

CANDOER News



A quarterly Newsletter dedicated to Communicators AND Others Enjoying Retirement

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Welcome to the latest issue of a Newsletter dedicated to the **CANDOERS** (Communicators **AND** Others **Enjoying Retirement**). This newsletter will be distributed quarterly. New issues will be posted on the Web for viewing on or about, January 15, April 15, July 15, and October 15.

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The success of this newsletter depends on you. I need contributors. Do you have an interesting article, a nostalgia item, or a real life story you would like to share with others? If you do, send it to me at the following e-mail address: candoercat@gmail.com

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**"Some cause happiness wherever they go; others, whenever they go."
- Oscar Wilde**

NWA Captain's Account of the Oberoi (Mumbai) Terrorist Take Over

(Editors Note: The following was received from Charles Christian. The writer is a NorthWest Airlines pilot.)

To all my friends and relatives, it has been several weeks since F/A Daryl J. and I were released from the Trident/Oberoi Hotel in Mumbai, India.

First, a sincere and heartfelt "Thank you" to all for keeping us in your thoughts and prayers. Believe me when I say, "we needed them!"

Here's my story: Timeline starts Wednesday night 26 Nov (all times local BOM).

2100: Returned alone from dinner (luckily not Leopold's). Headed down to 10th floor air crew lounge to use the computer. Made a couple of calls to the USA using Skype connection.

2155: Returned to room #1510 and realized I had missed my 2150 wake-up call. Noticed message light NOT flashing. Almost immediately heard what sounded like loud fireworks coming from the street level. My room faced the water. Peeking outside, I saw no unusual activity. The noises continued. I started to think that the cadence was unusual and not really like fireworks.

2205: I then decided to call reception to find out if the flight was operating on time --- no answer at the front desk. I then called the hotel operator --- no answer! At this point I started to think "terrorist attack." The hotel is extremely customer oriented and they normally

pick up the phone on the first ring.

2210: Looked out the window to see if there was indeed any panic in the street. Everything appeared normal. Nobody running around, etc. I start to think that my imagination was getting the best of me. Surely if there were terrorists shooting up the lobby that the people walking around outside the hotel would be running around seeking shelter. At this point I made an unfortunate and almost fatal tactical error. I decided to go down to the lobby to get some first hand info on our pick-up time.

2212: Still wearing jeans and a golf shirt, I jump into the elevator. As I descended toward the lobby I had a thought; If there are terrorists in the hotel, maybe I should stand closer to the side (by the buttons) of elevator car. Don't want to give the bastards too easy a target!

Elevator doors open and I see a pool of blood directly in front of me. I hear screaming and moaning. I immediately realize that my worst fears have come to fruition. I press the button to close the doors and simultaneously look up past the blood and see a guy, who has just noticed me, holding an AK-47. He turned toward me and fired just as the doors were closing. If the doors had not closed as quickly as they did I'm sure I would have been toast.

2215: Ran like lightning back to my room and locked myself in. At this point it took a few minutes to "get it together." Had to really concentrate on exactly what course to take. With all my lights off, I again peaked out between the curtains.

2220: While looking out side, I heard the first of many loud explosions and saw pieces of the hotel falling into the street below. This one sounded like it came from just to my left and above. (In retrospect, I believe some of these

bombs were planted days earlier by sleeper cell employees) Glad they hadn't chosen my room!

2230: "Breaking News" on the attacks was just starting to hit the TV airways when they reported that my hotel was on fire. Not surprising considering all of the explosions. I started to feel very helpless. I faced an unenviable quandary, if I left the room I'd probably be shot, but remaining in burning hotel was almost as unappealing.

2245: Made contact with Northwest Airlines SOC in Minneapolis. Fortunately, they were in contact with my two First Officers who were outside the hotel. They were able to conclude that the Trident, my side of the hotel, was not on fire. Amidst all this horror, a little good news goes a long way.

The terrorists occupied various sections of the Oberoi/Trident Hotel complex for about the next 37 hours. I won't go into the hostage taking and other atrocities. These were all well reported by the various news outlets throughout the Thanksgiving holiday. Eventually our TV, internet and hot water were cut off. The hotel phone continued to work and I was able to keep in contact with NWA and my family. I was also in contact with Daryl who was on the 23rd floor. As time slowly dragged on, I found myself going through periods of hope and despair. I was hopeful when the sun finally came up and I could see Indian soldiers on the sidewalk below. Though intermittent explosions could be heard, I continued to hope for some good news from NWA but the status quo prevailed. "Hotel not secure --- do not move." I started feeling badly for the men and women with whom I spoke. I knew that they wanted desperately to give me some good news. The SOC, Chief Pilot and NWA security did a super job

keeping us informed as best they could. Information was at a premium. About mid-afternoon on Thursday I was told that our evacuation would happen within the hour. This was a real high point. Sadly, no one came. And when the sun started to set I began to think I'd never get out. Soon after, I found out the last NWA A330 out of town had just departed for AMS --- without us. A very sinking feeling.

Halfway through the night I heard a door open in the hallway. Using my peep hole, I could see people across the hall carefully sticking their heads out of the room. They were Lufthansa flight attendants. I was really glad to find that I was not completely alone. I was told that their Purser was on the 17th floor and had informed them that Lufthansa was sending an A319 rescue aircraft. This was very uplifting news. I called Daryl to tell him that we had a "for sure" ride out of town.

The next morning at about 11:00 we were evacuated by the Indian Army. The walk through the lobby was sobering. Looked like a war zone. After out-processing, we, along with Lufthansa and Air France crews, were bussed to a hotel near the airport. After a hot shower and some lunch, we were boarding the Lufthansa A319 (about 1800 Friday evening).

I can't thank Lufthansa enough. They sent their head flight surgeon, psychologists, and all crew members had been trained in Critical Incident Stress Management. We could learn a lot from them.

We were then met in FRA by Lars Reuter and Bob Polak from AMS. They were awesome. Met us in the middle of the night, had our hotel accommodations and follow-on travel arranged. Again, "Thank you Lufthansa" for the first class

seat to BOS.

In BOS, I was surprisingly met at the aircraft door (upstream of customs!) by my family and my dear friend, BOS manager Tommy Neylon. Tommy even had the State Police watching our cars at the curb-right in front Terminal E (Tommy knows everybody!)

Memories of Oman

1982-84

by Charles Christian

Part I of II

In 1981 I requested and received a posting to the NEA. I had been a Middle East Rover based in Cyprus in the mid '50's and was enthused with the area and wanted to go back. I then received notification that I had been selected for Amman. I welcomed this as I did three months there in 1957 and enjoyed the city, people, and being close to the Holy Land. A few days later I was notified that a mistake had been made and the posting was to the Sultanate of Oman. Great! Just where is that? Looking it up on a map I had visions of something like I had always feared in that area; a post like Kabul. The post report said that the people are warm and friendly and that their view of life, religion, family, and basic values was very similar to those of most Americans. This proved to be true, but the county itself was just emerging from the Middle Ages as it was very primitive, backward, no paved roads, schools, medical facilities, etc, until 1970. Then the British assisted the son of the then Sultan, who was happy living in the Middle Ages, to overthrow him and send him into exile in England. This started the unbelievable transformation of the whole country. Twelve years later when I arrived at post there was already implementation of the most modern

amenities for the benefit of the people and the country. This even included free membership in the good national health plan for the diplomatic community. This was a result of a very benevolent Sultan who started putting the oil wealth to good use. Sultan Qaboos remains the same absolute and great ruler of the country today and as a result Oman today appears to be a mini-Dubai from what I can observe remotely. Instead of trying to tell you more about the country, I suggest that you do a search on "Sultanate of Oman."

As usual arrivals and departures tend to happen in the middle of the night in the Foreign Service, this includes the Diplomatic Couriers that we all had to pick up and deliver. I arrived about 2 a.m. The Admin Officer met me and drove me past the new modern area with detached houses and where all post personnel lived except for the Ambassador, PolMil Officer, and one communicator, me. The Ambassador wanted one communicator close to the Embassy and not 20 some miles way out in that housing area. My housing was in a new apartment building just outside the new main gate to the old city. Until 1970 the lantern hanging over the old gate was put out at sundown, the cannon fired, and the gate closed for the night just as it had been for a 1,000 years. My apartment had two bedrooms, new Drexel furniture, and A/C units in every room, except the kitchen and bath. I was on SMA as my wife remained at home teaching school in California. SMA was used to fly her over twice, including one whole summer during my tour. I received 2-3 weeks R and R after a year and went home. State would pay only for a return ticket to NYC, but it was much cheaper to go around the world and so I did. This gave me a whole day layover

in Hong Kong, which was a great way to start the R and R. Then another whole day in England on the way back.

Muscat is upwards of 115 in summer, 90 plus humidity, and it takes two weeks to adjust to where it is bearable to be outside. The first two weeks there I did not have a car and walked about five city blocks to and from work. I would go from a shady spot to a shady spot and then have to rest before I could go to the next one due to the oppressive heat.

The work was mostly 13 days on and one off during my two year tour. The FS Inspectors had some time before recommended one more communicator in the CPU, but it remained only two of us during my tour due to the shortage of communicators. This was why people like me with 14 years out of the OC loop were being hired at that time. Still there was always that off day when it was possible to take advantage of what there was to enjoy. Thanks to the FS Act of 1980 overtime was now paid instead of comp time and the tour paid well in OT, 25% hardship, 10% COL, plus tax free SMA of over \$400 a month.

The embassy was in a 1700's two story building adjacent to the British Embassy within the moats and walls of the old city. The building was actually crumbling as the cement had been mixed with salt water due to the shortage of fresh water back then. The termites holding hands were probably holding the building together. The ceilings were old palm tree branches full of them and their droppings in the PCC were always a problem. The phone room was a closet accessed only from the outside with no A/C. It was hot, dirty and probably the reason the telephones failed constantly. I could do little but change cards in the PBX and hope for the best. When all else

failed, in flew the CEO from Karachi. Part of the problem was that ever since the RAF had the building in WWI (repeat World War One) all new cable pairs were just placed over the old ones and painted a sickly green, creating a coil of wires about six inches thick along the ceilings of the whole building. If it was a wiring problem you had no choice but to string new wires until the problem was corrected.

Our equipment was the same as I had been working with at various posts back in the '50's after OC was upgraded from CW. Somebody must have told the selection board that I had a reputation of being a fast poker (since 1950 USAF) and sent me where that talent was really needed. If I was not fast at the time I sure was after this tour was up.

One of the amenities that was enjoyable was that the Embassy Recreation Association had a boat about 16 feet long with a 100 hp outboard and a 6 hp emergency outboard. It was parked on its trailer at the Capital Area Yacht Club six miles up the coast. The club had a great beach in a nice cove, a restaurant-bar, and was a member only club who were almost all expat; Brits with some VIP Omanis. The embassy had three free membership cards. I volunteered to help run the ERA that also had a small store with plenty of adult beverages and equipment for camping, BBQ's, charcoal, and a few other items that were occasionally needed by most of us on an outing and were not available locally.

I became the pass controller. The passes were kept by the MSG's at Post One. I made sure they were turned back in nightly and not kept by someone who felt they were able to do so by right of rank/position. I made a US Army Major very unhappy over that once. All in all

there was no problem and the ERA was able to have the funds to fix the boat when it needed repairs or service. The boat was a great source of pleasure for all who took the time to be trained in its use. There was a small cove way up the coast which had a very old abandoned village by the beach. This was a very popular spot for picnics for the members from the club. The only problem there was the very small entrance between some rocky areas at the entry to the cove. Normally it was very easy to get in and out if you had experience with your boat. One late afternoon a bad wind came up and it was a "high seas" area in the entrance. I had a TDY'er with me (one of ten I had during the tour due to the CPO's always shipping out on me). I told him that while others were going to wait I thought we could make it. I just did not want to wait a couple hours until the wind died down. We made it. When we got back to my apartment he proceeded to do a big job on a bottle of my whiskey straight. I had a feeling he was not happy with me after that event. I had lots of faith in that boat for it was a Boston Whaler with a powerful engine.

The PCC messages were about 60%+ for DOD. This was due to the large amount of cooperation and assistance we provided to the Sultanate. The Brits had a handle on most of the commerce and pretty much ran the military by having a Brit officer standing behind the Omani officers advising them what to do and say. I would think this is not true today as at the time the Omani's were all a product of having little education or any training unless their parents sent them out of country. We gave to Oman, and supported with US Army personnel, six modern tanks. They worked better and longer in the sand and heat than the Brit tanks. The Brits would

train Omani soldiers in their use and when they became proficient they would transfer them into other branches of the army so as to degrade the U.S. tanks' performance. Eventually the tanks were relegated to a command and control use rather than as fighting units. British face saved again.

The U.S. Navy had an aircraft carrier task force in the Arabian Sea most of the time as they do now. Every two weeks at sundown, in order keep a low profile in the area, a combat supply ship would sail into the port area of Muscat and take on fresh fruits, vegetables, and eggs and leave before morning. Often I would go aboard and sell embassy tee shirts and local Omani souvenirs for the benefit of the ERA. In return I would usually buy music tapes sailors made aboard ship from the original tapes and which benefited the ships' slop chest fund for their benefit. The sailors were not allowed to come ashore as the country was a closed country and you could not enter unless you had a "No Objection Certificate" issued by the government. You had to be sponsored by someone in the country who was a relative or had a business need for you to visit to get a NOC. I did this for my wife and then my daughter when she finished college and was doing the Grand Tour of Europe. She then came on to Oman for three months where she was a hit with the MSGs. She also volunteered with the Ministry of Interior cataloging plants of Oman as she had a Biology minor. She borrowed a sewing machine and made a colorful Omani's woman outfit in time for National Day and she wore it as we walked up the street to a spot in a modern area of old Muscat and watched the neighbor men doing the national circle dance in the street. The music

was provided by a drum, a clarinet type instrument, and beating drum sticks on a hubcap set in a block of wood. Women in their black robes stood together behind a wall in an apt. driveway watching. Some of them came out to my daughter to greet her and feel her outfit. Through sign language my daughter explained that she had made it. The women seemed to all express their praise to her for the good job. With the assistance of a trusted older Omani government official she also saw areas and met people that most foreigners never saw at that time. The same man and his lovely wife were also a prominent couple in the social life of the city and diplomatic circles. Once with my wife he took us one evening into the interior in a mountainous area. We parked at a remote location and struck up a conversation with an older goat herder who lived with his wife in a small stone hut. He had nothing to offer us except the small cups of Arab coffee, some dates, and his camp fire. We sat by the fire for an hour, with my friend as translator, and with the goats around us as we learned about each other. The sun had just set and that moment is one of my favorite memories of the county. This was not an unusual occurrence for those who are familiar with Omani's and/or the desert Bedu hospitality in the Arab world.

At Xmas time in 1982 the embassy decided it would try to do something that had not been done before. Get Oman's permission to bring some sailors to our homes for some shore time with Americans. It was granted and we took a total of 50. I took 3 of them as I only had a small Mazda 323 sedan for transport. The rule was they were to get out of the car only at your place of residence. Nothing was said about

coming and going. So they received an auto tour of the whole capital area on the way to my apartment. I put on a good feed with my part time Pakistani house boy's assistance and offered my bar to them. They would not drink liquor. In return I received some fine souvenirs from the ship which I still have and enjoy. The embassy later received a cable from the Rear Admiral of Task Force 73 off the coast besides one from the C. O. of the USS White Plains supply ship for "making the 1982 Xmas season truly memorable for the 50 American sailors." I use to go and watch one of the ships enter the harbor from a car park overlook and have a strong feeling of pride and appreciation for all those aboard that USN ship flying our flag. I am sure all who took the boys ashore that Xmas had a similar feeling towards those on our ships out beyond the horizon.

Take care and be safe!