

TRUCIAL STATES



THE SCOUTS STEP IN

Silhouetted on a barren hillside (above), the local Arabs watch as the Scouts move into action in an area where tempers have again reached boiling point.



IN the Arabian Peninsula, arguments are often settled by the simple expedient of one party shooting the other. Unfortunately this solution, while quick and decisive, is not always final. It can lead to a prolonged, full-scale shooting match between whole tribes.

Arabs tend to prize their rifles more than human life and any excuse to use them is welcomed with enthusiasm—whether it is blasting into the sky during a Bedu dance or blasting at each other.

Men of the Trucial Oman Scouts know this better than anyone else in the world—one of their essential tasks is to step in before the shooting when tribal disputes reach boiling point.

It is a job that requires many talents. For the Scouts—perhaps one of the most spectacular armies in the world—are responsible for keeping the peace in the Trucial States and it means keeping a well-tuned ear constantly close to the ground to be forewarned of likely trouble.

And when trouble does flare, the Scouts have to move fast and think quickly to persuade the opposing sides to lower their voices and perhaps their guns.

In the last resort the Scouts have to be prepared to stand literally in between the two parties and hope that they do not decide to resolve their differences or relieve their itchy trigger-fingers by mowing down the intermediaries.

Disputes between individuals and tribes which the Scouts are called on to smooth over are many and varied, but a typical example is the row involving the Habus tribe in the Ras-al-Khaimah district, where most of the inhabitants are descended from one of the biggest pirate tribes.

The Habus are fiercely independent people living in the foothills of a big mountain range which runs into Muscat and Oman. They live off their sheep and goat herds which graze part of the year in the hills and part on the plain below.

The harmony of the area was first upset when the Habus angrily discovered

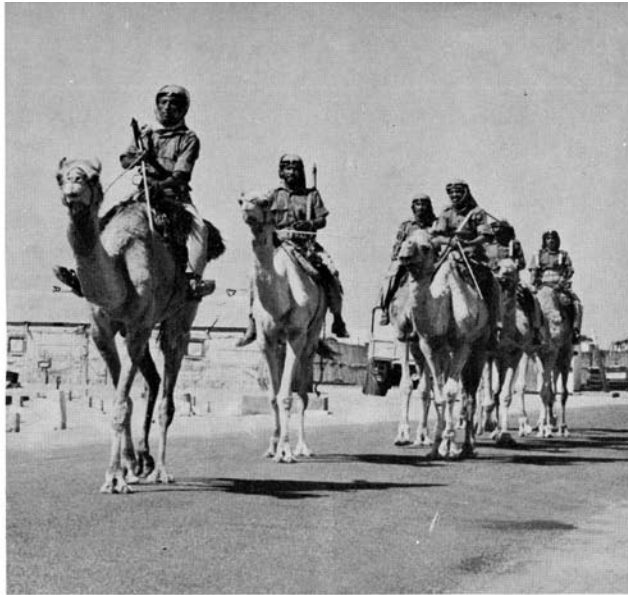
that their grazing land on the plain was being cultivated and fenced off by farmers developing small gardens.

Trouble began with the farmers finding their fences broken down and wells and pumps damaged. Incidents became more frequent and more serious until about 50 Habus tribesmen built stone positions in the hills and began firing at everyone passing on the plain below.

D Squadron of the Trucial Oman Scouts quickly arrived on the scene and, ignoring the flying lead, the squadron commander calmly walked up to the Habus positions and curtly ordered them to "pack it in."

Much lengthy and noisy discussion followed and the situation was brought off boiling point, but continued to simmer gently.

The farmers and the Habus tolerated each other for a few months, but meanwhile the ruler of Ras-al-Khaimah needed gravel for building and ordered that lorries should collect it in the Habus' foothills.



Above: Mounted on camels a Scouts' patrol leaves headquarters at Sharjah. Right: This farmer had 100 young trees cut down in a raid by the Habus.



Below: Inevitable facet of Arab life is the pow-wow to exchange news and drink scalding hot coffee.



This opened all the old sores and the Habus immediately complained that the ruler was physically removing their territory. Then they impounded three lorries and sent a message to the ruler that if he wanted gravel from the area he would have to come and fight for it.

Scouts rushed back to the area in time to prevent both sides shooting it out and days of bedlam-like negotiations followed which finally resulted in the marking out of ground for gardens and establishing where the gravel was to be collected.

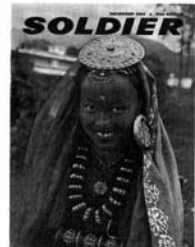
Whether it was the talking that settled this particular incident remains a matter for conjecture; nevertheless it did settle things—for a few months.

This year trouble flared again when the Habus warned that the garden fences were not strong enough and that their sheep and goats might break in—mysteriously they did so immediately.

The farmers retaliated by killing some of the goats and the whole chain was sparked off once more—Habus tribesmen broke into a garden at night and cut down more than 100 young trees and the Scouts once more appeared to separate the parties and calm them down.

These squabbles may have a child-like flavour to Western eyes, but there are serious undertones behind the juvenile arguments. Throughout the Habus incidents, there was a constant threat that the Habus might throw in their lot with another hill tribe, known to be spoiling for a fight, and start a battle on a really big scale.

The incident is typical of the hundreds with which the Trucial Oman Scouts deal every year. It is a tribute to their skill and tact that overall peace has been established in the Trucial States—an unusual situation which even the Arabs living there are beginning to enjoy.



COVER PICTURE

Gracing **SOLDIER**'s front cover this month is a Gurkha bride, Dhadranti Limbu, pictured in Nepal in her wedding dress the day after her marriage to Rifleman Bhuwansing Limbu. The wedding was at the Gurkha Depot, Dharan, where the bridegroom's father is regimental sergeant-major. Picture by **SOLDIER** Camera-man **FRANK TOMPSETT**.