

**Written by Bernard Skinner**

### **The Story of the Arabic Knife**

In 1944 my unit was defending an oil refinery from German bombers. The interesting point being that the enemy could reach the refinery from their bases in the eastern Mediterranean but due to the distance, could not be sure of getting back! The bombers never attacked the refinery. In consequence, life at that time in Iraq was easy-going with the result that we had time off to travel north to the cooler parts of Iraq.

It was on such a journey that this story was played out. Travelling in an open-backed truck on a very hot day it is probably that most of the men on board were more asleep than awake but one man had noticed a distant cloud of dust rising up from what was thought, a vehicle. It was some time before the cause of the dust was confirmed – it was a group of four horsemen moving at speed in our direction. It took several minutes before they caught up with us and then we could see that the skilful riders were on powerful horses which were now only a few feet behind us. Before we could ask them the riders indicated that they wanted cigarettes and in return would offer a knife of a type each wore on his belt. These knives, I now know, are described as Arabic Knives.

It is not possible after 70 years to remember what was in my mind when I agreed to this exchange but I did and things worked out quite well. I now understand that these knives are collectors' items worth rather more than the value of cigarettes given to the riders.

The horsemen were quite content and in a half circle and off they went – an impressive and memorable sight still clear in my mind. The knife will be hung on the wall at home after being hidden away out of sight for so long.