

UNEF 1

DIARY 1965 –1966

EGYPT/GAZA STRIP / LEBANON



by
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“It is hot and seems like the land of Genesis before the earth had cooled or life was created”

Capt J.A.Swetham 2 Jan 59 Directorate of Heritage and History Canada Report #78



We hit the coast of the Sinai and the blue sea turned immediately into featureless light brown sand – as far as eye could see. There, in the port window of the North Star, as if planted there by a Hollywood producer, was a Bedouin on a camel carrying of course his old Enfield rifle. The pilot must be a good navigator as we heard almost immediately the undercarriage going down and locking. We landed and taxied to the end of the runway where there were several white vehicles – but no buildings! The doors of North Star were opened and we were greeted by a blast of hot air – as if you had opened an oven door. Then the next we heard were the Arab workers yelling at each other opposing instructions on how to get the rickety ramp up to the opening of the plane!

Tired , disoriented and not hit with the heat - we three stumbled down the steps.

“Welcome to UNEF Pinky” one of the tanned Khaki clad figures yelled at the bottom of the ramp!

We had arrived at El Arish airport - our one-year UNEF peace peacekeeping in Egypt had begun.

Chapter 1 The HULL ARMOURIES Hull Quebec & Peacekeeping Training



I was informed I was to be posted to UNEF for a year unaccompanied two weeks before I was married- **12 December 1964**. I asked my boss in Oakville – I was working as CO of Army Recruiting Unit in Toronto – for a 6-month deferral so I could get marriage at least started. This request was turned down. I decided then I would get out of military when I got back from my tour –I would “*do my duty*” – and then get out. I made two conditions to myself :

- that I would get to be Major
- -I would get selected for Staff College –

and THEN get out of Military. Never again would I leave my wife at a train station or airport for a year. This resolution I kept. The WW2 mentality had not left the Canadian military – I had not seen my father when he was posted overseas from 1939 until 1945 – age 1 year to 8 years old- no father - too long – my *formative years* I grew up minus father.

We had minimum training really for the Middle East and the Israeli- Arab conflict. I was sent in February from Toronto to Ottawa for two day “ *UNEF Familiarization Training*.”

The course was held at a back room at the Hull Armory in a small room with no course material. The Course was given more or less “ad lib” by two returned officers from UNEF Peacekeeping and consisted of mostly *pidgin Arabic* training and their “war stories.” They told us hair-raising war stories. Heat of 120 F/40 C /continual dysentery / shaking scorpions out of shoes before putting the shoes on in the morning.

They had great fun dressing up as Arabs -and using the 10 to 15 words they had learned in Egypt. They had dressed up in full Arab clothes and were outdoing each other with their tales of conquest and travels

This Course also introduced me to the Canadian Army way of treating soldiers –both their officers and men .We were put up at a one star hotel more noted for its bar than its rooms! The Canadian army put my new wife and I up at the cheapest hotel in Ottawa on Bank Street at Gilmour – the Alexandria - right above the bar.!!- Boy was it noisy!! We moved to the Lord Elgin Hotel and I paid the difference out of my own pocket.

.This was the most valuable lesson –it introduced me to the attitude – rather “frugal” of the Military and either buy it yourself or scrounge the material. At this we became experts!

Then back to Toronto to wait for my “*embarkation*”.

I left Jan at the railroad station in Toronto’s Union station. They actually still had a very bored looking Movement Control Officer at the Union station- a “hold over” from WW2 troop trains- .He made a guest appearance and left- his day done.

I took train to Trenton and of course “the Military” sent me to Trenton 2 days **before** the Yukon airplane was to leave for Marville France. I sat around the Mess and phoned Jan a couple of times. The RCAF Mess in Trenton had everything – a salad bar –great food – fresh fruit – current magazines and newspapers from across Canada. I was already wondering why I had not joined the Air force and why the Army!

Postscript

In El Arish the North Star aircraft would land with the rejects of magazines and newspapers from Base Trenton – these weeks old magazines and newspapers were our only source of news from Canada. Some kind soul gathered them up in a box and put “115ATU El Arish on box” We always got them – bless his or her soul.

Observations

A year away from” kith and kin “is too long for a soldier if he is to keep a family OR have for sure trouble adjusting back into family upon return. We had NO counseling either before or after- no such thing as “post traumatic stress syndrome” :>)

A Canadian military overseas Peacekeeping “tour” was for a whole year- now a tour is defined by the Canadian military as 6 months. I spent from 4 March 1965 to end of June 1966 – 2 ½ tours – rounded out to a metal number “3” tours on my campaign badge or ribbon of UNEF I. A year is too long for a single or married man to be away from his or her family in peacetime – wartime is a different matter.

The military soldier needs training on the country they are going to – customs/culture/history/context of their mission when abroad. The Canadians had been in Egypt from 1957-8 years - so really – by the time I went which was 1965 the Canadian military had time to get a thorough indoctrination course together. This was not the case.

From 11 March 1965 embarkation to 14 June 1966 return to Canada and two months of “disembarkation leave” – what they call now “post traumatic stress syndrome” which was unheard of in our day – we received not one day of counseling coming back from the Tour - and not one hour of debriefing by Intelligence or Security.

I had seen a “not so famous then” Yassar Arafat every second day on the Caribou flight from Beirut to Gaza and him coming back again- I knew every henchman of the PLO by face if not by name – as I lived at the Beirut airport every day – seven days a week. What I saw and what they told re in candor would have ‘melted their Canadian Army boots” – who cared then about a bunch of Arabs traveling as ragged UNWRA refugees to Gaza and back to Beirut – no one in those days!

Chapter 2 TRENTON CANADA to MARVILLE FRANCE - “Embarkation”

I had been ordered to take a self-addressed box with me for my Army forage cap to mail back to Toronto – why we were not issued a blue beret then is beyond me- as we would be issued blue berets and a blue scarf in Trenton. I never wore my blue scarf my whole 18/19 months away – and the Canadian blue beret we were told to wear to Egypt where we would be issued with a real “Kangor” beret – a beauty that fitted perfectly. The Canadian beret was an abomination of a beret – thick – hung down over your ears to my collar! We ditched that soon as we got our *Kangor* berets. We called the Canadian berets “cow plops” :>)

The beautiful Kangor beret came with a metal UN badge – we never wore a cloth badge on our beret ever.

Finally we embarked for Marville France/Pisa/El Arish Egypt on 11 March 1965. We flew on a Yukon aircraft Trenton to Marville – really a Bristol Britannia aircraft – very comfortable and professionally done by the RCAF. Service and amenities as good as any airline. Then overnight and we boarded a North Star shuttle run to Egypt via Pisa.

Marville was a first class base – the PX was excellent – and the amenities such as swimming pool and gym and other facilities excellent. The French Government were not too happy with the Canadians at this time – after all – the Canadians were in Egypt after their botched effort with British and Israelis when the three attacked Egypt and captured the Suez Canal. They would have stayed – all three – but the Americans told them to get out! So the French were in the process of getting Canada out of Marville – and of getting France out of NATO!

Then Lester B Pearson came up with his Peacekeeping idea and won a Nobel Prize. The North Star, which was to take us to El Arish on the tail, had a slot – just as we were to take off for Pisa/El Arish a UN metal decal was slipped in – it stayed on the tail all the way!

Two memories of Marville France – my shower in my room where French plumber had put red on cold water and green on hot water nob – very funny. And the French would not let us put “UN” on any Canadian aircraft so the North Star had a UN metal plate that was slid in on the tail just before we took off.

The North Star had noisy Merlin Engines on a DC- 6 aircraft body. There has never been a noisier plane – and it shook /vibrated from the power. We- all 6 passengers and a couple of tons of cargo rattled and shook our way to Pisa Italy over the Alps where we got a terrific welcome from the RCASC Movement Control Officer there – he took great pains to take us to hotel/to the market and to the Leaning Tower of Pisa

I remember the Italian hotel and the last bath I was to have for a year and a half. The bathtub you sat in-it was shaped like a chair with a seat with your feet two feet below

you sat on your bum in the bath and the water covered you up to your chest – very comfortable. Like a comfortable chair in hot water! Then supper at the hotel was the absolute worst spaghetti I have ever tasted! Odd??

We were completely deaf and disoriented when we got off the North Star in Pisa – and completely “not with it” when we arrived in Egypt. We were told to wear “winter serge.” “over there.” – see picture below!



Observation:

Make sure your troops arrive in condition to function or if need be fight at destination.

Why am I dressed in winter uniform when I am being sent to the desert??

We arrived in El Arish completely stressed out and tired and morally and physically depressed. We were sent on the noisiest plane that ever flew as a passenger plane- the North Star – from Marville to El Arish Egypt – it was really a cargo plane with us “replacements” in canvas and aluminum bar bucket seats. If you are sending troops to a foreign assignment it is not a good way to send them steerage class – these troops will arrive already” in the hole” emotionally and physically to begin a difficult assignment .Add to that the culture shock of most third world countries. The unplanned stop over in Pisa saved us from arriving completely” bagged. “





Me on right shouting to someone I was traveling with –we eventually played cards on pile of stores right front of picture- cards even vibrated off “table”

Chapter 3 Arrival in Egypt

Next day – the big day –off to Egypt via Athens. We were thoroughly deaf by now and rattled in more ways than one. Good psychological way by military to prepare us for El Arish airport! The North Star had Rolls Royce Merlins in a DC- 6 frame. And were the engines noisy. Air Canada tried the North Star for a while – but the pilot had to hand a card around to all the passengers because nothing could be heard over the internal PA system

We arrived over coast of Egypt not 10 miles west of airport –good navigating. I looked out of the window and there was a scene from Lawrence of Arabia. *So help me* there was sand as far as you could see and an Arab on a camel in the middle of this wasteland.

The door opened and a blast of heat and noise hit us- as the Arab workmen yelled at each other to push the steps up to the side of the airplane. And flies came in- flies everywhere – and flies were not to leave me for my entire tour. Never got used to them landing on your face. And the smell – and heat – 120 F was the norm at the end of the runway.

We parked the North Star at the far end of the hangar which at the time appeared odd – more of the reason why explained later.





Old pictures of El Arish airport – about 10 miles inland from our “residential “ Camp called Marina

Welcome to Egypt –my new home to serve peace and Canada for a year-or so I thought.

Captain Bob Emberley a RCASC Captain and the one I was to replace was needless to say “happy to see me” I was called immediately “*Pinkey*”. (Pink because that was to be the colour of our skin with our first sunburn on our lower arms and faces.) There was a bored looking Egyptian Immigration Officer at the bottom of the ramp – supposedly Bob told me Egyptian Immigrations Officer main job was to check for Jewish names on manifest – but I doubt he could even read English). Bob Emberley told me he was not supposed to come on board the North star as it was technically United Nations and therefore neutral turf.

This was my first introduction “ real life “ up close to the Egyptian – Israeli problem –or the Arab – Israeli problem or the Palestinian – Israeli problem. All had different agendas I was to find. And we – Canada – were not so good either –here is me a couple of days after I arrived. Notice no tan, the Canadian Bush hat, which kept the sun off my eyes –but NOT the bottom of my face or my neck. I am also wearing a NATO red and black armband –saying “movement control”. The only problem was most of our peace keeper fellow Countries did NOT belong to NATO- how stupid to have me wear this (I did for 2 days – then ditched it) Finland/Indonesia/Yugoslavia /Sweden /Brazil to name some – did NOT belong to NATO !!



Picture – at least I am out of my winter uniform – and I have on a pair of Canadian “bush” pants- a Canadian “bush” hat and a hot heavy Canadian shirt-soon to be traded for Indian Army loosely woven shirt and Indian army loosely woven pants.I also will be wearing either sandals or “desert boots” made by locals overnight –in next photos!

Chapter 4 Peacekeepers and El Arish

We drove into RCAF 115 ATU Squadron Marina the Quarters . The living quarters were by the sea about 15 kilometers from the UN and Egyptian shared Airport.

The UN side of the airport was guarded by a lonely group of Indian Army – a platoon of soldiers. Yugoslav soldiers guarded the Marina Camp – the Yugo's had a large camp one mile east down the road from Marina. Both the Indian soldiers and the Yugos impressed me – they were business like and well trained.

Both the airport and the camp Marina-plus the highway and railroad - had been built by the British – probably WW2 but rumour had it both had been started WW1 – who will ever know. The UN had taken them over and – at Marina anyway –painted UNEF in blue lettering on white background on the roof.

We passed a dead donkey on the road on the way in – a week later the same donkey was there –welcome to Egypt!

Observations

More on training before you enter a foreign country and culture and “culture shock”

And we, as 25-year-old “peacekeepers” had been thrown into this complicated situation. The Arabs and Jews had been fighting since 1949 – we were – as Canadians – “babes in the woods”. We – the Canadian peacekeepers nor for that matter Canada understood the Middle East . We should have learned in Cyprus that there is a difference between peacekeeping and peacemaking. The first cardinal rule of peacekeeping is that the people in the country you are in have to “want you there” and “not as occupiers”. In Cyprus I believe from what I saw the Turks and the Greeks wanted us there. In Sinai and Egypt the Egyptians wanted us there – Israel did NOT.

Know the country you are going into – the history –the culture – the tribes – the religion and its rules and divisions/sects.

Also my generation was the generation of idealism –Lester Pearson and his UN Peace Prize – Kennedy and his “Peace Corps” – full of idealism and “we could make a difference’ If we did ,only history will judge .Or did I waste 18 months??

Chapter 5 El Arish Air base and El Arish Camp (called Marina)



Picture is taken outside of Marina Camp gate – Yugoslav Guard can be made out to the right centre of picture.

The airbase was about 15 kilometers from where we stayed.-Marina Why? – Who knows? El Arish was also about 30 miles from Rafah. I got to know the route well as I went from El Arish to Rafah every Friday to play poker with my army RCASC friends at 56 Tpt Company in Rafah – the highway was good having been built by British WW2.

The Egyptians occupied part of the El Arish Airbase and the UN another. Actually quite simple – they occupied one runway and we – the UN occupied another. Since the two runways were in the shape of an **X** we were at the end of one **X** and they were at the end of the other **X**.

All well and good – except they had the “good “ runway- the one built by the British god knows when – WW1 ? and we had the new runway – built by the Egyptians and not exactly up to standard. A visiting Yugoslav airplane had a tire go right through the runway while taxiing –so you can imagine how much base and asphalt they had put on “our “ runway.

So the North Star could NOT be parked at the UN part of the airport – but had to be parked overnight at the British made end of the tarmac or runway – about a mile from the small UN building and hangar. At night when the North Star was “over knighting” the plane had to be guarded by the Indian soldiers. I learned to take them out at night – usually a squad of them – and explain to NCO or officer each time – once a week – what had to be done. Guard the plane from “Break and enter” !! – the Egyptians had broken in a week before I arrived and ransacked the unguarded plane. The Egyptian police had hired a Bedouin to follow the tracks of the thief and had followed his tracks for miles till he lost them in the town of El Arish saw this tracker – he could distinguish even camel tracks from the imprint – quite incredible in sand and hard packed small rocks – but they could do it well. I learned the Bedouin or Bedu were incredible workers and intelligent – much better workers than the local Egyptians.

Observation

One learned quickly the local customs and traditions and habitat and “creatures”

I was sitting in the common latrine of stall after stall to “go to the bathroom”. I saw a Crab like creature go scurrying by my feet –I jumped on the toilet- I had not been taught the difference between a harmless land crab which were everywhere and a scorpion.

I had not been taught to shake out my shoes or desert boots to ensure a scorpion or poisonous snake had not curled up in the warmth for the night! The snakes were called the ‘three step” snake – after you were bitten- three steps and you were dead.

Don’t try to “go native” or be one of them or you will be ridiculed. But understand their ways – sometimes a bit of a culture shock – but they won’t change so you might as well adapt. We wore Canadian blue bush hats and blue berets – absolutely useless in the hot sun and sun that burns all your face. A brim merely covers the eyes from the sun. We needed the Australian Akubra wide brimmed hat –or the Arabic cloth table cloth hat with the camel hobble which is what the cord is that keeps it on.

We quickly traded our Canadian bush pants and shirt with the Indian Army – they had loose woven long pants and shirts and were 100 % cooler. Adapt to local conditions. We got comfortable in dress quickly.



Chapter 6 Rafah

Rafah or Camp Rafah was, in 1965 –66 the main hub of the UNEF 1 Operations for the Peacekeeping efforts for the Canadians. There were all elements of the Canadian Army represented here – RCAC – the Recce squadron /RCEME/RCASC both supply and logistics/RCAMC /Cpro C the Provost Corps – even the Postal Corps /Dental Corps and the Chaplaincy corps. What must the Moslems have thought when we put up two identical churches side by side in Rafah – one Catholic and the other Protestant! The Church bells were supplied by discarded bells from two steam train engines – a generous gift – and I wonder if they are still in Rafah „,or where these train bells ended up?

A double fence of the Danor Battalion –a combined battalion of Danish and Norwegians, guarded the Camp. The Danors were complete with police dogs. The Egyptians still got in regularly and stole whatever was not nailed down regularly – how? –Who knows.





Amazing what a rain fall will do- sand with water 7 all of a sudden blossoms – lasts about a week-then back to sand!!





For the first five days I was to stay in Rafah before relieving Bob Emberley as Movement Control Officer in El Arish. I was put on a cot in the “living room” as I was a transient in the RCASC Officers Quarters – called Playtime Villa – Playtime was the radio code for RCASC. (Someone has bizarre sense of humour)

All I got in Rafah was bed bugs and an invitation to play poker every Friday- which I took up.



I was not accepted, as I was not to be part of RCASC Rafah contingent – but had a 5-day insight how they lived and survived. I was to move “down to road” to join 115 Air Transport Unit as their Movement Control Officer – and was totally accepted as part of the Unit –the only one of the 11 officers in RCAF Officers Mess not a pilot. The RCAF really was independent in Egypt and certainly cooperated with but did not report to the Army military.

Note : When the UNEF was originally formed Ottawa designated the RCAF unit as an autonomous unit not reporting to the Canadian Commander at Rafah.ⁱ

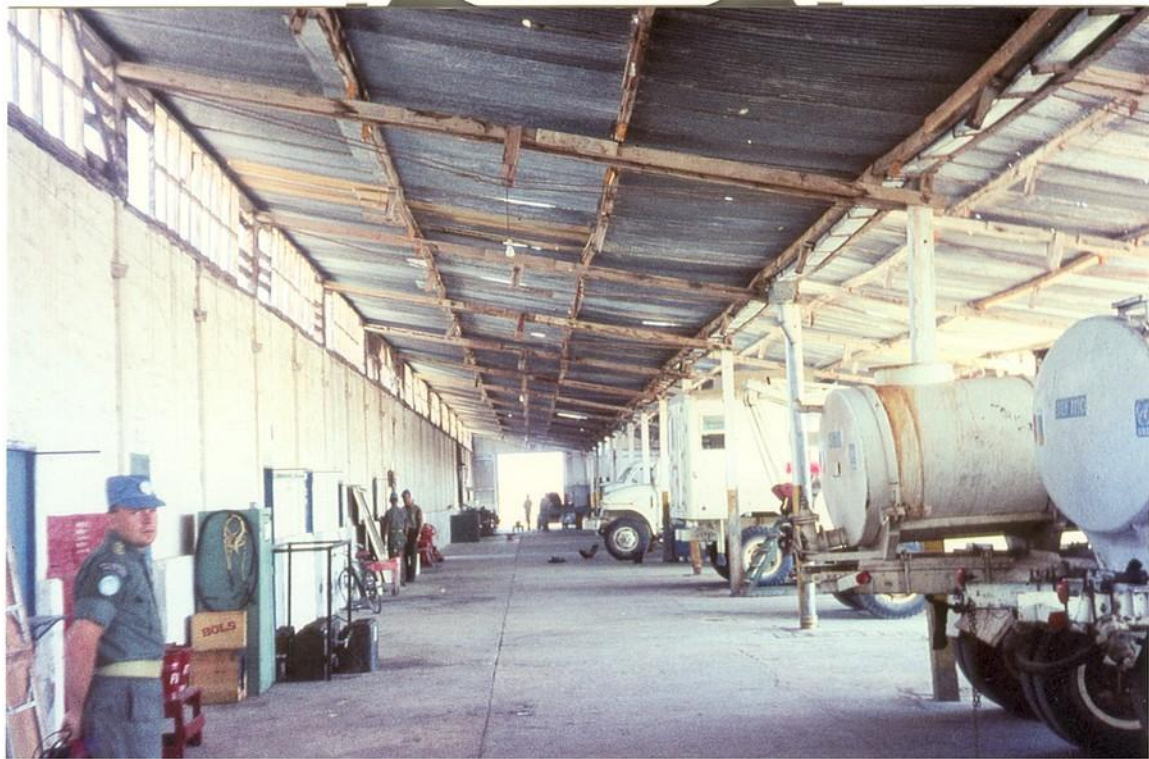
I saw their compound filled with 8 different kinds or types of vehicles – I was told there were 14 kinds!



and did not envy the mechanics: English Bedford's /U.S. Dodge trucks/ French Citroens/ Canadian 2 ½ ton trucks and so on.

The British and French vehicles had been purchased from the “invading English and French Armies when they invaded the Canal and Egypt and started this whole mess with the Israelis- the reason the UNEF was sent in to Egypt!

The Bedford's and Citroens were purchased from England and French and painted white and driven from Port Said to Rafah (it was cheaper for English and French to sell to UN then to reload them in ships and take back to UK/France. If you looked carefully under fading white paint you could see French/English Army markings – plus there was a few English/French logbooks left in glove compartments.



UNEF to start used to make monthly trips from Port Said to Rafah – as part of the trip they had to “cross the Canal” which took paper work. The Canadians found out that the Egyptians loved rubber stamps on a document- the more stamps on a document – the more “official”

So one of our enterprising officers came up with a whole board of rubber stamps, which he had mounted on a board on his jeep dashboard. He stole every rubber stamp from the Canadian Orderly Room in Rafah – “*do Not Open*’ and “*Restricted*” –even Medical Certification stamps saying “Passed Medical”

The Cdn UNEF Officer crossed the canal with ease – the more officious the border guards became –the more stamps he used. Worked” *like a charm*” – he always got through quickly and with much ceremony! He must be important because he had lots of stamps.

The drivers make lots of money driving – from smuggling gold and drugs. This you wont find in the Official history book I bet. The package would placed on their truck as they stopped waiting for Canal crossing- then they were told to stop at a certain spot – to NOT look back in their mirror – the package would disappear and they would drive into Camp Rafah. They always got their money for doing this – always.

One Cdn Provost sergeant last week knew what was going on and challenged a veteran driver – the driver said “*OK sergeant- I will back my truck up 100 yards- I will then hide my cigarettes in my cab- and I will give you \$100 if you find the cigarettes*”

The Provost sergeant did not find them – he gave up – and the drivers went on making their money.

One RCASC Officer had his wife send him a book every 2 weeks –between page 100 and 1021 she would put a U.S. \$100 bill –now THAT U.S. 100 was real money in Egypt – the Egyptian pound being over valued and almost worthless. He never told me how much he sold the US \$100 dollar for – but enough for him to get another book from wife 2 weeks later more money in it!!

What a mess of trucks/jeeps /cars – including the Canadian ordered Jeep the M151 for the Hussars



In Sinai and Egypt the Egyptians wanted us there – Israel did NOT.

Also my generation was the generation of *idealism* –Lester Pearson and his UN Peace Prize – Kennedy and his “Peace Corps” – full of idealism and “we could make a difference”.

Wider view of the "Water Hole" Rafah



" Water Hole " Rafah.



Picture of water hole at UNEF Camp Rafah the locals were allowed to use – these are probably the “Danor” Battalion who guarded Rafah Camp – the blue helmet liner headdress was discarded quite quickly into the “campaign”- too hot

After 5 days I was off to El Arish none the wiser – complete with bed bugs from a grubby sleeping bag they gave me at Playtime Villa to use. Got very little by way of kit – a blue Canadian bush hat (I wore 6 times) a blue scarf (I wore never) and the QM orderly asked if I was Army or Air Force – I was issued a fly swatter. Air Force was issued Raid spray.

Same thing in El Arish – the Air Force wore shorts and stockings but the RCAF on hearing I was Army said “sorry *old man* – no shorts for you”. I wore long pants my entire tour – but cool lightly woven Indian long pants.

Observations

Morale is dependent on how well the troops are looked after by their home country/unit /regiment.

The Army food was not as good as Air Force food – nor the quarters (sheets at El Arish – sleeping bags Rafah) and the prize –

- *fly swatters Army*
- *spray for bugs Air Force*

I suppose any military is like that – different arms have different standards. It was so bad for feeding at one time that the El Arish Air Force Unit “discouraged” army visitors from Rafah and Gaza- the RCAF would supplement their food from their flights to Beirut /Cyprus/Pisa (and American PX there) and so on.



Bedu tent on road to El Arish

Chapter 7: So What is this Movement Control Crap?



Now it time to take up my duties as Movement Control Officer in El Arish - composed of an Egyptian /UNEF shared airbase about 10 kilometers inland (guarded by a platoon of Indian soldiers who lived there)

and

El Arish camp called Marina, which was close to –but not on – the sea. (The Yugoslav Army guarded Marina). The “Yugos” have their camp just down the road. They also provide an outpost or observation post in the middle of the Sinai at Ras El Naq and also at El Kuntilla. These two outposts are on the Egyptian side of the Israeli/Egyptian border.

The camp had a number of buildings put up by the British in WW2. They were cool as they were made of thick walls of sandy concrete bricks and very high ceiling – so all the heat would go up to the ceiling. The only problem was the small windows to keep out the sun and heat. Believe it or not mosquitoes are a real problem and I am told we are to take a malaria pill every day.

My first night was interesting – the stars were incredibly bright – no pollution here. There were lots of birds and it was nice to hear them at night and in the morning. Where the birds had their nests I have no idea – no trees! The birds would see an airplane taxiing in and would be making a nest in the tail portion before the engines were off! It is an important job of the ground crew to take out the nests from the Caribou and Otter aircraft before they take off – a tail fin that does not move because of a nest can cause real problems!

The picture below is “me” just arrived –March 1965 – notice the red and black NATO Movement Control armband- I only wore it once – I thought it not a good idea to wear as the Indian and Yugoslavs were definitely not NATO – nor were the Brazilians or the Swedish soldiers.

Also notice the Canadian blue bush hat – good for Canadian bush –but too hot and heavy for desert-plus no protection for lower face or neck from he sun. I have already also you will notice picked up a pair of “desert boots” – which the Egyptian workers would make for you overnight. They might last a month if you were lucky but were light and cool and good in the sand, which I am standing on. The UN badge on hat was metal by the way – and added to weight.

There were 11 RCAF Officers plus myself – I was part of their Unit – which was called not a Squadron but **115** ATU – Air Transport Unit.



The above is a good shot of our Quarters. On the roof – when I went up the one time to look –(too hot) had “UNEF” painted on it in large identification letters and a big cistern to store water. I looked in at the water and saw lovely green mold floating on top. No wonder we were told to be careful with the water. We could not use it to brush out teeth. The best thing for brushing teeth was a bottle of Canadian club rye- what a way to start your day.

We never used ice –here or anywhere in UNEF or Middle East for that matter. Despite all our precautions all of us got mild dysentery or “*gypo gut*”- which meant you had “the runs” and also kept the weight down.

The RCAF food was good – no complaints there. The pilots would purchase fresh vegetables and canned goods and condiments in Beirut and would stock up the Messes – the Officers/Sergeants and the Airmen’s Mess. No one ever complained about the food at Marina!

We spent most evenings in the bar – no TV or radio. All our radios – no matter how powerful - picked up 99% Arabic – except for the BBC which came through Radio Cyprus for 15 minutes in English for 15 minutes. I even picked up Chinese-it took me months to figure out how –it was “Radio Albania “ which was having a “love affair “at the time with mainland China and rebroadcasting Chinese – god knows why??

We would wait for the evening movie – this movie plus mail –letters were 90% of our morale. No mail or no movie on a day and the morale of unit and people crashed.

The Canadian Army in Rafah and Gaza was not so lucky but their food was not so bad. The Canadians were well looked after – considering the circumstances – for food and medical and dental. 115 ATU had their own doctor – he was one of the 11 officers. A Canadian dentist was available in Rafah – and he had the latest dental equipment.

Our favourite entertainment was the movie at night and letters from home- both were THE two most important morale boosters in the desert posting.

Following pictures in order are:

1) our “garden” outside the Quarters

2) the roof of the Mess hall where we watched a movie most nights and

3) construction of a new building (*note Cdn RCE shoulder flash*) the new Officers Mess the famous MARINA Officers Mess !!- in background you can see how close Camp Marina was to Mediterranean Sea and railroad and road to El Arish town – the railroad had been

1. built by British
2. had “*given by USA Aid*” diesel railroad engines going by hourly
3. –hauling Russian tanks and trucks east –
4. and wrecked trucks –each with the driver sitting forlornly in cab – west to Cairo to be fixed







Picture through the windshield of downtown El Arish town. Canadians were forbidden to take pictures outside the Camp – the other contingents ignored this rule.

Observation

*Settling in was –when you are young – fairly easy. **We were all lonely for home and our wives and loved ones – and we counted the days till we were to leave. A year away from loved ones is too long.** I never met anyone who wanted to stay – although there were some people who did 2 or even 3 tours. They were nuts!-and single and there are always ‘people’ who do three tours! A tour in those days was a full year – so anyone that was over then in my time actually did 2 tours! (a tour at time of writing was 6 months –long enough)*

Let me explain – shortly after 1965 the Canadian military changed the time of an official “tour” to 6 months – so all us UNEF people can wear a “2” on our ribbon – as we are credited with two tours. A year in the desert –or any special Duty Area –far from your family –wife-children –is/was really too long! Any longer and soldiers WILL have traumatic problems of adjusting again to civilian life. God knows how WW2 people did after 5 /6 years away from Canada and family .I know – my father was away in WW2 for 6 years.

Chapter 8: So What is this Movement Control Crap?

Settling in was slow but sure – routine and boredom quickly set in. My job was driving out each morning to watch the loading of the Caribou and occasionally the Otter for the daily flights to Sharm el Sheikh (south) and to Gaza /Beirut with a stop most trips in Jerusalem for the UNTSO people.

An Indian guard lived and guarded the inland airport – they had a lousy posting. They had one volleyball and there was always a volleyball game going on during the day. Their work was at night because the Bedouins and Egyptians would nightly try to get in to steal something.

My movement Control “Office “ was a small mud walled hut with a corrugated roof and a counter and no radio communications to me chair. Next-door was an office with my UN radio control officer. The radio communications were first class – professional civilian operators from the UN in New York – all civilian – all excellent -including their radios. I never ever had trouble with radio transmissions – at this the UN excelled.

I had a Swedish Movement control Sergeant – a Canadian Corporal and Cdn private. The Swedish sergeant was on his third 6 month posting to El Arish – he would join for the winter and go back to Sweden for the summer – these guys were called “UN Bums”. He had learned all his English from Canadians and spoke “Canajun’ like a native – eh?

Then we would either fly with the Caribou wherever it was going/or wait at airport/or go back to Marina till airplanes returned just before 5 pm supper time. This routine went on 7 days a week –every week!

On Friday nights I would go to Rafah to break monotony and play poker with RCASC officers- the Major and I were the only two good poker players so I came home on late Friday night with money.

The only problem was with the check points of Egyptians – sometimes PLO- but when they saw a white car and blue beret the machine guns were no longer pointed at you and a few questions and you were waved on. The one bad habit they had is Egyptian Army trucks drove along at high speeds on highway with their lights out – nothing to do with security- that is how you drove in desert in Egypt- no lights.



Chapter 9: So What is this Movement Control Crap?



The Brazilian C-54 – a gloried DC- 4 with 4 engines flew from Brazil to El Arish. We never knew *when the hell* they would arrive in El Arish airport, as the Brazilian plane would always “break down” in Rome or Athens for a few days. The Cdn Movement Control staff would wait in the Mess in Marina Camp on the coast and when we finally heard the 4 engine DC 6 we would jump in our cars and drive like hell for airport and try to arrive before the “Brazos” would shut down their four engines!



I drove from El Arish every Friday night to Rafah – about 60 km –to play poker. When I think how dangerous it was I shudder now –particularly returning alone at 1 a.m. with my poker winnings and going through all the Egyptian Army checkpoints! The Egyptians never traveled in their vehicles at night with their headlights on - they considered it quite rude of you to have headlights on!!

I was a good poker player – then! The Major RCASC who was CO and I were usually the last two in game. One night I had a good hand and so did he –he thought – he was a bit short of cash – so he threw in “my next move was to Beirut for 6 months”- I gave him a \$100 buck deal on that one. I won. One month later he kept his word –I was off to Beirut!!

Chapter 10 : Trip to Jerusalem

Trip To Jerusalem 3-4 Apr 65

We, consisting of 2 Officers and 30 other ranks, departed El Arish at 8.45 AM 3 Apr. It was a miserable, cold, rainy day. The trip to Jerusalem took us 45 minutes and was fairly bumpy at times.

We arrived at Jerusalem Airport at 9.30 and were met by a representative of Kim's Travel Agency and were immediately transported to our Hotel on a short rest prior to our first tour. The Taxis used for the trip from the Airport to the Hotel and for the duration of the tours thereafter, were mostly of latest American models and the drivers were experienced drivers.

The Hotel where we stayed at, called the "New Orient House" was very good and the food was excellent.

The first tour started at 1030 H and consisted of the following: (1) Visit to the old city of Jerusalem entering via Herod's Gate and visiting Pilate's Palace. (2) Judgement Hall. (3) The Flagellation. (4) Ecce Homo. (5) Walk Along Via Dolorosa (The Way of the Cross). (6) The Russian Excavations. (7) The Holy Sepulchre and (8) Mount Calvary. During this whole tour it rained and hailed almost consistently.

Our guide was very good but seemed to spend too much time trying to sell to us. I have

never seen any place quite so commercialized in all my life. It certainly makes one stop and ponder if Religion is what it is supposed to be. Everybody is trying to take you aside to sell you some kind of trinket that such & such a Saint touched or a rock from the site of such & such an event, etc., and the prices for these are out of this world. (Rather appropriate, since this is supposedly the Holy City.

At approx 1.15 PM we returned to the Hotel for dinner which was very palatable and very welcome.

The afternoon tour consisted of the following: (1) Entering the old city of Jerusalem via St Stephen's Gate. (2) Visiting the church of Sts Anne. (3) The Garden of Gethsemane. (4) The Tomb of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Thence to (5) Bethlehem, visiting (6) Rachel's Tomb, (7) The Shepherd's Field. In Bethlehem, we visited the (8) The Church of the Nativity. (9) The Manger. (10) The Chapel of St Jerome and a few other places which I can't remember at present.

In St Stephen's Church, we were privileged (or so we were told) to get a view of a replica of the old city of Jerusalem as it used to be in the early days. The priest, Franciscan I believe, who explained it to us was fluent in the English language with a slight European accent. He was very interesting. He pointed out a place which used to be inside the old city wall, but is now outside, called the Temple of Evil Council (because this was where Jesus Christ

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CHAPTER 5

FIRST UNITED NATIONS EMERGENCY FORCE UNEF I 1956 - 1967

Authorization: 4 November 1956

Ceased operations 17 June 1967.

Function: To secure and to supervise the cessation of hostilities, including the withdrawal of the armed forces of French, Israeli and the United Kingdom troops from Egyptian territory, and after the withdrawal to serve as a buffer between Egyptian and Israeli forces.

Canadian Participation: Armoured reconnaissance squadron, signal, engineer, air and land transport, maintenance, movement control units and an infantry platoon. HMCS Magnificent, an aircraft carrier, transported troops and equipment from Halifax to Port Said 29 Dec 1956 - 11 Jan 1957.

Commanders:

LGen E.L.M. Burns (Canada)	Nov 1956 - Dec 1958
LGen P.S. Gyani (India)	Dec 1959 - Jan 1964
MGen C.S. Paiva Chaves (Brazil)	Jan 1964 - Aug 1964
Col L. Musicki (Yugoslavia)	Aug 1964 - Jan 1965
MGen S. Sarmento (Brazil)	Jan 1965 - Jan 1966
MGen I.J. Rikhye (India)	Jan 1966 - Jun 1967

Nations Contributing Troops: Brazil, Canada, Columbia, Denmark, Finland, India, Indonesia, Norway, Sweden and Yugoslavia.

The 1949 General Armistice Agreement between Egypt and Israel was seriously threatened when Israel, France and the United Kingdom invaded Egyptian territory in 1956, after withdrawal of financial support for the Aswan Dam project on the Nile River led Egypt to nationalize the Suez Canal. In an all out attack, Israel seized the Negev while the UK and France seized the Canal. General Burns of Canada, serving with UNTSO at the time, called for a cease fire. In the first week of November efforts were made to stop the war. On the 7th, Israel was requested to withdraw its forces to the original Armistice Demarkation Line (ADL) and France and the United Kingdom were requested to withdraw all forces from Egypt. The first UN peacekeeping force UNEF was created and much of the credit

ⁱ Page 137 of Pearson's Peacekeepers –Canada and the United Nations Emergency Force 1956 -67 by Michael K Carroll UBC Press 2009