

**O**wain Raw-Rees, RQBB Chairman, was interviewed about his hobby for the March 2010 edition of the Yemeni Forces magazine Maglet Al Jaish.

- You have visited Yemen before – how long did you stay in Yemen? Which cities and parts of the country did you visit?

I first visited Yemen on business in 1991 and I have continued to visit the country on average once every year since then. Whilst during the first few years I visited on business since about 1995 almost all of my visits have been as a tourist. During these visits I have had the good fortune to see a lot of Yemen from Hajjar in the north to Marib, to Al Qatn, Seiyun and Tarim in the Hadhramaut, Mukalla, Shihhr, Ghail Bawazir and Aden on the southern coast, to Lahej and Taiz, Mocha, Ibb, Jibla, Dahmar to Sana'a and to Hodeidah, Salif and the island of Kamaran. My wife and two daughters have on occasion accompanied me and over the millennium we spent a week travelling around the country. During my recent visits I am usually accompanied by one or two friends and I do my best to introduce them to the country.

- Did you find Yemen as you imagine before you visited? How was your view previously?

Although I had read of Yemen and knew that the country had long been referred to as Arabia Felix or Happy Arabia I did not know what to expect other than I was sure that its long and rich history would interest me. My first visit fulfilled my expectations and I was determined to come again and as I have now been working in the Middle East for twenty years I have been very fortunate in having the ability to visit on a regular basis.

- After you have visited and stayed in Yemen how did you find its atmosphere, environment and tourist landscapes? What service was unsuitable for you in Yemen? How did you find the Yemeni people? What is your impression about Yemen? What is the thing that caught your attention? What are the best and worst things that you found in Yemen?

For a visitor with an open mind and open heart the overwhelming impression of the Yemeni nation is one of hospitality. As with most nations there are problems but the welcome I have received during my many visits has been ever present and consistent. All over the country people, no matter their circumstances, have been friendly and welcoming. Both as a business visitor and as tourist people are always ready to help and offer assistance. With its wealth of history and beautiful and imposing landscapes Yemen has great potential for tourists with an enquiring mind and a taste for adventure. It is unfortunate that security concerns have badly affected the flow of tourists as tourism has a great economic potential for the country.

From my recent visits Yemen obviously has a number of concerns – a growing population and the attendant need for economic development, security issues manifested by secessionists in the south, fighting in the north and the matter of terrorism. Of course economic and security issues are not unique to Yemen but are worldwide concerns.

- What are the researches that you did during your visit in Yemen? What were the obstacles that faced you in this research? Could you please tell us about your research? How did you pick out? What about the conclusion that you reached from the research?

Many years ago when I joined the British army as a young Second Lieutenant in an infantry regiment in 1978, my father gave me a British military medal which had been awarded to one of my relatives for service during the First World War. From then onwards, and encouraged by my interest in history, I started to collect orders, decorations and medals. I left the army in 1984 as a Lieutenant and then briefly served with the reserves as a Captain. On leaving the army I entered the world of insurance working in London and when I came to the Middle East in 1989 it was a logical step to take to focus on the awards of the Arab world. Over the past twenty years I have built up a large collection of Arab awards and have spent many hours researching and writing on these awards. The research is as important if not more important than the awards themselves for without the knowledge of the historical context of an award the medal is but piece of metal without any real meaning.

In building up a collection I have used many sources – antique shops, auctions, dealers, fellow collectors, the internet and of course travelling. Here in Yemen I have been able to acquire medals in the souks of Aden, Sana'a, Seiyun, Taiz. I have also had success in Aleppo, Amman, Cairo, Damascus, Jeddah, Khartoum, Muscat, Riyadh, Sharjah and Tehran.



Kingdom Order No 1

Yemen has a wealth of medallic history. Imam Ahmed in his last years had an order designed by Fahmy Tewfic Bichay of Cairo (the Bichay company made awards for both the Kingdom and Republic of Egypt) – this un-named order was never formally instituted although I believe one example was made.

After the 1962 Revolution the early awards of the

Yemen Arab Republic were also made by Bichay – the Orders of Saba'a and Marib and the decorations of Bravery and Liberation. In the early 1970's a new series of awards replaced this series – the Orders of the Republic, Marib, Seventy and Justice with decorations for Bravery, Duty, Honour and Service – these were manufactured by Skinner and Company of London. Other orders instituted were for Agriculture, Art and Literature, Co-operation, Industry and for Merit. Also issued were medals to commemorate the 20<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of the Revolution. In the south some of the historical sultanates had instituted their own awards – in about 1910 the Abdali Sultan of Lahej instituted the Order of the Morning Star and in 1948 the Qu'aiti Sultan instituted Orders of Distinction and Merit. In the early 1960's the Kathiri Sultanate considered creating its own order but this was never formally instituted. In 1964