

The announcement of a helo contingent from Australia and NZ to the Sinai Peninsula in early 1982 was greeted with much anticipation by RAAF crews, most of whom wished to go. This was the first really big unit size effort since the Vietnam War and we were equally tense and excited but not sure of our futures. The whole affair was rather muddy in that firstly postings came out in two basic lots, and at the time the aircraft were loaded on HMAS Tobruk in Brisbane on 16FEB82, there was no confirmation of the deployment. I was among the second group of the postings which was effective 15MAR82 on reference no PD6028, with an X grade posting. If my memory serves myself correctly I had about three weeks from posting notification date until departure. The contingent and aircraft were assembled at Amberley, and flying at 9 Sqn virtually came to a stop while aircraft were prepared and painted. Even the paint scheme that was applied was not a definite scheme, while no one was quite certain of where the RNZAF was obtaining their aircraft from. Eventually we were advised that they were going to lease two aircraft from the US Army, and that they would be delivered direct to Sinai.

The aircraft were flown to HMAS Tobruk, berthed at Fisherman Islands container wharf, in two separate flights on 16FEB82. Aircraft deployed were UH-1H Iroquois serials A2-376, 485, 649, 915 in the first flight and A2-377, 486, 085 and 488 in the second flight. The crews who delivered the aircraft were not necessarily the crews going to the Middle East. A detachment of RAAF ground crew personnel were placed onboard HMAS Tobruk to take care of the aircraft while in transit. We were later informed that rough conditions in the Great Australian Bight meant that one of these personnel had to be hospitalised in Fremantle. During the Indian Ocean transit, another was reprimanded by the Captain for hanging his legs over the bow while the ship was underway. The men reported that the passage through the Indian Ocean was particularly smooth. They also later reported a tense situation when the ship was approaching Israeli waters and I can't be certain but there may have been an encounter with an Israeli patrol boat at night.

Personnel at Amberley underwent a series of lectures and other pre-departure tasks and on the allocated date a special farewell function was held in the Airmens mess at Amberley where the Honourable Jim Killen, Defence Minister gave a farewell speech to the assembled personnel and loved ones.

A full description of the flight to Israel was given by Mal Lancaster in a RAAF News issue after our arrival in Israel on the 20th March 1982. All I can say about this is that the description is accurate as far as I am concerned.

We were a bit peeved to be put straight onto a parade at the Ben Gurion airport after 24 hours in a Boeing 707, even though it was a welcoming parade. We were then bussed down to Eitam (El Gorah) where we were rather dismayed at the desolate countryside. Still, we were determined to make the best of it. Initially there were not enough beds to go around, but we were saved when the US troops had some beds returned to the store as their boss reckoned they were too tough to sleep on beds.

The buildings themselves were transportable type with two beds to most rooms and an air conditioner in each room. The shower ablutions block was central in the area but of course feet would get dirty walking to and from this block if you didn't wear any footwear. Some months later a concrete path appeared from each living block to the shower block, thus the appearance of "Keep Off The Grass" signs in the desert arena. Some lawn seeds had been obtained from Australia and a lawn was eventually planted in the Surf Club area. Various working bees saw this area paved and decorated to

improve our by now very popular Surf Club. It seemed that half the base wanted to socialise at the ANZAC SURF CLUB.

The very next morning we had an early rise and off to HMAS Tobruk now docked in Ashdod, Israel. We were there to fly out our aircraft and while we set them up and loaded them with some freight, we were delighted to have lunch on board ship. This was interrupted when two huge bangs shook the ship. One of the sailors was yelling collision, but when we appeared on deck it had actually been an Israeli Defence Force aircraft breaking the sound barrier at low level. Thus we had our first real scare.

When ready, just after lunch clearance was obtained and we took off from the Ashdod wharf to fly off to the South tracking coastal to near Rafah where we turned inland to our new home base. It must have been quite a thrill for our ground crew when we, all eight of us arrived and landed. What a feat to arrive one day and fly the next!!! I flew the last aircraft, A2-486 with F/L Steve Fielder and F/L Gary Presneill with cargo on board, hence probably the only person without a seat for the flight. All of our aircraft had been zapped with a small Rat which is prominent in some photographs. It is a tradition to get a spray can and stencil, and then zap items of military equipment from other units, hence our small Rat of Tobruk" zap.

Upon our arrival several things came to our attention. Firstly we found the area littered with unexploded munitions with a very real danger that someone was going to get hurt. Noteworthy for our aircrews was the fact that we had to have some anti mine training in case we came down in a mine field (given by Sgt Mike Ryan, a Crewman), while for our fitters there was no hangar so all maintenance was to be do in the open air. Mixing with the troops in the force was very interesting as many didn't speak a word of English. The flight line area was covered in litter from the previous occupants of the airfield. A strategically placed suspected explosive device was located when we eventually got time to pick up this rubbish, and the US Army people had many a piece of unexploded ordnance to dispose of.

Most of our initial work came in setting up the base areas and for this reason it was really great to be in the very first push over there. There was always work to be done somewhere, but the people who really benefited from this were the people who were posted there after December 1982 when every thing was firmly established. By that time even the locals had quietened down a lot. The Commissioned Officers (pilots) were worked as hard as the troops, there being no real distinction in the early days. Discipline was there but it didn't affect work ethics.

There was some opposition to our being there by the PLO, some Israelis and some Egyptians. The modern nearby Israeli town of Yamit was totally destroyed as was numerous military installations before the Israelis were to withdraw to the new cease fire lines.

At first we had to flight plan 48 hours in advance with the Israelis before we could fly a mission. We had Israeli military aircraft constantly low flying over the Sinai areas as well as through our airfield circuit area. This very high risk of mid air collision was not to be ignored and despite some complaints was kept up until the withdrawal date. Indeed on my first flight, a two aircraft flight to the Southern base of Ophira (Ras Nas Rani) on 29th March in an aircraft (A2-488) captained by S/L Wood, RNZAF we had a close pass by two IDF Kfir aircraft while we were cruising at 8,000 feet about halfway to Eilat. Some flying was curtailed because of this danger. All types of IDF aircraft were encountered in the air, including Kfir, Nesher, F-4 Phantom, F-16, F-15, A-4, Magister, and various helicopter types like the CH-53, AH-1 Cobra, UH-1N Twin Huey, OH-58 Kiowa and Hughes 500MD.

We did have an IDF Reservist Roberto Schleisser (El Al staff) as our air traffic controller for these early days, along with an IDF Fire Crew. IDF aircraft including CH-53 Helos, UH-1N helos, Cessna 206, IAI Westwind and Beech Queen Air all were among the foreign military aircraft that was of interest to us and parked on our flight lines at various times. Myself and another RAAF person (name forgotten) were in big trouble with an IDF CH-53 crew when we just took a casual stroll into their aircraft for a friendly look. They were very security conscious.

Returning to my flight with S/L Wood RNZAF to Ophira on the 29th March in A2-488. We were a flight of two aircraft on basically a nav trainer to the southern Sinai Israeli air base. On landing at Ophira, the Israeli manned tower parked us on the main taxiway near a civil terminal building at the far end of the field from the control tower/military section of the field. After shutdown, S/L Wood RNZAF ordered one of our Australian ground crew nick named "Cyclone" to run to the other end of the field and get the fuel tanker for us. This seemed a huge task as the airfield was quite large and the taxiway/runways disappeared more or less over the horizon and although you could tell he wasn't happy, he shrugged his shoulders and jogged off into the distance. The rest of us gradually wandered over to the terminal style building and bought a soft drink. As we went outside we noticed a largish group of Israeli troops all lined up and looking at the far end of the field. We stood with them for a while before one of us asked them what was happening. We were shocked to be told that their underground hangar complex was stuffed with all sorts of explosives and was about to be demolished. We rapidly informed them of the location of "Cyclone" and asked if anything could be done to stop him/save him, but they said too late and with that this huge explosion lifted this piece of concrete some hundreds of feet into the air. It was by far the largest explosion any of us had seen period. Convinced of "Cyclone's" death we were distraught at his demise. As we were wondering what to do next, this Israeli military jeep pulled up and a very agitated "Cyclone" got out. He was red in the face and quite adamant that we had tried to kill him, and I believe to this very day he has vivid memories of this explosion. Turns out some Israelis had seen him wandering around, rushed in and grabbed him in their jeep and took off with him to the safety line. He thought they were kidnapping him. It was rumoured that he was pictured on Israeli TV that night depicted as an Australian refugee rescued by soldiers from sure death.

The IDF had concerts by Israeli civilians given to our force, and generally made us feel welcome although there was some tension in the air in that our future was still up for grabs. We were more tense to our living type conditions than any possible military type action. Fear of the unknown is larger by far. We were also conscious that if you did something terribly wrong by foreign rules, you may well be shot before questions could be asked.

For the first few months we were subjected to the end of winter, and it was particularly cold after sundown. Every one rugged up for our occasional movie at the Anzac Surf Club outdoor cinema (the most popular movie I remember was Xanadu with Olivia Newton John). Grown men shuffling around in sleeping bags or large coats became the norm after sunset in the living area.

A temporary PX was set up and we, some of us, were quite happy that boot polish was not kept in stock!!! Other useful items for hygiene were available, and as base currency was US dollars, and no coin change being available, everything was rounded out to the dollar value. While in Sinai we were paid in US dollar currency. Our first meals in the mess were quite lavish, but this deteriorated rather quickly and at one period of time we preferred the ration packs to the unknown samples in the mess.

Early on there was some trouble with the Dutch MPs. There were set times for different nations to dine, and if you missed your time you didn't get fed. It didn't help that as there was a long que, your allocated time had expired by the time you got to the start of the line up. The Dutch MPs always walked in and pushed to the front of the line up, thus worsening the situation, as the Dutch MP officer then came along to shoo you away for being late. They weren't aware nor were most ANZACS that one RAAF member present was of Dutch origin and spoke Dutch fluently. During one such encounter the Dutch MP who pushed in remarked to his off sider how stupid we Australians were in his own language, only to have an Australian tell him where to go in Dutch, thus ending another saga. After that they didn't know who spoke Dutch so minded their manners a bit more often. The standard of meals never really recovered in the time I spent in the Force.

Transport was a problem in that the airfield was some distance from the quarters and Orderly Room area. A lot of walking was done by all ranks, and at night this was hazardous due to the continuing construction on the base. Several personnel fell down large holes that were left open. Also in summer the heat affected the amount of physical activity during daytime hours. It was a real pain to have to go to the Orderly Room while on duty at the airfield as it meant a long walk.

Not long after our arrival we appeared to be the flavour of the month for visiting VIPs, and in fact we had so many that it hindered our work. On one such occasion, Senator Susan Ryan was our guest for lunch, which was to feature our ration packs. As personnel were sitting down to lunch in our large tent, someone yelled fire and dense black smoke was seen to be coming from the very rear long tent that was full of airframe type spares. This fire raged for some minutes and despite some very brave actions, the damage done was severe. We lost servicing publications, spare parts, some armoured seats and an enormous loss of pride. Tribute must be paid to the brave souls, I believe Uruguayans or Columbians who actually stood on a fuel storage container and hosed it and the fire to prevent an explosion. No one was hurt and flight operations were quickly back to normal. It was said that the fire started by spontaneous combustion in a cleaning rag bale that was, located in the very rear tent. The troops thought otherwise but never could fully explain it.

The 25th April, 1982 was important to us all. It meant the start of our Peace Keeping duties, the withdrawal of the Israelis and most significantly an ANZAC DAY in the desert where the Light Horse made history. We began the day with an ANZAC DAY dawn service which was highlighted by the overflying of an Iroquois formation in a cross shape. The attendees of the service were fittingly subdued and we were later told that it was the most heart wrenching service many had attended, particularly because all through the service our Iroquois could be heard softly in the distance before we swept by in formation with lights blazing. As I was flying I missed the ground service. A number of people were able to attend a service at Beersheba. On this day I flew my first resup type sortie while others were partaking of ANZAC celebrations. With F/L McClelland RNZAF, in A2-377 we had a task to deliver some supplies to an outpost. We encountered a terrific sand storm and had to do an emergency out landing due to the poor visibility. Visibility in the cabin wasn't much better due to the fact that I had to have the doors open as the load was so long it meant that I had to "through" load it, hence the load was poking out each side of the cabin. We returned to base and later successfully completed the task when the storm had abated.

Sand storms are different to normal storms in that the closer to the ground you fly, the thicker the murk. It is also the same colour as the ground so you can't be really sure of

your height or see significant features. Conditions are similar to white out in snow fields. Many of these storms were encountered over the next few months and I remember one crew saying they climbed to eight thousand feet and it was still higher than they were so they gave the idea away of flying over it. Also low flying over sand dunes is similar to low flying over ocean waves, and height can be difficult to estimate.

Around this time water became a scarce commodity on base as the Bedouin kept bursting our pipeline from Israel. This situation was quite the norm for several weeks and it was a fact of life that sometimes there was no water for showering, laundry or other basic uses. It was mentioned by our hygiene Sergeant that as we'd heard of the "Dirty Dozen", we were now the "Grotty Gross" (approx 144 of us).

Our pay and allowances were to our Australian dollar value but paid to us in US Dollar currency, as this was the base currency. As there was initially no coinage on base, every thing had to be at least a dollar. I guess we came out even in the long term. Our own Bar, The famous "ANZAC SURF CLUB" was paid by bar chits. You bought a book of chits, each of which was equal in value to one beer, hence no money changed hands at the bar. Several quite good events were held in the club, which was known all over the base as the place to be for social life. We never were permitted to take leave in Israel during my time there as the conditions of entry had not been negotiated. This situation was rectified at about my tour expiry. We did however manage to get some time in Tel Aviv etc., all of which was deeply satisfying and rewarding in pleasure. I shall remember these trips with great sentiment.

On one occasion, I travelled to IAI Industries at Lod with our transport driver for aircraft spares. We wore our drab uniforms (the old RAAF Summer uniform) and while standing in a hangar, an older Israeli tapped me on the shoulder and said "You're an Australian!" This I confirmed with him and he told me he could tell by the cut of the uniform (obviously similar to an earlier time). He then said "When I was a lad in a village during WW II, we were short of foods and leisure items. One day an Australian Unit came marching through the village, and when about halfway through they were stopped for a break. During their break we children came out looking them rather curiously and we noticed that one of them said something to the others. After some activity, these soldiers presented all of us children with chocolates and sweets." This simple act of kindness by our troops, long ago in a foreign land, has stayed with those people who only think highly of Australian service people to this day.

Despite the ground crews best work ethics, which were outstanding given the spares shortage and work conditions in the sun, some aircraft were forced to carry out precautionary landings or abort flights. For myself it happened four times, two of which were with our fabulous CO, W/C T Wilson night flying on 18 August 1982. On our first attempt we had to shut down with severe vibrations from the main rotor. Changing aircraft to A2-488, we got airborne but departing the field area we had a problem I think from memory was to do with the transmission oil pressure or temperature and thus returned to the field and landed, giving away the idea of flying that night.

I had previously had an incident with F/O John Oddie on 26th May with A2-486 when our engine was displaying signs of crisis and we had to force land at an OP and wait for help to arrive.

We were almost downed by explosions on the 13th October in aircraft A2-649. F/O John Oddie and SBLT Hype RAN with myself crewed the aircraft on one of our two day patrols, which was to Suez, then south via the Gulf of Suez to Ras Nas Rani.

Remain there over night and then return to El Gorah via the Gulf of Aquaba the next day. We had two US State Department observers on board along with an Egyptian Army Liaison Officer. We had arrived in the southern Sinai coastline area and we were asked to fly north along the zone boundary at low altitude and slower than normal speed. Comms were established with the southern US manned base and they were notified of our presence and location of our operations. While we were tracking north a person on the ground was seen by the pilots to be running and waving. Almost instantaneously several explosions rocked our aircraft and caused F/O Oddie to take violent evasive flying to a very low altitude and escape out to the gulf waters. The US personnel on board thought the Egyptian Army was shooting at us and they tried to take cover on our aircrafts aluminium floor. We all thought we were downed at first but finally realised that the aircraft had very luckily for us not sustained damage. We proceeded to fly to the US base at Ras Nas Rani where we later found that it was the US troops who were using explosives and we were just unlucky enough to come along at the same time. I have a vivid memory of rocks and other debris sailing past us in our steep turn and dive to level off between sand dunes.

Night flying near the border was often tense as we would observe high speed Israeli military aircraft nav lights pass us and sometimes what looked like an explosion or two in front of us but on their side of the border.

Most of us originals became used to the way Israelis flew, that is very low and fast, and it attracted no unusual comment from us as it was the norm. Sometime later, a F/O Stewart was one of the relatively new arrivals when I was scheduled to fly a patrol on the Israeli side of the border in A2-485 on 15th September. When we were near the border south bound at low altitude, I observed an Israeli F-4 Phantom side on at low level heading from our eight o'clock to our six o'clock position. I called the aircraft to the pilot but omitted a height. I believe I said something like "We have an F-4 coming from behind". This F-4 blasted past us at near equal height and at high speed, giving F/O Stewart a bit of a start and scoring myself a black mark with him for not giving a fuller explanation of what was going on. As the F-4 was behind us and out of my view for most of its approach I didn't think I deserved the chastising I got because I didn't know what it was exactly doing.

By this time there were two definite groups of ANZACs in country. They were known as the Pinkies and the Brownies. Pink because of sunburn having not so long in country, Brownies because of a healthy tan from the time in the climate. Thus the experience level of a troop was physically seen. I remember flying over the Gulf of Aquaba one day and we had +52 degrees C on our outside air temp probe. This meant some exhilarating flying in and around the mountainous areas. In summer our aircraft performance was often critical because of the air temp. and altitude we were working at with the loads we were carrying..

During the time we were in country, we received our news via a teleprinter type message or via one of the overseas radio stations like the BBC. We were thus relieved of the Ayers Rock dingo case hype, and the Falklands war was type written page, that we scanned daily. We used to listen to the BBC or The Voice of Peace radio stations for any news affecting us. Also some copies of "The Jerusalem Post" were available at times.

We had a temporary news black out and some excitement when Israel invaded Lebanon in "Operation Peace for Galilee". The movement of war machines was obvious when we were able to get to Tel Aviv. Bomb laden fighters were flying past, Merkava tanks on transporters, and other open signs of war going on. At night when

flying at reasonable height it was sometimes possible to see what looked like huge explosions far to the north.

At some point in time, workers arrived and started to build a hangar for our maintenance people. This magic building became known as the Taj Mahal due to its size and prominence on the base. The contract apparently said that the building was deemed finished when it could be used regardless of details. Apparently one very hot day our fitters asked if they could put an aircraft into the shade to work on it. The Egyptians agreed with this but promptly disappeared. After some time it was noticed that work had stopped on the building and it was then discovered that as our blokes had used it, it was deemed finished. Contractors did appear later to finish the job. Aircraft A2-085 was a memorable aircraft. As one of the original "D" models supplied to 9 Sqn Vietnam, and later serving at Ismalia with Austair UNEF, it was a much travelled airframe and a sentimental one at that. At one time the CO decreed that there would be no Xmas treeing of aircraft to keep others in the air, but alas poor 085 had the misfortune to go u/s with a rotor problem. It was left on the flight line for some time with no main rotor or mast, along with other less obvious parts. One fine morning when we all got to the airfield 085 was spied with a tree poking out of the place where the mast should have been. This quite naturally upset the CO who ordered its removal forthwith. A2-085 then sat in the hangar for quite a lengthy period and at one time we thought it would never fly again.

Every Monday morning, the heads of the unit departments would gather for a meeting to decide on any issues arising during the previous week. These became known as CHOGM after the Commonwealth meetings. One Monday morning, FSGT Bamber RNZAF, NCO i/c Crewmen came rushing into our crew office and came forth with "Alright you bastards, what have you done lately so I know before I get to CHOGM?" We thought this showed that unity in ANZAC Airlines was complete. We never had any problems in our section relative to country or service. We had two RNZAF and one RAN Helicopter Crewmen mixed in with our RAAF people, and we got along as though we had been together for years, not weeks or days. It was hard to believe we were from different lands etc.

The areas we patrolled held some very interesting war relics, but we were always very conscious of land mines. We knew they were there and thus treated every step off base with respect. About twenty miles south south west of the base were several destroyed T34-85s. These had been involved in the 1956 battle that had held up the Israeli advance for some time and led to the use of the Deika Pass so that the Israelis could surround the Egyptians. Also to the south of base about twenty miles were the hulks of two Soviet built JS111s which had their turrets blown off. These were huge tanks, amongst the largest in the world when introduced. At El Kuntilla there was a very well known ex Israeli Super Sherman tank wreck which had at one time been used for a target. There were large amounts of live munitions plainly visible here. One KIWI Crewman said that he was going to get a live round from this tank, to which the rest of us Crewies were aghast and said in no uncertain terms that he was crazy. One day a live 105 mm round appeared as our crew office door stop. It took no guess as to where it came from and who put it there. The offending person was told very promptly to remove it immediately from the building, but in reply he stated that he was taking it back to NZ with him. We informed him that no RAAF C-130 crew would allow it on their aircraft and that he was silly at least. He replied that he was due to go home on a RNZAF Herc and they would certainly let him take it. I have no idea what happened to it after this minor confrontation.

We maintained a Search and Rescue chopper on standby 24 hours a day. We started work at 12 noon and stayed on duty until the same time the next day, thus if we were called airborne during the night we were within crew duty time limits. I only did one SAR flight during my time in country. I had just entered the terminal building at 12 noon when someone yelled at us to get airborne immediately and head east. Details were to be given when airborne. Once airborne we were given details of what was a traffic accident to the south east of the base. While enroute we received a call asking if "we had our guns on board". To this we replied a worried no, that we had left in too much of a hurry to grab them. We were then advised that we had better have a really good look before landing as there appeared to some sort of confrontation at the accident scene. Arriving overhead we noticed that some Arabs got up at the sides of the road and walked towards the vehicle wreckage. As it appeared safe we landed at the site and found that a water tanker had run over a small vehicle that had several people in or on it. Apart from the tanker driver, there was only one victim left alive. The tanker had absolutely flattened the smaller vehicle, and the tankers right front wheel was on top of a body. By this time US soldiers had arrived on the scene and one of them was asking me to help lift this enormously heavy vehicle off it, but we had to depart to El Gorah with our live survivor. I later heard that he lived for a few days before passing away in El Arish hospital where he had been transferred. For our leisure there were a number of organised activities. Some of these were Aussie Rules footy matches, Touch Footy, volleyball, golf and what ever others could think of. There was a definite swimming club which travelled to what we called North Beach on most Saturdays and Sundays. This had a quite large following and some earned their life saving certificates while in country.

One notable trip to Cairo was held during my stay. It was notable in that several came down with food poisoning, one of them severe enough to be hospitalised in Israel. The golden rule was don't drink Egyptian water or eat from roadside food stands.

Every few weeks we were receiving either an RAAF or RNZAF C-130 with supplies from home. The first one to arrive held forth such goodies that we were dreaming of. In particular it had washing machines which were of no help as at the time we had no or very little water and they were to Australian electrical voltages. There was also a boat on board which sat on the base for months, not able to be used as there was a problem with insurance. These resupply Hercs were always very welcome reminders of home and left a small tear in some eyes when they departed for home. The loading people probably didn't realise that most of this freight had to be hand unloaded, no machines being readily available over there. The first Herc to arrive appeared in the sky to our north, but heading in a easterly direction. As we watched it droned away to the east until it magically appeared heading back our way. The Loadmaster on board had previously done a tour with AUSTAIR Ismalia and as the Herc was about to enter Israel he noticed vegetation and had the aircraft turn around before it was shot down. The border is very prominent due to the lush vegetation on the Israeli side. It is easily apparent even from space photos.

When we were short of main rotor blades a desperate plea to Australia was answered when a Herc arrived with some on board. Immediate dismay though when we learned that there were five blades on board. Blades come in matched pairs so you should never get an odd number for an Iroquois. On unloading we were even more dismayed to find that three of the blades were for B model Iroquois, approximately two feet shorter than we needed. These had been despatched by the civil over haul authority and obviously not checked by the supply system. We struggled on.

I had the brilliant idea of making some land yachts as we had the old runways to use. All we needed was some old parachutes for sail material. I requested some old Mirage brake chutes for us to cut up using the excuse we wanted them for the carriage of external loads, but alas the system failed us once more and some one in Australia took it upon themselves to correct our order and sent us two or three full 28' diameter canopies. As luck would have it we had a job come up that needed a stabilising chute attached. These really heavy generators had to be delivered to the OPs in the desert. Hence we had these extremely heavy generators rigged with these enormous chutes to stabilise them in flight. They created so much drag that the aircraft could only be flown level in flight with a ten degree nose down pitch, and as the loads were so heavy we were on minimum fuel and performance. As the aircraft flared to terminate to a hover at an OP, someone would have to run out and collapse the chute so as to prevent it hitting the tail rotor and destroying the aircraft. One of our ground crew, I think by the name of Cedric was at one site to help collapse the chute. Apparently as it came in and still a little fast Cedric leapt out and grabbed the chute. Unfortunately it was still travelling at a fair speed and Cedric got his leg caught in the chute. He thus bounced through the OP position with his leg caught in the chute and the rest of the crew rolling round in the sand laughing at Cedric's act in front of the foreign nationals (troops).

One morning I observed a ute at the threshold of the runway, and later I spoke to the US bloke driving it and so asked him what he was doing out there. He informed me that each night Arabs were sneaking out to the piano keys and placing land mines on the dark bitumen bits. He was picking them up for disposal. The French AF fixed wing element always tried to show off to our crews by landing the main wheels spot on the piano keys. One morning when the pick up guy was on the threshold a Frenchy asked me what the fellah was doing. After I told him what I knew they always appeared to land a bit longer into the strip length. Some of our crews did go on flights with these aircraft. I also remember one French AF Twin Otter returning from a Cairo trip early one day, with the pilot saying he had an encounter with a Mig over the Canal and came home instead of forcing the issue.

The flag debate! We had a major problem for foreign forces in recognition of Australian or NZ force location. To them our flags had the Union Jack on them so we were always called British by the forces from other countries. To ease this situation, two flags were made up and flown on the flag poles at the airfield. These consisted of a Yellow/gold hopping kangaroo (as per the RAAF roundel) on a green flag while the RNZAF flew a white KIWI on a black flag. Once these were up the rest of the countries like Uruguay, Columbia etc had no further trouble.

We had some minor problems working with Columbian infantry as they were very young and spoke virtually only Spanish. As my surname is Manuel they used to come to me at the airfield thinking that I spoke the language and could interpret for them. Thus one day when we were sent to a Columbian OP for some time, I spent most of that time sitting down with a Columbian soldier who spoke no English, learning some basic words and numbers of their language. This paid off for at the airfield I could frequently sort out who was going where on what aircraft for the other crews. Incidentally, when we first arrived at this location some of the Columbian soldiers wanted to know if we wanted a drink., to which we replied yes. One soldier went away and came back with a can of Coke each and gave us. Later one of our passengers asked us if we knew what this meant to the soldiers and obviously we had and admitted to having little idea of what he was talking about. He then reminded us that these soldiers were in the desert for some time at the OPs and their cans of coke

were strictly rationed. They were giving us their precious supplies and were pleased to do so. There's a lesson there somewhere!

The northern OPs were run by the Fijians, the central by the Columbians and all of the southern ones by the US forces. Whenever we worked with the Columbians I was amazed at the age of the troops. Some were as young as reportedly 14. They were always ready with a smile for us ANZACs, and frequently when one was in the International base bar, a beer would arrive on your table as a gift. When you looked around to see who gave it to you you'd see this young smiling Colombian face and he'd be waving his hands off to you. When I queried their age with a Colombian officer who spoke English, he told me that this was normal in Columbia and that they viewed a trip to Egypt etc as a holiday compared with living in Columbia. The fighting in Columbia is constant and on going.

On a trip where we had to refuel at Melaize, we called the tower at ten miles for clearance and received an OK from the Egyptian Controller. As we got closer he called us and asked if we wanted fuel, to which we replied "yes please". When we turned base for landing, we called the tower several times and got no replies so we landed normally and taxied in to find a tanker waiting. Turns out the controller was also the tanker driver, and it appears he made more money from fuel than controlling aircraft.

We had a patrol to Saint Katherines one day, where we landed at the airport. I waited with the aircraft on my own, but it wasn't long before this little seven or eight year old Arab boy wandered up to the chopper for a look. The embassy had sent us some small booklets on Australia in dual Arabic and English for handouts to Arabs in the desert so that they could learn about Australia. I gave one of these to the young lad and he then proceeded to read it to me in Arabic and at the same time telling me in English what it said. He had no trouble with words like Kangaroo, Kookaburra and Wombat etc. so I reckoned he was a very well educated and smart young chap who should have shown our teachers in Australia what can be done with an effort. Just imagine, a young Arab lad that age speaking and reading English fluently.

Near the Israeli border and not far from our base on the Israeli side was a balloon observation post that was raised several thousand feet into the air each day. The height of this was never really known but we had several aircraft climb up to see how high it was but no one I knew ever found out.

There are numerous stories from the first crews deployment that will have many in fits of laughter, and that was the norm on our ANZAC AIRLINES. I must stress that the crews who followed us into the MFO were given an easy time because all of the hard work was either done or had a lead in that was given by the first push. We spent months confined to base area or the desert until, the leave in Israel situation was sorted out, or the base facilities were developed.