



RAF MASIRAH, OMAN. 1972

I was detached to RAF Masirah, in Oman, for 4 weeks, which was extended to 6 weeks to instruct the ground crew on the servicing and minor rectification, of 53 Squadron Belfast Freighters, as I was a Sergeant Aircraft Engineer, Qualified on that Aircraft as they were unfamiliar with it.

I Flew out to Akrotiri, in Cyprus, by VC10 of 10 Squadron, which took about 4 hours, I was billeted in the Sergeants mess, to await an aircraft to take me to RAF Masirah, there was a Hercules going out there from 70 Squadron, but I declined the offer as a Belfast was due out the next day on route to Masirah, so I was put on the passenger list, much more comfortable not like a noisy Hercules, a Gentleman's aircraft as we used to say.

The Belfast arrived on schedule, and was turned round and refuelled, ready for its trip down route. I got on board introduced myself to the crew, some of whom I knew, from the Squadron, The aircraft was empty I recall except for a spares pack, Jacks, main and nose wheels, and a towing arm, just in case the aircraft had to be moved down route.

The flight of 1850 miles took about 5.5 hours, flying over Syria, Iraq, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, via the Persian Gulf.

We finally landed at Masirah, the aircraft was refuelled and serviced with my help, and the crew did a night stop, I was allocated a room in the Sergeants Mess, got my kit unpacked, and had a meal in the mess.

The next day I went out to the aircraft ready for its departure, to Singapore via RAF Gan in the Maldives.

AS there wasn't much to do on the island, apart from walking (Trogging) as it was called or Fishing, I opted for the Fishing, as I had brought some gear with me on advice from UK, I started off with light tackle, and finished up with 25lb line and steel traces, whatever was out there in the Indian Ocean was huge it took everything I cast out, I think it must have been either a shark or a Barracuda, I decided to give the Fishing a miss and went for the walking instead.

There was on the other side of the airfield a small local market (Souk) where you could buy all sorts of things, I bought 3 Seiko watches which were genuine as they came in boxes with the usual guarantee, for a good price, and took them home with me.

One day an Andover from 84 Squadron based at RAF Sharjah, came it and we were offered a trip down to Muscat, for the day we flew into Seeb International airport, and organised transport into Muscat the Capitol, for a general look around and visit the Markets, most interesting, got transport back to the Airport and flew back to Masirah.

Back at base there wasn't much going on apart from a daily supply run from Akrotiri with the Hercules, fresh food every day, they fed us well,

We used to get visits from the Omani Air Force in their Shorts Skyvan Aircraft, usually carrying local tribes men armed with Lee Enfield, 303 rifles, complete with a 100 rounds of ammunition, in two bandoliers, and a curved Arab knife stuck in their belts, they looked fearsome, and by all accounts were very good shots.



My 6 weeks were up and I needed to return home as there were matters that needed my attention, a Belfast came in on route back from Singapore, and it was empty, and Air Movements decided to load a fire engine onboard for return to UK, I asked the STO, (Senior Technical Officer) if I could return with the aircraft, and he agreed .

I am pretty sure the Fire Engine was full of water, as on the take-off run with me on board strapped into a seat on the ramp it, took 47 seconds to rotate as I timed it, and I had done the Turn-round and refuelling, quite a scary experience .

We landed at Akrotiri, after a 5.5 hour flight, refuelled and took off for Brize Norton 2020 miles which took about 6 hour flying time, on landing at Brize, we went through the arrivals lounge and Customs, and I got transport back to RAF Abingdon, my home base, a most interesting and enjoyable detachment.

John Billinton, RAF Sgt Retd.