

The Emirate of Dahla, the Western Aden Protectorate

1959.

My tour with Aden as my base lasted from the end of February 1959 to the end of November 1960. After this period of time the actual dates cannot be remembered.

Aden and Aden Colony were peaceful places, it was assumed that Aden would always remain as a British base. Assassination of British personnel in the streets did not start until 1966 when it had been decided to abandon Aden.

Any member of the services who served 30 days or more in Aden, The Aden Protectorate and the Oman between 1st. January 1957 to 30th June 1960 is entitled to the General Service Medal with clasp Arabian Peninsula. I was 26 when I became entitled to the medal and 69 when I found out. Having spent three months at Dahla and three months on the Jebel Akhdar in the Oman, I reckon that I am entitled to three clasps but only got one.

The following map I have to thank the Aden Veteran's Association for. It shows the Radfan area enlarged where a definite small war went on in 1966, which is described elsewhere. At first when asked to write about the protectorate for small wars I thought, there wasn't one, but on further thought realised that there was a never ending, never declared small war that had probably been going on ever since we had made the first treaties with the Sultans and Emirs.

Aden had originally belonged to the Yemen province of the Turkish Empire. The province was so remote as to be almost independent. Similarly the tiny sultanates and emirates had been nominally under the control of the Imam of the Yemen. The last of

The Sultanate of Lahej was the closest, largest and most important, it was at the edge of the sand sea and the start of the foothills. To what degree it had been modernised I have no idea, as I never visited it. I flew up to Dahla.

You will note that the road passes through five named towns; these are the capitals of small states each with an independent ruler, tiny army and borders with customs posts. A trader in his mammy wagon would have to pay duty at each of these posts. Dahla was at 3,500 feet, after passing through Lahej the road, unpaved often blasted through rock enters an area of extremely deep wadis and massive mountains, ideal ambush territory.

The rulers were similar to a feudal baron in the Middle Ages, each ruling over a given area, often taking hostages from the ruling families of outlying villages. The farther reaches of their area being only under nominal control. Some tribes were traditional enemies of other tribes, if our political officers managed to persuade an unfriendly tribe to become friendly, and then their traditional enemies became our enemies.

The tribes on the Yemen side of the border were also traditional enemies of those on the southern side. The Imam of the Yemen started to encourage his tribesman to carry out incursions on our side, which is why the camp at Dahla had been built.

There was one small problem with regard the border, no one knew exactly where it was. There had never been a conference and treaty actually delineating it. Three miles north you were definitely in the Yemen, three miles south definitely the protectorate. In between depended on which group had more rifles when they met.

Most personnel, weapons and supplies went up by the weekly convoy on Wednesday coming back on the Thursday. I was required urgently, the usual army cock up, no

body had realised that the Doc in Dahla's tour had ended. As I was required yesterday, I flew up from Khormaksar by Twin Pioneer.

Road to Khormaksar.



My Twin Pioneer



Edge of Sand Sea.



Kharieba Pass



↑
The Pass.

On Wednesdays and Thursdays as the convoy went to and from Dahla a battalion of Aden protectorate Levees, a battalion of British infantry and two companies of an armoured cavalry battalion picketed the lower two thirds of the road from Lahej where the sand sea ended and the foothills started. The battalion of Levees based at Dahla and the other company of the cavalry battalion based in another camp close to the levees camp picketed to the upper third of the road.

The picketing was highly efficient and well organised and covered by Hunter jets (I think they were Hunters.) on standby at Khormaksar or often patrolling overhead at the same time. Attacks on the convoy were almost non-existent; the medics usually did not accompany them. I accompanied the Dahla end of the pickets on two occasions, partly out of curiosity and partly to have some idea of what to expect if I was called to attend a casualty.

Main Road to Aden



The little cluster of vehicles on the flat area at the bottom of the slope was the Command H.Q.

Command H.Q.



Left to right. No. 1 Company's land rover. C.O. Lt-Col. Briggs' land rover. The fitter's truck obscuring my land rover. The small square building is a saint's tomb. These buildings were scattered all over the protectorate, they are pre-Islamic from a time when the area was partially Christianised. The names of the saints were still known and revered in spite of the conversion over a millennium ago to Islam. This was the start of the Kharieba Pass.

Up the Khareiba Pass to the Second Right Hand Bend.



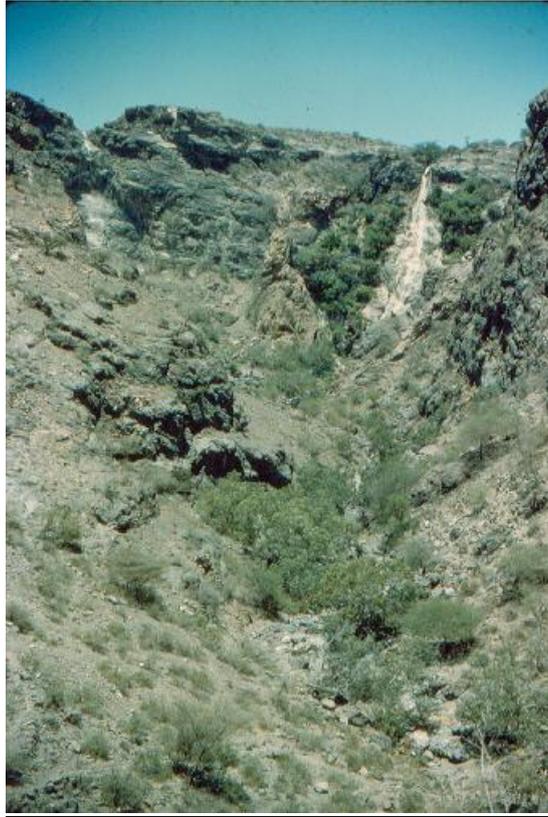
Follow the arrow downwards to where the road turns the corner, a Saladin armoured car is just about to turn the corner. The white cascade is the position of a waterfall in the rainy season.

A Magnified View of the Saladin.



This wadi was very deep if any vehicle went over the edge there was no way of recovering it.

Remains of Three Tonner at the Bottom of the Picture.



This also gives a clearer view of the right hand bend.

The A.P.L. Camp at Dahla.

Camp entrance.



Main Square.

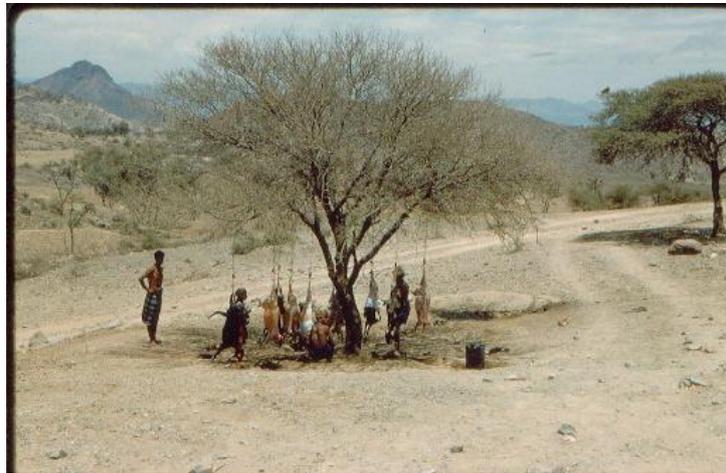


Motor Transport Park



Land rover. Ferret armoured cars. Three-ton truck.

The Goat Tree.



The daily meat supply, we were in Islamic territory, the rule being that all meat must be eaten the day the animal is killed. The sweepers' first morning chore was to slit the throats of the goats and then skin them. The animal must be killed by the Halal method. Throat cut and the blood drained out. The blood was not used.

I have eaten goat boiled, braised, roasted, fried, grilled, stewed, plain, curried, spiced, in chunks, sliced, diced, minced, in soups, sausage, hot, cold, jellied, the only thing I have not had is goat black pudding. Rarely a herd of sheep would be delivered instead, when we had mutton, not lamb but mutton with a capital M. Fortunately we were all young enough not to have false teeth.

The parade ground was out side the camp walls, where weapon training was also carried out. The A. P. L. was armed with 303 rifles, bren-guns, mortars and heavy machine guns. We provided the artillery and the armour. Arab soldiers provided the support services, signals, maintenance etc, with British corporals and sergeants in charge and doing the training.

Weapon Training. Rifles and Heavy Machine Guns.



Note another saint's tomb just beyond the parade ground.

British Armoured Company Camp from APL Camp



The Warwicks were occupying this camp whilst I was there.

Medical and Other Personnel.

The Dahla Medics.



Gabriel Driver.

Ali, bearer, self. Corporal Moorish, Corporal Griffiths and Hassan, medical orderly. The corporals, National Service, first class likely lads from Liverpool, life long pals since they went to primary school, how they wangled it to get posted together I could never fathom.

06:00 hours. Sick parade. Arab and British soldiers together.

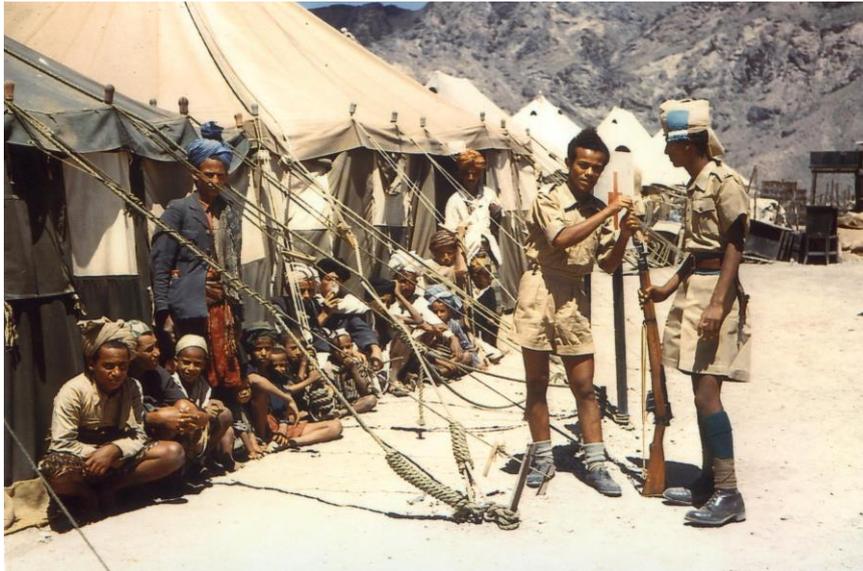
09: 00 hours Breakfast. Every morning before breakfast, one paludrine tablet, anti-malarial, two large one gram tablets of sulpha-guanidine, anti-dysentery, and a one gram salt tablet to replace salt lost by sweating, all swilled down by a glass of water flavoured by some vile army concoction said to be lemonade powder.

We often went bare headed, the Solar Topee long gone. Sunstroke is not caused by heat on the head, but by depletion of sodium through sweating, hence the daily salt tablet.

10: 00 Civilian sick parade. The Arabs went about all the time armed, a rifle and the large curved dagger whose name I cannot remember. The rifles were usually rather ancient, single shot Matini-Henries (similar to those used at the battle of Yorke Drift), the rifle, the handle and scabbard of the dagger all decorated with solid silver.

An Adeni tribesman would walk about with about two pounds of silver on him. All weapons had to be handed in at the guardroom to be returned when they left the camp. They were supposed to be under guard by a guard with a bullet already in the spout but unless there was an unusually large turnout we did not normally bother.

Civilian Sick Parade



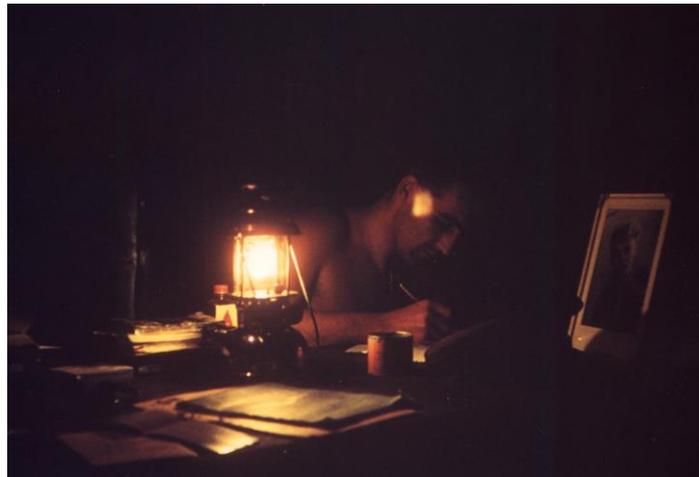
Note all men and boys. Women had to get better on their own at home and little girls were not worth bringing, unless they were close to puberty and would soon be menstruating, when the father would be able to sell them to the highest bidder as brides. Women were just chattels, with no rights, the property of their fathers, husbands or brothers. They had three uses to work the land, produce sons and be copulated with. Before the menopause their most important use was copulation and no matter how much a doctor had stressed that a woman would die if she became pregnant again, would her husband refrain from intercourse or use a condom. It might be financially inconvenient but if the wife died he could always buy another one. Of all the places I was posted to, the Trucial Oman, the Oman and Somaliland, the Adeni tribesmen were by far the worst when it came to dealing with their womenfolk.

Accommodation, my Tent.

Day



Night.



PETS.

Horace, the Chameleon.



I was not **The Doc** but the **Hakim Sahib**. Hakim a mixture of wise man, wizard, witchdoctor and healer. The Adenese would never touch a chameleon. They did not harm them because they were useful to catch flies. I suppose that long tongue with a knob on the end, which disappeared as quick as it appeared, resembled an erect penis. If you touched a chameleon you would become impotent. During the civilian sick parade, Horace became part of my witchdoctor uniform. Firmly grasping the left tube of my stethoscope while I listened to chests, Arab boys gazed at me in awe and trepidation.

Cpl. Griffiths and his Hyena.



Charlotte, a young female baboon, was my personal responsibility. She was named after the Colonel's mistress, a lady he visited every weekend, when he said he was flying to Aden on official army business. I suppose he was correct in a way, it was a

matter of maintaining morale, HIS! Fortunately for Charlotte I am a very hairy type of chap.

Charlotte Looking for Fleas.



Other Personnel.

Royal Artillery Company Sergeant.



Watch it sergeant if you tell that squaddie his hair is too long you might end up having to cut it.

Two Young Rogues and Osman a Large Fat One.



From the military viewpoint, note the 70mm, Howitzer of which the artillery had two. Poor Othman, the butt of the levees, overweight, lazy and absolutely useless, not even a full Arab. He was half Arab and half Indian, always in trouble with somebody. To him Ramadan was absolute torture; he was always being discovered in another hideaway having a drink or something to eat. His fellow Moslems would drag him out and give him a beating. The British sergeants had given up on him and he drove the Arab N.C.O.s to distraction. They wanted to show that their O. R.s were just as good as ours and he thwarted their every effort. British soldiers of a similar useless type were never sent out of Aden and if any did arrive they were got rid of within a week. There is an Othman in every unit; he is beautifully described, in George Mc.Donald Frazer's book, the series of short stories entitled "The General Dance Till Dawn". It describes the British army in Libya shortly after the war and Othman appears as the Scotsman Pte. McClausky.

Dahla.

Dahla like all the other little towns and villages, was built on a hill overlooking the surrounding plain. This was to make the little settlements easier to defend.

The Arab term for a market is THE SOUK. In Dahla market day was at the end of the week, Thursday, the day before the Sabbath, Friday.

Dahla Souk.

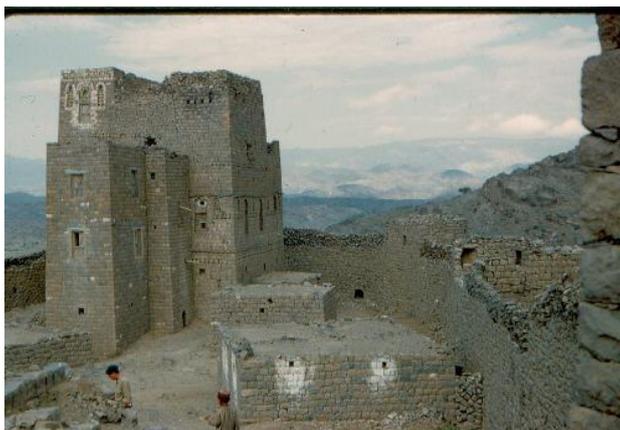


There were also shops, rather like caves, built into the sides of the houses, 12 to 15 feet deep, 8 wide and 9 high, packed with anything. There were no specialist shops they anything that could get hold of. The owner sitting at the door drinking coffee and talking to his friends. The doors filled the opening, three inches thick, 9 foot high, when shut covered in bolts, locks and padlocks, they obviously did not trust anybody. In the picture above the opening on the right of the house is a shop.

The Hubs,

On top of the hill was the citadel, a Turkish built fort called the hubs. I suppose it would protect against a rifle shot, but it was not a strongly built place. It would not have withstood a trebuchet never mind a cannon.

Inside the Hubs. Cpl. Moorish on the Left.



It was used partly as barracks for the Emir's soldiers and partly as a prison for the hostages. The hostages were male members of the ruling family of the various villages and areas that the Emir claimed authority over.

Political Hostages and Ali, the Bearer.



They were there to ensure the good behaviour of the families they belonged too. The ultimate sanction was for them to be shot. This was most unlikely only if there was an extremely serious uprising in which a member of the Emir's family had been killed was that likely to be carried out. Presumably their stay was temporary and other male family members took their turn. They seemed to be an incredibly cheerful lot.

Look carefully at the above picture the hostages are wearing ankle irons. Ali is in the white shirt on the right, look at the leg of the second man on his left with the light blue turban.

Dahla, from the Hubs.



The Emir's palace the three storey castellated building is on the small hill, in front the women's palace, with the tower of the mosque to the right. In the top right hand corner, two peaks of the Jebel Jihaff. From the second peak with straight edge a ridge can be made out, at the foot of which was Dahla camp.

Jebel Jihaff from the Hubs.



The Jebel Jihaff starts in the centre of the picture to the left, average height 2,000 to 2,500 feet above the plain. It was another occupied and farmed plateau. The third peak to the left, with the straight edge on the right side was where the Company camp was situated. Follow the ridge from it to the right, where there is a pale area, that is Dahla camp. There are other paths up the jebel especially from the other side; it would be an ideal base from which to attack the camp, which is why a company of Aden Protectorate Levees were permanently stationed there.

The Jebel Jihaff from the Camp.



My first day at the camp, I had to climb the jebel; the company members were due their annual TABT inoculation. Dahla was about 3,500 above sea level, the company camp another 2 to 2,000 feet. I suspect I had some mountain sickness because I found

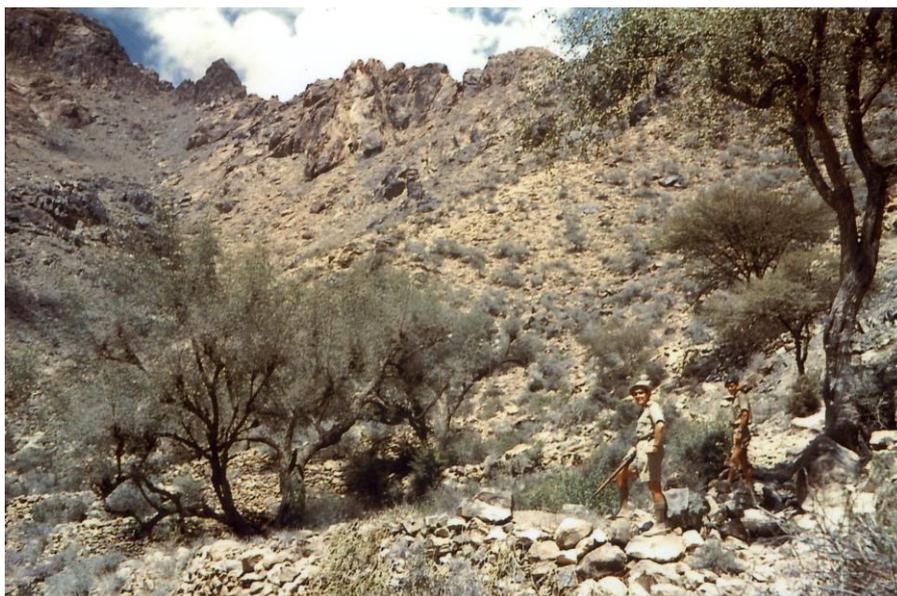
if tough going, especially as well as my doctor's bag I carried a 303 rifle and 200 rounds of ammunition.

“ This is a dangerous place Doc. You must go armed at all times.”

But why enough bloody rounds to start a small war? I reckon two clips but have been enough. That was the first and last time I carried the rifle. As the local Arab dissidents only shot at anyone when carefully concealed in ambush. There seemed little point; you would be dead before you knew they were there.

We were not armed but we were escorted. We did not go anywhere uninvited, but went when the local Arabs sent someone to fetch us. Invariably there were at least two, both armed, as soon as we left the camp we became their guests and they were bound by the honour of their tribe to protect us. Not only would they fight to protect us, but it was also dishonour, when we were going to see a sick person, for other tribes not to allow us to pass safely through their territory. An attack on us could have started an intertribal feud.

Starting the Climb, with that bloody Heavy Rifle.



At the top, looking down.

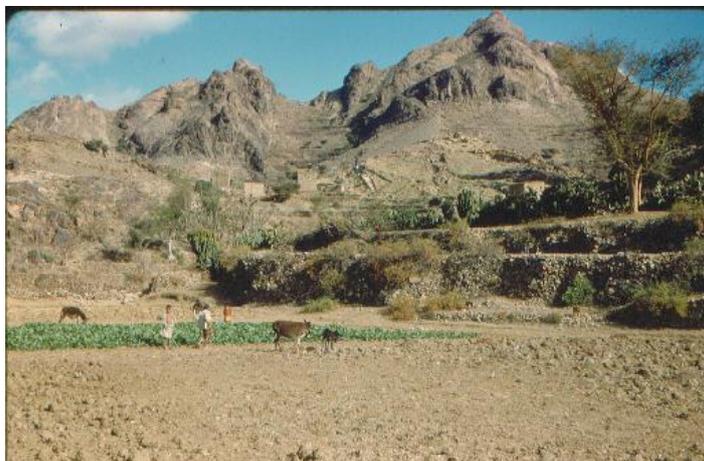


Royal Artillery Platoon, Manhandling a 70mm Gun up Onto the Jebel.



Well you have to keep those National Service lads up to scratch.

Quatt field Jebel Jihaff.



Quatt, sold in bunches that resembled a bunch of fresh cut privet, the leaves were chewed and wad of leaves kept under the cheek, it contained a narcotic like stimulant. All the best land was put down to quatt.

The plateau was farmed and occupied. The tribe was peaceful but not friendly. There were English wives on the Jebel Jihaff, mostly dominated, put upon and unhappy. The Adenese took work on British cargo ships, visiting British ports where they met and married English girls. They thought they were marrying landowners, which they were, but these were peasant owners. They were not allowed any contact outside the villages. Letters had been smuggled out asking for help, but were all ignored. We had the hardware to rescue them, but the result would be to convert a peaceful tribe into a dangerous one. The German SS could have done it, but then there would have been no one left alive to cause trouble. That is not the British way.

Company HQ.

Note the straight edge to the peak, which enables it to be identified from below.



The Officer's Mess.



Who said officers lived in the height of luxury. Left to right are, Mike Hudson, RA, Peter King, Aden protectorate Levees and me.

Dahla Plain and Airstrip from the Jebel.



The airstrip is in the bottom left hand corner. Just a strip, no control tower etc., the planes came and went at the pilot's discretion.

Border patrol.



They were rather gay affairs, everyone, except me, hoping something would happen. Such as a Yemeni tribesman with more guts than common sense taking a pot shot at us, or a young inexperienced officer in charge of the local garrison, oppose us with his purely armed troops. We definitely “quite accidentally” strayed into Yemeni territory on each patrol. They were totally haphazard, so the Yemenis would not know when we would patrol and lay land mines down.

The Saladins, which were armoured underneath, led the patrol, the Ferrets scattered through the convoy and bringing up the rear. The levees were in three-ton trucks and included the heavy machine gun and mortar section, together with the Royal Artillery’s two 70mm guns. Hunter jets were on standby at Khormaksar. Any opposition would have been given a right clobbering.

The first patrol I went on was during Ramadan and virtually every levy volunteered. Mohamed said that travellers could be excused from not eating and drinking between sunrise and sunset. I doubt if he was considering internal combustion engines at the time, but the levees were convinced as soon as the engines were switched on out came the water bottles, cigarettes and chapattis