

# TWILIGHT CONFLICT: OPERATIONS IN THE RADFAN, MAY-JUNE 1964

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The operations in the Radfan mountains, within the hinterland of Aden, which occurred during May and June 1964, possess a curious multi-faceted appeal, which is embodied in the term 'twilight' contained within the title. It was a twilight conflict in so far as it represents the very last active military role which Britain adopted east of Suez; in a very real sense it embodies the dusk of Empire. The terrain of the Radfan mountains, and the nature of the primitive tribal opponents, endows the operations with echoes of the North West Frontier. However, the conflict was cast within a very different global context, that characterized by the eclipse of Empire, and in which the term 'red on the map' points to the paramountcy of a very different power. This absence of the assurance which underlay Britain's military role during the last quarter of the nineteenth century has an important bearing on the facet of the operations which relates to the press and politics. For the military response to the recalcitrant tribesman of the Aden hinterland was effected within a context of 'public opinion' (represented by the news media) — both in Britain and elsewhere — which was essentially hostile to any connotations of Britain's traditional imperial role. Within another, more specifically military, context, it represents the twilight of purely land-based operations; the Radfan theatre of conflict illustrates the necessity for co-ordinated air and land operations and thereby exemplifies the process whereby the soldier moves into the three dimensional sphere; pivoting upon the tactical role of helicopters. It is intended to analyse the conflict within the context of the lessons to be derived from it — in terms of global strategy, intelligence, the role of helicopters, and administration/organization.

## Background to the Operations

The geo-political context in which these operations occurred has now totally ceased to exist. Aden became a British Protectorate in 1839, after Captain Haines of the Royal Navy landed in order to avenge the early ravaging of a Madras ship which had gone aground in the vicinity. In the name of Queen Victoria he annexed the territory which was thenceforward administered from India. The Aden Protectorates lay mainly to the north-east of the colony of Aden. The Western Aden Protectorates

(WAP) were situated parallel to the Yemen. Within the Western Aden Protectorates were the Federation of Arab Emirates of the South (founded on 3 February 1959). However, not all states were federated or even administered. In point of fact, the British never directly ruled beyond the colony of Aden and rarely had been able to do more than advise (and occasionally browbeat) the local rulers. Nevertheless, there was effected, in 1962, a merger between the Aden colony and the Federation. Britain promised these Federated States future independence. Events in these states were profoundly influenced by developments in the neighbouring Yemen, in which the death of the Iman Ahmed of Yemen triggered a rebellion and the proclamation of the 'Free Yemeni Republic' by insurgent troops (31 October 1962). Colonel Abdullah al-Salal became President. However, the claimant to the imamate, Muhammed al-Badr found refuge in South Arabia and organized the royalist tribes against the new regime. These events exercised direct repercussions upon the Western Aden Protectorates; in so far as the Sultanic members of the Federation allied themselves with the Royalists, and Nasser of Egypt with the Republican faction in the Yemen. The latter's 'anti-imperialist' policy and the belief (or excuse) that it was essential to eliminate support for the Royalists emanating from the Western Aden Protectorates led to the subversion of the not unsusceptible Radfan tribesmen; a subversion which assumed the form of providing them with training in the Yemen, and also arms, upon the condition that they returned to the Western Aden Protectorates in order to undermine stability. The activities of factious tribesmen were not unknown phenomena in the Western Aden Protectorates. The new factor resided in the nature of the equipment and the scale of weaponry. For the first time an approximation of a uniform appeared, and also automatic weapons and bazookas. (The subversion was extended to Aden itself, expressed in the form of terrorist operations directed by two rival movements; the *National Liberation Front* and the *Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen*. On 25 September 1964, the British government

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suspended the Aden constitution because of the failure of local authorities to deal with the terrorism of the extreme leftist National Liberation Front. On 2 March 1966, a revolutionary command was established at Taiz (Yemen) by the *Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen* (FLOSY). The new front initiated terrorist operations, especially in Aden.

The epilogue to the Radfan operation was that, in June 1967, the British forces withdrew from the tribal areas in the hinterland of Aden. On 22 February 1966, the British government announced its intention to abandon the Aden base as soon as the South Arabian states attained their independence in 1968 (despite the fact that a British government Defence White Paper of April 1962 stated that the policy of Her Majesty's Government was to maintain a base in Aden for at least the following ten years). 5 September 1967, witnessed the official dissolution of the Federation of South Arabian States, which were formally declared independent on 29 November 1967 (henceforth officially designated the *People's Republic of Southern Yemen*, with Qahtan-a-Shaabi as President). In 1968 the British withdrew from the Aden base. As Britain withdrew from South Arabia, and eventually Aden itself, the ruling Sheiks and Sultans found their power destroyed by nationalist forces. The power which ultimately seized control of the Southern Yemen — and thus of the South Arabian States and the Aden colony itself — was the *National Liberation Front* (NLF), even more radical and more opposed to tribal rule than the *Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen*, the latter of which was supported by Egypt, and the Yemeni republicans. The vanquishing of the *Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen* by the *National Liberation Front* was the familiar situation by which one terrorist faction ousts another.

It should be borne in mind that the geopolitical context of these Radfan operations possesses a vital strategic dimension, in addition to the purely military and historical facets. There were undoubted powerful strategic inducements for the assertion of a continued British presence in the Defence White Paper of 1962. From the logistic viewpoint, the Aden colony (whose existence became untenable once the hinterland had been occupied by hostile forces) formed a strategic crossroads, providing a base for a striking force either south past the Horn of Africa or north towards the Persian Gulf. With regard to the former, the efficacy of such a base was vividly illustrated by the prompt response of

carrier-borne forces, operating from Aden, to President Nyerere's appeal for assistance in quelling the Tanzanian army mutinies (motivated by anti-British sentiment in the armed forces); in four days four separate mutinies were crushed (1964). With regard to the military access to the Persian Gulf, although the abstract function of British forces in Aden was to maintain stability, their effective presence did provide a disincentive to the utilization of oil as a political weapon against the West (a feature of the 1970s).

### **Aden and indirect strategy**

In point of fact, the British withdrawal from the Aden colony and the Western Aden Protectorates provides a model of important aspects of the functioning of indirect strategy. The method of indirect strategy is the answer to one of the most perplexing military dilemmas of our time; viz. how highly sophisticated military technologies (those of France, the United States, Portugal and Great Britain) have allowed themselves to be ejected from vital spheres of influence (in South East Asia, Angola and Mozambique, and the Middle East — particularly Egypt and Aden) by insurgency movements largely consisting of primitive peasants. The reason for this phenomenon resides in the peculiar psychological-military-political resources utilized by the strategy of indirect approach; resources which function independently of traditional western orientated approaches towards conflict. The essence of indirect strategy is the process by which an expansionist power obtains control of a particular sphere of influence without physically committing its own troops; through the method of dominating insurrectionary movements (that is the terrorists) against the established regime. Translated into the South East Asian theatre, the victories of the Communist Viet Minh and its successor, the Viet Cong, secured for Chinese Communism a vital sphere of influence, whilst obviating the necessity of physically committing its own troops (as it did in Korea). The successes of Frelimo and the MPLA, in Mozambique and Angola respectively, have secured vital bridgeheads for the Soviet Union. (In the latter instance, this bridgehead was consolidated by direct military intervention by Soviet intermediaries, thereby departing from the rigid tenets of indirect strategy). The supreme advantage of the indirect approach is the maximum freedom of manoeuvre which it permits the protagonist, whilst seriously restricting that of the subject who is attacked. It should be borne in mind that the success of insurgency within any particular operation is dependent upon the success of such programmes within a

global context. This concept may be defined as 'exterior manoeuvre'; the central feature of which is to ensure for oneself maximum freedom within terms of the international political-diplomatic community, whilst simultaneously paralysing the enemy by a multitude of deterrent checks. Writing on the psychological dimension of exterior manoeuvre, Andre Beaufre<sup>1</sup> states:

*It is a point worth noting that, just as in military operations one captures a position on the ground and denies it to the enemy, on the psychological plane it is possible to take over abstract positions and equally deny them to the other side ... The procedures employed to achieve this deterrent effect range from the most subtle to the most brutal: appeal will be made to the legal formulae of national and international law, play will be made with moral and humanitarian susceptibilities and there will be attempts to prick the enemy's conscience.*

(The general international reaction to South Africa's recent raids in South West Africa certainly lend credence to Beaufre's comments.)

Aden embodies the approach of indirect strategy in five important respects. First, it exemplifies the 'domino principle' implicit in such an approach. The domino theory has important implications for the concept of exterior manoeuvre. Should the nation under attack yield certain areas or spheres of influence in response to the programme of exterior manoeuvre, it will become correspondingly more difficult to resist renewed assaults. Thus, in response to the climate of 'international opinion' which denigrated 'colonization', generated at the United Nations, France relinquished her colonies in West Africa and much of North Africa (Morocco and Tunisia). It was thus not ideologically equipped to counter the psychological assault upon its defence of Algeria. The success of this assault was such that, although the FLN was decisively defeated in the field, it gained a conclusive psychological victory over the French political establishment. Similarly, it became psychologically impossible for Britain to defend Aden and the Western Aden Protectorates once the tone of its response to threatened spheres of influence had become firmly fixed after Suez (1956). It should be noted that the functioning of the domino principle component of exterior manoeuvre did not end with the British exodus from Aden. When it had been decided in 1966 to withdraw entirely from South Arabia, it had been assumed that Britain would maintain and reinforce its military presence in Bahrain. However, in January 1968 the govern-

ment made a sudden 'volte face' and announced that it would be withdrawing all its forces by 1971. This decision to end Britain's last quasi-imperial relationship to the Arab world was confirmed by the Conservative government when it came to power in 1970.

Second, the Radfan operations clearly illustrate the process by which the practice of exterior manoeuvre imposes deterrents within a purely military context. The sole use of the Royal Air Force in policing operations (upon the pattern of the Middle East in the 1920s) was prohibited as the result of the hostile response — both domestic and international — to a Royal Air Force operation on 28 March 1964, in which British aircraft destroyed a Yemeni fort in retaliation for an attack against the Federation. This restriction upon the use of air power was especially unfortunate, as Aden had for many years been a Royal Air Force stronghold, dating as far back as 1917, when the Henry Farman Flight was formed for reconnaissance against Turkish forces operating against the territory from the Yemen. Of more immediate significance was the fact that Khormaksar airfield, in addition to being the airport of Aden, was one of the largest and busiest air stations of the Royal Air Force. It was a strategic airfield of obvious importance and fully capable of operating the largest jets. Khormaksar airfield was a vital staging post in the air link with the Far East, in addition to being an ideal base for aircraft supporting military operations in the Western Aden Protectorates.

Thirdly, the British presence in the Western Aden Protectorates clearly illustrates the futility of utilizing moral-judicial principles in countering such a psychological assault, in view of the latter's essential cynicism. In a lecture delivered at the Royal United Service Institution on 24 November 1965, by Brigadier G.S. Heathcote,<sup>2</sup> the Chairman, (Air Vice Marshal F.E. Rosier) stated:

*As the sappers get on with their roads and the building of wells a change will come over the attitude of the local tribes. They will see that we are helping them.*<sup>3</sup>

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1. Andre Beaufre: *An introduction to Strategy* (London, 1965)
  2. All ranks denoted refer to those held at the time the particular comments were stated or a particular command held.
  3. Royal United Service Institution Journal, No. 641 February — November 1966 (G.S. Heathcote: Operations in the Radfan)

Certainly, the lack of any sophisticated communications (roads, etc) in the Radfan seriously impeded rapid ground movement; but the political-psychological value, as opposed to the purely military advantages, of such development, may be seriously doubted, in view of the fact that it could not prevent ultimate British withdrawal, and the total collapse of the Federation.

Fourthly, Aden clearly exemplifies the extent to which the United Nations is an extremely pliant instrument in the practice of exterior manoeuvre. On 5 November 1964, the United Nations trusteeship committee called on Britain to surrender its Aden base. Fifthly, it illustrates the method by which indirect strategy encourages and utilizes a hostile and orchestrated response on the part of the mass media ('play will be made with moral and humanitarian susceptibilities'). There can be little doubt that, in general, the Radfan operations received a 'bad press' in the overseas media. An image was projected of a colonial power employing heavy weapons against a defenceless people, Britain was represented as supporting a government supposedly composed of semi-feudal Sultans against an oppressed people. This facet of the campaign represents a consistent feature of Counter Insurgency operations in the succeeding decade; the military endeavour being undermined and corroded by efforts to alienate the national psychology from the protagonists of Counter Insurgency operations. This characteristic had been manifest in France during the Indo-China and Algerian wars. An uncensored left-wing press played a major role in injecting a mood of defeatism, and inducing into the political psychology of the nation the concept that capitulation was the only rational course. The American news media performed a similar role during the United States involvement in Vietnam. In their book, *Wars of the twentieth century*<sup>4</sup>, the authors write of Vietnam:

*North Vietnam proved that a great power can be defeated in a guerilla war, if the war is waged successfully in the newspapers and on the television sets of the people who, in a democracy, ultimately pay for and support any military effort.*

### Course of Operations

The prologue to the British armed intervention in the South Arabian States occurred in 1963, when the Dhala Road began to be seriously interfered with. As a result the army of the Federation (the Federal Regular Army or FRA) undertook the first

Radfan operation in January 1964. It was designated *Nutcracker* and was remarkably successful. However, the political objective was never made clear, and, due to the fact that the Federal Regular Army was so over-extended, combined with a local reluctance to occupy and administer the area, the troops, who had secured the Rabwa Pass, reached the fertile area of the Wadi Thaim, and even penetrated up the spine of the Bakri Ridge were eventually withdrawn. The effect of this withdrawal was unfortunate, as it lowered the morale of the Federal Regular Army and, of more importance, was regarded by the tribes as a victory. Attacks on the Dhala road were soon intensified, and intelligence suggested that the infiltration of men and arms into the area was considerably increasing. The Federal government and the High Commissioner decided therefore that they must once again resort to military action. The Federal Regular Army was at this point too over-extended to be employed alone, and the sole use of air control was beset by political restrictions (the result of reactions to a Royal Air Force operation, discussed above). Thus, the only course left was to use British troops. (It is of interest to note that this represented the first time a sizeable British force had been employed in the Protectorate since 1915). In this operation (designated TEWT — Tactical Exercise With Tribesman), a political aim was formulated, viz: 'To bring sufficient pressure to bear upon the Radfan tribes: — (a) to prevent the tribal revolt spreading; (b) to re-assert (the) authority (of the Federal government); (c) to put a stop to attacks on the Dhala Road and Thumeir'. The theatre of operations in the north consisted of two fertile areas — Danaba and Thaim — each dominated by features ascending 3–4 000 feet. The great spine termed the Bakri ridge, runs in a north-south direction, and gradually rises to Arnold's Spur (approximately 6 000 feet). Beyond this lay the deep Wadi Dhubsan, extending the east. Further south lies the ultimate feature, the Jebel Radfan, with the Jebel Huriyah as the highest point.

The units which comprised the British forces at the outset of the operations, on 26 April, consisted of 45 Royal Marine Commando, the 1 East Anglians (as they were then styled), B Company of the 3 British Naval Parachute Regiment (transferred from Bahrain), a Squadron of the SAS, a squadron of armoured cars, and two weak Federal Regular Army battalions, in addition to the joint force headquarters. To support this force MEAF

4. S.L. Meyer: *Wars of the twentieth century* (London, 1975)

made available two squadrons of Hunters and a small squadron of Shackletons based at Aden; four — gradually increasing to six — Belvedere medium range helicopters; and a squadron of Scouts and Beavers provided by 653 Army Air Corps. The force was commanded by Brigadier Hargroves, who had established himself and his force at Thumeir, some sixty miles by road from Aden. The Force Commander decided that, operating from Thumeir on the Dhala road, he would first break into the Wadi Thaim and the Danaba basin. Hargroves decided that, in pursuit of this initial strategic objective, his first tactical objective should be the high ground dominating both the northern fertile areas, thereby enabling him to deny the tribesmen their food and water, and cut off their camel train routes to the Yemen. The features themselves were named *Cap Badge* and *Gun Sling*. Moreover, if *Cap Badge* could be secured, it would be possible to dominate the village of Danaba, believed to be a dissident stronghold, and the main populated areas, and thus be in a position to operate against the south. 45 Royal Marine Commando, after a night march, reached their objectives, but B Company of the 3 Battalion Parachute Regiment, who took a route along the low ground, were caught at first light near the village soon to be called Pegasus, by very determined short range fire from the lower slopes of the main feature (*Cap Badge*). In the course of the contact, which occupied most of the day, they lost two killed and ten wounded, and a third company of 45 Royal Marine Commando had to be lifted by helicopter onto *Cap Badge* to help clear the enemy below the ridge. Nevertheless, despite the attack encountered by the Paras, the Commando had taken the first and perhaps most important step in the operation; viz. it had secured the key features in the north, thereby outflanking the Rabwa Pass. In the ensuing days, Phase 1 (i.e. the occupation of the high ground dominating the northern fertile areas) continued with the occupation of the Rabwa Pass and the introduction of 1 East Anglians into the Wadi Thaim (their landrovers having to be ferried in my helicopter).

Additional forces consisting of the headquarters of 3 Parachute Battalion and another Parachute company from Bahrain, two battalions of the Kings Own Scottish Borderers and the Royal Scots, a second squadron of armoured cars from Aden, provided robust reinforcements with which to initiate the second phase. Further, on 26 May, Wessex helicopters from *HMS Centaur* joined the force. Brigadier Blacker replaced Brigadier

Hargroves as Force Commander; the latter, together with his very successful 'ad hoc' headquarters, returned to their proper task of internal security in Aden. Phase 2 of the operations was to consist of the invasion of the Radfanis' most inaccessible and cherished defensive areas of the south; viz. the Wadi Dhubsan, the Jebel Radfan and the Jebel Huriyah. The preliminary stage of this phase coincided with the Royal Air Force, who were at last authorized to employ the well tried technique of air control, beginning the process along the southern edge of the Bakri ridge, as well as the tribes further east. 3 Parachute Battalion, who had been told to feel their way along the northern end of the Bakri ridge towards its highest feature, made a rapid advance, and by 20 May was in the centre of the Royal Air Force area of ground control. The Royal Air Force boundaries were adjusted, and 3 Parachute Battalion were then instructed to secure Arnold's Spur. Upon achieving this objective, the core of Phase 2 was initiated. Blacker planned for the Kings Own Scottish Borderers to take over the static garrison duties in the north; for 3 Parachute Battalion to make a raid into the Wadi Dhubsan, and for 45 Royal Marine Commando to make the final advance up the Wadi Misrah. The latter operation was delayed and later became the task of the East Anglians. The first action in Phase 2 proper called for 3 Parachute Battalion, with a company of 45 Royal Marine Commando (X Company) to descend into the cavernous Wadi Dhubsan. This they did on 26 May, in an operation which resembled the 'storming of Quebec' in reverse, for the Paras surprised the rebels by descending the 2 000 feet to the Wadi floor by the most unexpected and precipitous route, using ropes. After a severe fire fight lasting for four hours, in which one marine was killed and six men wounded, an outflanking move on the high ground above the Wadi compelled the rebels to withdraw.

The British forces were now in the heart of the Radfan, but still did not possess its key features: the Jebel Radfan and, above all, the Jebel Huriyah. The only practicable approach to them was up the length of the Wadi Misrah, and the advance up this by 1 East Anglians and the Federal Regular Army became Phase 3 of the operation. Phase 3 occupied the time from 30 May until 11 June, when the East Anglians saw the lights of Aden fifty miles distant, from the summit of the Jebel Huriyah. However, the turning point in the Radfan operation undoubtedly occurred on 8 June, when some fifty tribesmen came out into the open to defend what was soon to be called *Federal Regular Army ridge*.

There they exposed themselves for the first time in force; they either died or fled, and never again seriously contested the British operations. Coincidental with Phase 3, the Kings Own Scottish Borderers were experiencing opposition in their control operations in the Wadi Thaim. The Sappers commenced road building operations, and for the first time in the region's history it was possible to drive into the Danaba basin, and thence into the Wadi Thaim.

### The Radfan and Coin Operations

The little known operations in the Radfan mountains precede the major counter-insurgency (COIN) offensives which were to characterize the following decade (Vietnam, Rhodesia, Mozambique, Angola), are coincidental with the campaign in Borneo, and immediately follow the conflicts in Algeria and Malaya. Whilst the Radfan operations superficially appear to be the last species of North-western Frontier Style operations, an important aspect of the campaign bears a close relationship to the new type of insurgency; viz. an external power training and injecting hostile forces into the theatre of operations. In the early phases of the campaign, the imprint of the training provided to the rebel tribesmen in the Yemen was evident in a well organized attack upon an SAS patrol in near darkness, and the well directed short range fire against a Parachute Company near Pegasus village, as discussed above. The issues crystallized in the Radfan offensive were to be of fundamental importance in succeeding counter-insurgency operations. These issues were inter-dependent, and centred upon the tactical role of helicopters, intelligence, administration of multi-dimensional warfare, logistics and supply.<sup>5</sup> The extent to which the campaign exemplifies the functioning of indirect strategy has been commented above. For all these reasons, although the Tactical Exercise with Tribesmen operations were conducted within a geopolitical context which has been obliterated, they possess far more than simply historical significance to the military observer.

### Helicopters

With reference to the tactical role of helicopters, it should be observed that the number of helicopters available in the Radfan operations was always pathetically small, and for this reason they were never utilized in an assault role. This lack of helicopters determined the nature of the first phase of the operations. To try to fight in the low country with the dissidents above would have been

suicidal. Obviously, the first principal objective would be to seize control of the high ground. Helicopter assault was precluded as there were insufficient numbers to overcome the high risks of tactical landings. This decision was reinforced by the consideration that, in view of the extreme vulnerability of the helicopters' sensitive mechanism to ground fire, downed helicopters would have provided the rebels with considerable psychological/propaganda value. Hence, the night operation was decided upon. However, the extremely primitive mountain terrain of the theatre of operations was congenial to the process of vertical envelopment, for which the helicopter is perfectly adept. Vertical envelopment takes advantage of the mobility implicit in helicopter attack to overfly hostile, or potentially hostile, ground forces and envelop them from the open flank (i.e. vertically). The helicopter possesses the ability to shift units within the operational area regardless of obstacles, or difficult terrain, and without reliance upon airfields or strips. Hence, relatively small numbers of government troops can play havoc with insurgent base areas, which have hitherto often appeared safe in some remote and inaccessible area, disguised by the terrain (example the Radfan mountains, the Atlas mountains of North Africa, the dense bush of Rhodesia and Mozambique, the jungles of Borneo and Vietnam). There is a further reason why the helicopter, as an instrument of airborne attack, is ideally suited to counter insurgency operations. One has the advantage which may be termed 'flexibility of response'. The nature of the terrorist offensive demands immediate pursuit of an enemy who must withdraw before any situation emerges which promises prolonged confrontation with pursuing government troops. Thus, the requirements of counter insurgency operations demand very quick reactions by small numbers of troops over relatively short distances. Such demands are superbly fulfilled by helicopterborne troops who can thus react to ambushes and other attacks (i.e. can perform 'follow up' operations) with a speed which greatly restricts the enemy's freedom of action.

The Radfan campaign was a perfect illustration of a military context demanding such 'flexibility of response', clearly illustrated in the following extract relating to 45 Royal Marine Commando's role in the post-operational policing function:

*A patrol of six men on a bare hill 1 000 yards out caught a fleeting glimpse of four men in green*

5. *Assegai* April – August 1976 (S. Monick: Pegasus airborne operations since World War 2).

*uniforms moving back past them. They moved to intercept, sighted them again, got one at 300 yards range, and ranged guns and mortar fire on the others as they disappeared into the tangle of wadis.* (quoted by Lt Col T.M.P. Stevens<sup>6</sup>).

Brigadier Heathcote states:

*With the probably false confidence of hindsight one cannot resist letting one's imagination loose on what might have been achieved in terms of a rapid conclusion to the operation by a combination of a deliberate intelligence seeking operation, a force of say 20 tactical helicopters of the Wessex type — some of them armed — and a well developed technique of fire and movement in the third dimension, using fixed and rotary wing aircraft, operating on occasions by night.*

That the Radfan operations clearly demonstrated the potentiality of helicopters in counter insurgency operations is attested by Brigadier Heathcote. He states that, although never used in the assault role *used in the logistic and tactical role they were as near vital to the operation as anything could be. There is little doubt that it could have been done without them, but at a conservative estimate they divide by a factor of three the time taken to achieve our aims.*

However, it should be observed that the Radfan operations also exemplify a disadvantage of helicopter-borne attack. In the plan to seize the commanding features of the Danaba basin, it was decided that helicopters could not provide the rapid build up of troops needed. This does point to the fact that where a large number of troops is required, the restricted carrying capacity of the helicopter nullifies the vital element of surprise, as this element of surprise will not remain suspended whilst a shuttle service builds up the strength of the airborne force. (Thus, the shock character of the airborne attack is concentrated in the role of helicopter-borne troops).

The exterior manoeuvre facet of indirect strategy has been discussed above. It should be borne in mind that helicopter assault (and, indeed, airborne assault generally, comprising also conventional parachute drops) bears a distinct relationship to that aspect of indirect strategy known as interior manoeuvre. Interior manoeuvre consists of psychological erosion of the established power and inducement to war weariness; be that power the French in Indo-China, the Americans in Vietnam, or the Portuguese in Mozambique and Angola).

Such psychological erosion depends upon prolonged conflict, which the successful airborne operation obviates. This facet of airborne operations was incisively commented upon by General Walker. In an article *How Borneo was won*<sup>7</sup>, General Walker succinctly defined his objectives:

*We were given the task of identifying and defeating Indonesian aggression or 'confrontation' as it came to be called, over a land frontier of 1 000 miles, a coast line considerably longer, and the air space above. My aim was to prevent the conflict from escalating into open war, similar to that in South Vietnam. To do this it was necessary to win the opening rounds in the jungle battle.*

Air mobility — pivoting upon the tactical role of helicopters — was a crucial tenet in General Walker's strategy.

### Logistics

With regard to the logistical aspects of the Radfan operations, these commenced by using the system of maintenance and supply practiced in Aden to support the up-country garrisons in normal times. This was that units in Thumeir left rear parties behind in Aden to whom they signalled their daily demands. These rear parties dealt direct with the Aden base depots and despatched the supplies the following day. It was only with the arrival of 39 Brigade at the outset of Phase 2 that a base maintenance area was formed at Thumeir. However, the viability of Thumeir as a base maintenance area was certainly restricted by the scarcity of helicopters and light aircraft (although their role was indispensable). The supply facilities at Thumeir were further impeded by the fact that an airstrip for medium range transport aircraft was only developed late in the campaign. This late development of the MRT strip impeded the rapidity with which the Thumeir base could be supplied from Aden. The experience of Borneo suggests that a considerably larger number of rotary and fix-wing aircraft could have rationalized and accelerated the process of supply in hostile terrain. In the Borneo operations (1963—65) the security of bases was ensured by logistic supply founded upon air mobility; a mobility which, in turn, depended very heavily upon helicopters. The lack of road and rail communications demanded that 90% of such supplies (of both men and materials) was delivered by air. The average monthly airlift was 19 000 troops and 1 750 tons of supplies.

6. Royal United Service Institution Journal, no 640 November 1965 (T.M.P. Stevens: Operations in the Radfan, 1964)

7. Round Table, January 1969 (*How Borneo was won*)

This was accomplished by 80 helicopters, in addition to approximately 40 fix wing aircraft and an excellent communications system. To reduce the work load of the Naval and Air Force helicopters, airstrips were hacked out of the jungle at all possible bases and camps, in order that Beaver and other fix wing Army or Air Force planes could land.

### Intelligence

With reference to intelligence, in fighting an unsophisticated enemy on ground of his own choosing, and on ground as large and as difficult as the Radfan, intelligence concerning the enemy could derive from only two sources; from fighting and from defectors. In the initial stages of the campaign, the chances of obtaining information from defectors or agents was small, for precisely the reason that called for the operations; the morale of the dissidents. As long as the Arabs believed themselves to be winning, they saw no reasons to ensure themselves against failure. Further, aerial photography could not provide information about an enemy as elusive as the Arab. The problem, therefore, that faced Brigadier Hargroves was how to persuade the enemy to show himself whilst husbanding one's resources until a clear intelligence profile had begun to emerge. The SAS did not have enough time available to provide the answer to this problem in the early stages. During the second phase of the Radfan operations, the SAS penetrated deep into the area east of the Wadi Thaim and were able to provide Brigadier Blacker with most valuable information. However, in the early stages of the operations, the SAS had little time with which to thoroughly familiarise themselves with the terrain, resulting only in casualties. Borneo, once again, exemplifies the role of helicopters in gathering intelligence. In the same article as that cited above, General Walker comments upon the inter-dependence of helicopter mobility and efficient intelligence, and how this inter-dependence yielded vertical envelopment:

*They (helicopters) flew tirelessly over the mountains and along the valleys, placing men exactly where they would do the most good. For example, reconnaissance patrols were positioned along the frontier to find and report the enemy, and sections were set down neatly in depth to cut off unsuspecting raiders. A clever company commander with a few 'choppers' could so block guerillas at every turn that they would think an entire army was on their heels. We hit the enemy so often the moment he put his nose across the frontier that we were credited with having some form of radar.*

### Administration of Multi-dimensional Warfare

Within the context of administration of three-dimensional warfare, it should be observed that airborne warfare — whether effected by helicopter, small fix-wing aircraft, or fix-wing troop carrier, or all three — can create tensions between the air force, who normally pilot the aircraft, and the army commander directing operations. One may justifiably argue that wherever the purpose of the operation is to achieve a ground force aim, it would appear that the overall commander should be a soldier; where, however, the aim is to support air power, the better choice may be an airman. Unity of command must, however, remain the central principle. General Walker himself was in absolutely no doubt concerning this principle. Speaking at a Seminar on Air Support of Land and Maritime Operations, at the Royal United Service Institution in London on 20 November 1968, he states:

*Once an operation was launched, the command simply had to be vested in one person and that person, I submit, can only be the commander who is fighting the battle — in this case the infantry commander — otherwise there is bound to be confusion. I believe that there can be no difference between this and any other support for the infantry, be it tanks, artillery, engineers, or signals support.*

The approach to the problem in the Radfan operations was somewhat confused. It was in Aden that the first British unified command headquarters was established. It was an all-service headquarters, directly responsible to the Ministry of Defence, administering dispassionately the needs of all three services. However, one may doubt whether this machinery was sufficiently attuned to the administrative problems implicit in the new context of multi-dimensional warfare. The original commander, Brigadier Hargroves, was provided with a single Brigade Air Staff Officer (BASO), who was responsible initially for the control of all aircraft — both offensive and transport aircraft. This relatively junior officer was responsible simultaneously both to the Air Officer Commanding for the safety of his aircraft and to his Brigade Commander in all other aspects. The Radfan operations thus pointed to the fact that the introduction of growing numbers of helicopters had created a new aspect to the command of a land force which was not met by the Brigade Air Staff Officer type organisation, which had been created for a different purpose.



The type of situation which divided command over land and air forces can create is vividly illustrated in a most revealing incident related by (then) Brigadier James Lunt, in the discussion which followed Brigadier Heathcote's talk. Brigadier Lunt relates how he entered the Radfan on 4 January 1964. He continues:

*I had decided that my task was to seize the Rabwa Pass and eventually build a road through it into the Wadi Thaim. This was the first time helicopters had been used operationally in the Western Aden Protectorate ... It was a new form of warfare for me, and I decided to use them to establish the pickets to cover our advance into the Rabwa Pass, using all the Wessex and two Belvederes for this task. The advance guard had reached the entrance of the pass and we were waiting for the helicopters to go in. The first picket went up, and the second picket in a Belvedere passed over my head and disappeared behind a ridge. At that moment it was fired upon and the pilot called up Force Headquarters six miles away and reported that he had been shot up and holed; he had landed his picket but was returning. The British Air Staff Officer then recalled all the helicopters to base. I looked over my shoulder and saw all six helicopters turning round and disappearing, and there we were stuck in the Rabwa Pass, with only two pickets established, and we had to stay until the British Air Staff Officer obtained permission from the Air Officer Commanding for the helicopters to complete their mission. This naturally took some time, and I could not wait. We were being very heavily fired on at the time, and there was no alternative but to send up pickets on their feet.*

*This is obviously a difficult situation for a commander who is carrying out an operation. If he has not got full control over all the resources on which his plan is based, he is not a free agent.*

In Borneo General Walker attempted to overcome this type of situation by decentralizing the available Naval and Air Force Wessex machines to brigades, battalions, and even companies. Initially, inter-service rivalry led to resistance to this policy, but each service became ultimately convinced of the logic of Walker's argument; viz. that if helicopters remained centralized most of their flying hours would be devoted to 'dead' mileage, and that the pilots would be completely divorced from the operational situation for eighteen hours out of

twenty-four. However, owing to the implementation of Walker's tenet of unified operations, helicopters were immediately responsive to the operational situation, crewed by sailors and airmen who were fully integrated (in spirit, if not by establishment) into the infantry team; whilst precious flying hours were economically husbanded.

## Conclusion

In summary, one may reiterate that the operations in the Radfan mountains, although a relatively obscure campaign, crystallized problems which were to overshadow counter-insurgency warfare during the forthcoming decade; issues which centred upon the advent of multi-dimensional warfare. The Radfan campaign elicited issues of a strategic nature, as well as tactical. The strategic aspect relates to the practice of indirect strategy, with regard to both interior and exterior manoeuvre. The strategic and tactical facets of the operations are certainly not mutually exclusive. The very nature of indirect strategy — which utilizes politicalpsychological resources to induce a process of attrition — can be effectively countered by rapid execution of military response. Precisely because the issues evoked in this campaign were of direct relevance to both contemporary counter-insurgency operations (Borneo) and subsequent operations (Vietnam, Rhodesia, Mozambique and Angola), a kaleidoscopic approach has been adopted. In other words, the Radfan operations have been discussed within a context which parallels aspects of this campaign with other counter-insurgency operations. Hence, that aspect of the operations which relates to the media has been paralleled with the media's response to the campaigns in French Indo-China and Vietnam; the issues which bear upon the practice of indirect strategy have been discussed with the context of Suez and Algeria; whilst aspects relating to multi-dimensional warfare have been discussed within the frame of reference of the Borneo operations. This peculiar focus has been adopted in order to cast the significance of the Radfan campaign in its correct perspective. The time perspective has been distorted for the same purpose. Thus, the political epilogue to the campaign has been discussed before the prologue and actual course of operations, in order that the relationships of overall indirect strategy to the Radfan operations — and the British situation in Aden — may be assessed in its correct dimensions.