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*-UNEF Memoir-*

In the fall of 1956 the United Nations Emergency Force was formed to separate Israel and Egypt. 436 Sqdn from Edmonton was tasked with transporting Canada's supplies to Egypt. They established a base in Italy near Naples at Capodichino. Personnel to man the base were taken from 436 and 435 Sqdn.

On the 31 of March 1957 I was transferred to 114 Com Flight at Capodichino airfield. The flight over was in a North Star, carrying mostly freight with a few troop seats up one side. We flew to Gander then to Lajes in the Azores for an overnight stop and crew change. The next day we flew to Gibraltar, that is a thrill, throttles back flaps down look out the window nothing but water getting lower, wheels down still nothing but water then bang you are down and you can see that the runway extends away out into the sea. Fuel the aircraft and feed the crew and passengers at the British mess hall Peas leather lamb chops and chips and tea, milk and sugar added. Then off to Naples. Italian coast line is very beautiful with many shades of blues and greens in the water and a multitude of bays and islands. We are picked up at the airport by a bus and driven into Naples to the Hotel Grilli, which will be home while we are in Italy. It is on Via Umberto close to the main train station. Each morning the same buses will take us out to the airport where we will service the C119 aircraft flying between Italy and Egypt. We also did the periodic inspections on the Dakotas that were stationed in Egypt.

In one of the hangars near ours was a hangar full of aircraft that looked like small Spitfires. They were packed in nose to the ground tail in the air as tight as possible. I was told that they were Fiats. Back of our hangar was a tall concrete wall there was a ladder by the wall and I was told that using the ladder to go over the wall would put you across the street from a wine shop.

I was still very much interested in motorcycles and this was home to the Gilera one of the fastest bikes of that time. I found a dealer and asked for a test drive but they would not do that. One of the staff started a bike and said jump on. Now the streets of Naples are made with cobble stones and every couple of blocks they have a piazza which is like a traffic circle with a fountain in the centre. If the wind is blowing the spray from the fountains will wet the cobble stones. Off we went on one of the most memorable rides of my life, this guy was a racer we were out to set new records. We wove in and out between cars, buses and donkey carts skidding sideways on the wet spots and some how getting back to where we started. When I got off I tried to light a cigarette and act casual but I couldn't do it. I went home without a Gilera.

Naples, what a wonderful place for a 22 year old Canadian that had never been to Europe before. I didn't know where to start and I wanted to do everything at once. When you walked out the hotel door you were met by "Hi Joe you want to buy genuine Rolex watch, Hi Parker pen, Hi genuine diamond ring real cameo" and when you beat him off it was "Hi Joe you want nice clean girl I get you my sister." This was a daily occurrence and you would ignore them unless you met a really persistent one bugging you while you were eating or drinking at a sidewalk café.

The food was new and interesting, I do not remember seeing Pizza anywhere. The cheeses, salami, breads and pasta kept me going I don't remember eating sea food. we were told don't eat any of the local sea food as it is all contaminated. Each morning on our trip to the airbase we passed a fish shop and on a chopping block would be whole fish about three feet long (possibly a Tuna) each day there would be a little less fish until it

was all gone, this could take three to five days. That might account for the sea food warning.

With all these new things to try some people still wanted their Burgers and Fries so a small place was set up in the Hotel and to earn a little extra money I worked as a Fry cook for a while

The Americans had a base in Naples and they gave us access to the PX, (post exchange.) Things were so low priced compared to Canadian prices. Money Exchanges were a new experience There were quite a few of them around. Canadian money wasn't any use, you used American or Lire. At that time the exchange rate was around 600 lire for \$1.00 The real currency was cigarettes. We were rationed to two cartons of US cigarettes a month? If you were getting Canadian cigarettes sent to you, you could trade them two American for one Canadian on the base. The American cigarettes were in great demand on the streets and could be sold or traded for anything.

We rented a car a Fiat 500 ? The engine was a two stroke, the fuel premixed oil and gas. We learned that rural roads up mountains do not have places to turn around and it takes a long time to back down. Two barber stripped pole at the entrance of a street means this street turns into stairs. Whoever flashes their lights first at an intersection has the right of way and that Fiats are tough little cars.

We went on boat trips to the Isle of Ischia, toured cameo factories, went to Pompeii, Mount Vesuvius and many other things. Naples is a major sea port and has great variety of entertainment.

In May I was transferred to 115 Com. Flt. In Abu Swier Egypt. The trip was in a C119. At that time flights over water required that you wear a may west, a chute harness and carry on a chest pack chute. The aircraft were fitted with one row of troop seats on each side and cargo tied down in the centre.

Abu Swier had been an RAF base before the British and French had been kicked out of Egypt when the Suez canal had been nationalized. The base had been taken over by the Egyptian Air Force and equipped with Russian aircraft including Mig's. We were told that during the war the Israelis parachuted pilots into the base to fly out any aircraft they could and blow up the rest. We saw piles of burned out Mig's that had been bulldozed off to a corner of the base. The hangars we were in had been strafed by the British when they objected to being kicked out. The roofs were full of holes and the floors were all pock marked.

115 Com Flt. Consisted of four Otters, three Dakotas and sixty RCAF personal that were rotated on a six month rotation. We were outfitted with tropical wear, shorts, shirts, knee socks and blue fibre glass helmets At first we did guard duty with sten guns with no clips and Lee Enfield's with no bullets Later we were guarded by Indonesian Troops and later by Mexican Troops. When Mexican troops had a problem with each other their commander would form them in circle and put the two problem makers in the centre. They would beat on each other until one could no longer get up. This must have been a very successful treatment because I only saw it happen once.

Our accommodations were a row of mud huts that had been inhabited by a great number of different nationalities by the time we came along. Unfortunately one of the previous tenants had brought their pet bed bugs with them. This was my first contact with bed bugs. I burned the bed frame and mattress, put the legs of the bed in tins of diesel

fuel, put a mosquito netting over the bed still they found a way into my bed.

We were equipped with a great variety of vehicles, Mercedes Unimog, a four wheel drive multi purpose vehicles that were used for general transportation around the base and towing aircraft. We had a Reo and GMC Deuce and a half that must have been left behind in WW II., also a British Bedford of the same vintage. The Mercedes Two and a half tons were new and were a fantastic truck to drive at their best when fully loaded.

Due to the extreme heat during the day we would start operations early in the morning and hope to have all the aircraft down by twelve o'clock. This allowed us the afternoons free for exploring, recreation, or working with other sections that were short handed.

The "Maggie" our only air craft carrier brought all the equipment for the initial set up of the Canadian Forces in Egypt including Canadian beer unfortunately Canadian beer doesn't travel well and the sea voyage had made it skunky. The ship landed at Port Said and the things were sent by train to the base.

We shared the base with the Egyptian Army, they were doing their training all over the base except for the hangars and runways. They were equipped with the hand cranked Bofor anti aircraft guns and they kept in practice by following our aircraft as they took off and landed. They strung field phone lines all over which we would put pins in so they could look for the problem. The Egyptian Sgt's. Mess backed onto the taxi strip that we parked visiting aircraft on. The story goes that the Egyptians were stealing from us and hiding it in the Sgt. Mess. So a C119 was parked in a suitable position and a run up was carried out. It blew the corrugated steel roof off the building.

Ismailia is a town on the Suez canal and was the closest town to the base. Most people spoke English so getting around was easy. I had my first mango, picked fresh from a tree here. We could go to the movies, American shows French sound and Arabic subtitles. (it was cheap and after a few drinks entertaining)

There was a lake nearby, the Egyptian Navy had a base there. They had diving towers, wharves and boats. We used them for a while but were told not to by someone. I saw live sea horses in this lake.

There were trips to Cairo in a seven passenger DKW bus powered by a two cycle engine. The trips were over night or for a couple of days Again a tremendous experience for a twenty-two year old.

The army engineers had repaired a hangar and runway at El Arish for us. Before we had moved to the new base a Brazilian B17 landed there and had trouble with the oil pressure on one engine. I was flown there to work on it. It turned out to be a ruptured diaphragm on the transmitter. There were no spare parts and I couldn't repair it. The pilot fingered his cross and said it will be OK. The F/O (Flying Officer) with me had him sign a paper absolving the RCAF of any responsibility. (I still have a copy of this letter) I was very disappointed in the B17 I had always envisioned this enormous four engine bomber carrying tons of bombs and it wasn't all that much bigger than a Dakota.

When we packed up and moved to El Arish. I drove the old Bedford with two propellers in the back. The Egyptian police had check points on all the highways. These consisted of three pieces of railroad track welded together, one tripod would block one side of the road and a short distance along one would block the other. This forced the

drivers to slow down and perform a rather sharp "s" turn. I made it through but on the other side the truck very slowly fell over on its side. The wrecker came along and got me back on my wheels but the frame must have twisted because it didn't go very far before the ruxel axel seized up and the driveshaft snapped. I left it as a tow job.

The Camp was on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Walking up from the sea you crossed over a set of railroad tracks, a roadway, then went through the main gate. The officer's barracks and enlisted men's barracks were two storey brick buildings painted white, everything that was painted was painted white. The mess hall was a concrete slab with a walled tent on it. The kitchen was a brick building. The medical building was also brick and the rest was concrete slabs with tents. Along the back fence was the barber shop the airmen's mess and a couple of other tents that housed the guards. In the centre were storage tents and the Sgt's. mess After my bed bug experience I commandeered a space in one of the storage tents, moved my bed in and built some furniture with old packing boxes. I even had a batman to do my laundry, make the bed, polish shoes and sweep the floor all for twenty piaster a week, plus a few cigarettes he could steal from a pack I left open on the dresser. Amazingly no one questioned my move. This was a wonderful base we swam in the ocean practically every day. We built a raft that we could swim out to.

On meals I can remember eating fried egg plant, roast beef with gravy that had all the colors of the rainbow on it. Fried eggs that were so greasy that you had to tip you plate or they would slide off the other side. Evening snacks were bully beef from five pound tins that made good sandwiches, beef with mustard, beef with HP sauce, beef with ketchup, beef with cheese, beef with onion or beef with any or all of the above. The tea was the British way premixed with milk and sugar, you could get used to it. The airmen's mess had tins of Lowenbrau, Tuberg and Carlsberg beer. They didn't sell hard liquor but the Indian Army had an unlimited supply of Don Q white rum that sold for the equivalent of ninety eight cents for a twenty six ounce bottle. The Egyptians were not supposed to drink but they had a local beer called Stella. It was a rice beer and served cool was very good, it was 15 piaster a litre. The only problem was that the heat would get to it and it could be skunky.

The Indian Army had a signals corp. on our base and the No.1 Para. Division were our guards they had a Mess out at the air base. We were invited to come and play soccer with them and after the game to have a meal in their mess. I rated the meal by the number of beers it took to quench the fire.

Another experience I had with troops from other countries involved the Yugoslav blacksmith. We need a part repaired and were told this was the man to do it. So I drove the part to their camp and watched him fix it. This man was a magician he heated, he bent, he shaped, all with hand tools. It was Tito's birthday on the day I was there I was handed a glass of clear liquid told "Vivo Tito toss it down". That was my introduction to Slivovitz Yugoslavs plum brandy. I survived but learned a valuable lesson, sample first.

We still operated from early in the morning until noon, but I was actually finished as soon as the last aircraft took off. Occasionally I would crew on an Otter if they were short handed but most of the time would be spent with the M.E. section. When you crewed on the Otter you sat up front in the right seat. Occasionally the pilot would say he need to do paper work or something and he would pull the pin and put the yolk over to

your side. You would work very hard to keep the aircraft on course and level. Then you might notice out of the corner of your eye that the pilot was turning the trim wheel one way then the other.

I would do the supply run to Raffa or the diesel fuel run for the camp generators. On one trip back to the base I saw a little animal by the side of the road. I stopped and managed to catch it. It was a little Desert Fox. I kept it in my tent for several months. It was a very unique pet. They do not bark, they yodel, they also eat scorpions which earned her a home in my tent.

We also had a white dog on the base called Sputnik for the Russian satellite that had launched at that time. The dog and the fox would play together. We had Grundig radios from the American PX and listened to Radio Canada on short wave. So we were current on all world events.

There were no lights on the runway so if we had a night flight we had to run out and put flare pots along the runway.

We showed movies at the base in the evenings so I was sent to Raffa to the Army Mechanical Engineers to take a Bell & Howell projector course. We had the projector on the second floor balcony of one of the barracks. I can't remember how long I did this.

The Norwegian and Swedish civilians had to do a compulsory six month military training, so they used the time with the UNEF to do that training. As a result they had some accidents that required air evacs to major centres like Tel Aviv. I crewed on one flight with the Dakota, where the soldier had torn his abdomen open. We could not fly high with no pressurization and to fly low made for a very bumpy ride.

Another Dakota flight was to Gaza to pick up Gen. Burns and his secretary. As soon as she got on the plane she complained about the dirty windows. Imagine having dusty windows in the desert. Dave and I were sent out to clean them. While outside I managed to get one of the UN flags off his jeep. Still have it.

We were entitled to UN leave as well as our service leave. It was possible to take your leave in Beirut Lebanon. Of all the places that I visited I liked Beirut the best.

The time that I was in the middle east was the best and perhaps the last time to see these beautiful places before the Crazies, (radicals) ruined them.

My first six month tour was due to expire and I was having such a good time I had to ask for an extension which was granted. During the second tour I was sent back to Italy to write my level 3 trade test. All trades writing were grouped in one room but seated so the person next to you was an other trade. I passed. While in Italy I did some shopping at the American PX so that I would have some things to barter. I also bought a Berretta 22 Cal. pistol with a three and six inch barrel. Soon discovered that hand guns were not one of my talents. So I sold it.

We were paid by the RCAF and another \$30.00 a month from the UN. The UN pay was in Egyptian Pounds. Everything you bought on the base was in pounds and off the base all you need to use were pounds, but you could use US dollars and get a premium on them. The Egyptian Pound was valued at \$2.80 by the UN., but you could purchase pounds for as little as ninety-eight cents. A little currency trading and a person had no need to touch their service pay.

While in Egypt I had a motorcycle a 1942 Matchless 350cc. I feel the bike may have originated in the British service as dispatch rider bike. I am a little vague on how I

disposed of it. Perhaps it was sold to an airframe tech and he laid it down on the concrete in front of the hangar doing considerable damage to himself and the bike. I have located pictures of bike taken in front of the barracks at Abu Swier. To drive the motorcycles off the base I had to have Egyptian licence plates. I still have the motorcycle registration and the insurance papers. Recently I had an Arabic friend read these papers for me and she told me that the bike was registered to a Ken Bateman. It looks like I never bothered to change the registration.

Outside the base at El Arish the Egyptians dug down in the sand to plant their date palm trees. There were hundreds of these trees all around the base, they made ideal places to ride with the motorcycles, the sand was packed as hard as concrete.

After we moved to El Arish the C119 shuttle from Naples to Egypt stopped and every thing was flown in on the North Stars.

The service records sent to me for this period show two personal assessments one for Italy and one for Egypt. The medical records show that I broke my glasses. While in Egypt I injured my back quite badly and it still bothers me occasionally I was surprised to see no record of that

Just before I left I had cut the machine gun out of the wing of a WW II fighter I had found in a sand dune. It was rusty so I had put it in a can of oil and put it on top of the Instrument section. I wonder if anyone did anything with it?

End of the second tour was coming up and I requested a third. It was not granted so I was on my way back to Canada with 30 days RCAF leave and 30 days UN leave plus a little over one year of untouched pay. My new base was Gimli Manitoba sixty miles north of Winnipeg.

We flew home on the North Star. The route had changed we landed in Athens for an overnight stay then to Piza finally landing at Dorval where you cleared customs then went to the base in Lachine. The next day you worked the orderly room and the account section to get every thing set up to go on leave. I arranged shipment of my kit box and kit bag to Gimli. I was told if I shipped my tool box I might never see it again.