



## A Journey to Kamaran Island

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During a recent business visit to Sana'a, the capital of the Republic of Yemen, I took the opportunity to visit the Military Museum in Liberation Square. The museum, in some detail, chronicles the military history of the nation with much of the focus on the 1962 Revolution which overthrew the Imamate and the subsequent progression of the Yemen Arab Republic to its unification with the Peoples Democratic Republic of South Yemen in 1992 thereby becoming the Republic of Yemen. Of particular interest to the British military history of Yemen was a display of miscellaneous items from the Red Sea island of Kamaran which included the upper third of a British military grave stone. This slate headstone, beneath the engraved badge of the Royal Marine Light Infantry, bore the inscription: "P.O./16184 Private C.H.Read H.M.S.Odin 12<sup>th</sup> June 1917"

Kamaran Island is just offshore from Salif which lies on a peninsula on the west coast of Yemen, some 50 miles north of the port of Hodeidah, in the Red Sea. The island had been inhabited for centuries when the Portuguese established an outpost there in the 16th century. The island was occupied by the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century but annexed by the British in 1858 in connection with the laying of an international telegraph cable to Bombay. In

addition the island was used as a international quarantine station for pilgrims conducting the Hajj to the Ottoman-controlled holy city of Mecca. During World War I, whilst the British occupied the island with troops from Aden. After the war Britain continued to occupy the island despite the objections of Yemen and administered it from the Colony of Aden. During the British occupation the quarantine station was administered by an international quarantine board and on the island there existed a short tramway and ice making plant and a water distillery. In 1967, Kamaran became a part South Yemen upon its independence from Britain and subsequently annexed by the Yemen Arab Republic in 1971.

On returning to Riyadh I wondered what had happened to Private Read. After a little research I came upon a copy of the 1931 The War Graves of the British Empire and amongst details of those buried in Cemeteries in Arabia noted seven names of personnel buried at North Point Christian Cemetery, Kamaran Island including: "READ, Pte. C.H., PO/16184 H.M.S. "Odin." 12<sup>th</sup> June, 1917. Age 24. Son of Charles Henry and Louise Read, of 5 Heather Cottages, Ash Vale, Surrey." A later Commonwealth War Graves Edition of 1981 notes that the graves on Kamaran could no longer be maintained and their names are commemorated on the Cross of Sacrifice Memorial in the Ma'ala Cemetery in Aden. Private Read is also commemorated in the United Kingdom on the Ash War Memorial in Ash Hill Road, Ash, Surrey.

Further research noted that Pte Read had been killed during an assault on the mainland Turkish garrison of Salif. During the Great War, the Navy blockaded the coast of Arabia, and by the end of 1916, there was much activity to prevent arms reaching the Turkish troops, who were besieging Aden. At Salif there were large rock salt works belonging to the

