

## West Wales Veterans Archive

### Written aide to the collection of material relating to RAF Veteran Ivor Thomas of Ceredigion

#### Aide to the Cine film recorded by Ivor Thomas at Aden in 1960

In 1958 Mr Ivor Thomas, lately of Ceredigion, Wales, was a single male living in England, with family links to Wales. At the time, National Service in the United Kingdom armed forces, remained a compulsory obligation to all able-bodied males aged between the age of 17 to 21 years. Ivor was conscripted into the Royal Air Force.

At the time, the port of Aden was a British protectorate and a temporary home for units of all three UK armed forces. The port had particular strategic importance, due to the location it occupied and accessible port status. Aden is situated on the southerly tip of the Arabian Land mass and allows access to the red and Arabian seas (Gulf of Aden). This sea route offers access to shipping routes into the Mediterranean Sea and Indian Ocean. Certainly, of world-wide importance.

In 1958 Aden was experiencing the beginnings of discontent amongst the population, as the fall-out from the brief Suez war and General Nasser's limited success, reverberated around the middle east. This discontent later developed into a full scale armed revolt against British rule, but at the time Aden was enjoying relative stability.

Aged 18 years, Ivor received his draught to report for National Service into the RAF at number 4 recruit training school at RAF station Wilmslow in Cheshire. Here, he completed eight weeks basic recruit training, before undertaking training in Wireless communications engineering at a RAF technical school.

As this article refers largely to the British protectorate of Aden, it is of no surprise that upon completion of his trade training, Ivor was posted overseas to Aden. The reader's attention is drawn to the photograph of an Aden Airways Limited luggage tag numbered 019727. This is indeed the very tag that Ivor attached to his luggage, as he flew out from the UK on a civilian Dakota DC3 to RAF Khormaskar, Aden.

At the time RAF Khormaskar operated as Aden's civil airport, as well as the United Kingdom aviation hub. It was to become the home to no fewer than nine RAF squadrons. It was also to be Ivor's home for the majority of his military service. It is believed that Ivor was assigned to the newly formed Electronic Repair Squadron, incorporated within



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Cyfeiriad ein swyddfa gofrestredig/Registered office address: 27 Heol y Wig/Pier Street, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion, SY23 2LN

Ffôn/phone: 03333 447 874

Ebost/email: [reception@agecymrudyfed.org.uk](mailto:reception@agecymrudyfed.org.uk)

[www.ageuk.org.uk/cymru/dyfed/](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/cymru/dyfed/)

number 131 Maintenance Unit. This squadron undertook the bulk of work maintaining and repairing the Radio and Radar equipment.

Single or unaccompanied servicemen and women were mainly accommodated in large blocks of barrack room style accommodation. Once again, the reader can refer to the collection and view photograph's taken by Ivor at the time, which illustrate the blocks and rooms.

With the hot climate and post Suez war unease amongst the population, life in Aden for a UK serviceman presented problems. Whilst work duties occupied the Airman and women a great deal of time, finding safe activities to undertake in their down time proved a challenge. The reader will note more photographs taken by Ivor, which show UK troops enjoying the sea, water and shopping in the local shops.

Ivor himself, had a keen interest in films, filming and photography. He was the proud owner of a 35mm Cine Camera and stills Camera. Ivor can be seen operating his Cine Camera, in a photograph taken during a holiday to Kenya in 1960. This holiday occurred during leave that his RAF friends and himself took, immediately after leaving Kenya.

Ivor made good use of his Cine Camera and his twelve- minute film of Aden is the main feature of the Ivor Thomas collection on the archive. The film offers the viewer a unique snapshot of Aden in 1960. Ivor successfully recorded moving images of street scenes, furniture and people going about their business. He also concentrated upon local landmarks, such as the beaches, Steamer Point, Crater and Ma'alla main.

An interesting side issue of note to the reader could be the photograph of Ivor in his room, surrounded by bottles and bottles of Coca Cola, housed in numerous crates. Ivor found a lucrative aside, buying and selling bottles of Coke, which he managed to chill using an Air Conditioning Unit, seen in the photograph. Given the hot conditions on base, this particular business made Ivor a popular Airman in the barracks. Along with the Coca Cola business, operating the projectors in the station Cinema, also helped to keep Ivor occupied. Ivor can remember loading and feeding film through the projector's and having to become expert and joining the Reels together. Difficulties in joining film, resulted in much derision from the servicemen and their families attending the Cinema screenings!

Viewers of the collection may also note the photograph that Ivor took of a crashed aeroplane. The aeroplane in focus is a Sottish Aviation Twin Pioneer, operated by the RAF number XM 959. A further photograph of Ivor and his colleagues posing for a photograph with local Tribesmen, illustrates that duties were not always confined to the RAF station. Ivor was aboard XM 959 when the aeroplane developed mechanical difficulties and the Pilot was forced to make an emergency landing. An experience that Ivor quite understandably describes as frightening.

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- **Our thanks to the National Library of Wales for assisting in the publishing and retention of the material.**



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