

"MEMOIRS OF AN RAF MEDIC" 'CONT.'

One morning the Flt. Sgt. took a turn for the worse, so as I came off duty I said to the incoming Sister that if he died I would come up to help her lay him out, so leaving the WRAF Nursing Attendant to look after the polio case. At about 2.30 pm I was in the billet when I said to Brian Webb "I am going up to the hospital to lay out the Flt. Sgt.". His reaction was "How do you know he's died?". Over the Ward there were about six Brown Kites circling, and this was very uncanny but whenever anyone died the Kites always flew overhead.

I had a spell doing Ward Master duties which included seeing to all the admissions, transfers and discharges between Wards.

On Friday nights we tried to keep six empty beds available on the Surgical Ward, especially when the Royal Highland Fusiliers and Commando Royal Marines had their friendly get together in the Lido at Steamer Point.

As we did not have a proper mortuary any corpses were placed on twelve 56lb. blocks of ice on the examination slab. Every two hours the duty driver made the journey to the Ice House to bring in fresh supplies. To carry out the replenishment each body was transferred to a stretcher, cleanse the examination table and remove the melted ice, before replacing same and transferring the corpse from the stretcher back onto the new ice base. Squadron Leader Moore, the Pathologist would ensure that the corpse would not fall onto the floor since to use his words, "They do not bloody bounce back up and they make a mess".

One night we had two bodies in the mortuary, one on the slab and the other one on the floor. I went into the room to check the condition of the ice when I noticed the sheet covering the body on the slab was rising and falling in a rhythmic pattern. I immediately woke up the duty driver Mick Sparrow and asked him to come with me to check if the patient was alive. He was so scared

that I had to grab him by his collar and push him into the mortuary! Eventually one of us glanced up to see that the ceiling fan was drawing the sheet up and down as it revolved above the body.

What a relief!

In 1960 Brian Webb and I were allocated places to go to Kenya for a two week break. We stayed in the White Highlands on a farm in Nanyuki where we had a glorious time. Upon our return we noticed that the billet was exceptionally quiet so we asked what was wrong. We were told that the Clerk Catering, Jock Reid from the Aden Supplies Depot had drowned in the sea a few days before. A very sad time for all who knew the "Singing Scotsman". *(Douglas Alexander Reid is buried at Ma'ala Cemetery in Aden and died on 9th July 1960 Ed.)*

In 1961 I went again to Kenya, but this time on Ground Defence Training, which was in effect a measure to preserve one's sanity.

Based at RAF Eastleigh near Nairobi we set off on a Safari, camped on the banks of the Tana River, before returning to base via "The Fourteen Falls Hotel". On our flight back to Aden we were advised that a sandstorm was raging over the airport at Khormaksar, but by the time we were due to land the storm had abated and we came down safely to territory that we were familiar with.

One of my last regular duties was to go to Khormaksar once or twice a week to meet the "casevac" aircraft on route from the Far East. The patients requiring accommodation at Steamer Point Hospital were duly transported by road, whilst the "walking wounded" were looked after at RAF Khormaksar. The bearers did all the preparations so basically my task was to ensure that the patients had a very early night since departure for the United Kingdom was normally around 05.30 the next morning. At around 05.00 hours the following morning I would

be woken up by the bearer to be told that everyone was awake and had been fed and were ready to leave for the aircraft. After the aircraft had left RAF Khormaksar I had the opportunity to have a wash and shave, take breakfast and await the road transport back to Steamer Point. I reported back for duties at around 09.00 hours and the Matron would normally prescribe a day off in order to catch up on my sleep. This duty was considered to be a bit of a "doddle".

We played Rugby in Aden, frequently against the Royal Army Medical Corp, or who ever else could raise a team. Our changing room was often the back of a three ton truck en route to the match.

In August 1961 the duty officer came into the billet to tell me that my Father was seriously ill and that I was being sent home on compassionate leave. Even though I still had two months to go before officially being declared as "Tourex". I did not go back to Aden but finished my time at RAF Credenhill near Hereford, which is now the home of the SAS.

I still keep in touch with Brian Webb, Kenneth Rilston, and Peter Ribbons, and I am pleased to see their names appear on the National Membership List each year.

Nevertheless there are many names that come to mind that I do not see mentioned.

To everyone – thank you for helping me to make the most of what could have been two years of purgatory, and due to our sustained efforts we all came through this period with a better understanding.

I trust the above may activate a few more memories and I look forward to reading them or hearing from a few more old friends. I can be contacted by telephone on **01452 619895** or at my address: **31 Mayfield Drive, Hucclecote, Gloucester, GL3 3DS.**

Jim Major 4248121.