

## The Arab Police Mutiny – ADEN 1967

We don't hear very much about the small actions British troops have been involved with post WWII. These were often related to 'Policing' operations, intended to keep the peace but for whatever reason, the poor old Tommy was stuck at the wrong end of a quarrel, about which he knew little, and received no thanks from the local population. Quite often British soldiers were killed or behaved courageously, politicians had no moral courage and the British public knew nothing in any detail and probably didn't want to.

This story comes from the website **Britain's Small Wars – The Preservation of British Military History**. One of many stories of forgotten bravery which deserves to be known.



The South Arabian Army (SAA) had come into existence with the combining of the Federal Army and the Federal Guard. The SAA numbered about 15,000 troops with its own artillery, armour and engineers. It had been commanded by British officers up until 1967 when, because of the imminent British withdrawal, Arab officers replaced the British officers. Within the ranks of the SAA there were large elements of FLOSY and NLF supporters. During 1967 the British Government was not entirely sure where the SAA

loyalties lay.

In June of 1967 Nasser's Egyptian Army took a terrible beating from the Israeli Army during the Six Day War. This Arab defeat strained relations between the Arabs and the British in Aden because the Arabs thought that Britain, along with the United States, had aided Israel. The United States certainly had aided Israel.

The Aden Mutiny began on the night of the 19th of June 1967. Men of The Royal Northumberland Fusiliers were enjoying the film "The Battle of the Bulge" at the cinema when shots were heard. The Fusiliers immediately returned to their barracks at Waterloo Lines and deployed to guard the married quarters. Next morning Arab soldiers based at Lake Lines mutinied and burnt down their barracks.

This mutiny had started because three Arab colonels had been suspended and also because of tribal rivalries within the SAA. The fire was quickly put out and the colonels reinstated but trouble quickly spread to Champion Lines. Arab soldiers broke into the armoury and started fighting each other in tribal groups. Discipline broke down completely and the Arab and British SAA officers locked themselves in the camp guardroom. The Arabs then started firing randomly into the nearby Waterloo Lines where British troops were billeted.

At 9.00am a three-ton truck containing men of 60 Sqn, was returning to Normandy Lines. These troops had just completed weapons training on the local ranges. As the lorry passed the SAA camp they came under heavy machine gun fire from the SAA troops. Eight of the Royal Corps of Transport were killed in this unprovoked attack.

The chaplain of the 1st Battalion Lancashire Regiment, Reverend Robin Roe, on hearing the gunfire left Radfan Camp to find out what was happening. On the road outside the SAA camp, he found a British



army lorry on fire with British bodies scattered around it. Although under heavy fire Reverend Roe bravely helped the wounded survivors back to Radfan Camp. For his brave action in saving the wounded, Reverend Roe was awarded the Military Cross. The SAA now directed their fire into Radfan Camp killing a British officer, 2nd Lieutenant Young of the 1st Battalion Lancashire Regiment. Also, two policemen and a public works employee were killed.

The 1st Battalion Lancashire had two other casualties during their tour of Aden. Rod Blenkarn was an NCO from Recce pltn in the turret of a Ferret scout car when a sniper squeezed a round through the open flap Blenkarn was peering out of. Charlie Roberts was fatally wounded by a grenade whilst on a foot patrol.

C Company the 1st Battalion King's Own Royal Border Regiment under the command of Major David Miller was ordered to put down the mutiny using minimum force. C Company set off for Champion Lines accompanied by a troop of the Queens Dragoon Guards in support. As the first British truck entered Champion Lines it came under machine gun fire. One British soldier was killed and 8 wounded. The British NCOs ordered their troops to keep their cool. Even though they could see the bodies of British soldiers lying on the ground, they remained calm. Major Miller sent 10 Platoon to release the officers still hiding in the guardroom.

The officers were rescued without any bloodshed. The Arab soldiers were still taking pot shots at the British as they tried to evacuate the wounded. Cpl. Vickers RCT and Pte. Dickerson of the Kings Own both braved the sniper fire to drive the wounded men back to Radfan Lines. Both Cpl. Vickers and Pte. Dickerson were awarded Mention in Despatches C Company started to advance through Champion Lines disarming the Arab soldiers as they went. No shots were fired and no Arabs killed. The British soldiers kept their heads, their discipline, as well as their courage and won the 1st Battalion King's Own Royal Border Regiment a new battle honour to add to the Regimental flag, "Champion Lines". Major Miller received the Military Cross for his control of the situation on the day.



While all this was taking place around Champion Lines, the Arab Police in the police barracks in Crater started to get nervous. On hearing the shooting, the police thinking that the British would be out for revenge emptied their armoury and took to the roofs of the surrounding buildings of the Police Barracks next to the Queen Arwa Road.

At 11 O'clock a "State Red" warning was given to the Royal Northumberland Fusiliers who were keeping the peace in Crater. Major Moncur, who was commanding Y Company of the Fusiliers, sent Lieutenant John Davis and his section into Crater in an armoured personnel carrier (a Pig) Davis moved through Crater but noted nothing unusual. Davis returned and reported back to Major Moncur. Shortly afterwards, Davis's section went back into Crater. This time they noticed that the Arabs in Crater had erected some small roadblocks. As the patrol headed towards the Arab Police barracks they saw that some buses had been parked across the Queen Arwa road as a roadblock. Davis and three members of his patrol, including his radio operator, dismounted from the Pig. As soon as the four men left the vehicle they came under heavy fire. Davis



ordered the Pig driver to return back Main Pass. The Pig drove off without Davis and the three other men. This was the last anyone ever saw of these four brave men.

Davis had been unable to inform Major Moncur that he was under fire, because his radio operator had left the Pig with him and most likely been killed shortly after the firing started. Moncur was concerned about Davis's patrol, as he had not heard from them since they entered Crater. On hearing the shots and fearing that Davis was in trouble, Moncur and his escort, Sgt. Maj. Pete Hoare, Fusilier Hoult and Fusilier John Story and two others, jumped into the Majors Land Rover and headed in to Crater up the Queen Arwa road. Major Bryan Malcolm, OC "D" Company of the Argylls, along with Pte. Moores and Hunter followed close behind in another Land Rover. The two Land Rovers drove up the Queen Arwa Road not realizing they were driving into a treacherous ambush.



As the two Land Rovers drove past the Arab Police Barracks, the trap was sprung. Without warning the police opened fire with a well-planned murderous cross fire. The Land Rovers pulled up and those men who had not already been hit leapt out to fire back. But there was no cover for them and the massacre was soon over. Only one British soldier managed to survive. Fusilier John Storey managed to race across the road to the cover of the flats opposite the Police Barracks without being hit. As he looked back, he saw that all the others had been killed apart from one soldier, who was still firing at the Police. Fusilier Storey watched with horror, as the last soldier was machine-gunned down. Later, Storey was unable to identify this man.

Storey got on to the top of the flats and started firing at the Police positions before he had to take cover. He burst into one of the Arab flats and held the occupants at gunpoint for three hours until the Arab Police captured him. He was about to be shot when a senior Arab Police officer ordered his men not to kill him. Storey was tied up and placed in the back of a truck, which he found to his horror, contained the burnt bodies of his dead comrades. He was later released unharmed.



On hearing the shooting 2nd Lt. John Shaw of the Royal Northumberland Fusiliers volunteered to take his patrol into Crater to see if Major Moncur needed support. His patrol moved into Crater traveling in a Pig supported by two armoured cars, a Saladin and a Ferret of the Queens Dragoon Guards. When Shaw and his patrol arrived at the scene of the ambush, they found the two burning Land Rovers with eight bodies littering the road. The Police now opened fire on the Pig and the armoured cars. The fire was so intense that the paint started to flake off the armour inside of the Pig. The men in the Pig returned fire until their ammunition was expended and the tires of the Pig blown out by gun fire.

The Saladin commander radioed for permission to fire his 76 mm gun at the building, but Brigade HQ refused permission. He was told he could only fire his machine gun. Fearing the possibility of being hit with an anti-tank weapon the Saladin had to withdraw along with the Pig and Ferret.

Throughout the day more attempts were made to advance through a hail of police fire on the Police Barracks. Each time permission to use heavy weapons was refused by Brigade. A Sioux helicopter was sent to place some Fusiliers on an OP above Crater. The helicopter was brought down by Police fire but none of the crew or soldiers were killed in the resulting crash.

By the end of the day 22 British soldiers lay dead and Crater was in the hands of an estimated 500-armed Arab terrorists and the Arab Police.

Col. Blenkinsop of the Northumberland Fusiliers and Col. Mitchell of the Argyll Sutherland Highlanders went in person to the Brigade HQ to gain permission to re-enter Crater in a combined attack with both battalions and "sort them out." Them being the Arab Police. Brigade refused permission. The decision had been made to seal off Crater and not engage the Police. All exits to Crater were closed and guarded while 45 Commando took up positions on the high ground surrounding Crater. The Royal Northumberland Fusiliers took up positions on Inception Hill above Marine Drive. The following day Cpl. Terry Beal of 9 Plat Y company was wounded in the head by an unknown sniper inside Crater. The bullet hit Cpl Beal just above his right eye. Although few people would have survived this horrendous injury, Cpl Beal was flown back to England and made a remarkable recovery.

*Below, A memorial in Newcastle to men from the area killed in this action.*

