

Campaign Service Medal with 'South Arabia' Clasp 1st August 1964 – 30th November 1967

Qualifying Period – 30 days service in the Federation of South Arabia between the above dates.

The Aden Emergency

Cannot be separated from the Radfan Campaign which had been successfully concluded by the British in July 1964. It was an insurgency against the British Crown forces in the British controlled territories of South Arabia which now form part of the Yemen. Partly inspired by Nasser's pan Arab nationalism, it began on 10 December 1963 with the throwing of a grenade at a gathering of British officials at Aden Airport. A state of emergency was then declared in the British Crown Colony of Aden and its hinterland, the Aden Protectorate. The emergency escalated in 1967 and hastened the end of British rule in the territory which had begun in 1839. On 30 November 1967, British forces withdrew and the independent People's Republic of South Yemen was proclaimed.

Background

Aden was originally of interest to Britain as an anti-piracy station to protect shipping on the routes to British India. With the advent of the Suez Canal in 1869, it further served as a coaling station. Following the independence of India in 1947, Aden became less important to the United Kingdom.

The Emergency was precipitated in large part by a wave of Arab nationalism spreading to the Arabian Peninsula and stemming largely from the socialist and pan-Arabist doctrines of Egyptian leader Gamel Abdel Nasser. The British, French and Israeli forces that had invaded Egypt following Nasser's nationalisation of the Suez Canal in 1956 had been forced to withdraw following intervention from both the United States and the Soviet Union.

Nasser enjoyed only limited success in spreading his pan-Arabist doctrines through the Arab world, with his 1958 attempt to unify Egypt and Syria as the United Arab Republic collapsing in failure three years later. A perceived anti-colonial uprising in Aden in 1963 provided another potential opportunity for his doctrines, though it is not clear to what extent Nasser directly incited the revolt in Aden, as opposed to the Yemeni guerrilla groups drawing inspiration from Nasser's pan-Arabist ideas but acting independently themselves.

Emergency

By 1963 and in the ensuing years, anti-British guerrilla groups with varying political objectives began to coalesce into two larger, rival organisations: first the Egyptian-supported National Liberation Front (NLF) and then the Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen (FLOSY), who attacked each other as well as the British.

Hostilities Commence

Hostilities started on 10 December 1963, with an NLF grenade attack against British High Commissioner of Aden Sir Kennedy Trevaskis, which took place as he arrived at Khormaksar Airport to catch a London-bound flight. The grenade killed a woman and injured fifty other people. On that day, a state of emergency was declared in Aden.

The NLF and FLOSY began a campaign against British forces in Aden, relying largely on grenade attacks. One such attack was carried out against RAF Khormaksar during a children's party, killing a girl and wounding four children.

The guerrilla attacks largely focused on killing off-duty British officers and policemen. Much of the violence was carried out in the Crater, the old Arab quarter of Aden. British forces attempted to intercept weapons being smuggled into the Crater by the NLF and FLOSY on the Dhala road, but their efforts met with little success. Despite taking a toll on British forces, the death toll among rebels was far higher, largely to inter-factional fighting among different rebel groups. In 1964 24th Infantry

Brigade arrived to conduct land operations. It remained in Aden and the Aden Protectorate until November 1967.

By 1965, the RAF station RAF Khormaksar was operating nine squadrons. These included transport units with helicopters and a number of Hawker Hunter fighter bomber aircraft. These were called in by the army for strikes against rebel positions in which they would use 60-pounder high explosive rockets and their 30 mm ADEN cannon.

Aden Street Riots

On 19–20 January 1967, the NLF provoked street riots in Aden. After the Aden police lost control, British High Commissioner Sir Richard Turnbull deployed British troops to crush the riots. As soon as the NLF riots were crushed, pro-FLOSY rioters took to the streets. Fighting between British forces and pro-guerrilla rioters lasted into February. British forces had opened fire 40 times, and during that period there were 60 grenade and shooting attacks against British forces, including the destruction of an Aden Airways Douglas DC-3, which was bombed in mid-air, killing all people on board.

Arab Police Mutiny

The emergency was further exacerbated by the Six-Day War in June 1967. Nasser claimed that the British had helped Israel in the war, and this led to a mutiny by hundreds of soldiers in the South Arabian Federation Army on 20 June, which also spread to the police. The mutineers killed 22 British soldiers and shot down a helicopter, and as a result, the Crater was occupied by rebel forces.

Concerns were heightened regarding the ability to give sufficient security to British families in the midst of the increased violence, and the evacuation plans for families were speeded up considerably. This is recorded in "From Barren Rocks to Living Stones".

Battle of the Crater

Following the mutiny, all British forces were withdrawn from the Crater, while Royal Marines of 45 Commando took up sniping positions on the high ground and killed 10 armed Arab fighters. However, the Crater remained occupied by an estimated 400 Arab fighters. NLF and FLOSY fighters then took to the streets and engaged in gun battles, while arson, looting, and murder was also common. British forces blocked off the two main entrances to the Crater. They came under sniper fire from an Ottoman fort on Sira island, but the snipers were silenced by a shell from an armoured car. Order was restored in July 1967, when the 1st Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders entered Crater under the command of Lt. Col. Colin Campbell Mitchell and managed to occupy the entire district overnight with no casualties.

Withdrawal

Nevertheless, repeated guerrilla attacks by the NLF soon resumed against British forces, causing the British to leave Aden by the end of November 1967, earlier than had been originally planned by British Prime Minister Harold Wilson and without an agreement on the succeeding governance. Following the British departure, the NLF managed to seize power, and established the People's Republic of South Yemen.

Aftermath

Irrespective of the fact that the Suez Canal was shut by Nasser on the eve of the Six Day War, it was to be closed anyhow in the wake of that war because it served as the demarcation line between the Egyptians and the Israeli occupied Sinai desert. The British naval base at Aden also closed in 1967. These factors would deprive the new oil-poor South Yemeni nation of valuable business and revenue, and precipitate severely disruptive economic circumstances for years afterward. British casualties included 57 killed and 651 wounded, while local government forces lost 17 killed and 58 wounded. Casualties among the NLF and FLOSY are unknown. Another source lists British casualties of 68 killed.

Units serving in Aden, 1964–67

8 Sqn RAF
43 Sqn RAF
208 Sqn RAF
123 Signals Unit RAF
40 Commando RM 42 Commando RM
45 Commando RM
10th Royal Hussars (PWO)
1st The Queen's Dragoon Guards
Queen's Own Hussars
4th Royal Tank Regiment
1st Regiment Royal Horse Artillery
3rd Regiment Royal Horse Artillery
7th (Parachute) Regiment Royal Horse Artillery
19th Light Regiment
47th Light Regiment
95th Commando Regiment Royal Artillery
1st Battalion, Coldstream Guards
2nd Battalion, Coldstream Guards
1st Battalion, Welsh Guards
1st Battalion, Irish Guards
1st Battalion, Royal Scots
1st Battalion, King's Own Royal Border Regiment (Various companies in support)
1st Battalion, Royal Irish Fusiliers B Company
1st Battalion, Royal Sussex Regiment
1st Battalion, Royal Northumberland Fusiliers
1st Battalion, Royal Anglian Regiment
3rd Battalion, Royal Anglian Regiment
4th Battalion, Royal Anglian Regiment [C Company]
1st Battalion, Prince of Wales's Own Regiment of Yorkshire
1st Battalion, Lancashire Regiment
1st Battalion, Somerset and Cornwall Light Infantry
1st Battalion, King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry
1st Battalion, Cameronians (Scottish Rifles)
1st Battalion, Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders
1st Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment
1st Battalion, Parachute Regiment
2nd Battalion, Parachute Regiment
3rd Battalion, Parachute Regiment
2 Troop, 34 Independent Field Squadron Royal Engineers
39th Field Squadron, Royal Engineers
60th Field Squadron, Royal Engineers (two tours)
10 Airfields Squadron, Royal Engineers (last until to leave - 13 December 1967)
Royal Corps of Signals
Royal Military Police
Royal Corps of Transport