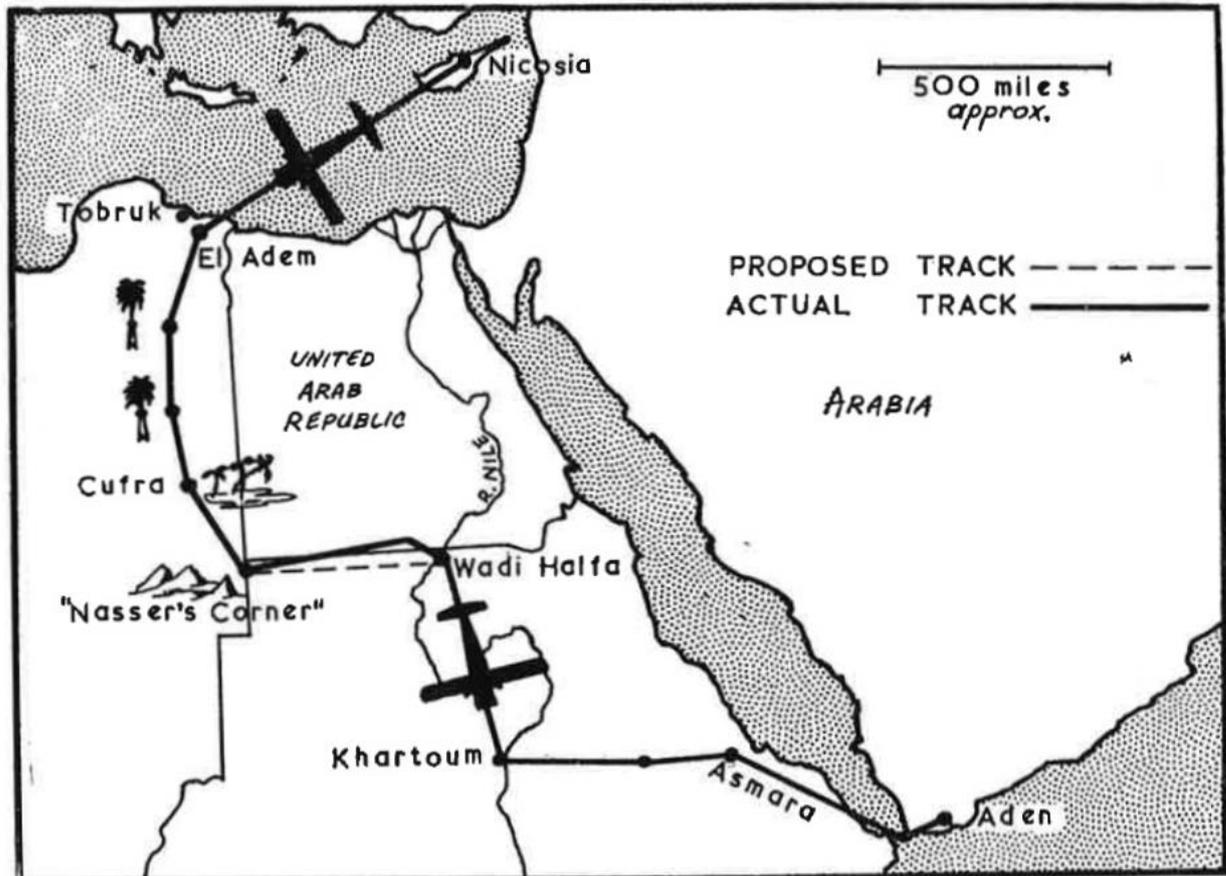


CYPRUS to ADEN.....JUNE 1964

Article courtesy of the Army Air Corps Association Journal

Spring 1965 No:7



On the morning of 3rd June 19 Flight received a large signal from Ministry of Defence (Army) instructing us to fly our three Beavers from Cyprus to Aden. We had flown out to Cyprus in February, and had become a part of the United Nations force there. We were told that the trip had to be completed by 16th June.

In a remarkably short time maps were being examined, the flight planning room of R.A.F. Nicosia being turned upside down, and possible routes being debated.

We decided that the most feasible route was via Egypt, the Sudan and Ethiopia, and a signal requesting diplomatic clearance was despatched the next day. As we were not sure whether clearance would be granted, we began planning for a route which would take us via Libya and “Nasser’s Corner,” a large rock outcrop on the south west border of Egypt. This leg was to be our major problem, as the distance involved was over 1,000 miles, there were no airfields or navigational aids en route, and we had no long-range tanks. From our experience of flying in Libya the previous year, we knew that there was an oasis at Kufra which the R.A.F. used as a desert rescue strip. We now had to find out whether the strip was suitable, and whether any fuel was positioned there. We signalled R.A.F. Aden for this information, and asked Middle Wallop for long-range fuel tanks to be provided as a matter of urgency.

On 8th June we were informed by signal that some fuel was positioned at Kufra, and that the strip was suitable. Dependent now upon the delivery from U.K. of long-range tanks, our flight plan could go ahead. We talked to the met. men and contacted H.Q. Near East Air Force asking them to position new stocks of fuel for us, we required 300 gallons, and a drum of oil. Met. caused us some anxiety, as the forecasters were very cagey, and spoke ominously of rising sand and “ghiblis.” A few hours spent with the Hastings Squadron at Nicosia gave us a lot of local knowledge and calmed our worst fears. We decided to get a local forecast at El Adem, and play it from there. Having given a lot of thought to the problem of navigation, we decided to ask the R.A.F. to provide a Pembroke escort with a navigator for the leg El Adem—Kufra—Wadi Haifa.

It was well that we took these steps, as we were refused overflight permission for Egypt on 8th June, and time was running short. Time was our next problem ; we were held up by a Minor on one Beaver, and were still waiting for two long-range tanks.

We estimated that the flying time would be in the region of 26 hours, and wanted at least five days en route. Crew fatigue was discussed at length, and we came to the conclusion that aircraft had to get to Aden, and that if we had underaken too much, we would rest route. The second leg meant 10 hours planned flying time without a co-pilot but this had to be accepted, as a night at Kufra was out of the question. On 9th June War Office advised us to fly via Turkey, Persia, Sharjah, Masrah Safety heights in the order of 20,000 ft. precluded this, coupled with the fact that it would have taken a fortnight !

We pressed on with the Libya plan, and all was complete except for the long-range tanks, confirmation of fuel at Kufra and an escort. As diplomatic clatrance was not necessary, flight notification was signalled to the stages en route. On 12 June, the day before we departed, the two long-range tanks arrived late in the evening. They were unpacked and to our dismay, found to be punctured 1 They had been packed with their filler caps secure, and pressure in the descent in transit had burst them. Capts. Bingham and Eames, our E.M.E. officers and the R.B.M.E. fitters, set to work with a will to repair them. They were repaired early on the morning of 12th, and fitted. When one of the pilots asked whether they were safe, Capt. Eames became so incensed that we feared one Beaver would stay for want of a pilot At midday on June 13th, heavily swathed in Mac Wests, the crews of the three Beavers-Capt. Wastie, who was to lead the Beaver Section, Capt. Ingram, Capt. Ashley and the three mechanics, Cpl. Gavin, Cpl. Lace and L.Cpl. Cain said farewell to Major General Carver, who had come to see us off. The first leg to El Adem took us 5 hours 45 mins.. and we picked up the El Adem N.D.B. 200 miles out at sea. When we arrived we contacted the crew of our escort, which we discovered to our consternation was a Valetta with a cruising speed of 180 knots! As we could not now keep our escort in sight, we had to think again, and again the temperature rose in the flight planning room.

We plotted three oil-rig N.B.D.'s from the Valetta Navigator (who had checked their position from the air that morning), and replanned our route via these. One N.D.B. was off our maps and, as El Adem had no maps, we resorted to the en route chart. We decided to compute our heading and fly as accurately as we could. The maps were so featureless that this was all we could do. The Valetta would take off after us, and we would tune our A.D.F. into his M.F. transmissions to check our track. When the Valetta had found Kufra, he would circle and transmit on V.H.F. until we had horned on to with our Green Salad. In case this plan went wrong, we decided to turn back at the first oil rig. On the morning of 14th at 4.30 we took off and climbed through a thin layer of fog. We waited for sudden silence when we switched the fuel " off," and the long range tank on," but as before it worked beautifully. Dawn was just breaking as we cleared the fog layer, and a lovely rose glow suffused the sky ; the anti-collision beacons of the Beaver stood out brightly as we climbed, and it was delightfully cool after El Adem. We settled on course and began to digest the notorious El Adem breakfast of soya bean sausage and baked beans. We picked up the first oil rig N.D.B., and later flew over the oil rig. It was an enormous place, with air-conditioned caravans and an air strip. We changed course and flew on to the next beacon. Soon we began to hear the Valetta, but were unable to tune our A.D.F. to his transmissions. Four and a half hours later, we began to home on his V.H.F. transmissions. as he circled Kufra. We landed after 4.55 hours flying, and refuelled from drums. Kufra possessed an Italian hanger with dilapidated buildings. Various British formations had, over the years, decorated the walls, and holes from cannon shells were seen in the hangar roof. Refuelling took over two hours, and we tried to rest while the locals and our air mechs. worked. We took off for Wadi Haifa at midday, and the heat was suffocating-huge clouds of sand rose as we turned on to track. This was our most difficult leg, as we had to fly in a straight line for more than 500 miles without any ground references.

We found ourselves about eight miles port of track when we sighted “ Nasser’s Corner,” and turned on to course for Wadi. Flying was extremely bumpy, and El Adem had provided lunch with each item carefully separated in cellophane. Several unusual attitudes were experienced as we attempted to butter bread and pick up salad with the control yoke in the way Much fell to the floor, where it remained. They had also replaced the ice in our Thermos flasks with tepid water, which did nothing to add to our good temper. The desert was astonishing- absolutely featureless as far as the eye could see, and there was no sign of a main road leading to Wadi Haifa, prominently marked on our \$ million maps. After four hours we began to check our track on the Valetta’s transmissions, and found that we were 20 deg. off track. Only 50 miles before reaching Wadi Halfa we picked up their N.D.B. As before, the Valetta circled, and transmitted the latest elephant jokes ! This leg took 4.55 hours. When we landed a strong, hot wind was blowing, and after nearly two hours of form-filling, we climbed into an open pick-up and headed for our hotel with the R.A.F. crew. We passed an upturned truck on the way, which explained why refuelling had to wait until next morning. Surprisingly enough, we were not tired, although we had flown for almost, 10 hours that day. The Nile flowed serenely past the garden of our hotel- a Sudan Railways Hotel- and we soon became immersed in the atmosphere of days long past. The hotel is soon to be covered by the huge dam which will be created by the Aswan project. The walls were decorated with photographs with captions like “ European lady on a camel preparing to go sight-seeing.” There was a problem in obtaining a drink, but this was solved by liaison with the crew of the Valetta, who had brought their own Carls- berg. Reminiscences were exchanged until dinner, and we went to bed early. After a gentle awakening with tea served in a silver teapot. we had breakfast and were driven to the airport. Our forecast weather was poor, giving sandstorms at Khar- toum, so we began to re-plan our route via Port Sudan direct to Asmara.

Half-way through this exercise a further forecast came through which was quite different, and acceptable. We filed our original flight plan, and began preparations for take off. The day was bright and hazy, and we were soon leaving the Nile cataracts behind, and flying over desert strewn with rock outcrops, sand making strange patterns where the prevailing winds had blown it. We completed an intercept on the Wadi Haifa N.D.B., and set our course. We sighted Khartoum three hours later, and as we joined the circuit saw with amazement the manner in which the houses of the city were laid out. There appeared to be at least one complete Union Jack in sight. Buzzards circled the airfield, and we hoped we would be more fortunate than Stuart Whitehead who struck one whilst flying at Beaver to Kenya, displacing a wing. We hoped for a more satisfying "bird" strike on our night stops. We refuelled and ate some sandwiches with a representative of the Air Attache, and examined an indigenous Beaver painted red and white which was parked nearby. The leg to Asmara was flown at 9,000 feet, and the haze all but obscured the land. We lost sight of each other for long intervals and flew on instruments. As we neared Asmara, the flat desert gave way to mountains, and the air became cool and heavy, We could see thunderstorms ahead, and were unable to tune to Asmara on the A.D.F. ; the static was earshattering. Soon we were flying above a cauldron of boiling sand, which reached up almost to the aircraft, and quickly built up behind us, the sky before became darker, and the A.D.F. more useless. We calculated that we were near Asmara and the air was becoming more turbulent and we were flying through rain. Suddenly, just as we were contemplating diversions, through the boiling red cloud of sand behind us we saw the plateau of Asmara below the clouds, and we began a gradual descent towards it. The weather was fine over Asmara, and crystal clear. We joined the circuit and landed. It was a delightful place, we were greeted by ground crew as long lost brothers, and an enormous amount of trouble was taken by the airport authorities to make sure we were comfortable.

When the usual endless formalities were completed, we were driven to our hotel. The town of Asmara was delightful, and one could almost have been in Italy ; it was cool and green and sidewalk cafes abounded. We stayed in a pension, and were amused to observe groups of prosperous-looking Ethiopians entering and leaving rooms accompanied by the most attractive companions. Readers may draw their own conclusions, as indeed we did!

Breakfast the next morning consisted of a tiny cup of bitter black coffee, so we plundered the large bunches of grapes which grew in abundance in the garden, and, still ejecting grape-fruit, we mounted the airport bus. Our last leg was uneventful, and took 3 hours 25 mins., and as we climbed from our aircraft at Falaise Airfield, we were greeted with a large bottle of ice-cold beer, which was as welcome as nectar. The trip took three and a half days. and a total flying time of 25 hours and 20 mins. The three Beavers were soon dismembered and loaded on to the aircraft carrier H.M.S. Centaur, for onward shipment to the Far East. As a final conclusion, we received a signal from G.O.C. 3 Division reading.....

"Congratulations on successful completion historic Beaver Flight. 3 Division feels lost without its Beavers."