

Sultanate of Muscat and Oman

Later - The State of Oman

Former Postie - John Jackett (1959 – 1981), served at Salalah in Dhofar province in the south of Oman from Nov 1971 until July 1972

He starts his Oman article with this entry from the internet, which outlines the political and military reasons for the presence in Oman of British Forces, so creating the need for our BFPO service, details of which follows on later pages.

On 23 July, 1970, Said bin Taimur was deposed. The coup was almost bloodless. Folklore has it that one of the plotters, two of the Sultan's bodyguard and the Sultan were slightly wounded, all by the Sultan himself. Sultan Said went into exile in London. He was replaced by his son, Qaboos bin Said, who immediately instigated major social, educational and military reforms. His "five point plan" involved:

A general amnesty to all those of his subjects who had opposed his father; An end to the archaic status of Dhofar as the Sultan's private fief and its formal incorporation into Oman as the "southern province"; Effective military opposition to rebels who did not accept the offer of amnesty; A vigorous nation-wide program of development. Diplomatic initiatives with the aims of having Oman recognized as a genuine Arab state with its own legal form of government, and isolating the PDRY from receiving support from other Arab states.

Within hours of the coup, British Special Air Service (SAS) soldiers were being flown into Oman to further bolster the counterinsurgency campaign. They identified four main strategies that would assist the fight against the PFLOAG:

- Civil administration and a "hearts and minds" campaign;
- Intelligence gathering and collation;
- Veterinary assistance;
- Medical assistance.

The military commanders on the ground (rather than the UK Ministry of Defence) suggested the implementation of a Hearts and Minds campaign, which would be put into operation primarily by a troop (25 men) from the SAS. The British government (then under Conservative leader Edward Heath) supported this unconventional approach to the counterinsurgency campaign. It approved the deployment of 20 personnel of the British Royal Engineers, who would aid in the construction of schools and health centres, and drill wells for the population of Dhofar. A Royal Air Force medical team would also operate out of Salalah hospital, in order to open a humanitarian front in the conflict. The operation was almost a carbon copy of a system that had proved successful in the Malayan Emergency some twenty years previously. The British government additionally provided monetary support for the creation of the Dhofar Development Programme, whose aim was to wrest support from the PFLOAG through the modernisation of Dhofar.

To assist in the civil development and coordinate it with the military operations, the command structure in Dhofar was reorganized, with the newly-appointed wali or civilian governor (Braik bin Hamoud) being given equal status to the military commander of the Dhofar Brigade (Brigadier Jack Fletcher to 1972, Brigadier John Akehurst from that date)

British Propaganda - "*The Hand of God Destroys Communism*"

A major effort was made to counter rebel propaganda and induce the Dhofari population to support the government. In particular, appeals were made to Islam and to traditional tribal values and customs, against the rebels' secular or materialistic teachings. A significant outlet for government propaganda was the many inexpensive Japanese transistor radios which were sold cheaply or distributed free to Dhofaris who visited Salalah and other government-held towns to sell firewood or vegetables. Although the PFLOAG could also broadcast propaganda by radio, the Government's propaganda was factual and low-key, while that of the rebels was soon perceived to be exaggerated and stereotyped.

Government counter-attacks

One step which had a major impact on the uprising was the announcement of an amnesty for surrendered fighters, and aid in defending their communities from rebels. A cash incentive was offered to rebels who surrendered, with a bonus if they brought their weapon. The surrendered rebels formed *Firqat* irregular units, trained by teams (British Army Training Teams, or BATTs) from the British Special Air Service. Eighteen *Firqat* units, numbering from between 50 to 150 each, were eventually formed. They usually gave themselves names with connections to Islam, such as the *Firqat Salahadin*. These irregular groups played a major part in denying local support to the rebels. Being *jibalis* themselves (and in many cases with family connections among the communities on the Jebel), they were better at local

intelligence-gathering and "hearts and minds" activities than the northern Omani or Baluchi personnel of the regular SAF.

The first serious step in re-establishing the Sultan's authority on the Jebel took place in October 1971, when *Operation Jaguar* was mounted, involving five *Firqat* units and two squadrons of the SAS. After hard fighting, the SAS and *Firqats* secured an enclave on the eastern Jebel Samhan from which they could expand.

Meanwhile, the regular units of the SAF were expanded and re-equipped. Extra officers and NCO instructors from the British Army and Royal Marines (and also the Pakistan Army) were attached to all units (there were nominally twenty-two British or contracted personnel with each infantry battalion) while Omani personnel were educated and trained to become officers and senior NCOs. The SAF created fortified lines running north from the coast and up to the summit of the Jebel, to interdict the movement of rebels and the camel trains carrying their supplies from the PDRY. The "Leopard Line" had already been established in 1969, but this line had to be abandoned during the monsoon season as it could not be supplied. The more effective "Hornbeam Line" was set up in 1971, running north from Mughsayl on the coast.

The lines consisted of fortified platoon and company outposts on commanding peaks, linked by barbed wire. The posts possessed mortars and some also had artillery, to provide cover for patrols and to harass rebel positions and tracks used by them. The SAF soldiers continually sortied from their outposts to set ambushes on the most likely enemy infiltration routes and against rebel mortar and rocket launching positions. Anti-personnel land mines were sown on infiltration routes. The rebels also used anti-personnel mines against suspected SAF patrol bases, and even anti-tank land mines on tracks used by SAF vehicles.^[13]

The Sultan of Oman's Air Force was also expanded, with BAC Strikemaster and Hawker Hunter aircraft which provided air support to units on the ground, and eight Shorts Skyvan transport aircraft and eight Agusta Bell 205 transport helicopters which supplied *firqat* and SAF posts on the jebels. A flight of RAF Westland Wessex helicopters also operated from Salalah.

The defeat of the rebellion

As a result of these combined measures, the rebels were deprived both of local support and supplies from the PDRY. To retrieve the situation, they mounted major attacks on the coastal towns of Mirbat and Taqah during the monsoon season of 1972. At the Battle of Mirbat, 250 *Adoo* attacked 100 assorted *Firqat* under training, paramilitary *askars* (armed police) and a detachment of the Special Air Service. In spite of the low khareef cloud cover, air support from Strikemaster aircraft was available, and helicopters landed SAS reinforcements. The *Adoo* were repulsed with heavy losses.

From this point on, the rebel defeat was inevitable, although they defeated an offensive by the SAF in 1973 intended to seal the border with the PDRY and capture the main *Adoo* base in the Shershitti Caves. The SAF had earlier gained one success when they made a helicopter landing to capture a position codenamed *Simba* at Sarfai near the border. The post at Sarfai was held at some cost in aircraft for two years, and overlooked the rebels' supply lines along the coastal plain although it did not block them. The *Adoo* earned the respect of their opponents for their resilience and skill.


In January 1974, after several splits and defections, the rebel movement renamed itself the **Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman** (PFLO). This contraction of their aims coincided with a reduction in the support they received from the Soviet Union and China. Meanwhile, the *Adoo* were steadily cleared from the Jebel Qara and Jebel Samhan by *firqats* and were driven into the western part of the Jebel Qamar.

As a result of Sultan Qaboos's diplomatic initiatives, the Shah of Iran had sent a brigade of troops numbering 1200 and with its own helicopters to assist the Sultan's Armed Forces in 1973. The Iranian brigade first secured the Salalah-Thumrait road. In 1974, the Iranian contribution was expanded into the Imperial Iranian Task Force, numbering 4,000. They attempted to establish another interdiction line, codenamed the "Damavand Line", running from *Manston*, a few miles east of Sarfai, to the coast near the border with the PDRY. Heavy opposition from the *adoo*, which included artillery fire from within the PDRY, thwarted this aim for several months. Eventually, the town of Rahkyut, which the PFLO had long maintained as the capital of their liberated territory, fell to the Iranian task force.

In July 1975, the SAF launched a second "final" offensive. An attack from *Simba*, intended to be a diversion, nevertheless succeeded in descending cliffs and slopes 3,000 feet (910 m) in total height to reach the coast at Dalqhut, and thus finally cut off the *Adoo* from their bases in the PDRY. Other SAF units finally captured Deefa, the Shershitti Caves and other defended positions in the Jebel Qamar. Hawker Hunter aircraft of the Sultan's Air Force (31 of these had been transferred to the SAF from the Royal Jordanian Air Force) attacked artillery positions in the PDRY. Over the next few months, the remaining rebel fighters surrendered or sought sanctuary in the PDRY.

The Rebellion was finally declared to be defeated in January 1976, although isolated incidents took place as late as 1979.

[RAF Masirah](#)

	<p>Main units (continued): -</p> <p>212 Sqn (Dec 1942 – May 1945)</p> <p>No 33 Staging Post (1 Nov 1943 – 31 Mar 1946)</p> <p>244 Sqn (17 Mar 1944 – 1 May 1945)</p> <p>No 214 Air-Sea Rescue Unit (Apr 1944 - 15 Dec 1945)</p> <p>8 Sqn (8 Aug – 8 Sep 1967)</p> <p>Detachments**</p> <p>209 Sqn (Jul 1942 – Jul 1945)</p>
<p>Location</p> <p>Country: - Muscat and Oman</p> <p>Lat/Long: 20:40:30N 58:53:31E</p> <p>Height Above Sea Level:</p>	<p>244 Sqn (Oct 1942 – Mar 1944)</p> <p>321 Sqn (Oct 1942 – Apr 1945)</p> <p>265 Sqn (Apr 1943 – May 1945)</p> <p>259 Sqn (Sep 1943 – May 1945)</p>
<p>Operational Control: -</p> <p>Opened -</p> <p>Closed - 31 Mar 1977</p>	<p>294 Sqn (Jun 1945 – Apr 1946)</p> <p>No 8 Sqn (Oct 1961 – Aug 1967, Sep 1967 – Dec 1971)</p>
<p>Notes</p>	<p>204 Sqn (Apr 1971 – May 1972)</p>
<p>Links to related sites/pages</p>	

[RAF Masirah](#)

The island of Masirah is the location of a former RAF military airfield now belonging to the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) which has played a vital part in numerous middle-eastern conflicts since it was established. Masirah is an island approximately 40 miles long by 10 miles wide at its maximum point.



Masirah Island



RAF Masirah was right up at the top of the Island

On plan it is shaped like an hourglass, being five miles wide at its narrowest point. It lies approximately 15 miles off the Oman coast, to which it belongs politically. It is about 225 miles due south of Muscat and 400 miles southeast of Salalah.

In the 1930s Masirah became one of a number of unmanned staging posts between the RAF bases in Iraq and Aden. Masirah used to be considered one of the less desirable RAF overseas postings: hot,

humid, dusty, nowhere to go and little to do when you had time off. The British withdrawal from Aden, the Arabian Gulf and the Far East left Masirah stranded as the very last RAF base east of Suez. In the 1960s and 70s there was only one runway. That runway was a mere 7,500 feet long which was just about long enough for VC-10 transport aircraft and anything smaller but barely long enough for the Mark 1 Victor tankers that flew in the 1970s. The RAF had a base on the island until March of 1977 when it was closed down. There were facilities for a sea plane base in a bay south of the present base. At one time it was also used as a "staging post" by the old Imperial Airways (forerunner of BA of today) and was one of their stops between England and the Far East

It is all different now. After the Iranian and other regional crises in the latter days of the Carter Administration, the US spent a lot of money on airfields in friendly countries in the mid-east. That build up proved essential to Desert Shield (the buildup to the war with Iraq). The apron at Masirah was significantly improved over 1979. Masirah is a thriving place with two full-length modern runways at right angles to each other, acres of concrete, modern housing and roads, and satellite television.

A NARROW GAUGE RAILWAY ON A DESERT ISLAND With low gravel hills in the south, rocky hills up to 900 feet high in the centre, and a flat gravel plain at the northern tip. By the end of 1942 the danger to allied shipping in the region posed by Japanese submarines led to the RAF and USAAF setting up a permanent airbase on that gravel plain. In order to handle the large quantities of supplies landed by ship a narrow gauge railway was built, serving dispersed fuel dumps and supply compounds. The railway continued in this role until the mid-1960s, then fell into disuse. Resurrected by the British servicemen as a spare time activity in 1969, trains continued to run until 1977, when the airfield was handed over to the Sultan of Oman's Air Force. Bill Corser details the history of this exotic little railway from its inception, and brings the story up to the present day, as one of the locomotives has survived and lives on the Leighton Buzzard Light Railway. The story has been gleaned from wartime records and many personal recollections, and is presented using the words of those involved as much as possible. Maps showing the development of the line and drawings of the American and British locos and rolling stock complete this in depth study of a most unusual narrow gauge railway.

[BFPO services in Oman](#)

Having spent almost 2 years in trying to identify all Posties who served at Masirah and Salalah. I am very grateful to all those who have helped me compile these names. The publication date of those shown below, is as at **1st June 2011**

Postal staff names at the end of this Masirah list (BFPO 65) are confirmed in writing on a Turtle shell, which is currently held at South Cerney.

<u>NCO i/c</u>	<u>Tour Dates</u>		<u>Seconded by</u>	<u>From</u>	<u>To</u>
	<u>From</u>	<u>To</u>			
Cpl Bob Meen	68	68	Det from Bahrain		
Sgt Ken Batchelor	?	?	(One man office)		
Sgt Bill Skeel	69	69	Relief for 2 weeks		
Sgt Brian Penny *	?	<u>Medevac short toured</u>	(One man office)		
Cpl / Sgt ? ? **	?	Jul-70	Det from Sharjah ?		
Sgt Tony James	Jul-70	Feb-71	(One man office)		
Sgt Joe Kelly	Feb-71	1971 ?	(One man office)		
S Sgt Bruce Reiling	?	Aug-72			
			Cpl Bob Moonie	Jan-72	Sep-72
S Sgt Brian Dobinson	Aug-72	Apr-73			
			Cpl Ian Hayward	Sep-72	Jun-73
S Sgt Tony Milton	Apr-73	Jan-74			

			Cpl Mick Lambert	Jun-73	Mar-74
S Sgt Dave Harmer	Jan-74	Jul-74			
			Cpl Ron Davies	Mar-74	Sep-74
S Sgt Brian Marshman	Jul-74	Jan-75			
			Cpl Andy Bruce	Sep-74	Mar-75
S Sgt Ken Batchelor	Jan-75	Jul-75			
			Cpl "Taff" Behenna	Mar-75	Sep-75
S Sgt Mick Buckley	Jul-75	Dec-75			
			Cpl TJ Evenson	Sep-75	Mar-76
S Sgt Peter O'Rourke	Dec-75	27942			
			Cpl Jim "Chippy" Pearce	Mar-76	Sep-76
S Sgt Harry Eagle	Jun-76	Dec-76	Spr Eddie Rea	Sep-76	Oct-76
S Sgt Al Bendon	Dec-76	Mar-77	Cpl Benny Hannan	Oct-76	Mar-77

FPO MASIRAH closed – 31 March 1977

- * **Brian died in 1977**
- ** **When Tony James arrived in July 1970, the FPO was closed – WHY ?**



Masirah Turtle Shell
1972-1977 Posties on station



1976 S/Sgt Harry eagle 'at the dimount'




1977 Spr Eddie Rea is on duty



1976 FPO Masirah details

2011 – February / March Update. Harry and Eileen Eagle re-visited Masirah with a great deal of help from Pete Braithwaite, who was working at Muscat during this time. They were able to get onto the Island by ferry, staying in a very posh hotel for just one night, even with local contacts they were not able to visit the entire RAF site that Harry remembers, however they enjoyed a stroll around the old haunts.

RAF Salalah

	Location
	Country: - Oman Lat/Long: 17:02:17N 54:05:32E Height Above Sea Level: 73 ft
	Operational Control: - Opened - HQ British Forces Aden (1943) Closed - 31 Mar 1977
Notes It is now Salalah Airport and the second busiest airport in Oman.	Main units: - Detachments, 8 Sqn (Feb 1927 - xxx 1937, Sep 1942 - Nov 1945) No 32 Staging Post (8 Mar - 11 Nov 1943)

RAF Salalah

RAF Salalah, was a staging post in the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman and lay in the fertile coastal plain of Dhofar, 650 miles from Aden. The airfield was constructed in 1928 and had been in constant use ever since as a military and civilian staging post. In the 1950s it was a refuelling staging post for the duty Valetta flights from Khormaksar to Mauripur until the latter closed in mid-1956. Throughout the 1960s, Salalah provided refuelling and replenishment facilities for Valetta, Beverley, Argosy, Dakota and other aircraft operating on the Aden-Masirah-Sharjah-Bahrain route, and could accommodate limited numbers of personnel for overnight stops. The climate could be said to have been generally good with the possible exception of the May - September period. During this time, the normally arid Arabian Waste was affected by the South-West monsoon and a strip of 100 miles either side of Salalah was subjected to periods of continual although light rain and complete cloud cover, often for the whole five-month period. This was accompanied by low visibility and periods of high humidity, causing considerable amounts of mildew on clothing and equipment not in regular use. The rest of the year Salalah enjoyed temperatures around the eighties with clear skies. In addition to the normal station messes and clubs, the Unit operated a library and reading room, containing newspapers, magazines, and periodicals of generally one week's vintage and a good selection of reading material both light and more serious. A limited supply of text books for specialised study was readily available. There was also a photographic club of considerable popularity, a well equipped darkroom which was in constant use, complemented by a small but well stocked photographic store. There was an excellent rediffusion system " **Radio 219** " and this is without doubt the piece de resistance of Salalah leisure-time enterprise, providing up to nine hours daily of entertainment from 14:30-23:30 hours. Posties rang extension 219 and the arrival/departure time of Mail planes was relayed to one-and-all, so that collection of inward mails was timed to be about an hour after the scheduled arrival, enabling the Posties to get the mail back to the FPO and get it all sorted – to the benefit of all concerned.

As local radio reception was poor, the Overseas Service of the BBC was re-transmitted over the rediffusion service, backed up with programmes ranging from 'Classical Hour' through the Goon Show and other BBC transcribed show records to a locally produced 'Top Twenty' programme. A favourite venue was the Station Cinema which ran to packed houses four times a week. In earlier years, outdoor sports centred mainly on football fixtures between the various sections on the station and matches against the Sultan's local Army unit, the Dhofar Force. The Sultan, who lived in Salalah, was particularly keen on fostering a spirit of sporting competition between this Unit and those on the RAF station and contributed trophies for the various sporting activities. Volleyball was another popular sport as were basketball and occasional games of softball. During the non-monsoon period, sailing and swimming became available at a small cove some ten miles from the Station (there were three Enterprise dinghies at one time) and fishing was very popular throughout the year. During the monsoon period, due to high seas swimming was confined to an inland lake 25 miles from camp or the station pool.



1977 Aerial view of RAF Salah, entrance gate from the M1 is bottom left



Identified from that 1977 view:

- 1 ATC Tower
- 2 Met Office
- 3 FPO Entrance
- 4 Officers Mess



2011 How Google sees 'RAF Salah' today

Posties in Salah – BFPO 66

<u>NCO i/c</u>	<u>Tour Dates</u>		<u>Seconded by</u>	<u>From</u>	<u>To</u>
	<u>From</u>	<u>To</u>			
Sgt ?					
Sgt Tommy Martin	1967	1967			
Sgt ?					
Sgt ?					
Sgt Gerry Leeks		Feb-69	(One man office)		
Sgt Dave Gladwin	Feb-69	Nov-69	(One man office)		
Sgt Terry Bruce	Nov-69	not long	(One man office)		
Sgt Tony Belcher	1970 ?	Not long	(One man office)		
Sgt Harry Wylie	Jul-70	Feb-71	(One man office)		
Sgt Jim Brady	Feb-71	1971 ?	(One man office)		
Sgt Sammy McNally	?	Oct-71	(One man office)		
Det from 275 PURE Cyprus Cpl Ron (Paddy) Hawthorne	Oct-71	Nov-71			
			Spr ?		71?
S Sgt John Jackett	Nov-71	Aug-72			
			Cpl Mick Herrieven	71?	72
S Sgt John Harwood	Aug-72	Apr-73			
			Cpl ?	?	?
S Sgt Jimmy Craig	Apr-73	Jan-74			

			Cpl Speight	?	?
S Sgt Don Scott	Jan-74	Jun-74			
			Cpl Terry Martin	?	Sep-74
S Sgt Graham Warden	Jun-74	Jan-75			
			Cpl Clive Jones	Sep-74	Mar-75
S Sgt Jack Griffiths	Jan-75	May-75			
			Cpl Roger Brown	Mar-75	?
S Sgt Peter Redfern	May-75	Sep-75			
			Cpl ?	?	?
S Sgt Paul Brooks	Sep-75	Jan-76			
			Cpl Bill Winfield	75	76
S Sgt Ted Jenkinson	Jan-76	May-76			
			Cpl ?	?	?
S Sgt Jim McNicholas	May-76	Dec-76			
			Cpl Bob Barr	?	Feb-77
S Sgt John Douglas	Dec-76	Mar-77			
			Cpl Brian Felks	Feb-77	Jun-77
S Sgt A G "Yacker" Yates	Mar-77	Jul-77			
			Cpl Les Hutchinson	Jun-77	Sep-77
S Sgt Dave Gladwin	Aug-77	Dec-77	Cpl Dave Wrigglesworth	Sep-77	Dec-77

FPO Closed – 22nd Dec 77 Delayed from Nov to support BATT still on site

How did the mails circulate?

Aden = BFPO 69 Bahrain = BFPO 63 Sharjah = BFPO 64. Mails would have circulated under the local Postal control, initially from the UK through Aden – which closed in November 1967, then Bahrain and finally Cyprus – I am grateful for help with FPO staffing information above, not only from those listed above as being stationed there, also from many of the " Gulf Couriers ", who followed the routes mentioned by Graham Warden below.

The closure in Bahrain / Sharjah of 261 PCCU RE in 1971 and to the conclusion of our BFPO service in 1977, via Cyprus – sometimes on the twice weekly " Veg run " but more often direct to Masirah and then local flights, probably by Andover aircraft, to Salalah.



1972 Salalah to Masirah weekly courier visit by John Jackett, coincides with visit by Eddie Stuart (Cyprus Courier), with resident Cpl – Bob Moonie in attendance (photos probably taken by Bruce Reiling)

Photos taken in 1971, and through to 1975, show that PCS control remained with 275 PCCU RE in Cyprus. Posties going to Oman from 1976, had to report to South Cerney for briefing and the closure of both FPOs in 1977 also involved that location, control having now passed to: UK (Sp) PCCU RE. By mid 1975 Peter Redfern instigated the routing of airmails to be by Gulf Air via Muscat, the rundown of RAF Salalah together with the monsoon season offered a mere 3 / 4 weekly flights. Following the March 1977 official closure, RAF direct flights into Salalah became fortnightly, bringing in surface parcels, together with re-supplies of freight and of course medical needs up until the winter of 1978, when the last FST pulled out of the Dhofar region.



1972 parked between the protective barrels, C130 arrives with mail at Salalah – S/Sgt John Jackett

“Postie” Memories –

Dave Gladwin recalls of his first tour:

Let me try and bring you a few things that happened while I was there Feb 69 to Nov 69, I can't remember the exact months. The 6 hole golf course was built by DOE and any other service man. **First man to the moon:** so in the hobbies club we built **UK 69 rocket** out of 50 gall drums and it was placed outside SHQ. The Firemans club was renamed the Wobbly Wheel and I think I'm right in saying the last LSL Sir Bedevere came in, which we unloaded on the maxi float. Medway the SOAF station some 30 miles away was renamed Thumrait, Jet Provost replaced the ageing prop Provost to SOAF. Giro in-paying from NAAFI was done with the BFPO. Later in the year RAF Regiment rock apes were deployed as trouble was brewing in the region, the lookout towers were built along with lots of other safety precautions. In November the Camp was hit by mortar fire. The WO i/c at Bahrain was Joe O`Toole I think he only visited once, that was only to do monthly FF26 check and to see if I had any stamps with no Queens head on. Monthly visit was made by RAF doctor, on his visit he would be taken to Sultan Said bin Taimur at his palace in Salalah, the Sultans son used the FPO quite regularly and I was also able to visit the Palace during this first tour and also when I came back in 1977. I think I was the first Postie to get the Dhofar GSM.

August 1977 when I came back again, to formalise the closure, we were initially going to do that as soon as the major celebrations of the birthday of Sultan Qaboos bin Said was over on 18th November. The Holiday Inn [**now The Crown Plaza**] was home to King Hussein of Jordan - guest of honour, plane loads of UK personnel were flown in, including The Red Arrows and The White Helmets display teams. However our leaving was all delayed to support BATT, the Captain RE was appointed OC and disappeared on a swanee. I retained the certificate, of formally transferring the FPO building and some postage stamps etc over to SOAF on 22nd December 1977. Dave Wigglesworth, the Capt RE and myself flew up to Muscat and then by 1st class on British Airways, arriving Heathrow just before Christmas. Living close to South Cerney, a vehicle arrived over the next few working days and transfer of all FPO “remaining bits” was made.



1977 S/Sgt Dave Gladwin is thanked for his service in Salalah by Sultan Qaboos Bin Said



1977 Dave Gladwin is 3rd from left as the last of the UK & Jordanian REs (in the background)

1977 Nov, farewell tea party with H M The Sultan

John (Joe) Barry REME came to mend the Fire Engine – [taken with his permission, from the Posties website]

Serving or Ex?	Ex REME
What years did you serve?	1966 - 1994
Where did you serve?	All over, including a detachment to RAF Salalah Jan 69 - May 69
What was your favourite posting and why?	RAF Salalah 1969 - No Barber
Please enter your comments?	

Detached to Salalah from 1 Inf Workshop REME Sharjah. Went down there to repair the floor boards of an RAF 10 Tonner. The Station Fire Engine (a landrover) had been damaged by a mine and unable to motor, Its` fire fighting kit was intact so they put it on the back of said 10 tonner. The floorboards in the 10 tonner were rotten - hence my visit - yes they flew me down in an Argosy with floor boards just to fix it! Anyway, the Postie [**Dave Gladwin**] down there was a grand man who went out of his way to look after me, I was one of only 4 soldiers on the station at the tender age of 18. Does anyone know who the postie was at that time? This was early 1969 from Jan through to May (yes I took my time). He may have been Airborne [**yes he was**] - not sure.

Ron "Paddy" Hawthorne recalls that in 1971 on detachment from 275 PCCU RE in Cyprus

I've got a short story of my time in Salalah. I think I had been in camp for a couple of days when the attack alarm went off. I was in the FPO on my own, the Sapper had popped out. I had never been briefed, so did not know what to do to find a shelter. I locked up the FPO and ran blindly looking for somewhere to hide. I spotted what I thought was a shelter so ran towards it, only to find that it was locked. As this was the first attack on the camp since I had arrived, I did not want to run around too much looking for the proper thing, as I did not know how bad it got. So I stayed put till the all-clear was given. On arriving back at the office, my Sapper – name forgotten but a good worker, was waiting to get in. He asked me where had I taken shelter during the attack, I replied that I had sat by a locked door to a shelter about fifty/sixty yards around the back of the office. He laughed his head off and told me that door I had taken shelter by, was the door to the ammunition bunker. I did laugh eventually and I did find out the proper procedures after that – just in case. Happy Days!

John Jackett remembers: from 1971 - 72 :-

Lyneham to Akrotiri and then on to Masirah was a very long flight over 2 days in a Hercules! RAF Sgts Mess etiquette was no different from the Army, their SWO took precedence over the two WO1s of the RE and RA. We enjoyed 3 or 4 film shows a week, **The blue jobs** took great pride in abusing **the brown jobs** for the screening of **Zulu**, we of course had our own back when **Battle of Britain** arrived. With one reel at a time, on only 1 projector, the more reel changes - the more trips to the bar. A 3 ton Bedford RL trundled down to the beach several afternoons a week – particularly on Fridays, complete with armed guard, it made a change from the camp pool.



1975 Camp Pool

Cricket was played on a matted strip, 5 a-side soccer on the tennis courts, so we kept ourselves fit. By invitation of the RE / DOE, we could dine at the Indian Club, fantastic curries are well remembered as a large part of a well enjoyed brown-knees outpost. We were looking forward to the Mess Christmas Draw, the local prevailing winds got up that week and finally subsided that very morning, leaving the outer mess accommodation several inches deep in "Dust" – many hands made light work and a great night was enjoyed by all. **Joe Brown and the bruvvers**, complete with **crumpet backing group**, made a very welcome and brief appearance in May in the big hangar, no aircraft stayed on the ground for very long, between the rows of protective oil barrels. Lt Col [later Brigadier/Controller PCS], **Don London** flew in from Cyprus and carried out an FF 26 check of accounts, he had been my OC at Mill Hill for 3 years back in the 1960s. Being in a permanent black-out state, all roads and paths were lined by white-painted stones to help guide walkers at night, safe transfer from the **Wobbly Wheel** all ranks club, or in our case Sgts Mess over to the Officers Mess can be and was quite tricky, even in the moonlight!!



1975 White stones define the roadway, passing some of the Sgts Mess accommodation

Those departing "next month" were dined out **Maas Salaam** during the previous month, so (along with several others) 8th June '72 was "farewell" for me. The "**Green Archer**" warning siren of possible attack, had been sounding on and off all day, those in the open would find their nearest bunker, those in a brick building, down on the floor against a wall, until the all-clear sounded. Assuming **planters order**, starting traditionally with drinks at the bar, we had just finished our first course of soup – **Green Archer!** Second course – **Green Archer!** Sometime later three mortar rounds crashed very loudly onto the base, accompanied by violent blue/white flashes. As a result of some injured servicemen being reported by the Press upon their repatriation firstly to Cyprus and then UK, RAF Salalah in Dhofar province was admitted by the MOD as being a "**military scene**". With the FST (all RAMC during my tour) occupying the buildings to the side of the Sgts Mess accommodation, the starting of the genny for the cold store, indicated a death in our midst. The Medic lads in the Mess were great company, when something happened - they were on call. "**Yimkin Airways**" were subject to weather vagaries, "**Any planes expected with mail today? Yimkin (Maybe)**", off to the beach for a swim was cancelled when the aircraft was heard from wherever you were, **back to work!**

Graham Warden recalls Posties and Military Units present: Firstly as a Gulf Courier in Bahrain (1970-71), then at Salalah in the summer of 1974 –

Three of us (myself, Tony James & Harry Wylie) flew out together to Bahrain for a 9 month tour and on arrival at 261 PCCU (OC Maj Gratwicke and 2 i/c Capt St Ruth - who was stationed at Sharjah) Tony James learnt that he was going to Masirah and Harry Wylie to Salalah. I used to see them almost fortnightly - myself, Sgt Malcolm Hill and Sgt John Bailey used to share the routes which also included Majunga monthly and Kuwait frequently. Muscat town occasionally. The Bahrain – Sharjah - Masirah - Salalah - Masirah - Bahrain courier schedule was twice weekly, Tuesdays and Thursdays.

The reason I recall travelling with Tony & Harry was that, although I was the senior Sgt by at least 10 months, Maj Dunkeld on our farewell interview (I staged at HPCCD from BAOR) took exception to the jacket I was wearing. A lightweight three colour (American brand) three quarter check jacket with a zip up the front. He said to me haven't you got a proper jacket (the other two were dressed in suits!!) I replied I thought this was suitable for flying in and he replied, he decided what was suitable, looked at Tony James and said you are I/C Party. All of us had a good laugh about as we left the building!!!!!! I just about recall Sam McNally arriving in Bahrain as I was due to depart for BAOR where I met with Tony & Harry again.

Sultan Said bin Taimur was exiled to BRIGHTON after the rebels came into Salalah town and captured the palace and he flew with his entourage on a RAF Britannia from Masirah to UK, after arriving at Masirah from Salalah on an Argosy. I was a courier at Masirah [July 1970] when the incident took place (from Bahrain). There were often incidents at Salalah during 1970/71. His son Qaboos bin Said took over as Sultan, he had previously served as a Major in **The Cameronians**.

In 1974 the RE Det, was known as DOE Salalah with an RE Major (?), 2 S/Sgts and five or six L/Cpls and Sprs. The DOE also had a large Indian civilian artisan contingent of approx 100. The RA unit was a Det of 94 Locating Regt RA (from Celle) with a Maj Det Cmdr, a WO2, four or five S/Sgts & Sgts etc. SOAF had increased its helicopter flight to include Bell Hueys; quite a number as I can recall; the jets were Hawk trainers converted to operational role. (Similar to those that the Red Arrows used then). The RAF Helicopter flight was there with 4 Sgts and a WO plus officer pilots.



1974 FPO Salalah – S/Sgt Jack Griffiths and a local. RAF Station PR photo

Jack Griffiths reminisces – Salalah 1975:

I arrived in Salalah in mid Jan 1975 flying in via Cyprus and Masirah. At Masirah the usual RAF proficiency prevailed. Coach at bottom of exit steps organised and shepherded by a number of Snowdrops moved to movement control etc. On arrival at Salalah had to rummage round in the hold of the Hercules to find my case and then bum a lift off the aircraft pan to camp!! This was Salalah with a very much laid back attitude but still with the underlying self discipline which made it a different but enjoyable experience.



1975 Capt John Nicholls 2i/c 275 PCCU RE Audits FPO Salalah accounts (with armed escort)



1975 Another Audit – this one by Maj Ron Jackson, OC 275 PCCU RE

At this time we were a Det of 275 PCCU RE at Cyprus and had a visit once a month or so from an officer of the unit to audit the books. I took over from Graham Warden and 'inherited' Clive Jones as my Cpl, a great character and a joy to serve with.



1975 FPO Salalah – Cpl Clive Jones (600)

Every day life was very much dictated by incoming flights for mail etc, there seemed to be no formal pattern and when word went out, usually Radio 219 'flight incoming' everybody required (including a postie) rounded up transport and went out to meet it and did what was necessary to sort and distribute the mail straight away, no matter what time!

The RAF was predominant on the base, the leader being a Wing Commander Gilliat who was my boss in Salalah and very much a gentleman. There was a Det of 94 Loc Regt RA commanded by a Major who also liked to think he was my boss! Also the RAF Regt who manned the Hedgehogs. A small group of RE's led by a Clerk of Works WO2 and a few NCO's acted as a DOE unit and employed quite a number of Indian civilian labour and looked after the infrastructure of the base and all the energy facilities etc (including the important swimming pool). Down the road in UAG (Camp) was based the SAS contingent; also before I forget one of the most important units 55 FST RAMC. This unit was positioned just behind

my Twyneham living accommodation and could get very busy with helicopters if there was a push up in the Jebel.



1975 FST Incomers for medical treatment



1975 Hedgehog defence position

There were also various civilian elements, Taylor Woodrow and Airworks who looked after the SOAF aircraft. Also down the road from the camp was the Dhofar Brigade with its Desert Regt etc who conducted the campaign against the Adoo (enemy)

During my time there 94 Loc Regt RA was withdrawn and went back to Celle in Germany. It was at this time that I procured a set of wheels for the postal unit. I was good friends with the QM of 94 Regt and as their vehicles were going to be desert dumped, I demanded a 'Gizit' a form of recognised trading of goods in Salalah. I got the Land Rover albeit a bit battered, the RE lads serviced it and supplied the fuel and the post office bike was redundant. No more waiting for a lift out to the aircraft pan!



1975 The 'Posties Bike' is ditched for some proper Postie transport

The RAF Regt was also withdrawn. This was replaced (I say that loosely) by a contingent of the Iranian Army. At that time the Shah was in power and everything they had was of American military origin and we thought the yanks had invaded. Among other things they took over camp perimeter security and it was not healthy to be loitering near the perimeter fence after dark! The RA Regt procedure, after having a contact on the Thermal Radar system was to put up a Paralume and see what's out there, normally a dog or camel. The Iranians would put out 2 or 3 mortar rounds and then see what they had got in the morning!!

I also saw the arrival of the first Hawker Hunter Jets given as a gift from the King of Jordan. I think these were initially flown by Jordanian pilots and then by SOAF. On the whole, camp life in Salalah was pretty good, a very good social life in the mess and Wobbly Wheel Club. As the only other REs on the base beside the DOE contingent, we were granted membership of the Indian Club. If you were into curry this membership was invaluable and a curry in their mess hall was a great way to start the weekend. If we had a visiting officer from 275, for the price of a bottle of whisky, a curry would be laid on for several people. My tour of duty was only for four months (the new period of a tour) but the RAF was still doing nine which didn't go down too well when somebody already there, could still be there when I left!! Then again, Germany to the RAF was still an overseas tour so you cannot have it both ways. I left Salalah in May 75 and look back on this 'experience' as one not to be missed and still talk about it today.

Near closure – John Douglas was there as the RAF departed –

Having been a Gulf courier through Salalah weekly back in the 1960s from 261, then Chief Clerk of 275 at Cyprus earlier in the 70s, I finally arrived in January 1977 to actually do my tour. It was very evident that the RAF were soon to depart. The Mess dining out evening in March concluded with the erection of the **Sgts Mess headstone**, which Brian has a photo of.



1977 March RIP Sgts Mess

An amusing moment occurred when some old rifles disappeared from the Mess walls, we were asked if any suspicious parcels had been handed in, we surrendered the same and they were once more put on display, all kept "within house" but an RAOC Sgt was never left alone again with brown paper and string! To keep the accommodation for a few more months, all the remaining Cpls were offered rooms, a most unusual event. **Cash to bank** became a chore, transfer now to the RE Field Sqn, thank goodness that we still had some independent transport.

I also recall a visit from a very large and hairy Camel Spider, somehow it got into my room, the FST captured and then preserved it. I always made sure I had something rolled up, to close the gap at the bottom of my door, after that little scare!!

Brian Felks also recalls :-

I still have my invitation dated 10th March 1977, to farewell drinks and buffet etc held at the Taylor-Woodrow recreation centre to formally declare the closure of RAF Salalah. The camp became a Sultan of Oman Air Force (SOAF) base.



1977 March – Farewell to the 'Blue Jobs'

It was a bit of a tear jerker watching the last RAF Personnel leaving and the Hercules doing a low level fly past. The only regulars left behind were 2 Posties, 2 RAOC Butchers and the RAF FST. There was also half a Sqn of REs a couple of miles down the road. All the other non Omanis were either seconded on twice our pay, or contract soldiers (mercenaries) who were on four times our pay. Although a ceasefire had been implemented, a couple of daily unclassified sitreps that I retained dated June 1977, indicate regular skirmishes. With a distribution to 35 addressees, amongst them: 11 Fd Sqn RE, Bde Wksp, UAG Hosp, 55 FST, BATT (SAS of course), indicates that a wide military presence beyond SOAF, remained there. The second of these on the 9th June, noted 3 minor casualties and small arms damage of vehicles during the previous night.



1972 At ease around the Sgts Mess areas



1972 Joe Brown & the Brothers bring some crumpet to Salah
NOTE: Airmail despatch ready to load



RAF Masirah plaque



SOAF GSM (Dhofar) as issued locally in Salah



SOAH Salah 1975



1972 Shopping trip into Salah town, John Jackett RE with David Barrow RAMC



1972 Sgts Mess BBQ at Salah
Roger Hicks (radiographer), John Jackett, Gerry (Radar) Farrell (OTT Tech) and David Barrow (Lab Tech – RAMC FST staff)