

Field Intelligence Officers in the Aden Protectorate

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(Approval has been given for a number of Field Intelligence Officer appointments in the Aden Protectorate to be filled by captains or subalterns of any combatant corps—Editor).

IN the Aden Protectorate tribal territory is difficult to reconnoitre and the number of recalcitrant tribesmen cannot be easily assessed. The elusiveness of the tribesmen resulted in a lack of information from contact and deep patrols as well as prisoners, so that the ordinary service intelligence units found themselves unable to build up a satisfactory picture of the tribesmen's activities and intentions. To overcome these difficulties a rather unorthodox type of intelligence service has been built up by the employment of a number of Field Intelligence Officers and their teams.

The main trouble in the Aden Protectorate is caused by the Yemeni regular and irregular troops, who snipe or raid across an allegedly peaceful and inviolate border, also by the activities of various Protectorate tribesmen, usually referred to as "dissidents", who occasionally harass or ambush military or civilian parties within our borders.

The "dissidents" are not readily recognizable as they wear no form of uniform or insignia, whilst everyone in these parts carries a rifle. Most of these tribesmen are only part-time malefactors, as they usually only become a nuisance when they are short of money or merely bored. Sometimes, as a result of their activities the tribesmen hope for free gifts of Yemeni arms and ammunition, some of which they are able to retain for private use!

The Field Intelligence Officers work directly under the Integrated Intelligence Branch at Headquarters, British Forces Arabian Peninsula, Aden. Their task is to obtain local military and political intelligence for use in future military planning. The first Field Intelligence Officer was appointed in 1955, and results since then have more than justified the organization. At present five Field Intelligence Officers are employed in the Aden Protectorate and two in the Persian Gulf. Up to date all these posts have been filled by Royal Air Force officers. Approval, however, was given in 1958 for three of these posts to be filled by Army officers. A general description of the work of a Field Intelligence Officer in the Aden Protectorate is, therefore, of interest.

Organization

Each officer is provided with a Land Rover equipped with two powerful mobile wireless sets; one for ground communication and the other, a VHF set, for voice contact with aircraft. A special frequency is allotted and a 24-hour listening watch is maintained at base, thus, under reasonable conditions the officer may contact his base at any time. He is not confined to this frequency,



A fertile wadi in the Eastern Aden Protectorate

however, and can tune in to other networks operated by the Aden Protectorate Levies and the Government Guards.

Full camp equipment, including an oil-burning refrigerator, a heavy duty battery charging engine, some first line spares, and a Pye "walkie-talkie" set are provided for each post; the set is for ground air communication in places where it is not feasible to take a Land Rover. The intelligence team is completed by an Arab signaller and a cook/bearer, both seconded from the Aden Protectorate Levies. The officer is thus reasonably mobile and self-contained and need lose no time in gaining a thorough knowledge of his area, its geography, personalities, tribes and local politics.

In each case the Intelligence Officer establishes his base, which may be in or near a Government Guard fort, a house in the local town or village, or in or near the local camp of the Aden Protectorate Levies. When possible he may live in a house, but this is frequently impossible since there is an acute housing shortage in the Protectorate, and where houses can be made available rents are often prohibitive. The accommodation is, therefore, often in tents; a protective stone wall being built to discourage Arab marksmen! The more bulky equipment is left in this base and the team then operates in its area, more often than not travelling very "light" and sleeping wherever opportunity offers, generally in forts or adequately protected houses. When forced to sleep in a private house the team's money, arms and equipment are absolutely safe since, if an Arab accepts you as his guest your life and property are "on his face", and his code binds him to protect them with his life. It is only prudent, however, to choose as one's host one of the more powerful and influential members of the local population!

Description of work

Information of intelligence value is gleaned from informers, both regular and casual, local rulers and headmen, and from reports by Government and

Tribal Guards as well as from Political Officers, with whom the officer works closely at all times. The Political Officer's advice and judgment are frequently invaluable to the Field Intelligence Officer, who often tours with him, meeting local personalities and listening to their conversations when they present their problems. In this way the officer can quickly obtain the "feel" of his area and make some attempt to understand its tortuous politics, as well as learning by this means the various current and past inter-tribal feuds.

It is a fact that much information is unreliable or biased, and herein lies the value of an officer who, from his knowledge of his source's background and his particular "angle", is able to evaluate the probable reliability of any information. Also, being on the spot, he is able to seek confirmation of a given report from a source independent of, and often hostile to, the original source.

Field Intelligence Officers frequently accompany military patrols, and their knowledge of the language, the area, and the local leaders can be most valuable. In areas where trouble is expected, or when specific operations are being carried out, Air Liaison Officers with their own Land Rovers and VHF sets are attached to local military formations. However, when an ALO is not immediately available the Field Intelligence Officer is adequately equipped to carry out the duties, and nearly all such officers have had to carry out this task at one time or another. Their detailed knowledge helps to prevent mistakes being made particularly during operations. This mobile air/ground link has, on many occasions, proved its worth in the field of tactical intelligence. The Area Commander, or the Political Officer, can request an air reconnaissance of a doubtful area through which it is proposed to pass and receive the pilot's report whilst he is flying over the area.

Living conditions

Life in the Protectorate is comparatively rough and even when the officer is fortunate enough to be living in a house, it will certainly be little better than a mud hut, with either the most primitive sanitation, or none at all. Water normally comes from wells, and frequently has to be carried long distances. No electricity is available and, therefore, the hot weather has to be endured without the comfort of a fan. However, in compensation, a large slice of the Protectorate is over 3,000 ft above sea level, and is consequently cooler and drier than Aden itself. On the Audhali plateau (approx. 7,000 ft) there are few nights, even in the hot weather, when at least one blanket is not a necessity. One of the simple pleasures of life in the Protectorate is to be able to sit outside in the cool of the evening sipping a cold drink, after a sweltering day in the sun. The oil-burning refrigerator adds a touch of luxury to an otherwise spartan existence. A small quantity of ice is normally available for cooling drinks, and there are few up country refrigerators which do not harbour a supply of beer in cans.

Water, of course, is a vital necessity and the subject of much planning when one is on the move. In many parts of the country wells are few and far between, and route planning has to take account of available supplies. Drinking water is either carried in a one-gallon Thermos flask (part of the standard equipment) or in canvas water bags, which are tied to the sides of the Land Rover, the water being cooled by evaporation. These bags give the Land Rover a slightly Christmas-tree appearance, but it is surprising how cool the water becomes, even on the hottest day. Water for other purposes, including the Land Rover, is carried in jerry cans. At least one improvident officer has had to have water dropped to him from the air, but this practice is frowned upon!

Local food is of poor quality and expensive. Fresh meat (generally the ubiquitous goat) killed and eaten more often than not on the same day, is



Nejd Marqad fort in the Beihan/Yemen border

obtainable from village markets, though not every day. In some areas, notably the Audhali Sultanate and the Dhala Emirate, fresh vegetables of quite reasonable quality are obtainable, together with excellent oranges, limes, grapes and papayas. However, usually tinned food is the answer.

Hospitality

It is a normal part of the officer's duty to attend luncheons or dinners given by local Arab notables, and to invite them in return. These Arab meals, which consist of mountains of rice accompanied by innumerable side dishes and great hunks of roast or boiled meat (generally goat though occasionally mutton or much more seldom, beef), can be extremely appetizing. Frequently the animals are roasted whole on a spit, and served on great dishes.

Entertainment is easy on these festive occasions since, when an Arab is invited to a meal, he expects just that. Small talk is confined to the period before the meal. This time varies, of course, as the Arab's sense of time is rudimentary. If a meal is arranged for midday it is by no means improbable that the guests will have to wait until two o'clock before sitting down to lunch. During the meal small talk is cut to the minimum to allow the maximum concentration on the serious business in hand. Few Bedouins are rich enough to be able to eat meat every day, so that it is a great treat to be able to eat it at someone else's expense and the maximum amount of pleasure must be obtained from it. Such entertainment is an education in mathematics, and needs careful thought. If half a dozen of the more important locals are invited to lunch, it is unlikely that the final party will be less than 30, since each person, for prestige purposes, will wish to bring a number of his followers. There is also

often the individual who thinks that it is a most reprehensible oversight that he has not been invited, but turns up anyway to save one the embarrassment of having to apologise later for one's mistake !

Travelling

Travelling in the Protectorate is slow, dusty and tiring. Road surfaces vary from the glorious free run on packed sand to hazardous tracks, which would have taxed even Dante's imagination. In many parts of the country Wadi beds are the only tracks running roughly in the direction required, and are often strewn with large stones and boulders. Dust arises in clouds and makes convoy driving extremely difficult.

Wadis are found everywhere ; most of them are dry, save during the rainy season, when they vary from a mere trickle of water to a roaring turbulent flood. Most can be negotiated at specified places, except during the flood period for a short time immediately following heavy rains in the hills. The technique for crossing such wadis varies according to the surface of the wadi bed and the height of the water. One has to learn quickly as mistakes can be costly. Fortun-



Mahfid. A typical town in the Western Aden Protectorate

ately, the local tribesmen are expert at reading the signs, and will advise against attempting a dangerous wadi when rain is in the offing.

Officers are briefed not to take unnecessary risks and to make their journeys coincide, where possible, with military patrols from the local APL force and Government Guards. Occasionally, however, they have to travel alone with their teams and two escorts as passengers, since there is seldom room for more

than two escorts in a Land Rover, except on the shortest journeys when no kit has to be carried. Frequently escorts have to sit perched precariously on a pile of camp kit, water cans and rations. In such cases greater alertness than usual is called for against the possibility of ambush—ever present in some localities. Breakdowns on these occasions are most unwelcome, and a certain amount of mechanical knowledge is almost an essential; a small selection of important spares should be carried, together with a full set of tools. Nevertheless, even a puncture in the wrong place may spell trouble, and a well-maintained Land Rover, carefully driven, saves many anxious moments. On lonely journeys the wireless is a great comfort since assistance can be called for either from the nearest camp or fort, or from the Royal Air Force, should it be necessary.

Language and customs

A sense of humour is a useful endowment as most of the local people have a highly developed one. Jokes are made, commonly, with a dead pan expression, and the ability to participate in them is much appreciated. Sometimes one's sense of humour is put to an extreme test, as when one officer was on the Protectorate/Yemen frontier examining the opposition's positions in the company of some prominent and warlike Arabs. The latter must have become bored with the tranquillity of life. To enliven the proceedings they commenced firing on the enemy positions, using tracer bullets, so that the Yemenis would have no difficulty in identifying their positions. Then, to make assurance doubly sure, they stood up on top of the emplacement, waved their arms and uttered war whoops amid the answering fire. Meantime, the officer was hugging the ground behind the emplacement, endeavouring to think up a good reason why he should be wanting a rest so early in the morning!

Arabic is a difficult language to master. The Arabs know this, and are inordinately proud of their language. They are glad when a foreigner learns it and the better he speaks it, the more pleased they are. Their pleasure turns to admiration when one can also read and write the language, as, even today, the majority of local people can neither read nor write. An ability to speak Arabic is an obviously necessary qualification for a Field Intelligence Officer. To speak it well is a great asset, not only for the greater ease of mutual understanding, but from the angle of prestige and confidence.

Usually Arabs judge a man by how he appears to them, and not by the appointment he holds. Their loyalties are personal, and cannot easily be passed from one man to another. In the main, therefore, Field Intelligence Officers have to stand on their own feet and develop their own contacts. A good knowledge of Arab customs is essential, as are tact and an ability to mix freely.

From this general description of the life and duties of a Field Intelligence Officer it will be appreciated that an officer holding such an appointment must be a good linguist, as he must live for long periods with his Arab companions sharing their austere life. He must know enough of their habits and customs to avoid giving offence, and above all he must be able to gain their confidence and respect. Since this is not easy it makes it all the more worthwhile. Any volunteer, who does not speak Arabic, if accepted, has, therefore, to be sent on a language course.

His reward will be a gradual acceptance by the tribesmen and their leaders and an opportunity to play a part in their local affairs. He will lead a life that is different from the normal pattern of military life; often hard, sometimes exciting, but never for one moment dull. His value to the Intelligence Organization is self-evident.