In 2007, I wrote a brief account of service with the late Major Spike Powell MBE, in the Sultanate of Oman during the period 1970-72. This was subsequently published by Bruce Rooken-Smith in *mini-SITREP XXXI* of the Kenya Regiment Association in December the same year.

It became obvious to me later that I had hardly done justice to the full and varied life of such a highly professional and well-liked character who had served with distinction in the Kenya Regiment, the Rhodesian Light Infantry and the Sultan's Armed Forces. It is well over sixty years since Spike joined the Kenya Regiment to do his National Service and began his several careers in uniform which were to be so sadly terminated in 1979.

I am profoundly grateful to all those who served with him down the years and have kindly sent me their reminiscences of life with Spike. Their testimony speaks for itself.

**Early years in Kenya**

Spike was born in Kenya in 1934. His father, who may have been engaged in gypsum mining at some time, had also been the road foreman for the PWD on the Thika-Garissa Road. After Nairobi Primary School, Spike attended the Prince of Wales School where he was in Hawke House. He is remembered by Tony Archer when Spike was in his teens and they spent time together on Mpala Ranch in the Laikipia. Spike was the younger of the two and deemed to be a good lad who joined in everything going. He was not particularly interested in guns or hunting, although he could shoot and did hunt. He is said to have spoken fluent Kikuyu but this may have been later when he was seconded from the Kenya Regiment to the Administration as a District Officer Kikuyu Guard (DOKG).

**National Service in the Kenya Regiment**

Spike appears to have joined the Kenya Regiment (KR) straight from school at the age of 18 in 1952. Initially he was given the number KR 4158 and was on the second 6 month course of National Servicemen run at the King George VI Barracks, Salisbury, Rhodesia from July 1952. Amongst others on the course, Spike has been remembered in particular by John 'Rusty' Russell (*Tales from the Kenya Regiment 1952-1956, Part One*):

> He also regarded King George VI Barracks as a rather pleasant place to spend a few months away from work and made no secret of his intention to enjoy it to the full. By nature he was a casual dresser and saw no reason to change his ways. On orders from above that we should all have our hair cut, he shaved off all his hair, which of course saved him the bother of combing it. This startled our hosts. They were also rather worried when he allowed his casual style to extend to Saturday morning kit inspections when we were required to spread out all our belongings in neatly arranged heaps all over our beds. Somehow he always managed to make his bed resemble an Indian 'duka', which enraged the inspectors.

> To him, army life was a huge joke never to be taken seriously. But he fooled us all, management and men alike, for in the end, he proved to be the only real professional among us. When we went into active service on our return to Kenya, he distinguished himself in action and was awarded an MBE. Then, after that war was over, he went off, I think as a mercenary to fight in the Belgian Congo, following which he headed north to the Middle East and I am told rose to a very senior rank in the army of one of the Sultans.

> Eventually he returned to Rhodesia at the time of the troubles there and was killed on the battlefield. He lived life in the manner he wished and he lived it to the full. I'm sure that he died without a single regret.

After Spike's return to Kenya in December 1952, he was posted for duty against the Mau Mau and went to I Force on 5 January 1953. In March 1953, I Force became I Company under the KR. By July he was serving in the company on forest patrols above Fort Hall. The patrols were generally arduous, covering difficult terrain with walls of forest crossing ridge after ridge, deep gorges and steep-sided valleys. In places the undergrowth was tangled and virtually impenetrable and at certain altitudes there were dense stands of bamboo. The nights tended to be dark, cold and often very wet. To begin with the patrols were not well equipped, in fact, suitable standard equipment was lacking and the men relied on personal items of clothing and in many cases, their own weapons. There was often the chance of meeting wild animals and the overall aim was that of tracking down and engaging the Mau Mau, whether in gangs, small groups or individuals.
Between July 1953 and August 1954, Spike was on active duty against the Mau Mau in the field and during this period he was commissioned Second Lieutenant and given the number KR 5871. During those operations, Stan Bleazard recalls that, on one occasion, an inexperienced platoon commander sent out two patrols in opposite, circular directions, perhaps trusting in the unlikelihood that there would be a 'collision' in the forest. The platoon commander was wrong. When the inevitable 'blue on blue' contact occurred, it was fortunate that Spike, despite being on aim and ready to shoot, recognised Bleazard at 40 yards in the forest and did not fire. On another occasion, Stan remembers:

Our patrol returned to camp towards midnight. As we passed through the gate we noticed the Major's Land Rover had returned. A few sleepy men still drank beer in the mess tent. Spike Powell alone among them became lively when he saw us and he encouraged all of us to join him, which most of us did. The others decided to call it a day when we new boys moved in. Although not all of us imbibed, we were keen to learn about the activities and past performance of I Company in the campaign. Spike proved a good raconteur. He told us how, on this last patrol, they had followed tracks of a large gang for three days which had led them up and across the moorlands. The gang had split into small parties and then to individuals and all signs were finally lost. How they had got an airdrop of rations to keep the search going for a further four days, still without result. How they had camped beneath a rocky outcrop to screen them from the bitter wind, but they had still suffered cold from a lack of gear for the weather at that altitude, over 10,000 feet.

Stan further recollects:

We listened in awe when Spike recalled another incident, when Pete Bekker's former big game tracker saved his life. A Mau Mau gang, thought to have been led by Stanley Mathenge, ambushed his patrol at close quarters. As the patrol got down and crawled to advance, Rukwaru saw a terrorist come round the base of a large cedar tree, unseen by anyone else, intending to shoot Spike with his homemade gun. The tracker threw his spear, nailing the Mick to the tree, killing him. So I learned from this discourse that a spear could indeed be useful. It was customary in those days to cut the hands off any deceased Mau Mau and deposit them at the nearest Police Station for identification, though Spike never learned who his assailant was.

In an earlier contact with the enemy, Spike shot dead a terrorist who was armed with a cut-down .303 Lee Enfield Mk3 rifle and he armed himself with this booty for as long as I knew him.

Spike was seconded to the Administration in Embu as a DOKG probably in early August 1954, and was put in charge of a Tribal Police Combat Unit (TPCU). The TCPU was a platoon-sized unit run on military lines, designed to be the cutting edge of the Administration's military capacity that would enable it to replace military units for operations elsewhere. This was a process now gathering pace and Spike's unit in Embu was based outside the forest just south of the township and his next-door neighbour, at least initially, was Tony Archer, the District Head of Special Branch. Spike operated both inside and outside the forests and among his duties were daily visits to KG guard posts. Living alone amongst the KG in the same, vulnerable posts and leading patrols, the DOKGs were marked men, watched wherever they went and attacked whenever possible.

Spike was a good and aggressive leader, which soon showed in his patrol results throughout his operational area. He became an integral element in the group led by Archer that included the Field Intelligence Officers (FIOs) Benjie Hatfield MM, Dave McCabe GM and later, Jim Gore BEM and the DOKG Dennis Lakin. Such was the rapport between the men in this group that it mattered little whether they were Police or Administration. It was within this group that some of the earliest and most successful pseudo-gangs were created. By April 1954, the FIOs in Embu under Archer had been operating full-blown pseudo-gangs. When they started they were primarily a Special Branch/FIO responsibility in which the KR was to play only a limited operational role. By mid to late 1954, the KR was running similar, if again limited, operations. 
In late August 1954, a patrol of the Devons led by Major Hastings was ambushed by one of the more aggressive Mau Mau gangs in the forests above Embu. Hastings was shot in the stomach and a soldier may have been killed. Hastings survived but the incident was a great morale booster for the Mau Mau who lost no time in boasting about having routed the British. Spike with his TPCU then went after the gang responsible and during this follow-up laid an ambush. The gang walked into it and the joint gang leaders, two Mau Mau brothers, Brigadiers Saiko and Tonike were killed. This account was provided by Tony Archer. Spike Powell was awarded an MBE and the citation (published in the Official Gazette of the Colony and Protectorate of Kenya. Government Notice No. 699) was as follows:

Award of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire. His Excellency the Governor is pleased to announce that information has been received from the Secretary of State that Her Majesty the Queen has been pleased to appoint Neville Alastair Powell to be a Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (Civil Division) for gallantry of a high order.

On 27th August (1954), at about 4 pm, in the Mount Kenya Forest a combined patrol under command of Major Hastings, consisting of “B” Company, 1st Devons, and a section of the Embu Guard Combat Unit with Mr Powell (District Officer) was following up a gang. After discovering a hide, several terrorists were seen taking cover behind a fallen tree. The gang opened fire on the patrol which was caught in a small clearing, and Hastings was wounded immediately. The troops took cover, Powell, seeing that the terrorists were armed with precision weapons, realized that if the patrol was pinned down for any length of time, considerable casualties would be inflicted upon them. Powell therefore encircled the fallen tree by himself and attacked the enemy from a flank. He killed one immediately, whereupon the terrorists turned their fire on him. A second terrorist was then killed by Powell and the remainder fled. Both Mau Mau killed were in possession of .303 rifles and both were subsequently recognised as leading terrorists. By his action Powell was responsible not only in saving the patrol from further casualties but in recovering two precision weapons, two home-made guns and a quantity of ammunition, achieving this with complete disregard for his own safety. Throughout the action Powell was in direct danger of his life.

R.G.Turnbull
Chief Secretary
17th May 1955

A fellow DOKG, Charles Harris remembers that, in 1955:

Good progress was being made at this time to suppress the insurrection and the Government adopted a new policy by offering immunity to forest gangsters who surrendered under a series of talks designed to bring them back into the community. We were under strict instructions not to confront them if they came out of the forest, but to pass them on to Special Branch for debriefing.

A friend, Spike Powell, known universally and appropriately by the locals as Bwana 'Spark' who ran a mobile combat unit of very well trained and brutally efficient ruffians whose job was to provide teeth in any area deemed necessary, was billeted in Karamande, a nearby village. He occupied as personal quarters, a disused butchery, a stone building at the end of a row with a front sales area separated from the back by fly screening where freshly slaughtered carcases would have hung. Directly behind ran the Thiba, a well known trout river.

He was sitting one evening within reach of a crate of Tusker beer when a large figure loomed in the lamplight with a well-used sten gun glinting in his hands. This was none other than the much sought after leader, General Nene (derived from Nyama Nene, or large animal, a reference to his size). Spike was taken by surprise, the General with his firearm at the ready could have taken advantage of the situation and Spike would have been history. However, without batting an eyelid and with great presence of mind, he invited the General to sit down and help himself to a beer, which was accepted. The purpose of the visit was to discuss the surrender terms not actually to surrender. Many beers later in a much improved atmosphere, Spike "borrowed" the General's weapon and refused to return it when he got up to go. In agitation the General said it was more than his life was worth to return without it, so he was invited to spend the night behind the fly screen and ended his days as an active terrorist.

Spike was a trim, small man with an infectious laugh and steely purpose in his eyes. He was a born
soldier and loved the military life. A small scar on his left arm bore testament to the manner of man he was. It was the result of a game we played which involved holding a high value bank note tight round the arm then putting a lighted cigarette to burn a hole in it. If you could withstand the pain until it burnt through, it was yours and Spike was the only man I knew who had done this.

Spike showed me this scar one day in Dhofar and explained how he came by it. I was very glad that there were no bank notes of any denomination on either of us at the time!

Kenya after National Service

Spike would have completed his service in 1955, and then been released. He subsequently held Regimental Number KR 6312 which indicates that he held a commission after December 1956, when the Regiment reverted to part time territorial status. Mike Smith mentions:

Spike Powell was OC Coast Platoon when I was in Mombasa in the early 1960's, he was then working with Ian Pritchard at Watamu.

However, Ian Parker, who was a Corporal in the Platoon from 1957 into the early 1960's, has no recollection of Spike being a member of the unit whilst he himself was serving in it. He saw Spike from time to time when he visited Ian Pritchard at Watamu and comments:

I knew of Spike's reputation and successes during Mau Mau, but in this phase of his life when I knew him, his gentle demeanour gave no inkling of the man of action within. Those of us who had known him usually seemed to know where he was and what he was involved with. Although no letters ever passed between us, he must have been quite a good communicator for this knowledge to have been general.

After his release from the KR in 1955, Spike was employed as a Labour Officer for the Agricultural Department in Kericho. Charles Harris again:

Another incident related by a friend told of Spike in his days as a Labour Officer in Kericho. He was called to a farm in Koru to deal with a labour problem. On arrival the owner was sitting on the verandah of the house with a wide flight of stone steps leading down to the drive. As he approached the house, a Jack Russell terrier skittered down the steps and promptly bit his ankle. Without a murmur, he scooped the dog up with his hands on the neck and rump and bit it firmly on the back which established a proper relationship. What a man!

Whilst in Kericho, Spike met Mary McNab, sister of the late Jim McNab QPM(G)(Posth), BEM. They married in 1958, and spent their honeymoon in Malindi where their accommodation was a small tent in the garden of Brunie and Dave McCabe GM. Spike was then transferred to Nyeri from whence he resigned to help run Ocean Sports, Watamu for Ian Pritchard GM. There were no children from the marriage and Spike and Mary were divorced at some time in 1962.

Katanga interlude

It seems that Spike had moved to Rhodesia after his divorce from Mary. He subsequently married Beth Thorn whom he had met when she went up to Kenya for a holiday from Rhodesia. He probably began to find life rather dull and disappeared into the Congo where he fought as a mercenary on the side of Tshombe, which brought him into conflict with the UN troops that had been sent in to end the Katanga secession.

The combined fogs of war and time mean that there are no firm details of Spike's activities during this period. However, Tony Archer remembers Spike telling him that at one time he was in action against the Swedish contingent. He recalled that the steel helmets with which the Swedes were issued were incredibly hot and they were predisposed to take them off at every opportunity. Not really battle-wise, they seemed unaware how much their bright blond hair showed up and presented ideal targets for a sniper.

Whilst subsequently serving in the Sultan's Armed Forces of Oman (SAF) Spike told the following anecdote to Peter Gordon Smith. He had been in charge of a small unit of Katangese gendarmes with a .50 calibre Browning defending a vital underpass on the road from the airport into Elizabethville. The UN force opposing him was a Southern Irish battalion of “mad, bog-stupid Paddies” who tried to take the underpass in a series of charges.
through the tunnel. The Browning caused many casualties - “at that range you could not miss”. This so angered Spike that a local truce was arranged to enable the Irish to collect their dead and wounded, during which he told them not to be so bloody stupid, that he had plenty of men and ammunition and any further attempts to take the tunnel would end up the same way.

Spike was never sure whether they believed him or whether common sense prevailed, suffice it to say, no more attacks were made.

First tour in SAF

On 25 October 1962, Spike joined SAF on a three year contract in the rank of Captain. He was posted to the Muscat Regiment (MR). Owing to the passage of time and the dispersal of many of the ‘players', details of his service in MR are somewhat vague. John Darbyshire remembers Spike as his 2i/c in B Company MR for a short period in 1963. The Company had just moved to Nizwa from Rostaq:

I think that I and the other seconded (not contract) officers were rather in awe of Spike whom we knew had been successful against the Mau Mau. He was hardly the pattern of an orthodox Sandhurst-trained British Army officer ... and he had some rather original ways of obtaining information from prisoners. He was an impressive operator and I probably learnt a lot from him about unconventional soldiering.

Andrew Gowen served in MR in 1963, on detachment from 45 Commando RM in Aden. He remembers:

The only incident involving Spike that stands out is a dinner I attended at which a junior UK Government Minister was the guest of honour. The minister got into conversation with Spike about the UN operations in Katanga, all went well until Spike pointed out that he was fighting against the UN forces not with them. In the subsequent silence we managed to switch the conversation!

Robin Hitchcock remembers Spike as being IO of MR at Bid Bid in 1964. On 1 May that year Spike was promoted Major and on 31 October he resigned from SAF.

Mike Hall, (SOAF 1962-64 and 1971-73) has provided the photograph of a happy looking Spike on board the white dhow that was the Sultan's 'Royal Yacht' in the early 1960's. It is possible that he was on a coastal patrol with Jasper Coates on that occasion. Mike says:

There was a story that Spike was in a Landrover carrying a group of askars when it went off the track in the Wadi Sumayl near Izki. They all piled out and Spike persuaded them to help lift the vehicle back onto the track. Having got one side to about shoulder height, they disappeared leaving Spike to it. He looked down to find an old anti tank mine between his feet!

Mike was at a tea party one afternoon when Spike taught several of the assembled company the words to the song Ag plees Deddie, he also caught the hepatitis from which Spike was suffering at the time. Mike finished up being casevaced to Bahrain after collapsing on return to Bait al Falaj from the Beaver 'Red Run' to Nizwa, having gone sick at breakfast time at Izki! Notwithstanding, Mike was delighted to see Spike again in the early 1970's:

I cannot say that I knew Spike well but he was a great and entertaining character, a good friend and someone to be relied upon if the chips were down. Z Company was so typical of his independent spirit.

Service in the Yemen?

There was talk of Spike having fought on the side of the Royalists in North Yemen prior to his joining the Rhodesian Light Infantry (RLI). To date, however, no firm evidence of this has come to light. On the other hand,
Hugh Lockhart of SAF heard a story to the effect that, whilst fighting for the Royalist cause and during the withdrawal from an engagement with government forces, Spike and a fellow mercenary came across a Pakistani paymaster and relieved him of the money he was carrying, which they used to finance a good holiday!

First tour in the RLI

In 1965, Spike joined the RLI in the rank of Lieutenant and was subsequently promoted Captain. In October and November the same year he was passing on his expertise in pseudo-terrorist tactics gained in anti-Mau Mau operations during experimental trials run by Alan Savoury of the National Parks. These tactics were eventually adopted on the formation of the Selous Scouts in 1974.

Lieutenant Colonel (Rtd) Chris Pearce, BCR has kindly provided the following information:

I first met Spike Powell in March 1965 when I was a recruit in 2 Cdo 1RLI. 2 Cdo was then the Training Commando [in the RLI context 'commando' means either 'company' or 'troop'] and all recruits passed through it as the battalion slowly built up its depleted ranks following the break-up of the Federation of Rhodesia & Nyasaland – when many men left, accepting the Golden Handshakes at the time.

The OC 2 Cdo was Major Jon Cole, the 2i/c was Lieutenant, shortly to become Captain, Patrick Hill and the Training Officer was Lieutenant Spike Powell. At that time, Spike was the only person in the Cdo who had any medals, so we recruits were vastly impressed with this evidence of his soldierly qualities. He held the MBE, awarded for his work with the Kenya Regiment during the Mau Mau rebellion, the African GSM with Kenya bar and the Omani GSM for his service on contract in that country before he joined the RLI. Oman was an unknown place to us in those days.

Spike and I, the recruit and the Training Officer, forged early bonds for what was later to become a good friendship – because I had grown up in Kenya and we had something in common, I suppose.

Towards the end of my recruit course the decision was taken to form 2 Cdo as an operational unit. No more recruits were to be trained and sent to reinforce the rest of the battalion. Our first test was Exercise Long Drag, a battalion exercise designed to prove the viability of 1RLI as a commando unit. We had all completed our basic training, with added skills including training in demolitions, medical, rock-climbing, watermanship and signals, and as a fledgling commando sub-unit we deployed on the exercise. Spike led a group of two troops on the exercise, which was a great success.

Afterwards we were deployed on border control operations in the Kariba area for two months. During that period I was returned to Salisbury to undertake educational training in preparation for a Maths ‘O-Level’ so I could attend a selection board for Officer Training. I lost contact with Spike for just over a year at that point as I attended the Officers' Course at the School of Infantry, Gwelo, Rhodesia from March to December 1966.

Commissioned 2Lt in December 1966, I was posted back to 1RLI as a Troop Commander in 3 Commando. Spike was then a Captain and 2i/c, under Major Hugh Rowley OC 3 Cdo. It was a time when we trained hard for the counter-insurgency role that we all knew was what faced us in the future. In those days Spike's nickname was 'Baluch' – I think after the Baluch soldiers with whom he had served in Oman. His experience was invaluable at that time and he took an active part in planning and assisting with training. He was an able and popular 2i/c, a good administrator and well-respected and liked. He never talked a great deal about his past, but as friends do, he sometimes told a tale or two about where he had been and what he had done.

Spike was very much the mentor to us subalterns. We had a huge respect for his experience and knowledge.

We first contacted terrorists whilst on border control operations in the north of the country in 1967, when a small terrorist incursion was intercepted and eliminated. Thereafter, things were quiet in our part of the country until we deployed in March 1968, on Operation Cauldron in the north of Rhodesia in the areas bordering the Zambezi Escarpment and, as a result, the Zambezi Valley itself. This was the operation when 3 Cdo really became 'blooded' and Spike was with us, certainly for the first couple of months if not right through from March to May 1968, when the operation was concluded.

Spike reinforced my troop with Cdo HQ personnel plus the reserve troop the day following a fairly serious engagement when we had been inadvertently bombed by a Canberra of the Rhodesian Air...
Force, so he was certainly involved operationally.

1968, was a busy year for the battalion and for 3 Cdo and from March onwards we were engaged in operations. In June we deployed to the Kariba area where there had been a terrorist incursion. It was wrapped up quickly and we were then redeployed across to the north east of the country where a further incursion had taken place. By October though, things were under control and we reverted to border control operations.

In early 1969, Spike decided to return to Oman and resigned from the Rhodesian Army. We maintained contact through occasional letters and through my friendship with Beth, his wife, who kept us informed as to Spike's whereabouts. When he came home on leave we would get together, I gathered that he was the OC of a Support Weapons Company with a variety of weapons ranging from an artillery piece downwards! His involvement in the overthrow of the old Sultan has been recorded elsewhere, it was something he never really spoke about, but I recall him showing me a beautiful, chased rifle that had been given by the present Sultan as a thank-you gift for his services.

At some stage during the above period, Bruce Rooken-Smith remembers bumping into Spike and another officer the day after they had done a water jump on an abbreviated parachute course and that they both looked fairly shell shocked. When they were on operations, Bruce and Spike conversed over the air in Swahili to avoid time-consuming encoding and assuming that it would take hours for a translation to reach enemy forward elements. Post-independence, Bruce discovered that some of his erstwhile enemies, whilst under training in Tanzania, had learned Swahili!

The second tour in SAF (I)

On 18 August 1969, Spike rejoined SAF in the rank of Captain on a three year contract and was posted to Muscat Garrison. He was appointed to command Guard Unit Dhowar Wing, based in Salalah, which subsequently became Z Independent Company (Z Coy). He became a permanent and popular fixture in Dhowar, where he was to serve until 15 March 1975.

With the exception of Spike, Z Coy was entirely composed of Baluch soldiers, including his 2IC Lieutenant Sabzal. Initially, their main tasks were local security on the plain, the provision of vehicle escorts, following up enemy (adoo) 'stand-off' attacks and dealing with unexploded adoo ordnance. In the case of the latter Spike had created a small workshop in which he delighted both in taking things to pieces to see how they worked and in constructing his own ordnance.

Salalah is located on the coast of a once fertile plain: it had been the granary of south-west Arabia, which supplied the British cavalry in Mesopotamia with fodder during WWI. Rendered barren by the 'scorched earth' policies of Sultan Said bin Taimur, who was fed up with endless land disputes and dissident tribesmen in the jebel and had ordered the destruction of wells and falaj (water conduit) systems. It began to be cultivated again in 1974. The plain is half-moon shaped, 25 miles long and 7 miles deep at its widest. It stretches inland to the foothills of the jebel, is flat and alluvial and indented from north to south by river courses (wadis) that are normally dry. The jebel massif is characterised by deep, steep-sided wadis again running mainly north to south. The mountains are affected by the south-west monsoon between May and September when, for much of the time, they are covered by low cloud, swirling mists and rain, which produce a luxuriant vegetation. The main road from Salalah leading up over the jebel to the sand and gravel sub-desert beyond (and leading eventually to Northern Oman) is the Midway Road.

The plain and littoral, totally dominated by the jebel and between 1968 and 1971, belonged almost exclusively to the adoo. Going west from the port of Raysut to the border with the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) the jebel massif comes right down to the sea in towering, rugged cliffs. There are few beaches and there were only two fishing villages along this stretch, Rakhyut and Dhalqut. The adoo had a main position at Rakhyut and the cliffs above the village were heavily defended by a mixture of small arms and Russian and Chinese heavy weapons.

At that time, the Sultan's Navy consisted of two motorised dhows, The Muntasar and the Nasr al-Bahr. They were commanded by a piratical contract officer, Lieutenant Commander Jeremy Raybould and were crewed mainly by Baluch sailors. Spike would often accompany a dhow on her patrol westward or on seaborne operations with members of the jaysh. He was always most welcome on board because he always brought at least one .50 calibre Browning with him. The main purpose of the patrols was to interdict arms-smuggling
traffic but since an adoo motorised launch had been blasted out of the sea by an airstrike, there was little or no such traffic and the patrols were continued with the aim of annoying the adoo and, hopefully, causing casualties.

A firm rapport was established between Spike and Raybould who sometimes accompanied him on armed forays into the jebel by Land Rover.

I first met Spike in Salalah in 1969, during the course of a short visit by an RN minesweeper from Bahrain. It was suggested that I might like to participate in a run down the coast with the Sultan's Navy towards the border with the PDRY 'to rot up the adoo positions down there'. The invitation was accepted with alacrity, the Commanding Officer of the minesweeper agreed that his ship would hover around but at least three miles offshore and, bound by political considerations, could not open fire unless fired upon. Spike's idea of course was that, in the event that Nasr al-Bahr found herself in dire trouble, the RN would come to the rescue since one of her own was on board!

Nasr al-Bahr sailed at dusk, it was a moonless night, the phosphorescence was incredibly bright and one never-to-be-forgotten sight was that of the silhouette of an enormous whale shark following close behind the dhow for about half an hour. At dawn we found ourselves off the split rocks that marked the Sultanate/PDRY border. This seemed to cause no concern but by the time that we had returned eastwards and were off Rakhyut, the adoo had woken up and they started firing with at least one Shpagin from high up on the cliff. They were firing into the rising sun and Spike set to with his Browning whilst the rest of the crew weighed in with a motley collection of LMGs and rifles, we were about 350 metres offshore. Five adoo rounds went through our sail, I had been given the job of 'spotter' and was afterwards told by Spike that I had been 'firing' the binoculars in excitement during the action! We probably did not cause any damage to the adoo but, having stirred up the hornet's nest, an airstrike was called up which certainly silenced the Shpagin.

On 6 June 1970, Spike was awarded a Commendation for his gallantry during several seaborne operations carried out by the jaysh in 1968/9. Initially this was a palm leaf worn on the GSM Dhofar, however, in 1973, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos instituted the Commendation Medal. Unfortunately, there is no trace of the citation.

Peter Gordon Smith then 2i/c B Coy Northern Frontier Regiment (NFR), has many memories of Spike including the anecdote that, at the start of his second tour in Oman the Commander Sultan's Armed Forces (CSAF) Brigadier Corran Purdon asked him how he felt to be back in SAF. “Happy as a pig in shit” was Spike's reply!

In late September or early October 1969, it was the turn of Peter's company to open a section of the Midway Road:

The road was at that time the life-line for Salalah and SAF operations in Dhofar. Until the arrival of cargo planes road openings were an annual year-round routine, probably starting 1966–67. They peaked just before and immediately after the monsoon. Prior to the onset of the monsoon, stores and supplies of every description had to be piled into Salalah to last SAF and the town for the next three to four months whilst the south westerly winds and surf rendered Raysut or the normal landing of stores over the beach impossible.

By the end of the monsoon Salalah had generally run out of everything, thus a major resupply effort was essential but only when the road surface had dried out sufficiently to take heavy vehicles. Opened too early and the surface could be churned into impassable quagmires which then became hopelessly rutted for the rest of the year. Thus, the first post-monsoon road opening was the most important operation of the year, it lasted three to four days with convoys running from Midway to Salalah in the mornings and vice-versa in the afternoons.

During the monsoon the adoo had had time in which to sabotage the road, prepare ambush positions and rehearse tactics to try and close the road permanently.

The first post-monsoon road-opening of 1969, came as a severe shock to the Sultan's army. During the preceding three months the adoo had been equipped with the Shpagin 12.7 mm heavy machine guns –
the Russian equivalent of the .50 calibre Browning. With this weapon they comfortably outgunned the small arms of the ordinary rifle company, inflicting serious losses in men and material on the company which had been detailed to secure the aptly-named 'Ambush Corner' section of the road. Morale was so badly affected that the company mutinied a few days later and ejected their company commander from the camp.

For the next road-opening some 10-12 days later, it was the turn of B Coy NFR to clear and hold 'Ambush Corner'. There was no doubt that a meeting was scheduled with the Shpagin somewhere along the Midway Road and everyone in the company knew it. The adoo would be keen to repeat their earlier success in one form or another. A second victory for them would have untold propaganda value and wavering tribesmen would be forced to admit the adoo's strength and lend their support. The area under their control would expand and if they managed to close the road for good, they would have the free run of the entire jebel and SAF would be powerless to prevent that from happening.

We therefore asked Spike to help us out.

He flew in that afternoon bringing with him a Browning, a small crew of men and boxes of ammunition. Powell could only be described as a weather-beaten, grizzled veteran of sundry wars here, there and everywhere. What he did not know about weapons and explosives was hardly worth knowing. In his bait [room] at UAG [the main army base] he had a small library of twenty-odd books, every one of them about arms and ammunition, not a single novel or any form of light reading. His habitual dress was a camouflage uniform with a type of 'lizard' cap made famous by General Bigeard and his French paras in Algeria. On just about any other person such a cap would have looked ridiculous or pretentious but not on Powell, above his lean, slightly vulpine features it suited him to perfection. He was a professional to his fingertips, soldiering was his life and it was impossible to imagine him being happy in a business suit or any of the trappings of civilisation.

This was his second spell with SAF. After his first a few years earlier he had disappeared back to Africa to put in stints with Tshombe in Katanga and Smith in Southern Rhodesia “but I quite like this place in a funny sort of way so I thought I'd come back to give you jerks a helping hand”. His stories were legendary, especially after a few cans of beer, which he could consume in vast quantities without seeming to suffer any ill effects. For all that he was the archetypal mercenary and looked the part, he was a warm-hearted and generous man, more inclined to see the good points in another than the faults. His wealth of experience and his sheer professionalism made him a welcome addition on any operation; with him around, things might get hairy but never out of hand. He carried an aura of indestructibility so that when he left SAF to return to Rhodesia for another tour his death in the second Viscount that was shot down by a SAM missile near Kariba came as a severe blow. Many of us felt we had lost a very good friend and a man whose memory we would cherish.

“I'll be doing any firing that is required” said Spike “This lot” and he jerked a thumb at his grinning soldiers, “their only job is to look after me. Now, where are the donks you're going to lend me to carry this beast?” He spent an hour with the animals practising his men in the lashings and slip-knots we had perfected for the mortars before he pronounced himself satisfied. He put on a demonstration of the firepower of his Browning for the benefit of the whole company. They were amazed at the size of the weapon and even more so at the size of the ammunition. They liked the slow, heavy thumping of the gun as it fired, the red of the tracer as it curved out, out and away and they marvelled at the bright, white flashes of the explosive rounds as they struck. They stroked and fondled the gun at the end of the demonstration as though it was to be their talisman for the morrow.

After supper we were talking with Spike and voicing our reservations about the motivation and effectiveness of the Baluch as soldiers, “Look, sports” he said, “don't be too hard on them. Just remember this – the Baluch have come to serve the Sultan, not to fight for him.” In one short sentence this encapsulated an accurate assessment of the Baluch. For many of them, enlisting in the Sultan's army was an escape from the grinding poverty of their homeland. He continued “don't expect too much of them and you won't be disappointed, don't ask too much of them and they shouldn't let you down, get yourself into a position where there are plenty of you and only a few of the adoo and they'll do alright.”

The next day the Shpagin hit us as we neared 'Ambush Corner'. A couple of light skirmishes earlier
had given the gun-crew ample warning of our approach. With hindsight we should have realised that a lone fig tree close to the track made an excellent aiming mark but we did not and we nearly paid for it. The adoo waited until the donks carrying our 81 mm mortar and Spike's Browning were passing the tree. A series of strange thumps and a cascade of smashed branches opened the contact.

Spike was the first to react and the first to pinpoint the Shpagin's position on the side of a prominent knoll some fifteen hundred yards away. The Shpagin's opening burst had been a few feet high but it would take only a small adjustment for its fire to become horribly effective. It was now a duel – Shpagin versus Browning and mortar, winner takes all; everyone else became bystanders hoping and praying that the Shpagin would continue to concentrate on the fig tree. However, constant practice had brought the mortar crew to such a pitch that they could unload the mortar from the donkeys, set it up and have their two bedding-in bombs bursting within ninety seconds of the adoo opening fire and being on target three or four bombs later. This was just as well because Spike's men had not had sufficient time to familiarise themselves fully with the animals, their potential for sheer cussedness or the slip-knots we had perfected for securing loads onto the donkeys' backs.

When the Browning did come into action it was bedevilled by a series of stoppages “a box of duff bloody ammo” was Spike's expurgated after-action explanation. Mortar bombs were bursting on and around the knoll when, as sometimes happens during an action, a temporary lull occurred in the firing – during which the only sound was Spike swearing like the proverbial trooper and furiously heaving on the cocking handle to clear yet another stoppage. If that cocking handle could have been broken by voice alone, it would surely have ended up in a thousand pieces that morning!

Paraphrasing Wellington on Waterloo, the contact was a very close-run thing, but the adoo blinked first – probably not wanting to risk losing their most valuable weapon so early in the campaign season. Whilst the mortar searched out possible escape routes in the wadis behind the knoll, Spike, having cured his problems, sent a series of long bursts arcing over the area “just to show the bastards we have something as big as theirs”. Whatever the actual effect on the adoo, it remained a fact that the Shpagin did not re-appear during the remaining three months that B Coy spent in Dhofar.

The following day we received a note from Spike which included - “.....thanks for a 'lovely party' yesterday - I was most impressed with your bods and bloody unimpressed with the Shpagin......” - this in Powell-speak was high praise for our men.

The aftermath of this action was an order for the company to set up a camp at 'Ambush Corner' itself in order to better protect the road. We no doubt protected it – but we also acted as a marvellous shooting gallery for every adoo Tom, Dick and Harry for miles around. Daily attacks became routine and Spike again came to our assistance. From some secret cache known only to him he sent us a Browning and an artillery piece, complete with crews. The gun was probably a 75mm howitzer, it fired a small calibre shell which made a whip-like crack and had a very flat trajectory.

The problem was that both were long range weapons designed to engage an enemy out of range of small-arms fire. The camp, however, was well within the effective range of the adoo and both crews had to expose themselves to man their weapons, especially the mountain gun. After a week of trial and error we returned the gun whilst keeping the Browning – much to the delight of the crew of the former and the dismay of that of the latter.

**The Coup**

On the afternoon of 23 July 1970, Sultan Said bin Taimur was deposed in a practically bloodless coup. The obituary of the late Brigadier Tim Landon in the *Daily Telegraph* of 12 July 2007, mentions that Spike played a
part in the action referring to him as “..... a British Army officer, Major Spike Powell .....” one wonders what Spike's reaction to this description would have been!

In his book *A Taste for Adventure* (Hutchinson London 1978) Colonel John Blashford-Snell relates the following (he calls Spike 'Mike' to protect his identity):

> On a quiet afternoon in July, a group led by 'Mike' entered the labyrinth of passages that led to the apartment of the old tyrant (Said bin Taimur). At first they were unopposed then the royal bodyguard reacted. Dashing through dark corridors 'Mike' came to a heavy door, behind which, he assumed, lay the Sultan's room. Flinging it open and shouting 'Your Majesty', he found himself looking down the barrel of a tripod-mounted machine gun with its owner in the act of pressing the trigger. The weapon failed to feed a round into the breech, the opposition was dealt with and 'Mike' dashed on to the next room. The door was locked and his 'Your Majesty' was greeted by a burst of fire through the wooden panels. Then there was a single shot followed by a shriek of pain – the Sultan, whilst trying to reload his pistol, had shot himself in the foot. 'Mike' sent him to hospital in a Land Rover.

Spike related a similar tale to Peter Gordon Smith, commenting on the number of handguns scattered within arms-reach in every room, the vehicles, including vintage Rolls Royces and armoured cars, and the mass of other weapons stored in the palace.

Some 'official' accounts are at variance with this, for reasons best known to their authors, however, those who knew Spike well also know that he had no reason to be a 'bullshitter', in this context, or indeed, in any other.

**The second tour in SAF (II)**

The main jaysh (army) camp, Umm al-Glawarif (UAG), was located a few kilometres east of the provincial capital, Salalah. Outside the camp the main track ran west in one direction past Salalah to the port at Raysut, in the other it ran east to the Dhofar Gendarmerie camp at Ma'amurah. Every morning starting at dawn Z Coy would check these tracks for mines and, over the years, they found many. Between November 1970 and December 1972, nobody was blown up on these tracks. However, one or two individuals who knew better, drove off the tracks and suffered as a result.

One morning just before dawn, a loud explosion was heard somewhere west of Ma'amurah. The Z Coy morning patrol, led by Spike, worked its way out to investigate. The incident had been caused by the premature explosion of a TM 46 mine and an anti-lifting device. The scenario according to Spike, based on the various grisly remains lying around, was that the minelayer had been under instruction, kneeling over the ordnance with his instructor bending forward to look over his shoulder. Upon the explosion the apprentice minelayer had been virtually vapourised, the instructor had lost a large part of his scalp but had been able to run off leaving, about 30 metres from the scene, an extremely soiled pair of undershorts! For various reasons it was not possible to track the 'instructor' for any distance. Although he probably made it back to the mountains (jebel), alternatively he could have died and been eaten by scavengers: there were hyenas on the plain. Despite enquiries, there was never any comeback from this incident on the Intelligence network.

At times the adoo would carry out 'stand off' attacks against the airfield from the foothills and there was a ring of defensive positions out on the plain called 'Hedgehogs' designed to discourage close penetration down from the jebel. Any such attack during the hours of daylight brought Z Coy charging out with their trusty .50 calibre Brownings.

Spike's workshop was an interesting 'cave' where the paucity of equipment was more than adequately compensated for by the inventiveness of its denizen.

I remember giving him a PMN mine which had been handed to me by an immediately ex-adoo as evidence of his good faith when he surrendered (there was a bounty of 150 Riyals on those mines). Later, in the officers' mess, Spike asked me how I had transported the mine. “On my lap” was the reply. “Christ man! The safety strip was three-quarters eroded through!”.

Malcolm Hyatt, who bore responsibility for intelligence operations in the Negd (Dhofar, north of the jebel), went out to defuse a TM46 mine on the road between Midway and Marmul. A 'loyal' Kathiri knew of its location.
Malcolm’s bomb-disposal equipment consisted of a large pipe wrench, rescued from the rubbish heap at Midway (as were many other useful items that Defence Department were unable to provide at that time). His communications were furnished by radios that he had liberated from a Saudi ‘private army’. One was mounted on his Spanish (excuse for a) Land Rover and the other in my bathroom down in UAG, the only place where a suitable antenna could be rigged without compromising security.

Malcolm was getting a bit concerned about the stability of the mine, so Spike was called to the bathroom to give advice. He was very helpful too and, when Malcolm commented that his efforts to unscrew the fuse were causing the pressure plate to depress by a quarter of an inch or so, Spike responded with the observation that it ought not to detonate, but one could never tell! Malcolm lived, the Kathiri got his baksheesh and, later, Spike was made to stand a beer or two in recognition of his helpfulness!

We discussed a ‘naughty tricks’ campaign to try and spice up the life of the adoo on the jebel. Spike had already produced highly effective AP mines designed ‘to take an adoo's foot off at the knee. These were made from empty beer and coca cola cans (of which there was no shortage) packed with plastic explosive and using tiny torch batteries, detonators and electric wire. Peter Gordon Smith mentions an incident when an officer was awarded the Bravery Medal for rescuing one of his own men who had walked into a newly-laid field of these mines on the jebel.

Whilst Peter Gordon Smith’s company of NFR was still on the jebel, Spike had sent up several clips of doctored Russian 7.62 ammunition. He had replaced the normal propellant in a number of rounds with the same weight of plastic explosive, which, he reckoned, would give the firer ‘a bloody great headache’ if it did not actually take his head off. These clips were scattered at suitable spots but no results were ever reported.

Spike suggested that if we could get hold of some cannabis and airdrop it along the adoo's camel re-supply routes, it might have an interesting effect on those beasts of burden. No cannabis: but what we did try was dropping empty beer bottles (of which, also, there was no shortage) from Skyvans. This was too inaccurate but the falling bottles made a most interesting noise which mystified the adoo for a while.

Spike's next brainwave involved doctored sacks of rice which SAF would leave behind them when descending the jebel after operations. One afternoon I was given a pestle and mortar, a supply of sleeping tablets and some powerful liquorice anti-constipation pills which I was invited to pound into a powder that would then be added to the rice. “Why me?” “That's OK,” said Spike, “I'm providing the rice but don't pound the stuff up in a draught, you never know what might happen!” The idea was that the adoo, having found the rice, would brew up a large meal and, having eaten it, fall asleep. When they woke up … the reader will have guessed the rest! We released a couple of sacks but heard no more.

'Twist' aerial incendiary bombs were concocted from 2 inch mortar parachutes, white phosphorus grenades and the pressure plates of British AP mines. They worked, even though some of the SOAF pilots were dubious about carrying them on board – and rightly so. On one sortie Peter Gordon Smith remembers Spike and himself kneeling either side of the floor hatch in the rear of a Beaver dropping these bombs at regular intervals. These devices became dangerous after removal the safety pin, following which the pressure plate (which was extremely sensitive) would detonate the grenade as soon as it touched the ground or, of course, as soon as it was bumped into by the bomb aimer. The Beaver bounced in some turbulence and Peter dropped a bomb which bounced off the side of the hatch missing the pressure plate by a hairsbreadth. Spike didn't say a thing, he didn't need to – the look on his face said it all! Nor did they tell the pilot just how close the three of them had come to putting on a spectacular firework display. The use of 'Twist' bombs was stopped after it was discovered that crop destruction was causing deprivation to innocent jebalis as well as the adoo.

Perhaps the most preposterous operation involving Z Coy was when I received information that the adoo were using cows' twats as dead letterboxes. A small number of cows were kept within the wire at the western end of Salalah, these were allowed to be herded out each day with their minders to graze across the plain towards the foothills. Some months earlier the local firewood industry had been foreclosed on Government orders. Wood from the jebel was brought down to the town, either per se or as charcoal to fuel the cooking fires in the town. It had been proven that the adoo were communicating with elements in the town, either directly via the wood carriers or through messages hidden in the wood. Now, a normally reliable source reported that the adoo were (having probably laid it himself) and was eager to earn the bounty – for the benefit of his tribe, of course.
passing messages via the cows. I consulted Spike, without batting an eye he said, “Right, you're on sport, Z Coy will round up the cows but you will do the searching!” I was worried about the Baluch and religious objections, “No, no it is you who will be putting your hands in those parts, not them and good luck mate!” The operation, unique of its kind, was duly carried out, a hugely grinning Z Coy, including their CO, rounded up the cows and then stood round watching. I tried half a dozen cows without finding anything, the few that did not object rather worried me! I then called it a day: Z Coy had thoroughly enjoyed the entertainment! The fact remains that, if this had indeed been a means of communication, the word would have got back to the adoo and they would have had to think again.

Not all Spike's activities involved agents of destruction: it seemed that he could turn his hand to just about anything. One of his sidelines was drilling for water with a pile-driver rig in the Wadi Naheez aquifer alongside the camp at UAG. To begin with Z Coy had been detailed to provide protection for the rig but within a short time Spike had somehow taken over the operation. He appeared in the Mess one lunchtime and announced that they had not quite reached the right depth yet but the drill had produced thousands of ******* frogs! The frogs were in fact aestivating in the damp earth prior to swarming all over UAG at the beginning of the monsoon. Peter Gordon Smith recalls Spike drilling for water near Mughsayl and Adonib in 1973. The rig had almost certainly been wangled out of the Defence Department which had a habit (not unlike the UN) of abandoning bits of kit long before their use-by date.

Spike was promoted Major on 1 January 1971.

In early August the same year a patrol of the MR was very badly shot up in an adoo ambush on the edge of the foothills of the jebel north of Salalah. The officer leading the patrol was riding in one of the four Cadillac Gage Commando vehicles that the Armoured Car Squadron had handed over to MR. He was very badly wounded and in the confusion immediately following the incident, it appears that he died before the adoo came down to the vehicle and mutilated his body. Z Coy were sent out to the scene and without any delay went straight to the stricken vehicle and recovered the body, at the same time laying down such a weight of fire on suspected adoo positions that they were able to withdraw without taking any casualties.

Subsequently, in 1971, Spike was awarded the Sultan's Bravery Medal (WB) for the action taken to recover the officer's body. Again, there is unfortunately no trace of the citation for this award.

Spike built up Z Coy to have a morale and persona all of its own. Every so often they would lay on a 'fudhl' (goat grab) and friends of the Company would be invited. They were most generous hosts and the platters were piled high with far more goat and rice than the assembled company could eat. I staggered away after one such occasion to find some of the soldiers ostentatiously tipping the mammoth leftovers into the nearest flowerbed. “They do that just to show the others how generous they have been by the amount they chuck away,” said Spike.

Once, on his return from leave in Rhodesia, his plane had been delayed in Aden. Although he claimed to be highly relieved that the passengers had not been allowed off the aircraft, he did have the courtesy to apologise that he was therefore unable to provide any useful intelligence!

In late 1972, Ian Gordon of the MR was based in UAG with the NFR. As part of his Dhofar 'acquaint' he went out on two Plains Patrols with Spike who later took him up the Midway Road:

He was also kind enough to spend some time with me showing me how the main adoo mines worked, particularly the PMN and the POMZ2 and how to disarm them. I was most grateful for that and was able to safely disarm and lift several adoo PMNs as a result. I also trained my company in mines so we suffered no mine casualties when I was Company Commander. I will always remember Spike with affection for that. I also coveted his Rhodesian-styled hat but never got one!

Ironically, I remember Spike saying to me after the Katyushas started landing in Salalah in ’73 that the next thing the adoo would get would be the SAM7 and that would make our old Viscounts very vulnerable so he would leave before that happened. He left in ’75 and SAM7 arrived later that year.
But the irony was that Spike was to be killed in a Viscount by a SAM7 in Rhodesia in 1979. He seemed in retrospect to be almost foreseeing his fate.

Peter Gordon Smith again:

At about 1330 hours on 18 November 1973, a PDRY Ilyushin 28 dropped eight bombs some two hundred yards east of the camp at Makinat Shihan (a disputed location pretty well on the border) [between Dhofar and the PDRY]. The line of bomb craters started and ended beautifully in line with the camp's north and south boundaries as though the Yemenis were issuing a warning to us to stop cross-border operations – 'we can use our Ilyushins to take out your camps whenever we like'. Spike and I flew up the following day – he to recover three blinds for identification and I to photograph the happy scene for posterity. Having no experience of bomb disposal, I was a tad leery about the way in which Spike set about excavating the first bomb. “Look Desert-head (my nickname), if this is going to blow you're not going to know a thing about it – so give me a hand lifting it.”

Spike had been a major mine layer in Dhofar before we arrived and his experience was invaluable. Together we produced some rather terrifying devices including a 'flame trap' which we tested on the Salalah rubbish dump ... and scared the pants off the locals.

We also had some fun blazing away with his Landrover-mounted weapons at the invisible adoo and I have a snap of him with a 106 mm recoilless gun. We often swapped yarns in the Mess and I learned a great deal from him.

Later, when he had survived running over a Soviet mine (for the second time) I visited him in hospital in London. I think it was at Millbank. Both his eardrums were shattered but he was in good spirits, helped by the Scotch I had smuggled in!

David Holt was in the Jebel Regiment (JR) and was later Staff Captain AQ HQ Dhofar Brigade. On arrival at Salalah, having been somewhat confused after a series of vague briefings, he was taken under Spike's wing and, 24 hours later, he joined JR on the Hornbeam Line.

Some months later I worked closely with Spike on Plains Patrol as JR with Z Coy and we became good friends. Spike was my guru and taught me how to stay alive. I was very fond of him. Later when I was SC A/Q Spike and I were in the RAF Officers Mess when the rockets hit the patio. We just said "**** this" and took cover on the floor behind the stone wall bar and sank a bottle of whisky.

When I saw Spike in plaster at the FST [Field Surgical Team] - he had been blown up on another mine - I actually said to him “look Dad, this is getting boring ... is it not time to go home? Cats and nine lives etc., and that is what happened.”

David, in his capacity as SC AQ, drafted the original citation for the award of the Distinguished Service Medal (Gallantry) (WKhM(G)) to Spike. It passed upwards from the Brigade Commander to CSAF and was promulgated in October 1974. The citation exists in the National Archives at Kew. It encapsulates Spike's service to SAF from 1969 to 1974:

Major Powell has served in the Sultan's Armed Forces for over five years during which time he has twice been wounded, and awarded the Bravery Medal. Under his leadership Z Independent Company has grown to a unit of over 240 all ranks whose role extends from the provision of 75 mm howitzer
and heavy machine gun detachments at HABARUT and SARFAIT, to the guarding of SALALAH Airfield, and the regular patrolling of the Plain and foothills to keep them free of the enemy. In all these activities Major Powell has personally been closely involved and in particular his leadership of extensive vehicle patrols has been a major factor in keeping the plains secure. He also has been the unofficial Chief Engineer to Dhofar Brigade where his unrivalled knowledge of mines, booby traps and similar devices has been invaluable. He has on many occasions used his ingenuity to create explosive and incendiary devices for particular operational tasks, and I have personally witnessed his recovery of the first blind KATYUSHHA 122 mm rocket which could have well resulted in his death. In addition to his operational tasks Major Powell has been responsible for the administration of his unit with a minimum of clerical assistance. His personal involvement is a major factor in the contentment and high morale of his men. By his bravery, hard work and initiative Major Powell has made a major contribution to the success of operations in Dhofar and I strongly recommend the award of His Majesty's Distinguished Service Medal for Gallantry.

On 15 March 1975, Spike resigned from SAF. On his way out he called on those of his friends who were by then serving in Northern Oman to say goodbye. Some time later I tried to telephone Spike from Muscat. I got through to Salisbury and was then transferred to another number, only to discover that Spike was out. The following morning a worried official from Omantel contacted me and asked me not try to call Rhodesia again as that country was PNG. Well: no comment to that, in view of other contacts with Mr Smith's regime that were being conducted behind the scenes!

Second tour in the RLI

Chris Pearce, BCR recollects that:

I think it was 1975, that Spike returned to Rhodesia and rejoined the RLI as 2/c Base Group. I remember him on the parade when the RLI was given the Freedom of the City of Salisbury. He had a chest full of medals from Oman; more medals than a Chelsea Pensioner. I was out of the battalion by then and out of Salisbury, so we didn't see that much of each other. I recall meeting him for drinks one evening at the RLI Officers Mess. By then I was a Major and Spike still a Captain and it was odd to be called Sir by someone who was so much more experienced and, indeed, older than me! We kept in touch but most of my time during that period was spent in Gwelo and Bulawayo. When Spike was killed on the second Viscount tragedy, I was devastated to read the newspaper and see his name on the list of those who had died. It was such a waste of a real character and a good friend.

Spike was indeed a character. He was immensely practical and very good with his hands. I recall dropping round to his home one Saturday for a chat and the inevitable Pink G&T that was obligatory in those days. Beth said that he was in his workshop next to the garage so I wandered over there to find him busy sawing through a Czech RGD-5 hand grenade so that he could remove the explosive and make a free from explosives training model. The trouble was that that type of grenade was a sealed unit and the detonator was still in it. No trouble to Spike. He asked me to gently pour water onto his hacksaw blade to cool it down whilst he cut away. After that it was the turn of an RPG-2 rocket. That was a well-earned G&T?

Spike and Beth's house was burgled one night. The next time I dropped round there he pointed out that the light switch in the lounge was covered by sellotape. He explained that the reason was that he had placed explosives and an electric detonator in the ceiling light so that “the next b******d who came to burgle the house” was going to cop it when he turned the light on. Was it a joke? Possibly, but with Spike it was quite possibly all true.

Then there was the time when we went on a battalion exercise and Spike had a box of crystallising gelignite in the back of his Land Rover, which he decided we could use to blow our trenches. No-one else I know would have done that.

The thing about Spike was that he did do things which helped to create the legend, rather than just talk about them. He was many things; a loner, yet gregarious and he loved a good party; a joker and yet deadly serious about real soldiering. Perhaps he is best described as an enigma, because I wonder if anyone ever really knew the real Spike Powell.
Obituaries

On 12 February 1979, Spike was a passenger on Flight RH 827 of Air Rhodesia, Viscount Umniati YP-YND and whilst flying over the Muruvadona Range near Kariba, the aircraft was shot down by elements of ZIPRA using a surface-to-air missile. There were no survivors.

In his obituary in the SAF Association Newsletter, June 1979, Brigadier Colin Maxwell, the Deputy Commander SAF aka 'Father of the Jaysh’, wrote:

Spike Powell was among the passengers who died in the crashed Rhodesian aircraft brought down by guerrillas when returning from Kariba to Salisbury in February 1979.

Spike first joined SAF in October 1962 and served in the Muscat Regiment until September 1964 having previously served in the Kenya Regiment. He was awarded his MBE for conspicuous leadership in operations against Mau Mau in the forests, where he had a reputation from the start of the Emergency of an extremely tough and resolute leader who thrived on hard conditions and difficult tasks. When he resigned in 1964 (for family reasons) he had already qualified for this reputation in SAF.

In August 1969 Spike who was a British subject born in Kenya, 1934, rejoined SAF after service with the Rhodesian Light Infantry. He was appointed to command a sub unit of Muscat Garrison termed Z Company for duties in Dhofar.

It was typical of the man that in no time at all he trained his men in the use of explosives, mines, home-made bombs and booby traps. An expert in the trade, an experienced tracker and with his flair for leadership his men became enthusiasts; Spike and detachments of Z Company were always at the scene of trouble. Spike Powell, who suffered permanent deafness from mine blast in August 1970 and subsequently other injuries, was award His Majesty the Sultan's Bravery Medal for intrepid valour in Dhofar.

Spike will be remembered by all ranks of SAF who were privileged to serve with him, not only for his inspiration, bravery and high example of leadership but also for his friendly nature and even temperament, he possessed a flair for establishing the right sort of relationship with his seniors and juniors.

Muqaddam Ian Buttenshaw WKhM, who kindly provided the above obituary, sent also the one below which was published in the RLI Association Cheetah Magazine Vol 2 No 3, June 1979:

A chequered career. Possibly the most apt description of the life lived by Major 'Spike' Powell who died tragically on 12th February, 1979 when the Air Rhodesia Viscount in which he was a passenger was shot down by a terrorist missile.

I knew Major Powell for less than 3 years and from the first was struck by his warmth and friendliness. Later, when I worked more closely with him, it became apparent that his whole nature was one of empathy with others but that he was capable of summing up characters very quickly, which made life somewhat uncomfortable for those whom he found wanting. 'Spike' was a person with whom everyone knew where they stood. He was forthright, uncompromising and steadfast in loyalty to his friends, his troop and his regiment. For this he was greatly respected.

Major Powell never spoke at length about his past, he was always too busy thinking about the future. However, it is known that he spent his youth in Kenya, that he was involved in the fight against the Mau Mau rebellion. He commanded a regiment of soldiers in the forces of the Sultan of Oman, before he joined the Rhodesian Army. These facts enhance Major Powell's colourful background and indicate from where he derived his great love of the outdoors and the deep understanding of people, who always fascinated him. His career in our Army was affected by and related to dealings with people.

He is sadly missed by those who knew him but he has left indelible marks behind. The world is still a 'pork chop' on the bad mornings after; his enthusiasm has rubbed off and been copied by his workmates. However, to my mind, the greatest mark he left behind and the best tribute to him is laughter. He made us laugh in diversity and at ourselves and the quality remains. We still laugh at the things that would have made him laugh and the picture of him that stays with us is one of gaiety. He knew himself and was at peace with himself.
In common with others decorated for gallantry in both Kenya and Oman, Spike never spoke about his awards.

Major General Corran Purdon CBE, MC, CPM, a former CSAF, mentions Spike in his book List the Bugle (Greystone Books Antrim Northern Ireland, 1993):

> Spike was a legendary figure. Rough, tough, highly experienced fighting soldier. Warm-hearted. Teamed up with Jeremy Raybould who often accompanied him during armed forays on the Dhofar jebel, sometimes in Spike's Landrover.

> Firebreathing personality, steadiness under fire. A sound, cool leadership that won trust and affection of his Baluch soldiers, who adored him and fought magnificently under his inspired leadership.

Major General John Akehurst CBE, who was Commander Dhofar Brigade wrote in his We Won a War – the Campaign in Oman 1965-1975 (Michael Russell (Publishing) Ltd., Salisbury UK 1982):

> ... a remarkable soldier of fortune from Rhodesia called Spike Powell, a really tough, battle-hardened warrior with unlimited courage, plenty of initiative, a vast knowledge of explosives and a splendid sense of humour.

There can be no doubt that Spike left his mark on all whom he met. It must indeed be rare that a person of a calling such as his should have been so universally respected, admired and liked.

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Photographs - Accreditation

Front cover: Spike – provided by Bruce Rooken-Smith
Page 3: A young Spike on National Service – provided by John Davis, Kenya Regiment Association
Page 4: Spike with a captured home-made Mau Mau weapon – provided by Bruce Rooken-Smith
Page 6: Spike on maritime patrol aboard the Sultan's dhow 1963 – taken and provided by Mike Hall SOAF
Page 10: Spike on the jebel – RAO Records provided by Ian Buttenshaw
Page 11: Note from Spike to David Shillinglaw after operations on the Midway Road with B Coy NFR 1969 – provided by David Shillinglaw
Page 14: Spike at Jasmine location on the jebel – RAO Records provided by Ian Buttenshaw
Page 15: Sequence of Spike dealing with unexploded South Yemeni ordnance at Makinat Shihan – taken and provided by Peter Gordon Smith
Page 16: Captain N.A.Powell, MBE, WB, WKhM (G), RLI. 2IC Base Group RLI in Officers Mess photograph taken after Freedom of the City of Salisbury Parade 25 July 1975 – provided by Ian Buttenshaw
Back cover: Spike's medals – provided by Bruce Rooken-Smith. From left to right:
Rhodesia General Service Medal
MBE
His Majesty the Sultan's Bravery Medal (WB)
His Majesty the Sultan's Distinguished Service Medal (Gallantry) (WKhM (G))
Africa General Service Medal with Clasp Kenya
Oman General Service Medal with Commendation Palm Leaf (Spike was entitled to His Majesty the Sultan's Commendation Medal instituted in 1971, but it is not included on his bar)
Al-Sumood Medal, the 'endurance' medal instituted 1976 and commemorating the war in Dhofar. For the individual it covered a period of 30 days service in Dhofar between 23 May 1965 and 2 December 1975
His Majesty the Sultan's Accession Medal to commemorate the accession of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said on 23 July 1970