

THE PERSIAN GULF

We feel we can describe life out here best by brushing aside a few moth-eaten myths about the Gulf, namely:

- (a) That it is an unimportant part of the world where the "bad hats" are sent.
- (b) That it is always unbearably hot, and there are no recreational facilities.
- (c) That communication with the outside world is difficult, if not impossible.

The Persian Gulf has never really been the back-water that people are apt to suppose. In the last century hardly a year passed without one of H.M. ships being called upon to knock down a sheikh's fort because he persisted in smuggling drugs into his country; or to intercept a dhow carrying wretches away into slavery; or to back, with a display of force, the political authorities in arbitration between two rulers quarrelling over the ownership of a piece of land. And the history of a hundred years ago is being repeated today, only modified firstly by the slow march of civilisation, which tends to deprecate, for example, people having their right hands cut off for stealing, and secondly by the discovery of oil, which makes even more complicated, heated, and long-drawn out, the squabbles over different sheikhs' claims to territories where the oil exists, or is likely to be found.

As for this part of the world being the unhappy hunting ground of the ne'er-do-wells, a glance at the ships' companies would soon dispel any such

illusion. We have three frigates in the Persian Gulf Division, *Wild Goose*, *Wren* and *Flamingo*, manned respectively from the Chatham, Portsmouth and Devonport depots. *Wild Goose* is the ship of the S.N.O.P.G. (who is also her Commanding Officer), and so on the communication side carries a C.Y.S. and a C.P.O. Tel. (at present C.Y.S. Scurr and C.P.O. Tel. Howarth—the former is about to be relieved by C.Y.S. Cole). The other ships have a Yeoman and P.O.Tel. each. Of junior ratings each ship carries two Leading Tels. plus four Tels. and one Leading Sig. plus two Sigs.

The apparently large telegraphist complement is necessary because each ship has to read the Ship Broadcast continuously, whether in harbour or at sea, and has to man our Persian Gulf Wave four times daily. Conversely, ships only have a small V/S staff because we do not often spend more than two nights running at sea. (*Wild Goose's* recent three-week cruise round the Oman Coast and down to Aden was an exception). Nevertheless, there is much for the V/S staff to do. Though we have not yet exhausted the possibilities of the F.S.B., because two ships are seldom in company for long, many flashing exercises are carried out with merchant ships and the P.G. Division are usually to be found in the list published periodically in A.F.O.'s. In *Wild Goose*, where signals are reproduced for Staff as well as ship's officers, the M.S.O. is always busy; their record is 100 signals a day for the five days that C.-in-C. was in Bahrein this January. Thus, on neither V/S nor wireless side is there any room for the idler or malingerer. There is plenty for all to do and every one counts.

Between the middle of May and the middle of October it is undoubtedly hot out here. At Basra or Kuwait, the shade temperature may rise to 120 degs., though it is then usually a dry heat. At Bahrein the thermometer mostly stays lower, but the air is almost saturated with water. However, air coolers are fitted on the mess decks and in the wardrooms, wireless offices and sick bays of the three Persian Gulf frigates, and there is often a refreshing (and sometimes all too forceful) north wind to cool the ships down. For the remaining seven months of the year the climate is delightfully temperate and may even become frigid. When *Wild Goose* was inspected by the C.-in-C. at Basrah in January of this year it was so cold that the Chief Yeoman's telescope registered several layers of frost and the "sparkers" teeth at divisions were making morse at a "steady rate."

Bahrein is our base and here there is a good N.A.A.F.I. canteen, tennis courts, sports grounds and swimming pool. The Naval Base area, which in wartime was commissioned as H.M.S. *Jufair*, is shaded by palm trees and has its own flower and vegetable gardens; it is far from being the arid waste that the name "Bahrein" seems to imply to many who have never been there or who have only

passed through by aircraft. At Basrah in the north we go alongside a jetty belonging to the R.A.F. and share their swimming, tennis, soccer, cricket and canteen facilities. Nothing is too much trouble for the R.A.F., and many are the sporting fixtures that take place followed by amicable pints of ale which help us to restore our strength and find out why we won or lost. The C.Y.S. particularly recommends the Sergeants' Mess (R.A.F.) for thirsty senior ratings.

The Communicators are naturally represented in the sports teams. In *Wild Goose*, for example, Sig. Lear and L./Tel. Pye play for the first soccer eleven and C.Y.S. Scurr represents the ship at hockey.

Both at Basrah and Abadan many friends are made with people ashore, and we always look forward to our times up the Shatt El Arab. But our newest-found friends are the representatives of Kuwait Oil Company. In the last few months our ships have been going alongside the company's new pier at Mena Al Ahmedi, which is much nearer their headquarters than our former anchorage in Kuwait Bay. *Wild Goose* is there at the time of writing and a big programme of games, parties and cinema shows had been arranged, but unfortunately had to be cancelled as we have been put in quarantine. However, we hope to return soon when we are "clean" again to establish more firmly our relations with the "oily boys" of Kuwait.

When we have spent some time among the bright lights of commerce and our money has run out, we slip away to some secluded island to fish and bathe or visit a few minor sheikhs on the Trucial Coast where those who are lucky are entertained in ancient regal style to a "Khuzi" party of boiled sheep set on mounds of rice, accompanied by chickens, dates, fresh fruit and other local etceteras.

There is thus quite a lot of variety in life out here, and, of course, we can always look forward to the next docking at Bombay or Ceylon, with the associated trip "up country" to Poona or Diyatelawa. (We regret to say Poona is no longer what it was in that former age, when a chukka before breakfast and a chota-peg at sundown was the order of the day).

We have already said a little about communications. The merry clicking of the typewriter or the steady drone of "GZH's" in the operator's ear testifies to the ease with which the broadcast is received; and Portishead and others are no strangers to us on ship-shore. Our area includes the shores of so many countries that programme signals must needs contain a nightmare number of non-naval addressees; Embassies and Oil Companies, Political Agents and Consuls; all must be told and many interesting circuits come to light in the struggle to avoid enormous commercial traffic bills.

Our "portables" also are exercised from time to time. A few months ago a whaler from *Wild Goose* was sailed between two Sheikhdoms on the Trucial Coast, a distance of about 30 miles, the ship having gone ahead. Good communication was maintained throughout between the ship and Tel. Pridmore

with his portable set. It was even found possible to relay football results from the B.B.C. to the voyagers, and when it turned choppy and some of the crew began to feel the motion, a spot of "hot bepop" was transmitted to take their minds off current events.

We hope that this introduction to life in the Persian Gulf will make the idea more bearable for those Communicators who are suddenly shot from the Barrack nest unto the unknown abyss. Those of you who get this far will be warmly (but not *too* warmly) welcomed—which reminds us that in *Wild Goose* at any rate some of us will soon be on top line for relief; so how about it, Chatham?