

# *The Dhow*



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# 63 PARA SQUADRON ROYAL CORP OF TRANSPORT

BY CHRIS POWELL (ADEN 1967) (PT 2)



## Other Tasks and Duties

Of course stand down days were always used to carry out other essential duties like vehicle maintenance, weapon cleaning and shovelling out sand from the tents where the constant breeze and wind blew across the salt pans into the camp filling bed lockers and everywhere else it could find to settle. The three bladed fan did its best as air conditioning, with open flap tents, a blast wall and a few sandbags was always a tall order trying to keep cool and sleeping under a motion if mozzey' net.

Rust was a big problem to weapons and vehicles with damp nights and salty air, even the vehicle jacks and tools had to be checked on a regular basis and lightly oiled to ensure they would function if needed to be brought into play. Sandbagging and the refurbishment of weapon pits, unloading bays and watch towers was n ongoing task, all essential duties to keep the camp operational and for the safety of its occupiers as we found out on the 20 June. Complacency paid no part in our tour of duty.

One of the tasks carried out was to drive the Land Rover escort vehicle with a small section of riflemen under the command of a Cpl. We were tasked to escort Maj. Gen. Phillip MBE who at that time GOC Middle East Lad Forces. When he went out in his own vehicles we convoyed with him. Whenever the convoy stopped at a location, the section deployed and I stayed with the vehicle.

It was a marvellous opportunity for me to get around the province, visiting other units and HQ. We got plenty of banter when visiting our own regiment with this cushy number, and of course the Marines had to have their say. We were billeted at Steamer Point although basic accommodation like the Radfan Camp, it was a building which had air conditioning, amazing, my first taste of having a nights kip in air cooled conditions, and be able to look out of a window instead of an open tent flap.

Sadly the task only lasted a week, still, I was grateful for the opportunity to be able to diversify before being brought back down to earth when cranking up my next Bedford RL which had a flat battery.

Another task was to go down to Steamer point with two Land Rovers and a full section of riflemen, details would be made clear once we arrived at the headquarters. To my surprise and to the delight of the lads, we were tasked to take part in a Daily Mirror photo shoot with Donald Wise the Mirror photographer. These amazing Headquarters 'beauties' suddenly appeared in their short skirts, low tops and smelling of fragrance's which brought unbelievable normality back into my life.

The idea was, under the direction of Donald, that the girls would sit in the two land Rovers, then we would drive up the road slowly while they waved and smiled. Donald took the pictures, and the caption was 'Farewell to Aden' for the newspaper (shame it wasn't for the Sun newspaper!!). No sooner was the shoot over when we were thanked and told to return to camp by some Flt. Sgt. 'Snowdrop', That didn't go down too well, a slight rebellion to try for some socialising was met with a courteous, 'Leg it', although our reply was less courteous as we drove off. We did stretch the tale a little when telling

helicopters. An LZ (Landing Zone) was quickly established on Khormaksar Airfield and the re-supply took place with trucks transporting the supplies to a central hanger ready for distribution. Of course in those days everything was 'handball' so when the beer appeared in the nets, the Quartermaster at the distribution hanger must have been scratching his head, as the paper work said one thing and the supply in front of him said another!!



We were very fortunate to get to fly out the HMS Albion, and what an experience that was, the food in the mess was amazing and to be able to sit down in the air conditioning and devour a 'T' Bone steak with chips, onions and mushrooms with no competition from flies or s—e hawks was something else. Back to the Radfan camp and the extra beer or two made for a good nights kip. What a day that was??

## Drawdown



When draw down was approaching as the week and months went by there was no let up on security or the need to allow the dominance of the terrorist to influence our departure. Sheik Othman and Check points continued to be policed by 1 Para, however we were to hear a lot coming from the briefings about FLOS (Front for the Liberation of South Yemen), NLF (National Liberation Front) hostile groups of course, but would have a big say once the British Forces left Aden. Acceptance no, tolerated,

the other lads back at Radfan Camp, especially after a couple of Tiger Ales.

A further tasking was to involve most of the lads from 63 Para. A re-supply from HMS Albion was to take delivery of under-slung netted loads from the Albion's Wessex Helicopters, this was easy tasking for us lot as it was one of our Airborne Roles within the Brigade, whether it was fixed wing airdrops or

no choice. The main aim now was for us to leave in a dignified manner brought about by tactics to ensure everybody got away without another 20th June.

As handovers go it wasn't about signing pieces of paper, and lets part, it was about releasing areas in and establishing a line to maintain control, eventually this was called the Pennine Chain which was held until troops had departed. Whilst all this was going on,

## 63 PARA SQUADRON ROYAL CORP OF TRANSPORT CONT.



### 63 PARA SQN RCT - B TROOP - ADEN DETACHMENT (A)

SHEPHERD(A)-HARRISON-McDONALD(A)-HENDERSON(A)-STEELE(A)-STEELE(A)-MOSS(A)-ALEN(A)-JONES-GIBBINS(A)  
GARDENER-MELIA(A)-MOORE(A)-STEELE(A)-BUCKMASTER(A)-PARKINSON-GRAY(A)-STERLING-WILLIAMS(A)-GREY(A)  
ELDER-FINLAYSON(A)-FLINT-APPLEBY-SSGT KURLAK-LT PE MISEROY TP COMD (A)-SGT JONES(A)-POWELL(A)-HUNT(A)-CORONAN(A)-  
McFADDEN-  
NOT ON PICTURE - HARLEY(A)-HUNTER(A)-CROUCH(A)

Radfan Camp was thinning out with other regiments departing, the camp was then given a sort of 'make over' ready for whoever the new occupiers were going to be, personally I would have like to have seen the gates closed and a match thrown into the place but, of course that's not how we do things. I was amazed that there wasn't some BIA bloke there checking the blankets and counting the pillow cases. What a nonsense, even our vehicles were given the once over, however the Battalion finally left the camp to march to Khormaksar Airfield. Us mortals from 63 Para were tasked to drive the vehicles to the airfield to a holding area before joining the battalion. I was driving a 39 seated Bedford bus, no windows or doors and the other lads were driving Bedford RL's. When we got to the airfield I suddenly felt this bang at the sided of the bus, and then another bang from the other side, when I looked round there were grinning faces coming from the cabs of the RL's. Of course this was all on the move and soon realised that 'dodgems' was the name of the game. At the same time there were locals chasing our vehicles as they were obviously going to commandeer them once we had stopped. We did eventually stop, grabbed our weapons and legged it down the airfield to the waiting aircraft which would take us to Bahrain. The amount of equipment and kit we left on the airfield was unbelievable, acres and acres of it, a car boot sellers dream come true. Bye,

Bye Aden

#### Conclusion

Aden to me was an experience I will never forget, driving vehicles that would only be of scrap value over here (UK), living in conditions that refugees would consider inhumane, a climate that gave me prickly heat for 3 years, monsoon blisters under my armpits and in between my toes, ringworm that took a burning black ointment to clear it up, eating food that the flies were trying to lay their maggots on, the constant heat haze with the blowing dust and sand from the Salt Pans, the operational duties in and around Sheikh Othman, the manning of check points and foot patrols, the hours searches in hostile districts, the coming under fire from hostile forces, all made tolerable by one thing, thank God I was with the best Infantry Battalion I had ever served with, from the top down the leadership, comradeship irrespective of Cap Badge, we were always there for each other, yes we had our low points, losing some comrades, killed or wounded, but we never lost sight of our aims and mission.

I say to you, 1st Battalion Parachute Regiment, thank you for turning me into a proper soldier which was to stay with me during my tours to Northern Ireland and UN Peace Keeping Force in Cyprus and the 22 years I served in the Regular Army and 11 years with the territorial Army. *Esprit de Corp*

#### Foot Note

Why is it that whenever I go to Mess Dinners or Reunions and the subject of Aden come up, I am constantly reminded by those who served there that they were 'Last out'? Especially from the 'movers'. Well I can say this, that when I was boarding a C130 from Khormaksar I don't recall and 'mover' ticking my name of the flight manifest after showing him my passport and having my kit weighed. It was always my understanding, and remains so, that the last out was the Royal Marine Commandos, and was probably a Landing Craft crewman slipping the line on the Quay and stepping onto the craft and speeding away to join his ship. Just my opinion along with others who were there, and what I have read.

*Chris Powell—ex 63 Para Squadron.  
Royal Corp of Transport.*

***FIELD OF REMEMBRANCE WESTMINSTER ABBEY & REMEMBRANCE PARADE AT THE CENOTAPH WHITEHALL***



*The Field of Remembrance at Westminster abbey, London 8th November 2011. It's always an honour to attend, and also an honour to represent our association. As a Royalist I got to meet the Duke of Edinburgh. Dennis Gimes*



*The Aden Veteran Association on the march at the Cenotaph in Whitehall, November 13th 2011.*

*Photo by: Andrew Taylor*



*The Remembrance Day Parade went well this year, with ex RSM Barry Sutcliffe BEM, keeping us all in order, and that's no mean feat. Afterwards many of the members enjoyed refreshment at Knightsbridge Barracks courtesy of the Household Cavalry.*

# REMEMBRANCE DAY MA'ALLA CEMETERY ADEN 2011

BY REV. PETER CROOKS



*On Friday 11<sup>th</sup> November a Remembrance Service took place in Ma'alla Cemetery at 11.00 hours local (Aden) time. The names of some of those buried were read out and a special mention was made of the three Nuns who were murdered a few years ago and are buried in the Christian Graveyard.*

*Whilst Peter has been in Aden he has also been responsible for the "Mission to Seafarers" Office in the Port of Aden and to look after the needs of seafarers in general, and his wife Nancy has been involved with the Clinic. This vital establishment provides care and medical facilities for the local population who cannot afford private medicine. It also has a very well known team of doctors and nurses providing eye surgery and preventing*

**This is just  
a sample.**

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