterranean continued to carry out several times a week. Also the instant reaction of the Kuwait and British forces to any frontier violation had a salutary effect and undoubtedly deterred further Iraqi incursions.

When the Arab-Israeli war broke out in June, some anti-British activities were fully expected, but in fact they were few in number. A certain amount of rioting in Bahrein was firmly put down by the Police, and at Sharjah the sailing club boats belonging to the Trucial Oman Scouts were burned during a night incident. The CENTO air route through Turkey and Iran to the Gulf remained open to British aircraft and this enabled a squadron of thirteen Lightnings MK 6 to be ferried through to the Far East in June. They did not land at Muharraq which was a diversion airfield for them but they were refuelled overhead which enabled them to complete a leg from Akrotiri to Masirah where they all landed without incident. This was the first occasion on which such a reinforcement had been undertaken by Lightnings but no problems were encountered with the flight refuelling and Muharraq saw only the Valiant tankers.

While standing by to assist with the Aden withdrawal, 30 Squadron took on an unusual task in July. Some of the rough airstrips in central Oman were suitable only for Twin Pioneers by virtue of their length – or lack of it. Their value would be greatly enhanced if they could be made long enough for Beverleys to take off, which would involve extending most of them by several hundred feet. This was accomplished by the simple process of flying in a Beverley, which was perfectly feasible, loaded with a bulldozer and a grader, off-loading them with their crews, and waiting until the strip had been lengthened sufficiently to enable the Beverley with its load to take off comfortably. This sounds a fairly hazardous operation in potentially hostile country but 30 Squadron found no difficulties and it was certainly a highly economical method of extending an isolated airstrip.

These were in fact among the last tasks to be carried out by the Squadron in the Middle East. During the following month of August, 105 Squadron, which had been moving a few aircraft at a time from Khormaksar, became fully established at Muharraq with its complement of ten Argosies. It has been decided that when 105 was installed, 30 Squadron would fly its Beverleys back to the United Kingdom and, after a brief interval, would re-equip with the Hercules which was then entering RAF service, and remain based at Fairford. At least this fine old squadron, which had made an impressive contribution to operations in the Command, was not to disband and would soon be seen passing through the Gulf again with the Hercules. It was as well that 30 Squadron left when it did because the arrival of 105 Squadron and the transfer of headquarters staff from Aden began to create severe accommodation problems for Muharraq. Building had not fully kept pace with the expansion of the Station which was now approaching a strength of 1,700 RAF personnel, and would clearly get larger before the eventual

reduction started to bite. As accommodation in tents was not acceptable in the hot weather months, doubling up in the air conditioned barrack blocks and huts became inevitable. This resulted in the space which could be allotted to each airman being reduced from 75 to 45 square feet. The situation was no better for officers, and even worse for senior NCOs as a new Sergeants' Mess was still under construction. It was necessary to obtain special dispensation to accommodate some NCOs in hotels in Manama which were not themselves the height of luxury, and were a long way from the Station.

Muharraq had thus become almost as congested and uncomfortable as Khormaksar had been at the height of its overcrowding although the relief afforded by a long cool season in the Gulf gave Muharraq a marginal advantage. As there had never been any intention on the part of HMG to maintain a large garrison indefinitely at Bahrein, no wholesale building of married quarters and speculative hirings had been initiated, as had happened in Aden. A limited number of married quarters at Muharraq and on the main island had been approved, and these were occupied largely by key personnel of all ranks who were required to complete a full two-year tour to preserve continuity within the force. All other personnel had been placed on a 'one year unaccompanied' basis with a spell of mid-tour home leave which effectively made their tour length about thirteen months. Sharjah and Masirah, on the other hand, had no married quarters, were quite unsuitable for family life and were entirely manned on a one year basis. As we have seen in the case of Aden, the mixture of accompanied and unaccompanied men at Muharraq was never a great success whereas the unaccompanied airmen at Sharjah and Masirah found considerable satisfaction in the fact that they were all 'sweating it out in the same boat'. In both Kenya and Aden, and indeed in Iraq before that, Britain had had to leave behind millions of pounds worth of relatively new construction which had been provided in the expectation of a long stay. This was not to be repeated in the Gulf with the result that the most searching scrutiny was applied to every request for new building. It was much more economical, so the official argument went, to pay men reasonable separation allowances and to accept the inevitable turbulence and loss of efficiency of short unaccompanied tours of duty. This argument could hardly be faulted in theory, but it produced many problems in practice. In 1967 the Royal Air Force had reached a peak in the number of men on unaccompanied tours around the world. Coincidental with reductions in the Service and redundancies, it produced the most severe turbulence ever known in peacetime, and consequently, no little dissatisfaction, all of which seriously affected recruiting and was a considerable discouragement to married airmen to extend their service.

The airlift of the forces out of Aden which was completed on 29 November, and the part which the Gulf stations played in it, has been fully described in Chapter 13. For Muharraq and Sharjah it was a most

testing time, the former bearing the brunt of the traffic in transit to and from the United Kingdom while the latter gave temporary accommodation to units, such as 8 and 208 Squadrons, to relieve the congestion at Muharraq. Fortunately Muharraq, being something of an international crossroads, had gained much experience during the past few years of handling a varied assortment of large aircraft and their loads. Reinforced by a Mobile Air Movements Section (MAMS) from Air Support Command, the station handled 728 aircraft during November, which involved the processing of about 24,000 passengers and 2½ million pounds of freight. No less than 12,471 meals were provided for passengers in transit. An enormous sense of relief, and satisfaction at a job superbly done, was felt when the last transport aircraft from Aden bore its load away to the United Kingdom.

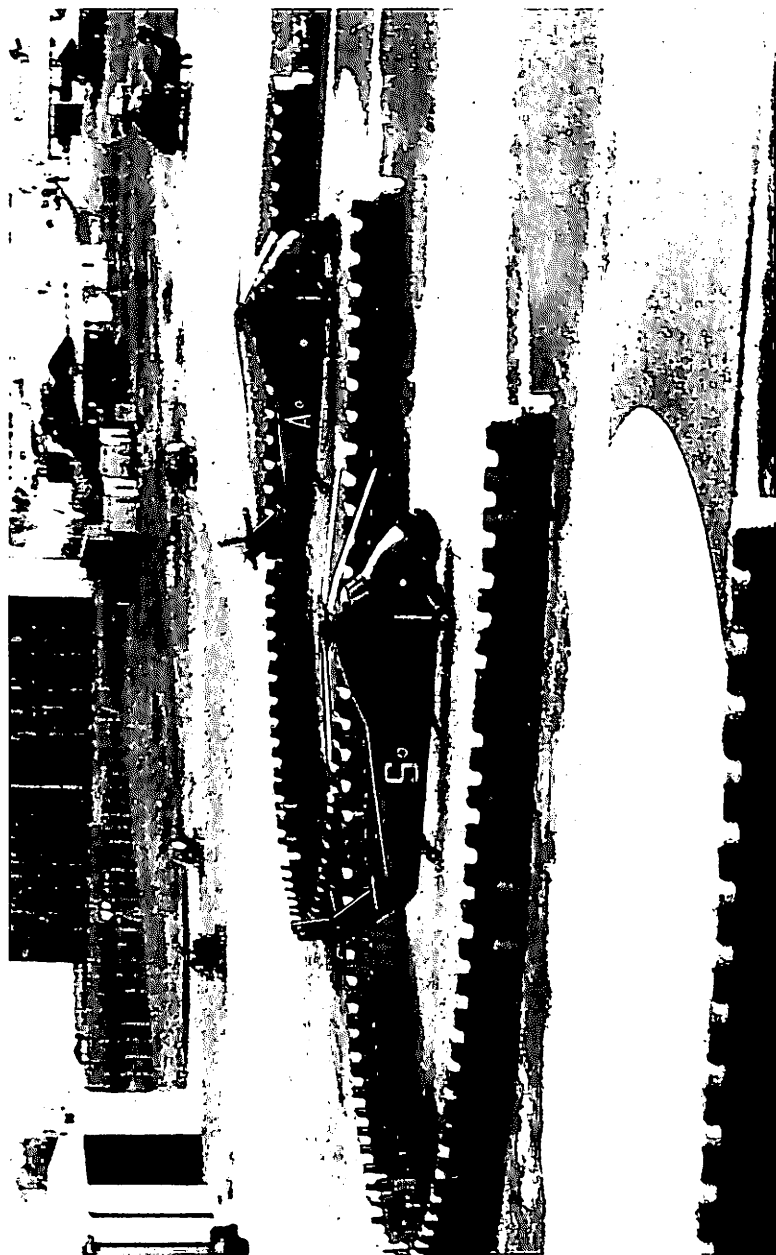
By this time the strength of RAF Muharraq had risen to a peak of 1,717 and accommodation was critical. The weather, however, was cooling down and air conditioning for sleeping accommodation becoming less essential. It was also clear that the numbers would begin to thin out, as the upheaval created by the Aden episode died down. The operational organisation of the Station was changed and two wings were formed; an Offensive Support Wing incorporating 8 and 208 Squadrons, the Defence and Security Squadron and the Physical Fitness Flight, and an Operations and Transport Wing controlling the transport squadrons and sections associated with their work. This organisation, with a wing commander in charge of each wing, was modelled on that of Khormaksar which had proved efficient and adaptable during an intensive period of operations in the Radfan and elsewhere.

Sharjah was also undergoing considerable upheaval at the same time. As soon as Muharraq was relieved of its huge transport commitment at the end of November, the two Hunter squadrons were enabled to return which then freed Sharjah to accept 78 Squadron whose Wessex had mostly been shipped up from Aden in *HMS Fearless*. One or two flew via Salalah and Masirah and the last ones out of Aden were brought up to the Gulf in *HMS Intrepid*. By mid-December the whole Squadron had reached Sharjah where it was to become a permanent part of the force remaining in the Gulf.

No 84 Squadron, also at Sharjah, began to re-equip as an Andover squadron, the Beverleys being flown home one by one as new Andovers were flown out by fresh crews who had been trained on the Andover at Abingdon, where most of the development work associated with bringing this new aircraft into service had been carried out. Thus 84 Squadron not only changed aircraft but received a virtually complete new complement of aircrew and ground personnel. The advent of Wessex and Andovers made it unnecessary to maintain the flight of Twin Pioneers of 152 Squadron at Sharjah and these small aircraft which had done such excellent work in Muscat and Oman were phased out. No 152 Squadron was renamed the Gulf Communications Flight at Muharraq,



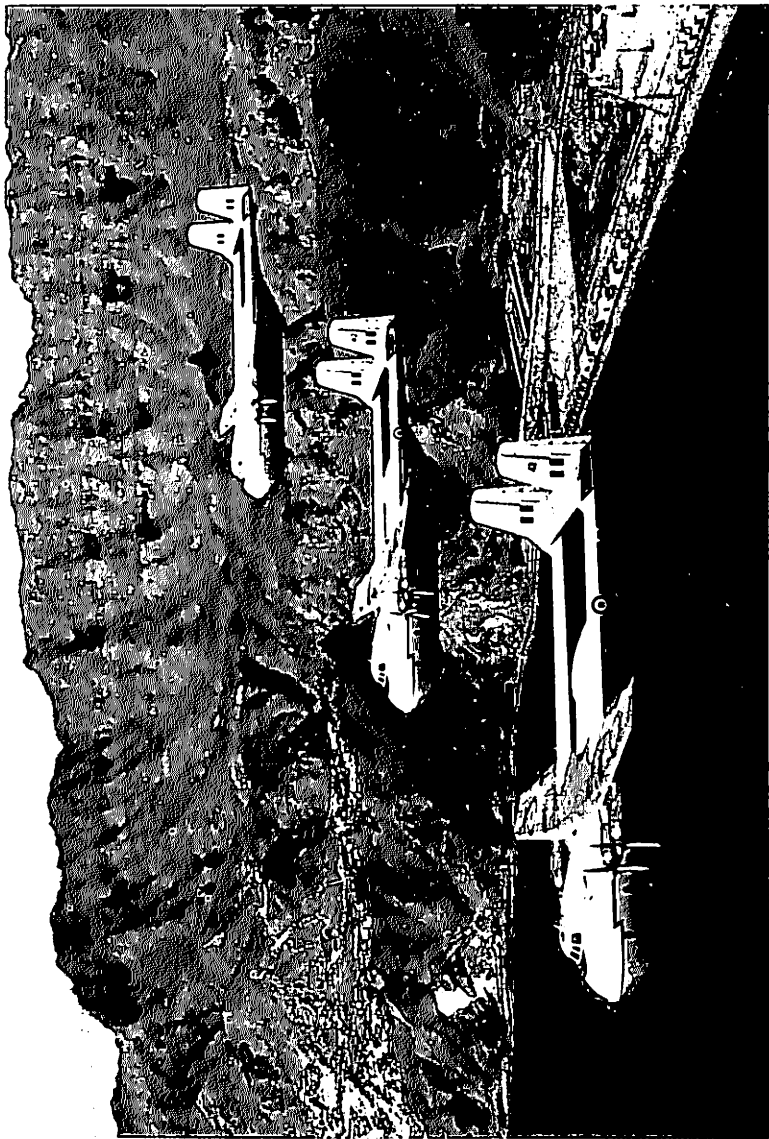
31. View of Crater with Khormaksar in the background.



32. Revetments made from empty oil drums filled with water at Khormaksar.



33. View of Muharraq airfield during the evacuation from Aden, 1967. (Hercules, Britannias, Argosies and a Belfast.)



34. Argosies of 105 Squadron leaving Aden.

retaining only three Pembrokes. There was talk of adding a Heron being given up by the Queen's Flight but, after some discussion, its range was considered inadequate for work in the Gulf, and it was never allocated.

In all this reshuffling of units 303 SU, it will be recalled, had for some time provided the air defence coverage of the Yemen frontier from Mukeiras. On leaving Aden it was held at Masirah for a time in command reserve. It was now moved to Hamala, some 15 miles south west of Bahrein where it set up its TPS 34 and UPS1 equipments. This was not an ideal location for providing early warning and interception facilities for the Hunters at Muharraq, but it was the best compromise which could be adopted. Ideally it should have been possible to move the mobile element (UPS1) further north to give Bahrein better coverage from the most likely direction of attack, but for this a shipborne radar was the only answer. As soon as 303 SU was operational in its new location, a plan was drawn up to reinforce Bahrein with a Lightning squadron from the United Kingdom should an air threat develop. With flight refuelling the Lightnings could reach the Gulf within two days and take over the air defence commitment from the Hunters. These arrangements did not indicate that there was an increased threat to Bahrein; merely that the overall reduction of British forces in the Arabian Peninsula increased their vulnerability.

1967 had been an eventful year, with the Arab-Israeli war, the departure from Aden, the disbandment of Middle East Command and the assignment of all remaining British forces in the Peninsula to a new Gulf command, with the newly styled CAFG in charge of the air forces. The second expansion in the Gulf was thus completed by the end of the year, and it was accompanied by much speculation about the future in the light of the implications of further withdrawal or reductions in the 1967 Defence White Paper.

Intensive training

No sooner had the second expansion reached its peak than further rationalisation of the squadrons began, designed to provide the balanced force which it had been decided to leave in the new Command until further policy decisions were forthcoming.

On 31 January 1968, 105 Squadron disbanded with an impressive farewell parade on the tarmac at Muharraq, and its Argosies, which had succeeded the Beverleys in the Command so effectively, were flown back to swell the Argosy pool in the United Kingdom. However, this was not to be the end of the Argosy in the Gulf. There was a continued need for a small number of medium range transport aircraft, particularly to lift vehicles and equipment beyond the capability of the Andover. In fact, the loss of the Beverley was keenly felt, and those responsible for moving the Army's heavy weapons and vehicles began to realise just how valuable the old 'furniture van' had been to them. And so 105 Squadron was replaced by a small detachment of Argosies provided from RAF

Benson which was rotated every three months. Although not intended as a permanent commitment, so indispensable did this detachment become that it was continued until the final withdrawal of the RAF from the Gulf nearly four years later. In view of the well known personnel turbulence and waste of flying hours caused by long periods of detachment, one cannot but speculate as to whether the disbandment of 105 Squadron was a sound and economical decision.

While the Argosies were being re-arranged, 84 Squadron had completed its re-equipment with the Mark I Andover at Sharjah and all crews had been categorised by the Air Support Command Examining Unit. This had proved to be quite a formidable task; not only were the aircraft and most of the crews entirely new to the theatre, but there was little or no previous experience of operating these STOL aircraft from the primitive airstrips in Muscat and Oman in temperatures which often exceeded the limits set for the Andover. Great care had to be taken against pushing the aircraft beyond its not inconsiderable capabilities. For example, engine surging at high ambient temperatures on take off compelled a limit of 30°C to be placed on full power take offs. The temperature was frequently above this figure during the months of June to September, and this often restricted 84 Squadron to taking off before, say 10.00 hours in the morning, from certain airstrips. The engine surging, which could be disconcerting when taking off with little room to spare, was caused by a fuel metering system which was affected by very high temperatures. It proved to be a difficult problem to solve and, although 84 Squadron was made the guinea pig for a number of modified systems, the Andover was subject to take off restrictions for a long period which complicated much of the exercise planning in the theatre.

As the newly constituted force settled down in the Gulf, an intensive series of training exercises was introduced, partly to publicise the presence of the two British battalions at Sharjah and Bahrein, and partly to foster close co-operation between the three Services. The two battalions and most of the RAF personnel were by this time on short, unaccompanied tours of from nine to thirteen months duration. The turnover was thus extremely rapid, and there was forever a new batch of soldiers, sailors and airmen to introduce to the unusual environment.

Exercises with the Army took place almost every month, and were usually held in the interior of Oman. They took many forms, from assault landings over the Batinah beaches followed by an advance inland and the capture of an objective, to dropping by parachute onto the Jebel Akhdar and occupying the airstrip at Saiq. Detachments of 22 SAS Regiment were frequently sent out from the UK to act as elusive 'dissidents' to be run to earth by the resident troops and the RAF. This acted as excellent and realistic training for the SAS under extremely gruelling conditions, and it was abundantly clear from the difficulty of locating and tracking them on many occasions that the Regiment had

lost none of the skill which had made it so successful in the Oman campaign ten years earlier. There is little point, and it would be repetitious, to relate the details of all the exercises which took place during 1968 and 1969. The RAF played a full part in all of them and there is no doubt that the overt activity of both land and air forces provided an effective deterrent to any renewal of dissidence in central Oman and in the Trucial States. These two years were extremely quiet, and even the Dhofar rebels were easily contained by the Sultan's own forces with no more help from British forces than a platoon or RAF Regiment flight which continued to strengthen the defences of the airfield at Salalah.

Training with the resident frigates and minesweepers, and with visiting ships of the Royal Navy was maintained at a high level. Exercises mainly took the form of simulated attacks by the Hunter squadrons, but co-operation in search and rescue and assistance in anti-smuggling patrols also played a part in the programme of exercises.

Further technical troubles began to plague the squadrons in mid-1968. The Wessex of 78 Squadron which had performed impeccably in Aden, were proving far less reliable at Sharjah. They began to suffer from the same trouble that had affected the Belvederes some years earlier, namely, the ingestion of sand and dust which caused excessive engine wear. Conditions were far worse in Oman than they had been in the Aden Protectorates where hard, rocky landing areas could usually be found. In the open desert, no such pads could be found, nor was it practicable to treat areas with oil to lay the dust. At one period, in July 1968, the flying hours per pilot in 78 Squadron fell to nine hours per month which was not sufficient even to maintain the crews in adequate practice. No permanent solution was ever found to this problem and it was only by careful planning of exercises to avoid areas of excessive dust that some alleviation of the difficulty could be obtained.

The SNEB rocket pods on the Hunters were also a source of trouble during periods of high ambient temperature. This problem came to light when a rocket exploded in its pod, causing damage to the Hunter. The subsequent investigation put the cause of the explosion down to excessive temperature and a restriction of 35°C was placed upon the carriage of SNEB rockets. In addition, a speed of 450 knots was not to be exceeded if the air temperature was above 30°C. These restrictions placed live firing virtually out of consideration during June, July and August and necessitated a greater concentration of training into the cooler months which was a considerable inconvenience.

Throughout this narrative there have been many instances of technical failures and limitations due to the heat, dust and corrosion inseparable from the Middle East. In spite of manufacturers' tropical trials of aircraft and equipment, prolonged service always found weaknesses which no amount of tropical testing during development could uncover. It is a situation which highlights the almost insurmountable difficulties

of developing aircraft in temperate climates, primarily for use in those climates, and then exposing them to conditions such as exist in the Arabian Peninsula. It postulates a case for aircraft under development, such as the Harrier in the mid-1960s, being put into the hands of the RAF in small numbers to operate in the most extreme conditions which they are subsequently likely to encounter in service.

One of the more interesting exercises for the RAF during this year was that in which the RAF Regiment evaluated a new surface to air guided weapon (SAGW), the Tiger Cat. A new low level weapon for close defence of airfields and keypoints, Tiger Cat was deployed around Muharraq and subjected to intensive low level attacks from the Hunters. It performed excellently and seemed unaffected by the heat – the trials were held in August – or by the difficulty of visual acquisition of a fast flying target in the conditions of haze which predominate in the Gulf during that month. A deceptively quiet year, during which the only rumblings of rebellion had come from Dhofar, closed with a goodwill flight by four Hunters of 208 Squadron back to their old home base at Nairobi. The flight was designed to give the Kenya Air Force a presentation on fighter and ground attack tactics, and to liaise generally with the new force. The route lay through Jeddah and Addis Ababa on the outward flight and, at the request of the Ethiopians, back through Hara Meda, their air force training base to give another presentation. It was heartening to see that, in spite of Britain's withdrawal from Aden, relations with the neighbouring air forces remained as cordial as ever, and no overflying restrictions were raised against RAF aircraft.

As if to offset the quiet year, the elements took a hand at the beginning of 1969, and violent storms swept the Gulf, commencing on 7 January with a hailstorm over Sharjah which did considerable damage to aircraft parked in the open. Several hailstones were measured at more than two inches in diameter and severe denting was caused to the upper surfaces and controls of a VC10, night stopping on its way to Singapore, a Shackleton, a Canberra, five Andovers of 84 Squadron and two Wessex of 78 Squadron. The surface dents measured 0.050 inches in depth and covered the upper surface to a density of twenty-five dents to the square foot. Some idea of the extent of the damage can be formed from the fact that much of the surface of the VC10 had to be reskinned back at Brize Norton at a cost of 2,500 man hours. No 84 Squadron had to be grounded for lack of aircraft and, with the added difficulty of flooded roads, it proved impossible to bring back a detachment of the 1st Cheshires which was exercising near Mirfa, some distance inland from Sharjah. Bahrein escaped the hail, but the rainfall at Muharraq for the month of January was 5.35 inches, the highest recorded for more than ten years, and not far short of the average for a whole year. Bahrein was perhaps slightly better organised to cope with torrential rain than Aden had been, where one storm on average every two years was not considered enough to justify a surface drainage system. Better placed

though it was, the inundation of January 1969 created an immense amount of damage and discomfort at Muharraq, the only advantage being that the aircraft had a good wash with fresh water, an all too rare occurrence.

Although the personnel strength of Muharraq had fallen slightly to about 1,400 from the peak of 1,700 reached immediately after the Aden withdrawal, the Station had become a major staging post for transit aircraft and a terminus for various types of training flights from the United Kingdom. 1969 was a busy year for dealing with 'visiting firemen' and rarely did the Movements Section deal with less than 10,000 passengers in the course of a month. It saw the first non-stop flight by four Lightnings from Binbrook to Muharraq, being refuelled several times on the way by Victors. It also saw the first detachment of Lightnings to Masirah as part of the scheme to reinforce the air defences of the Gulf. The Lightnings had no difficulty in operating from the new runway at Masirah, and they were quickly followed by a detachment of NEAF Vulcans from Akrotiri. They made some use of the Masirah firing range, and generally practised for their new role in support of any future Kuwait operation, a role which they had taken over from the Canberra squadrons after replacing them in Cyprus. The ease with which both Vulcans and Lightnings fitted into Masirah was a great relief as there had always been some fear that these sophisticated aircraft would find difficulty in operating with the somewhat primitive facilities offered by the island base. This was not so, however, and the only problem which arose was that of stocking Masirah with the considerable range of spares and specialised ground handling equipment which these aircraft needed.

As in 1968, no operations of any significance were called for during this year, permitting the squadrons to continue intensive training with both Navy and Army. The Gulf no longer contained a parachute battalion, or indeed any resident parachute troops. As this prevented 84 Squadron and the Argosy detachment from carrying out their annual quota of live drops with resident troops, it was necessary to send out from the UK small detachments of 16 Para Brigade to provide the necessary training for the two squadrons. It seemed a little rough on some thirty parachutists to have to fly out to Muharraq in order to hurl themselves out of Andovers and Argosies up to ten times each, both by day and night, merely to satisfy the training requirements of a few aircrew. Nevertheless this was how it was done, and parachutists and aircrew alike seemed perfectly happy.

Before the end of the year the Gulf Communications Flight suffered a blow by having to ground, permanently as it transpired, its three Pembrokes. This was a universal RAF order caused by corrosion of the main spar in these ageing aircraft: it was not peculiar to the Middle East aircraft. The Pembroke had been in service in the Gulf for sixteen years and had proved invaluable for VIP duties over fairly short distances. It

had been much used by the Political Resident, senior Service officers and countless visitors for touring round the Command economically. There was, however, no reprieve and the three Pembrokes were judged to be beyond economical repair; one was sent to Masirah for instructional purposes, one was flown home for spare parts, and the third suffered the indignity of going to Sharjah to serve as a target aircraft for the Fire Section to practise upon – after any useful equipment had been stripped from it. Another type of aircraft had thus finished its service in the Middle East, and creditable service at that. Many important personages had been carried safely to their destinations in these small high wing aeroplanes, and many passengers had watched with trepidation the tiny wheels thrashing up and down outside the cabin window, wondering whether they could possibly survive such treatment on some of the rough and stony airstrips – but they did – for sixteen years! In place of the Pembrokes, the Communications Flight acquired two Mark 1 Andovers, one given up by 84 Squadron and the other allocated from the UK.

British defence policy developments

After the total, withdrawal from Aden in November, 1967, various policy statements gave the firm impression that British forces would remain in the Gulf in some strength for an indefinite period. The impression which, it must be admitted, was fostered more by what was omitted from defence statements than by what was included in them, was dispelled during the course of 1968 when Britain's intention to reduce her Armed Forces and world wide commitments was made increasingly clear. Since the Kuwait crisis of 1961, efforts had been made to encourage the various States with which Britain had defence agreements to establish, or in some cases to expand, their own indigenous forces with a view to relieving Britain of some, if not all, of her defence responsibilities towards them. The Kuwait Air Force had been formed with British help and equipment, the Sultan of Oman's Air Force had been built up into a viable force in support of his army, and a start had been made in the formation of an Abu Dhabi Defence Force equipped with Hunters. With these developments in mind, the date of December, 1971 was mentioned as a tentative date for the withdrawal of the bulk of British forces from the Gulf.

A statement by the Prime Minister in January 1968, followed by the Supplementary Statement on Defence Policy,* published in July, made it quite clear that a British withdrawal was imminent and, in parallel with it, HMG wished to see "a steady evolution in the local arrangements for defence and co-operation".† At the same time it was announced that an arrangement had been made with the State of Kuwait for the termination of the Defence Agreement drawn up in 1961. This termi-

*Cmmd 3701.

†Quotation from Cmmd 3701.

nation was to be a mutual arrangement, and would, of course, relieve Britain of her major commitment in the area. It still left a host of special treaty relationships with Bahrein, Sharjah, Muscat, Qatar and the remaining Trucial States, under which Britain had responsibilities for their external defence and conduct of their foreign affairs.

The increasing wealth of these States from oil revenues and the growth of Arab nationalism were steadily increasing the desire for full independence among all of them, although the smaller and less wealthy appreciated the difficulties they would face in maintaining their freedom alongside larger and richer neighbours. Negotiations aimed at some form of federation among the Trucial States had taken place in a desultory fashion for some years, and Britain hoped that an announcement of her intended withdrawal from the scene would lend impetus to them. In fact a union between Abu Dhabi and Dubai was announced early in 1968. In order to co-ordinate, and hopefully hasten the progress of negotiations, Sir William Luce was eventually appointed as a co-ordinator of British policy in the area, with wide ranging terms of reference. He was particularly well suited to the task, having recently been for many years the much respected Political Resident, Persian Gulf, with an intimate knowledge of the problems and personalities throughout the Gulf States. Furthermore, as he had been personally responsible for initiating many of the negotiations between States, his mission was but a continuation of his earlier work. Like so many of Britain's diplomatic endeavours in the Middle East, this one had only limited success not, it must be said, due to any lack of effort on the part of Sir William Luce but because of the disparate nature of the many feudal States which made up the area. Some had oil, some had not; some were large and powerful and wished to dominate others less fortunate; some were more advanced and better educated, and despised those who were still feudal and backward. There were many factors which legislated against a simple federation of Gulf States with the result that, when Luce reported on his efforts towards the end of 1970, he could visualise only some form of co-operation between the smaller Trucial States, leaving complete independence to the larger states such as Bahrein, Qatar and of course, Kuwait. It was very clear to his experienced eye that any pressure to form closer associations would only create antagonism towards Britain and once again put propaganda weapons into the hands of Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Iraq, all of whom detested the British influence over their Arab brothers. There was plenty of goodwill towards Britain throughout the Gulf. She had always stood by her treaties with individual States and her wholehearted assistance in crises in Kuwait, Oman and Buraimi were fresh in the minds of all the inhabitants of the Gulf. Her humanitarian work in saving countless lives at sea and in the desert were remembered with gratitude.

The Gulf had lived easily with the British for many years but it now wished to see Britain loosen its control but remain friendly and at hand

against any emergency. In all these circumstances, Sir William Luce wisely advocated a continuation of the loose association which existed between States with the exception that the smaller Trucial States might be more closely banded together in a Union of Arab Emirates (UAE), and that British naval and air forces should pay frequent goodwill and training visits to the Gulf, and should continue to train, equip and generally support the various indigenous forces which had been established. He further hoped that overflying and staging facilities would continue to be enjoyed by the RAF. In general, Sir William's recommendations found favour in Whitehall enabling the firm decision to be made to withdraw all forces from Bahrein and Sharjah by the end of 1971 but to retain Masirah as a major staging post by agreement with the Sultan of Muscat, in return for which it was agreed to continue to staff the airfield at Salalah and for the RAF to continue to provide aircrew and general support for SOAF, the maintenance being undertaken by Airwork Ltd. This had been a most efficient and economical arrangement since the inception of SOAF which had, by 1970, become a well trained and highly proficient little force. Although planning for the withdrawal from the Gulf had been going on in general terms for some time, it was not until the Luce Report was considered during the course of 1971 that it was possible to draw up a specific timetable for running down the forces.

The last two years

During 1970 the intensive joint service training programme, which had been the predominant feature of the previous two years, continued unabated almost as if the RAF was determined to extract the last drop of training value from the unusual conditions of the Middle East before the time came to leave. This applied not only to the resident squadrons but also to the home commands and NEAF which flooded the Gulf stations with training flights and detachments of all kinds. In particular the Vulcan squadrons from Akrotiri sent several detachments to Masirah, one of which lasted three weeks, for low flying and weapons training. As can be imagined, the vast areas of isolated desert and mountain terrain provided great scope for practising the low flying and weapon delivery role of the Vulcans without the criticism and complaint which inevitably arose when these exercises were carried out in more populated areas. It also suited the Sultan of Muscat who specifically asked for low flying 'flag waves' to be flown over parts of his kingdom, and particularly near Muscat and around the Jebel Akhdar. He wished to advertise the continued vigilance of British forces while he was regrouping and distributing his own forces in connection with the campaign in Dhofar. Vulcans and, in fact, any visiting combat aircraft such as PR Canberras were asked to help out with this commitment which normally fell to the Hunter squadrons.

Reinforcement exercises from the United Kingdom to the Far East

were also much in vogue during 1970 and both Muharraq and Masirah were kept busy handling either the operational aircraft in transit or the Victor tankers which refuelled them. The biggest of these exercises took place in April when a brigade was moved to Singapore and back, resulting in Muharraq handling 233 Air Support Command aircraft, including forty-three VC10s during the month, stretching the facilities of the Station to the limit. As the decision to withdraw from Muharraq and Sharjah hardened, attention concentrated more and more upon Masirah, and the need to build it up into a self-sufficient operating base and staging post against the day when the other stations had closed down. Owing to the virtual impossibility of supplying Masirah except by air during the months of the south west monsoon – May to October – it was essential to build up storage capacity on the island to hold the inflated stocks of fuel, ammunition and equipment which might be needed to see the Station through this difficult five months period each year. In view of the variety of aircraft types which could be expected to use Masirah, the greatest discretion had to be exercised in provisioning and, indeed, even before 1970 the Station had had to complain at the excessive stocks of Vulcan equipment which were being positioned there. In consequence, the increasing use of the island for detachments and transit aircraft during 1970 proved a valuable guide to the future needs of the Station, and provisioning was done on a thoroughly realistic basis.

It looked as if the monotony of training was to be broken when, in May a dispute arose between Abu Dhabi and her powerful neighbour, Saudi Arabia. The dispute concerned oil drilling rights in an area known as the Liwa Hollows which lay on the ill-defined border between the two countries. (See Map 3). Abu Dhabi promptly invoked her treaty with Britain and called for assistance. A PR Canberra was summoned from NEAF to make daily reconnaissance flights along the disputed frontier in order to identify any Saudi activity. In addition 208 Squadron, which happened to be attending the Armament Practice Camp at Sharjah at the time, flew Hunter patrols along the border at irregular intervals and also maintained six Hunters at a few hours readiness in case of need. After a certain amount of diplomatic activity, the incident died a natural death, having probably been caused by an error of navigation on the part of an oil company team – an understandable occurrence in such a featureless and disputed area. Nevertheless the incident once again illustrated the seriousness of the boundary controversy which, in fact, was not settled finally until 1974. It also showed how easy it would be for Britain to become involved in a major diplomatic row caused by a trivial incident.

On 8 June 1970, Air Commodore G A Mason DFC arrived in Bahrain to take over command from Air Commodore J L W Ellacombe DFC. Air Commodore Mason was destined to be the last CAFG as it was by now almost certain that the RAF would be out of the Gulf within his tour of duty. One of his main tasks was to ensure the orderly withdrawal of the

RAF, and the handing over of such facilities and equipment as were intended to be left for the indigenous forces of the various States. However, hardly had he settled into his command when a most notable event took place, an event which was destined to result in many radical changes around the Gulf in the years that followed.

At about 1500 hours on 23 July news began to filter through to Bahrain from Salalah that a coup d'etat had taken place at the palace in Salalah, and that the Sultan, Said-Bin-Taimur, had been deposed by his twenty-nine year old son, Qaboos-Bin-Said. This was confirmed a few hours later when the deposed Sultan reached the RAF camp slightly injured, with three personal retainers one of whom was also injured. A little later the Wali of Dhofar, Sheikh Braik was also brought into the camp with injuries. It soon became evident that this had been virtually an unopposed coup which had the support of the Sultan's Armed Forces.

Qaboos had been educated abroad and had been through Sandhurst, serving subsequently with the Cameron Highlanders in Germany for a brief period. On returning to Muscat he had been incarcerated by his father in a house in the Palace grounds at Salalah. He was thus virtually unknown to his people and had, in fact, never been to the city of Muscat in his life. During the evening of 23 July Said-Bin-Taimur signed a letter of abdication in the Medical Centre at the airfield, where he rested for the night. His injuries were not serious and an Argosy arrived from Muharraq on the following morning to fly him to Bahrain. After a brief stay and a medical check he was sent on to the United Kingdom with four retainers by Britannia. He was never to return to Muscat and died a sad and lonely old man two years later in a suite at the Dorchester Hotel in London.

He had always maintained a close friendship with Britain but his refusal to improve conditions in his country and his lack of control over the interior had created many difficulties.

Qaboos, on the contrary, was a young man, equally friendly to Britain, who would quickly open up his country to the benefits which had for so long been denied to its people. That is exactly what happened and the next few years saw an unbelievable change for the better. Of particular importance to Britain was the fact that the agreements for RAF use of Masirah and Salalah remained valid and relations remained excellent. The coup gave a temporary check to the rebellion in Dhofar, but as soon as it was clear that the new young Ruler intended to control his country firmly and that his Armed Forces fully supported him, the rebellion broke out once more. And so the events of July 1970 in Muscat did nothing to alter British intentions to withdraw from the Gulf in eighteen months time. In fact, the greater stability which Qaboos brought to his kingdom made it, if anything, easier rather than more difficult to adhere to her intentions. The RAF personnel at Salalah were in no way endangered by the coup; the Commanding Officer called upon the new Sultan within forty-eight hours, bearing a letter of

compliments, and he was granted an audience which was extremely cordial. On 30 July, Qaboos visited the airfield and inspected a smart guard of honour drawn from the Dhofar Force and paraded on the tarmac.

The remainder of 1970 was uneventful but a few organisation changes took place in preparation for the rundown of the force which would begin in earnest in the New Year. The small Shackleton force at Sharjah which, since the disbandment of 37 Squadron, had been provided by detachments from home-based squadrons, was put onto a regular footing. Five Mark 2 Shackletons were flown out to Sharjah and they were formed into 210 Squadron, an old number in maritime reconnaissance history, but a new one to the Gulf. No 210 Squadron formed officially on 1 November and the somewhat untidy system of rotating detachments ceased. During the following month 84 Squadron gave up two of its Andovers which were flown home to Thorney Island, and then moved to Muharraq and absorbed the Gulf Communications Flight. It became operational again in its new guise on 21 December. This was an eminently sensible piece of rationalisation as the Comm Flight had been hard pressed to fulfil its commitments since losing the Pembroke: it made for economy to absorb the local communications task within a larger Andover unit.

The international airport runway at Muharraq was now handling an immense amount of both civil and military traffic, but was in need of lengthening to satisfy the needs of the latest generation of large jet airliners. With no alternative runway, and no taxi track capable of being used as a temporary runway, the problem of carrying out the reconstruction while still using the runway was formidable. The only solution was to close it to all traffic for a specific number of daylight hours, and to concentrate the work into those few hours. For three months – from November 1970 to January 1971 – the airfield was closed from 1200 to 2100 hours daily, all arrivals, departures and local flying being concentrated into the remaining fifteen hours. As can be imagined, these restrictions created great congestion, particularly after 2100 hours which seemed to be the most popular time for airlines to deposit their loads at Bahrain. The Hunter squadrons adopted a system of flying away to Sharjah in the mornings, operating from there during the middle of the day and returning after 2100 hours. This was a considerable inconvenience which had to be borne for the sake of progress and it resulted in a 12,000 foot runway becoming available on 14 January 1971, considerably earlier than had originally been expected, to the great credit of the contractors. Being at sea level with uninterrupted approaches over water and a generally good weather factor, Bahrain in its extended form was now one of the finest airports in the Middle East.* It was used as the terminal point for the first regular British Airways Concorde service.

*The runway was later extended to 13,000 feet with funds provided by the Ruler, making it the longest runway in the Gulf at that time.

During the early months of 1971 a general thinning out of technical equipment and supplies was initiated. A great deal of material was transferred to the Kuwait Air Force, Abu Dhabi Defence Force, SOAF, the Trucial Oman Scouts and, of course, to Masirah and Salalah. The installation of a new AR-1 radar at Masirah was an example of the importance attached to its future as the sole remaining RAF station in the region. It would obviously be a key point for flight refuelling operations on the Far East route through Gan and high quality radar to monitor and control the refuelling was essential. No 208 Squadron took advantage of this period to pay a goodwill visit to Pakistan, sending a detachment of four Hunters supported by an Argosy to Peshawar for a six-day visit during which demonstrations and a presentation on ground attack procedures were given to the Pakistan Air Force. Shortly after their return they were reluctantly compelled to begin, in company with 8 Squadron, to relinquish their Hunters in accordance with a programme to reduce the fighter force gradually to a small residual number of aircraft by the final departure date. Several Hunters per month were flown back to the United Kingdom until August, when 208 Squadron disbanded and the remaining aircraft were concentrated into 8 Squadron. It was known that 208 Squadron was not to be disbanded permanently, and would be reformed at home on a new type of aircraft but, nevertheless, the farewell parade held at Muharraq on 21 August was a sad occasion for a squadron which had had a magnificent record over many years of service in the Middle East. Sir Geoffrey Arthur, the Political Resident, took the salute, thanked the Squadron for its fine achievements and watched an impressive parade and fly past.

There is little point in itemising the many sections and facilities which closed down as planned: Headquarters, AFG was reduced steadily and essential duties were transferred to Muharraq with a view to the AOC eventually transferring his flag to the Station for the final few weeks and exercising his command through the Station staff. The main radar installation at Hamala was dismantled and the mobile element of it – the UPS-1 – was temporarily deployed on the airfield at Muharraq to provide some degree of warning while there were still Hunters left to provide skeleton air defence cover.

In July the Royal Navy held a final public day with demonstrations and full participation by the RAF as a last gesture to those who had been Britain's hosts in the Gulf for so long. Although there were still a few more months to go, the forces were so emasculated that July was the last month during which a respectable demonstration could be mounted. Its finale consisted of the spectacular destruction of an old RAF rescue launch, which disintegrated under cannon and SNEB rocket attack by four Hunters. The accuracy of 8 and 208 Squadrons had become almost legendary throughout the Arabian Peninsula and this, their final public demonstration, only served to confirm the truth of the legend.

In September the remaining eight Hunters of 8 Squadron were transferred to Sharjah from where they could more conveniently provide support in training exercises for the TOS and the remaining British troops. Operational control of 210 Squadron's Shackletons was also passed to Sharjah, enabling Muharraq to reduce its station organisation to one wing. At the same time 84 Squadron disbanded, but only temporarily, and the Middle East lost yet another of its historic squadrons. Two of its Andovers were flown to Masirah where they were to form a detached flight of 46 Squadron of Air Support Command, to handle communication flying in the region after the closure of the main stations.

Although exercises and routine surveillance tasks continued unabated with the remaining aircraft, there was little left by the end of November to do more than satisfy the minimum requirements. The AOC closed down his headquarters in *HMS Jufair* and moved into Muharraq on 30 October, using the Station Operations Centre to control the residue of his force. Muharraq in turn handed over its role as the major staging post in the Gulf to Masirah, and that station together with Salalah were formally transferred to the control of the Near East Air Force. No 210 Squadron left Sharjah early in November and flew its Shackletons back to the United Kingdom. One of the surveillance tasks which it handed over to the Hunters of 8 Squadron was the daily reconnaissance of the twin islands of Tunb and Abu Musa which dominated the entrance to the Gulf. As expected, Iran occupied them without opposition on 30 November. It had always been anticipated that this would happen before the last of Britain's forces left the Gulf, and before any other Power could seize them to the disadvantage of Iran. Their seizure created a brief diplomatic flurry, but it was not one in which Britain was prepared to become involved.

During the final few weeks there were many farewells to be said and courtesies to be paid. This departure was very different to that from Aden four years earlier. The British forces were leaving with regret, and that regret was mutual. Her Royal Highness Princess Anne and the Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Denis Spotswood both paid farewell visits to Bahrain in October, gestures which were greatly appreciated and which generated much goodwill. On 24 November, a final Guest Night was held in the Officers Mess at Muharraq, in honour of His Highness Sheikh Isa-bin-Sulman-al-Khalifa, the Amir of Bahrain, host to the Royal Air Force for so many years, and a good friend to Britain.

With the formal farewells over, it only remained for Muharraq and Sharjah to clear up and close down, handing over total control of military air traffic to International Airadio Ltd (IAL) who had for many years been largely responsible for the control of both civil and military traffic at both airfields, but with RAF assistance. At Sharjah the remaining eight Hunters of 8 Squadron flew out in two waves of four aircraft on

their way back to the United Kingdom accompanied by a Hercules. It was appropriate that this famous Squadron should be the last to leave the Command. It had been the first, and indeed the only squadron in Aden for a very long time and no squadron had become better known or more closely identified with the Middle East. A simple ceremony of lowering the Ensign took place at Sharjah on the afternoon of Tuesday, 14 December 1971, in the presence of Sir Geoffrey Arthur, and the Station closed after twenty-nine years of occupation by the Royal Air Force. So, to Muharraq, which closed twenty-two hours later. The Ensign was lowered at 1500 hours on Wednesday, 15 December, the last aircraft to leave being a Belfast of Air Support Command from which the crew and its few passengers looked down at the brilliant green, blue and yellow colours of the shallow waters of the Gulf which lapped the long runway and realised, perhaps, that they were witnessing the end of a chapter of RAF history. MAAF, MEDME, MEAF, AFAP and AFME had all come and gone and now, AFG, which had succeeded its illustrious forbears after Aden was given up, was also finished.

A huge vacuum had been created between NEAF in Cyprus and FEAF in Singapore, linked only by two tenuously held staging posts on the islands of Masirah and Gan. If such thoughts troubled those who looked down from that Belfast, there was nothing that they could do about it; defence policy was stronger than the emotions of mere airmen. But those airmen knew, and nobody could take that satisfaction away from them, that the Royal Air Force had accomplished all that had ever been asked of it in the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf and, furthermore, had left behind respect for its conduct and its efficiency.

In retrospect

In a few hundred pages this narrative has covered a period of twenty-seven years during which Britain relinquished control of much of her Empire and withdrew her military forces from many parts of the world where her soldiers, sailors and airmen, had gained experience to an extent which must be almost unrivalled among nations. During its short life the Royal Air Force has certainly partaken of its full share of this experience and nowhere more so than in the Middle East. Apart from two small stations in Muscat territory, and a few RAF personnel seconded to various State forces, the opportunity to continue to acquire this experience ceased in December 1971. The story however cannot be abruptly terminated with the departure of the last Belfast from Muharraq. It must be rounded off with some assessment of how much the RAF has gained from its Middle East sojourn and whether it will suffer in future years from the lack of service in those parts. At most a man serves for forty years and the average is less than half of that period. By 1990, therefore, there will be but a handful of serving airmen who have ever experienced service in the Middle East, and a generation of aircraft and weapons which will have had only a transitory acquaintance with the region, if that. It would be tragic for future generations of servicemen if all the experience and lessons learned by their forbears were to be irretrievably lost through failure to place them on record against a time when – perhaps – the RAF may again be required to operate in the deserts and mountains of the Middle East.

Flexibility of air power

As long ago as 1918 the ability to switch aircraft rapidly from one front to another convinced airmen, and the more enlightened politicians concerned with defence, of the vital need to retain the control of aircraft under one authority in order to exploit their inherent flexibility to the maximum. Hence the concentration of the various elements of Britain's air power into an independent Royal Air Force. The wisdom of this step has been demonstrated time and time again, but nowhere more convincingly than in the vast area covered in these pages. The Middle East Command which never possessed more than a handful of squadrons, stretched for more than 3,000 miles from Dar-es-Salaam in the south to Kuwait in the north. For years the Command was never without

operational activity in some part of its territory and yet, its few squadrons were always to be found at the seat of the trouble. Taking 8 Squadron as an example; with its modest complement of sixteen aircraft, it operated in Kenya, Somalia, Eritrea, Aden, Oman, the Gulf and Kuwait, all within a few months. This was true flexibility, and typical of the way in which the various squadrons in the Command were switched with great rapidity from one danger spot to another. During the period covered in this book the Command was fortunate in one respect, namely, that serious trouble never occurred in more than one area simultaneously. If, for example, the Oman campaign of 1952-59 had coincided with that in the Radfan in 1964-65 or the Kuwait crisis of 1961 with Mau Mau in 1953, then the small Middle East air force would undoubtedly have needed reinforcement, but this situation never arose with the result that a remarkable economy of force was obtained by the skilful and timely switching of modest resources.

With the introduction of jet aircraft, much higher speeds, greater range and flight refuelling, this quality of flexibility was immeasurably increased until it has become commonplace for a squadron to operate in Europe one day and, say, the Far East two days later. But it must be remembered that, after the great controversy that surrounded the establishment of an independent air force, it was in commands such as the Middle East that the flexibility of air power was finally proven and, in conjunction with the development of aircraft, permitted the British Government to adopt a policy of world wide reinforcement from the United Kingdom in place of garrison air forces located in static positions overseas. At times the men of the Middle East squadrons must have become very irritated with the speed with which they were being moved around their Command, and the effort involved in servicing their aircraft with inadequate facilities in appalling heat. But they were, had they but known it, establishing the true flexibility and versatility of their Service and building up experience of inestimable value for the future. Should there ever be any tendency to revert to allocating operational squadrons to army formations or to static fronts, the lessons of what the Middle East achieved in the way of flexibility with a very small operational air force will have to be resurrected and studied again.

Technical experience

If one were to be asked what an internal combustion engine disliked most, high on the list would come sand, salt, heat and humidity. Many parts of the world can provide one or more of these conditions, but the Arabian Peninsula could, and did, provide them all in unrationed quantities. 'Fair wear and tear' is an expression which it never seemed possible to apply to that region, so destructive were the elements and so short lived were some of the components. Provisioning scales, which were accurate for temperate European conditions, were utterly useless for the Middle East. The conditions in which some engines, airframes

and components were returned to the United Kingdom for major servicing was so appalling that, for years, manufacturers and maintenance units felt convinced that inefficiency in the Command must be the cause of it. However, inefficiency does not cause countless Wessex and Belvedere engines to swallow pounds of dust and sand, nor does it cause the top surface of Beverley main planes to corrode, nor the cross beams of Bedford 3-ton trucks to become eaten through in less than two years. It slowly became borne in upon those at home that the equipment really was being called upon to operate in the most appalling conditions and, far from the airmen being inefficient in their work, it was astonishing that they coped as well as they did. Moreover it showed that manufacturers' tropical trials, which were both brief and conducted on reasonably sophisticated airfields such as Bahrein, Khartoum or Khor-maksar, were no substitute for prolonged operational service with a squadron. This narrative has revealed many technical troubles which should have been eradicated before service in the Middle East, such as the engine surging at high temperatures in the Andover and the danger of the SNEB rocket exploding prematurely under similar conditions. It would be unreasonable to place too much blame on designers and manufacturers: it is clearly impossible to foresee and guard against every eventuality and the RAF, understanding this, was happy to cope with unforeseen difficulties, always provided that a lesson was learned from the experience and a fault eliminated for the future. On the whole this was done and lessons learned in the field found their way into future designs. But the loss of Middle East service to the RAF inevitably means the loss of the opportunity to submit all forms of technical equipment to the extreme conditions which alone can expose certain weaknesses. This means either that tropical trials will have to be conducted on a much larger and more realistic scale than before, or that the risk will have to be accepted that engines, airframes and equipment may fail in a manner which would have been avoided had the RAF been able to subject them to hard service use in extreme conditions.

Flying and operations

It must be a truism that the greater the variety of conditions under which the RAF flies and operates, the more proficient and versatile will be its aircrew. It used to be said of the Army before World War II that India and the North West Frontier provided its finest training ground. If that was true of the Army, it was probably equally true of the RAF which served there in some strength. When the training ground afforded by India was denied to Britain after 1947, the Middle East was its natural successor. Although on a smaller scale, the rugged mountainous terrain of the Aden Protectorates bore a striking resemblance to the North West Frontier Province of India, and parts of central Oman were not dissimilar. The deserts of Arabia and Iraq were, on the other hand, unique and provided a different kind of training ground as did the

surrounding waters of the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf. As a whole the Arabian Peninsula provided every imaginable type of terrain and climate and, for the RAF at least, was a more challenging environment than India had ever been.

Much has been said about the difficulties of navigation, largely due to the inadequacies of the available maps and the lack of long range navigational aids. The frequency with which these inadequacies threw pilots and navigators back upon basic principles of airmanship was most excellent training for them. For fighter pilots, the single-handed navigation to a target in hostile, mountainous country, followed by its accurate identification and determined attack often presented an immense challenge, particularly when the safety of nearby troops had to be considered. For transport pilots, the greatest challenge was frequently that of landing and taking off from rough, stony airstrips of minimal length, situated in deep valleys, and totally devoid of any form of landing aid, unless windsocks and white ground strips can be classed as 'landing aids'. And for the helicopter pilot there were many hazards created by the inexperienced selection of landing areas in most unsuitable places, the danger of damage to engines and rotors from dust and stones and the risk of exceeding lifting capacity at high altitudes or in conditions of extreme temperature. For all the aircrew, there was the constant risk of damage or worse from ground fire. It was rare for an aircraft to be shot down, but commonplace to return to base with one or more bullet holes, the origin of which was, more often than not, unknown to the crew. To all these hazards must be added the problems created by intense heat and turbulence at certain times of the year. Intense heat can be extremely tiring for aircrew and can do much to lower their concentration, and thus their efficiency. It is not easy to concentrate on a thorough cockpit check before take off when the cockpit temperature may be anything up to 150°F and no cooling can be switched on until after take off. Similarly, it requires skill and concentration to make an accurate bombing run in a heavy aircraft against a target surrounded by mountains while being thrown around by severe turbulence in stifling heat.

These flying and operating conditions can never be created in Europe where there are, admittedly, other hazards such as fog and ice. Nor can they be created or even simulated with any degree of reality elsewhere in the world where the RAF may continue to serve. Loss of Middle East service means, therefore, loss of some important element from the whole package of flying and operating conditions, without which the training of aircrew is not quite complete. The RAF has always prided itself on the comprehensiveness of its aircrew training but, to maintain its high standards, it clearly must have access to every possible variation of operating condition. That access has been severely restricted since withdrawal from the Middle East, and some loss of valuable experience is, therefore, inevitable.

Personal experience

We have spoken of the loss of technical experience and of the loss of the flying and operating conditions peculiar to the Middle East. To what extent will the loss of tours of duty in this area affect the personnel of the Royal Air Force? It must be remembered that this is not the only overseas theatre from which the RAF has withdrawn, or in which the Force has been run down in recent years. The opportunities for overseas service have been greatly reduced. Whereas an airman on a long engagement could, a few years ago, have expected to complete three or four full overseas tours, today he may have no more than one or two tours, during his career. Perhaps the greatest value of service in the Middle East, both to the individual and to the Service, was the adaptability which it gave to servicemen and to their families. The relatively primitive conditions which they met often called for great tolerance, not a little hardship at times and the need to adapt to a new and unusual style of life. Airmen, working in these conditions were frequently called upon to improvise and to display initiative well beyond that usually required. Junior officers and NCOs often held positions of greater responsibility than at home: rules and regulations could not be so strictly enforced and much more scope was left to the initiative of the individual. This style of Service life produced a maturity and a self-confidence more rapidly than could be achieved in the sheltered conditions of home service. Loss of overseas service, not only in the Middle East, must therefore be detrimental to the efficiency of the RAF as a whole, if only because it denies to officers and airmen the opportunity to experience life in widely different parts of the world. "Get your knees brown, chum", will no longer be an appropriate comment to make to an inexperienced RAF colleague.

Since withdrawal took place the Service has wisely taken advantage of every opportunity to arrange exercises, training flights and goodwill missions to as many of those areas where the RAF is still welcome as possible. Happily this applies to a high proportion of the countries in the Middle East, and also fortunately, there is a significant number of secondments to State Forces, such as SOAF available. Although full advantage is taken of all these opportunities to gain some experience of the theatre, they can never amount to the equivalent of a full tour of duty. Nor can the technical experience gained during a short detachment match up to that of a long tour when aircraft and equipment are exposed to the peculiar conditions of the region for a sustained operating period.

One must, therefore, conclude that, although a posting to stations such as Shaibah, Sharjah and Khormaksar, to name but three, was far from popular with many airmen, the experience gained by the Service as a whole on such stations was of significant value, and contributed to the development of an air force capable of operating with distinction anywhere in the world. Denial of such experience must be to the overall

detriment of RAF adaptability in spite of every effort to make good the deficiency by means other than overseas service.

Appendices

[Appendix A]

RAF Order of Battle in AHQ Persia and Iraq, AHQ East Africa and HQ British Forces, Aden in November 1945

<i>Location</i>	<i>Unit</i>	<i>Equipment</i>
	Air Headquarters, Iraq and Persia – Habbaniya	
Baghdad	Combined Intelligence Centre No 30 Movement Control Unit (RAF)	
Bahrein	No 5 Anti-Mosquito Unit No 42 Embarkation Unit (Det) No 158 Repair and Salvage Unit No 294 Air/Sea Rescue Squadron (Det)	Warwick/Walrus/Auster
	Aircraft Safety Centre (Persian Gulf) No 219 Air/Sea Rescue Unit (Det) Area Control (Bahrein)	
Basrah	RAF Station No 42 Embarkation Unit Marine Craft Section No 219 Air/Sea Rescue Unit No 294 Air/Sea Rescue Squadron	Warwick/Walrus/Auster
Habbaniya	RAF Station Iraq and Persia Communication Flight No 1415 Met Flight No 134 Maintenance Unit No 4 Base Personnel Office No 6 RAF Hospital HQ RAF Levies, Nos 1 and 2 Battalions Aircraft Safety Centre (Iraq and Persia) No 7 RAF Postal HQ No 115 Maintenance Unit No 156 Repair and Salvage Unit No 5719 Mechanical and Electrical Flight No 680 (PR) Squadron (Det) No 3 (ME) Met Unit No 1 Armoured Car Coy HQ and 3 Sections Area Control (Habbaniya)	Mosquito

<i>Location</i>	<i>Unit</i>	<i>Equipment</i>
Khor Kuwait	RAF Unit No 219 Air/Sea Rescue Unit (Det)	
Kuweit	No 219 Air/Sea Rescue Unit (Det)	
Margil (Basrah)	HQ No 5 Battalion, RAF Levies	
Masirah	No 294 Air/Sea Rescue Squadron (Det)	Warwick/Walrus/Auster
Shaibah	No 115 Maintenance Unit (Det) No 157 Repair and Salvage Unit	
Sharjah	No 294 Air/Sea Rescue Squadron (Det)	Warwick/Walrus/Auster
Air Headquarters, East Africa – Nairobi		
Dar-es-Salaam	No 1345 Anti-Malarial Flight (Det) RAF Admin Unit (C & M basis) No 4 Section AMDGW	
Diego Suarez	RAF Unit No 1586 Met Flight Marine Craft Section	
Eastleigh	RAF Station East Africa Communication Flight No 1414 Met Flight No 133 Maintenance Unit No 25 Anti-Aircraft Co-operation Unit Anti-Locust Flight Aircraft Safety Centre, East Africa No 249 Squadron No 1 Section AMDGW	Baltimore
Gilgil	No 105 Maintenance Unit (Det)	
Kisumu	RAF Station Flying Boat Repair Base	
Mauritius	RAF Unit Marine Craft Section	
Mogadishu	RAF Unit	

<i>Location</i>	<i>Unit</i>	<i>Equipment</i>
Mombasa	RAF Station No 15 Embarkation Unit Marine Craft Section No 3 Section AMDGW	
Nairobi	Nos 6 and 7 Anti-Mosquito Units No 9 RAF Postal HQ No 3 Works Area Area Control, Nairobi	
Pamanzi	RAF Unit Marine Craft Section	
Port Reitz	No 1345 Anti-Malarial Flight	
Seychelles	RAF Station Marine Craft Section	
Tabora	RAF Unit	
Thika	No 105 Maintenance Unit	
Tulcar	RAF Unit Marine Craft Section	
HQ British Forces in Aden - Steamer Point		
Addis Ababa	Telecommunications Centre (Det)	
Bandar Cassim (Somaliland)	RAF Unit	
Hargeisa	Telecommunications Centre (Det)	
Hedjuff (Aden)	Marine Craft Unit Nos 206, 216 and 220 Air/Sea Rescue Units	
Jhadir	Armoured Car Section	
Khormaksar	RAF Station No 621 (GR) Squadron HQ BF Aden Communication Flight No 1566 Met Flight No 114 Squadron	Wellington Boston

<i>Location</i>	<i>Unit</i>	<i>Equipment</i>
Masirah	RAF Station Nos 214 and 215 Air/Sea Rescue Units No 2 Section AMDGW	
Ras el Hadd (Muscat)	RAF Station	
Riyan	RAF Unit	
Salalah	RAF Unit	
Sheikh Othman	Aden Protectorate Levies	
Socotra	RAF Unit	
Steamer Point	RAF Station Equipment and Supply Section No 50 Embarkation Unit No 7 RAF Hospital No 11 RAF Postal HQ No 3 Base Personnel Office No 6 Works Area No 5721 Mechanical and Electrical Flight Aircraft Safety Centre, Southern Arabia Area Control, Aden	
Wadi Road (Aden)	Telecommunications Centre (Aden)	

Note: In addition to the units listed, various detachments from HQ 216 (Ferry and Transport) Group, Heliopolis were located on some of the above stations as lodger units.

[Appendix B]

Warning

To the Aqils of the Ahl Yehya and Ahl Fejjar

You have recently been addressed three letters by Government in which you were desired firstly to submit to your Sultan Muhammed Sarur: this you refused to do but Government is patient and subsequently ordered you to hand in three named hostages (names) to your Sultan at Milah in the presence of a Political Officer who has instructions to send them to Tor Al Baha where they would be detained pending an enquiry in Lahej by the Abdali Sultan, Haushabi Sultan and by the British Agent, Western Aden Protectorate; this you refused to do but Government is compassionate and merciful and finally ordered you to send in the three named hostages to Aden where they would be dealt with in the manner described above. This you have also refused to do and made it clear that in spite of Government's patience and desire to help you it is your deliberate intention to be classed as rebels both to your Sultan and to Government.

You are now ordered to hand in the three hostages and twelve serviceable rifles and make your submission to Government before dawn on Monday April 12 (3/6/1367) failing which air action or land action or both will be taken against you starting the same day. Warn all Radfanis and friendly tribes to leave the whole of the Raha area at once or they will suffer your fate if you do not submit.

Be wise and submit before it is too late.

9 April 1948

(Sgd) B W SEAGER
British Agent
Western Aden Protectorate

[Appendix C]

Units under control of Headquarters British Forces Aden – December 1951

Complete control

1. The following units are under the complete control of Headquarters British Forces Aden:

- a. Royal Air Force Khormaksar
- b. Royal Air Force Steamer Point
- c. Royal Air Force Riyan
- d. Royal Air Force Salalah
- e. Royal Air Force Masirah
- f. Royal Air Force Khartoum
- g. No 8 (LB) Squadron
- h. Headquarters No 20 Wing Royal Air Force Regiment
- j. Headquarters Aden Protectorate Levies
- k. Headquarters 51st Coast Regiment
- l. Headquarters Troop 65 Wing Royal Signals
- m. Royal Air Force Hospital Aden
- n. Headquarters Somaliland Scouts

Functional control

2. The following units are under the functional control of Headquarters British Forces Aden:

- a. No 114 Maintenance Unit (administrative control by RAF Steamer Point).
- b. No 1152 Marine Craft Unit (administrative control by RAF Khormaksar).
- c. No 50 RAF Movements Unit (Emb) (administrative control by RAF Steamer Point).
- d. Aden Supply Depot (administrative control by RAF Steamer Point).

[Appendix D]

Glossary of terms and abbreviations

ACP	Air Control Post
AFAP	Air Forces, Arabian Peninsula
AFME	Air Forces, Middle East
AIOC	Anglo-Iraqi Oil Company
ALO	Air Liaison Officer
AMDGW	Air Ministry Directorate-General of Works
AMSIS	Air Ministry Secret Intelligence Summary
AOC	Air Officer Commanding
AOP	Air Observation Post – light reconnaissance aircraft of the Auster type
APC	Armament Practice Camp
APL	Aden Protectorate Levies
Aramco	American Oil Co.
Avgas	Aviation gasoline – for piston engines
Avtur	Aviation turbine fuel – for jet engines
BAPCO	Bahrain Petroleum Company
BASO	Brigade Air Support Officer
BFAP	British Forces, Arabian Peninsula
B(I)	Bomber (Intruder) – Designation of Mark 36 and Mark 38 Canberras
BOAC	British Overseas Airways Corporation*
BTI	British Troops in Iraq
CAFG	Commander, Air Forces, Gulf
C and M	Care and Maintenance
CBFAP	Commander, British Forces, Arabian Peninsula
CBFG	Commander, British Forces, Gulf
CENTO	Central Treaty Organisation
Cmmd	Command paper
CRAFG	Commander, Royal Air Force, Persian Gulf
Det	Detachment from a major unit
D/F	Direction finding
DF/GA	Day Fighter/Ground Attack
D of O	Director of Organisation, Air Ministry
DZ	Dropping Zone

*BOAC came under the control of the British Airways Board on 1 April 1972, eventually merging into British Airways. Together with British European Airways (BEA) it ceased to exist as a separate entity on 1 April 1974.

EAP	Eastern Aden Protectorate
F	Fighter
FAC	Forward Air Controller
FB	Fighter Bomber
FEAF	Far East Air Force
F/GA	Fighter/Ground Attack
FLOSY	Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen
FOME	Flag Officer, Middle East
FR	Fighter Reconnaissance
FRA	Federal Regular Army
GHQ	General Headquarters
GOC	General Officer Commanding
GR	General Reconnaissance
hiring	Government rented living accommodation
HMG	His(Her)Majesty's Government
IFF	Identification – Friend or Foe
Imam	A religious leader of the highest rank
Jebel	A mountain
JOC	Joint Operations Centre
KAR	King's African Rifles
KAU	Kenya African Union
KCA	Kikuyu Central Association
KLM	Royal Dutch Airlines (translation)
KPRW	Kenya Police Reserve Wing
Lone Ranger	Long-distance training flight
LST	Landing Ship – Tank
MAAF	Mediterranean Allied Air Forces
MAF	Muscat Armed Forces
MEAF	Middle East Air Force
MEDME	Mediterranean and Middle East
MOFF	Muscat and Oman Field Force
MR	Maritime Reconnaissance
MT	Mechanical transport
MU	Maintenance Unit
Murram	A form of red, brick-like soil found in Kenya
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NEAF	Near East Air Force
NLF	National Liberation Front
ORB	Operations Record Book (Forms 540 and 541)

POL	Petrol, oil and lubricants
PR	Photographic Reconnaissance
PRPG	Political Resident, Persian Gulf
PSP	Peoples Socialist Party

'Queen Mary' A 60 foot articulated vehicle for transporting aircraft

RATG	Rhodesian Air Training Group
RCC	Rescue Coordination Centre
'Rhino'	A small draught ferry for transferring tanks and heavy equipment from ship to shore
RP	Rocket projectile
Rub-al-Khali	The Empty Quarter – the desolate area of Saudi Arabia between the South Arabian Coast and the Persian Gulf

SAA	South Arabian Army
SAF	Sultan's Armed Forces
SAGW	Surface to air guided weapon
SAL	South Arabian League
Sangar	A stone built protective emplacement
SAR	Search and Rescue
SNOPG	Senior Naval Officer, Persian Gulf
SOAF	Sultan of Oman's Air Force
SRAFO	Senior Royal Air Force Officer
STOL	Short Take Off and Landing
SU	Signals Unit

TOL	Trucial Oman Levies (earlier title)
TOS	Trucial Oman Scouts (later title)

UAE	Union of Arab Emirates
UE	Unit Establishment
UHF	Ultra High Frequency

VE Day	Victory in Europe Day (8 May 1945)
VHF	Very High Frequency
VHF R/T	Very High Frequency, Radio Telephony
VIP	Very Important Person
VJ Day	Victory over Japan Day (15 August 1945)

Wadi	A defile – often a dried up water course
Wali	A village leader or headman appointed by the Ruler
WAP	Western Aden Protectorate
W/T	Wireless Telegraphy

[Appendix E]

British Army regiments and corps mentioned in narrative

<i>Title used in narrative</i> 1	<i>Full title</i> 2	<i>Present title</i> 3
The Life Guards	As in column 1	As in column 1
Royal Horse Artillery	As in column 1 (forms part of the Royal Regiment of Artillery)	As in column 2
3rd Carabiniers	3rd Carabiniers (Prince of Wales's Dragoon Guards)	Royal Scots Dragoon Guards (Carabiniers and Greys)
9th/12th Lancers	9th/12th Royal Lancers (Prince of Wales's)	As in column 2
11th Hussars	11th Hussars (Prince Albert's Own)	The Royal Hussars (Prince of Wales's Own)
15th/19th Hussars	15th/19th The King's Royal Hussars	As in column 2
4th Royal Tank Regiment	As in column 1	As in column 1
51st Coast Regiment RA	As column 1 (forming part of the Royal Regiment of Artillery)	Placed in suspended animation 1 April 1953
Royal Engineers	Corps of Royal Engineers	As in column 2
Royal Signals	Royal Corps of Signals	As in column 2
2nd Coldstream Guards	2nd Battalion, Coldstream Guards	As in column 2
1st Irish Guards	1st Battalion, Irish Guards	As in column 2
1st Royal Scots	1st Battalion, The Royal Scots (The Royal Regiment)	The Royal Scots (The Royal Regiment)

<i>Title used in narrative</i> 1	<i>Full title</i> 2	<i>Present title</i> 3
The Buffs	The Buffs (Royal East Kent Regiment)	The Queen's Regiment
The Royal Northumberland Fusiliers	As in column 1	The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers
1st King's	1st Battalion, The King's Regiment (Liverpool)	The King's Regiment
1st East Anglians	1st East Anglian Regiment (Royal Norfolk and Suffolk)	The Royal Anglian Regiment
Devons	The Devonshire Regiment	The Devonshire and Dorset Regiment
1st Lancashire Fusiliers	1st Battalion, The Lancashire Fusiliers	The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers
1st Cheshires	1st Battalion, The Cheshire Regiment	The Cheshire Regiment
1st Cameronians	1st Battalion, The Cameronians (Scottish Rifles)	Disbanded 1968
1st Royal Inniskillens	1st Battalion, The Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers	The Royal Irish Rangers
King's Shropshire Light Infantry	The King's Shropshire Light Infantry	The Light Infantry
King's Royal Rifle Corps	The King's Royal Rifle Corps	Royal Green Jackets
Seaforth	Seaforth Highlanders (Ross-shire Buffs, The Duke of Albany's)	Queen's Own Highlanders (Seaforth and Camerons)
Cameron Highlanders	The Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders	Queen's Own Highlanders (Seaforth and Camerons)

<i>Title used in narrative</i> <i>1</i>	<i>Full title</i> <i>2</i>	<i>Present title</i> <i>3</i>
Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders	The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders (Princess Louise's)	As in column 2
1st, 2nd, 3rd Parachute Regiment	1st, 2nd, 3rd Battalions, The Parachute Regiment	As in column 2
22 SAS Regiment	22 Special Air Service Regiment	As in column 2
Army Air Corps	As in column 1	As in column 1
Royal Corps of Transport	As in column 1	As in column 1

Unpublished sources

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page 5	AHQ Iraq and Persia Operations Record Book (ORB)
8	680 Squadron ORB
10	294 Squadron ORB
12	Iraq Command Administrative Instruction 14/46
28	HQBF Aden Office Memorandum 3/46 dated 17 April 1946

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page 55	Aden Command Operations Order 1/47
56	Appendix D1 to HQBF Aden ORB May 1947
63	HQBF Aden report dated 7 April 1949
66	HQBF Aden Administrative Order 1/51
67	HQBF Aden Administrative Order 3/51
70	East Africa Operations Order 2/48
73	Air Ministry Organisation Memorandum 338/51
74	AHQ Iraq ORB January 1947
84	AHQ Iraq Operations Orders 4/51 and 5/51

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page 94	Telegram 620 from Kenya to Colonial Office
104	HQBF Aden Sitrep A680
105	GHQ East Africa telegram 83126/C-in-C dated 10 August 1953
108	JOC East Africa Directive 6/54

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159	RAF Levant Administrative Instruction 24/55

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175 VCAS minute reference VCAS 953 dated 7 July 1953
207 SECCAP 9 dated 6 February 1959

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215 HQBF Aden Operations Order 5/53
218 HQBF Aden Operations Order 6/54 dated 3 June 1954
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293 Conclusions of Air Council Standing Committee 21 (61)

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- page 309 AFME Operations Order 20/63
311 ibid

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- page 337 AFME S120/3/Air dated 1 February 1965

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- page 353 HQMEC JSOP 9 dated 22 February 1967
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