

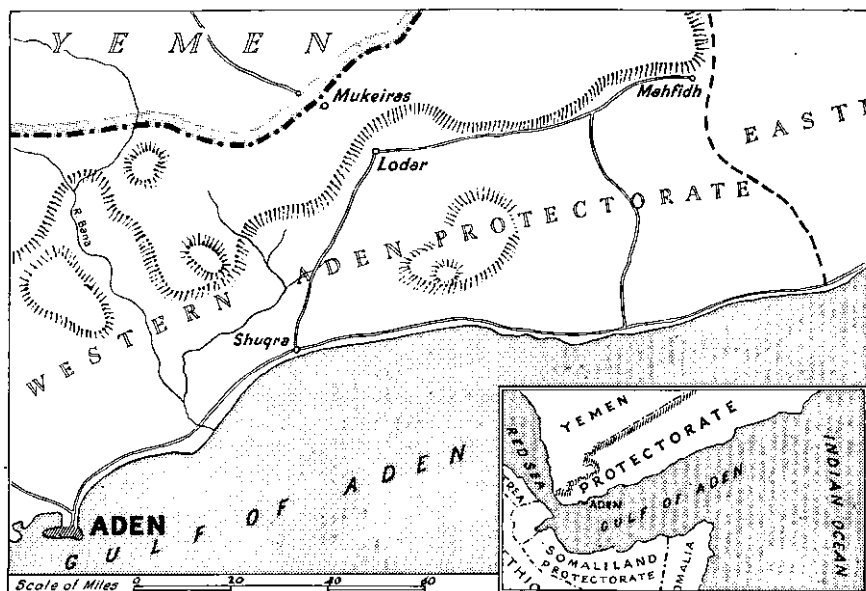
# A RIFLE COMPANY IN ADEN

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**T**HIS article, written from a personal viewpoint, records something of the way of life of a rifle company on detachment in the Aden Protectorate. The period covered is from August to October 1955, when the presence of British troops in the Protectorate, as opposed to the Colony, was still in its first few months.

The company was located at Lodar, one of the chief villages of the Audhali territory, about 3,000 ft above sea level. About one mile west of Lodar is the town of Zara, where the Audhali Sultan has his palace. Aden is about 120 miles away and the journey by truck can easily be done in one day, but with a large number of vehicles travelling in convoy it is more comfortable to break the trip at Shuqra, an uninteresting village on the coast, 70 miles from Aden.

To the north of Lodar lies the great Khor, an escarpment about 3,000 ft high, stretching from the Yemen in the west, to the territory of the Rabizi in the east. It is impassable to vehicles at present, but throughout its length there are several routes used by camel and donkey trains. One of these, the Thira pass, leads to Mukeiras about 18 miles away, where is the Government Rest House. Two other companies of the battalion, and a RAF Regiment flight were stationed there. To the east are the towns of Mudea and Am Quleita. At the former is a headquarters of the political administration, and at the latter is the last Government Guard post along the route to Mahfidh Fort, 100 miles away.



Lodar is served by an airstrip, an uphill stretch of gravel and sand which has been cleared of bushes, and as far as possible cleared of ruts. The pilots of the Communication Squadron say that it is one of the better strips in the Protectorate, but none the less a Valetta and a Pembroke, both derelict, make it appear dangerous to the inexperienced.

The company formed a perimeter camp near the edge of the airstrip and settled down to life at Lodar. This was divided roughly into four phases—dealing with the locals, administration, training and operations.



The Khor in the background. The three points on the skyline indicate the Thira pass

Before any move was made it was necessary to obtain permission from the Sultan. For this purpose an additional Political Officer had been attached to the Sultan, to act as his interpreter. The Sultan allotted wells for use of the troops, ensuring that the village women went elsewhere; invited the company officers to make use of his garden well for swimming; and allowed purchases to be made from his orange grove—some of the best oranges that can be found anywhere it seemed. Any complaints from the village, such as trucks raising too much dust or going too near graveyards, came through the Sultan; and any

complaints from the company went to him.

It was necessary to complain twice about hostile behaviour by the village. On one occasion two rounds, fired from the village, struck the parapet; and on another the company trucks were stoned when returning from a night exercise. The penalty for the offenders was to have their families put in irons, while they themselves remained out. The Arabs consider that to place the male member of the family in jail will entail supporting his dependants; therefore they imprison the dependants.

One of the biggest difficulties experienced was over trade. Every week the men drew about £120, this money being spent between the company Naafi and the village. Trading areas were allotted to the villagers by the Sultan, and tribal guards saw that there were no intrusions upon other peoples pitches. Unfortunately the villager allotted the well area felt that he was getting an unequal share of trade. This was probably true, for the soldiers went down to the well in PT kit. Not satisfied with complaining to the camp, the man removed the wheel and pulley supports from the well, stating that there would be no more water until he was allowed to trade within the perimeter. It was necessary to stop all trading in the village until the pulley equipment was put back eight hours later.

In general, the company found that the villagers were glad to have them there. The medical officer, attached to the company, performed remarkable work among them, with permission from the Sultan, and in the end people were travelling for three or four days to receive medical treatment. It was important to refrain from speaking to, or in any way noticing, the village women: this appeared to be a touchy point. Otherwise, it was found that given an inch, the inhabitants would demand a mile. During the wet season when roads to Aden were doubtful, it became customary to help out the Political Officer and

Sultan with a loan of petrol for their landrovers. One day a column of trucks appeared on the airstrip, and a spokesman came forward to state that they required roughly 150 gallons of petrol to take them to Aden.

For rations the company relied on the RAF, and an occasional run to the halfway house at Shuqra. "Compo" was the main issue, with roughly one day's fresh a month. In addition, a special allotment of RCA enabled a certain amount of fresh rations to be bought locally. This last was an unhappy arrangement since, owing to the extreme poverty of the district, it was a strain to raise the fresh rations required. POL and all replacements came by air, any seriously sick returning on the same plane.

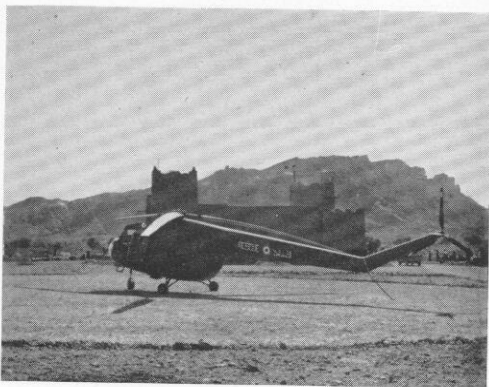
Daily duties and fatigues, the largest of which was drawing water from the well, occupied a platoon, from which came an inlying picket in case of snipers. At night LMGs were mounted at each corner of the perimeter, there was no prowler sentry, and no one left the perimeter for any purpose.

Accommodation was in two-man bivouacs; unsuitable for long periods or for high temperatures. They had the added disadvantage that the occupants were

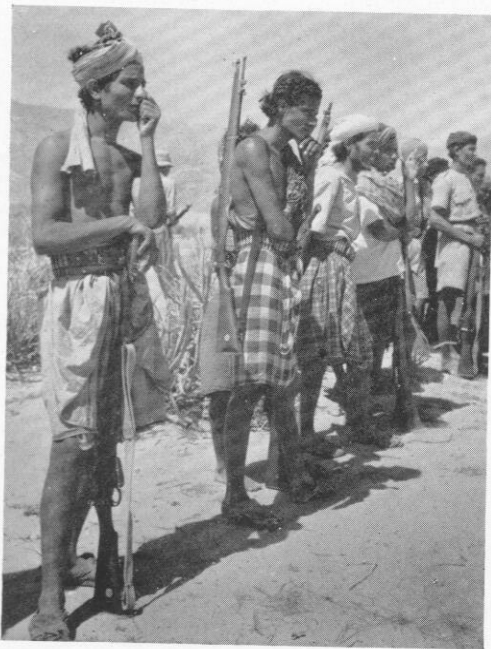
forced to sleep on the ground and were therefore the more prone to camel spiders and scorpions. Ideal equipment was the two-man lightweight tent carried by the RAF Regiment flights.

Wireless contact was maintained on a battalion net with hourly calls. The sets used were 19 and 62. Since it was only possible to use voice for a very few hours each day, nearly all traffic was in morse. In Lodar itself was a Government Guard wireless post manned by a Levy soldier. This net is in contact with all ports and with APL HQ in Aden. It is most reliable.

In training matters possibly the most important point was to get everyone hygiene and health-minded. In particular, precautions and training against heat exhaustion were most necessary. Generally, water was rationed to about one gallon per



Mahfidh Fort and rescue helicopter.  
West Aden Protectorate



Tribal Guards of the West Aden Protectorate

man per day. Practice is needed to live comfortably on this amount. First aid training, taught by the RMO attached to the company, added to the general confidence.

The Sultan allotted one of the local hills as a field firing range, and guaranteed it clear of people. Here junior NCOs had an opportunity to practice target identification and fire control. Any engagements that did take place eventually were fired at ranges around 600 yds and shooting needs improving to this standard.

Good shooting without doubt influences local opinion a great deal. It is satisfactory to record that the company defeated all comers in a series of matches. Opponents came from Government Guards (GG), Tribal Guards (TG), and the Sultan's personal guard. Ranges were any piece of open ground, and the usual targets beer bottles at 100 yds. The company provided the ammunition and the opposing team provided tea and biscuits afterwards. It is perhaps true to say that the temptation to dispose of arms and ammunition is greater in the Protectorate than anywhere else, the prices being six Aden shillings per round of .303, and £150 per service rifle. The brother of the Lodar Sultan, himself the possessor of a 1954 Mauser, offered to buy the company rifles at this price—cash down. These contests threw some interesting light on native methods of shooting. Great pains are taken with the first round, and ranging shots are used if necessary. The rest is guess work, as there appears to be no knowledge of theory or the use of sights.

On the operations side the greatest care was taken not to become involved in blood feuds and local operations were few. At this time the army operations were mainly the relief of Government Guard forts, the company going twice to Mahfidh, a long trip involving much picketing. On each occasion the column was fired at from long range and it was difficult to come to grips without delaying the Fort relief. It would appear that if Government writ is to run in the more mountainous parts, foot operations will be necessary. The local saying had become "Allah did not intend soldiers to go without their trucks".

Finally, operations, from a military viewpoint, were held up by lack of policy—all tribesmen being treated as friendly until they opened fire. This gave them a decided advantage and enabled them to come in at close of play and check up on the score.

It seems that Aden may be an army station for some time and it is to be hoped that following units may find conditions on a more regular footing. It is, however, a station where troops must live in the field and as such provides unrivalled opportunities for training and useful work in a little known area.



Tribesmen at Ataq. West Aden Protectorate