

The following account of the mortar attack on RAF Khormaksar was first published in the First & Last; The Journal of the 81st Entry.

“ ‘Ave **Yew** bin under fire? “

I have already admitted/confessed to having joined the Territorial Army a few years after leaving the RAF. Well I was a serial offender, as in 1984 I re-enlisted; into a Home Service Force [HSF] company, attached to the 3rd Battalion, Royal Regiment of Wales.

The HSF was composed of men with a minimum of 2 years previous military service; the gamut of previous military experience in my unit ran from the AC2 who used to deliver the internal mail around RAF Compton Basset, through to ex- Para's.

One member of my section was a Korean War veteran, who took great exception to being under the command of any one who hadn't seen active service. His refrain, when given an order, or such like, was

“ ‘Ave **Yew** bin under fire?”

The inference being that only those who had been shot at were entitled to tell him what to do. When Bert (I think that was his name) tried it on me I replied, truthfully, that I had. This answer mollified him somewhat and he never asked for details. So to set the record straight here is my tale.

July 1967, RAF Khormaksar, Aden;

The Six Day War had been and went; there was a heightened state of tension. Wives and dependants had been sent back to UK; living out personnel had been brought on to camp. The natives were definitely restless.

It was a quiet Sunday morning; the only flying on 37 Sqdn's program was 'manders' for one of the aircrews. As not much was involved it was thought OK to allow an Armourer Sgt (me!) to be NCO i/c Duty Crew, with a couple of responsible adults [i.e. Cpl Fitter and a Cpl Rigger] on hand to show me where to put my X in the F700.

The duty crew went out on to the pan to do what ever they had to do, [I believe there was an engine run involved]. I was left in charge of the Squadron Office [probably the first time I had been in there] with the red telephone to Ops. up at Strike Wing HQ.

I was idly reading through the list of punishments on offer for any false entries made into the F700 when I heard a bang, followed by a dull thump.

“What the F...!” My imprecation was stopped nano seconds later by louder (much louder) bang, followed by a thunderous thump, accompanied by the sound as if all the cats in Khormaksar were doing a clog dance on the hanger roof.

I ran out of the office, through the hanger to the entrance, which led out on to the pan.

I only just avoided ‘Death by Land rover’ as the squadron vehicle came hurtling into the hanger. The ashen faced duty crew were clinging on like K.D limpets [would my demise have been attributed to ‘friendly fire’?] We all piled into the office where the crew talked excitedly, (and loudly), about being shelled/bombed etc, all the time puffing nervously on their fags (even the non smokers). Just then the Tannoy came to life and a voice told us the camp was under attack and all personnel should take cover.

I showed my leadership qualities by promptly diving under the office table. About ten minutes later the red ‘phone rang. By this time the lads had calmed down a bit (although I was still under the table). I gingerly reached up and brought the handset down to my ear. “Hullo “ I squeaked nervously, expecting an Arab voice to call on me to surrender (I already had a rather grubby white hankie ready). A voice on the other end, which I recognized as the Squadron CO, asked, “Is there damage to any of our aircraft? Are they airworthy, if not how long to get them ready to fly?”

“Err, I don’t know, I haven’t been to look yet “ was my brave retort.

There was an icy silence for a second or two, I realized I had not given the proper reply, Damn it! I thought, there goes my BEM.

“Why haven’t you checked the aircraft for damage?” he demanded.

Quick as a flash I had my answer.

“ We were ordered to take cover Sir, we haven’t been given the All Clear”(a master stroke, I think you will agree under the circumstances. Who says that plumbers are slow witted?)

A longer, icier, silence, finally broken by a ” humph”, then the phone put down, none too gently.

“Cowardice in the Face of the Enemy; Dereliction of Duty, Lack of Morale Fibre, Conduct to the Detriment of Good Order and Discipline“ this was the sub text of that “humph”. [For weeks afterwards I checked my mail for any attached white feathers]

Some 5 minutes after this conversation the door of the office opened and in strolled the skipper (a Kiwi Flt. Lt) of the aircraft due to go on 'manders'. He was probably surprised to see all the duty crew in the office, with the NCO i/c cowering under the table, but being an officer **and** a gentleman didn't comment

It transpired that he had no knowledge of the attack. He had driven in from his quarters and hadn't heard the explosions or the Tannoy!

"I thought it was a bit quiet this morning" he remarked! He then asked if any of the duty crew had been wounded during the attack, which is more than the Squadron Commander ever did.

The Flt.Lt. sauntered out to the pan "to view any damage", the fitters and riggers trailed after him. Eventually all the duty crew left the office, except for me, but I had come out from under the table by then. More members of the squadron arrived as time went on so I relinquished my command of the duty crew and slunk back to the familiar territory of the Squadron Armoury.

I believe that there was a fair amount of shrapnel damage but the lads worked long and hard to get the aircraft serviceable and later that day the two Shacks' flew over Crater, showing that 37 was back in the air and ready to kick bottom.

So that is my take on the Khormaksar Mortar Attack of 1967

Not just under fire but also under the table.

Now you know why Dave's account doesn't mention the NCO i/c Duty Crew; no one knew I was there hiding under the table.