

UNEF 1

Beirut Lebanon

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From 1 Jun 1962 to 31 May 1963

I – rather Jan and I – lived in Beirut Lebanon during a quiet time of that turbulent beautiful country. Lebanon is another crossroads – the Turks – the French – the Syrians all-pulling at it. As well the mixture of 2 types of Christians –Orthodox and Marrionite the latter an “off shoot” of the Roman Catholic Church) – two types of Moslem (Shiite and Sunni) and the infamous Druze – what a mixture to keep in “ecological balance”



This is NOT Ashrafieh – this is Raoche near Ras Beirut where all the foreigner Englesi lived

Jan and I lived in Ashrafieh – a Marriomite suburb of west Beirut. Most of the English and Americans lived Ras Beirut or Raoche – the “English quarter” or or looked at the English foreigner ghetto. We enjoyed our apartment surrounded by the culture and day to day living of a Beirut resident.



The above is a picture of daily flight from 115 ATU as the RCAF used Beirut not Cairo as the base for their supplies of fresh fruit and vegetables ands “luxuries”

Jan got quite used to it quickly – bartering and bargaining- pushing to front of meat line in front of butcher- finding out where you could buy some North American or European food and goods.



Above is a general view of Beirut Airport before civil war –note MEA Viscount

As you can tell from the pictures inserted –I was doing Movement control at Beirut Airport for UNEF. It was quite a fortunate turn of events as I t time – I was only UNEF Officer in Beirut or Lebanon for that matter- Beirut was a quite and peaceful place at that time – and since it was peaceful it was safe to bring Jan over. There is no way I would have brought Jan into the Gaza Strip – no way – too uncertain and dangerous. There would have been no suitable accommodation for Jan in El Arish or Rafah – may be Gaza City but that would have been too far to get ‘home’ at night! My Brazilian boss brought his wife to Gaza brave man – he was – he had Italian Star Medal WW2 – I never knew Brazil had fought in WW2 – mty Brazillian Col boss had been at Monte Casino.



Note Brazilian plane C 54 which flew from Brazil to El Arish but always “broke down” in Rome or Athens –or both – so we could NEVER tell when it would arrive!!



My UNEF crew in Beirut – a Sergeant/Corporal/Private for me as a driver –and one Lebanese “worker” plus a UN New York radio operator and a Sergeant Postal services –not in picture

So we found a nice apartment in Beirut and I worked at airport and Jan tanned at a private beach in Beirut called “The Sporting Club”. My job at the airport was not onerous as I met re would be other visitors – the Caribou from El Arish and Gaza daily or every second day.

Occasionally there would be other visitors- once a month the Brazilian DC – 6 would come in on its way to El Arish (The Brazilian plane would always break down in Athens or Rome –usually both!!)



Sometimes we might even have the luck of a plane from Canada –but this was rare – as the RCAF North Star weekly flight went direct from Pisa Italy through Athens direct to El Arish.

One flight had “yesterdays” Canadian newspaper –the Globe and Mail. I was in the position in Beirut of getting the news from BBC Cyprus on the radio/Newsweek at the Beirut airport kiosk – suitably censored and the English language Beirut Star newspaper.

Better still the Yukon had milk – Canadian milk – cartons of it the crew were going to throw out. I had not had real milk in a year –canned milk yes – but no cows in the Middle east - = no milk. I tool cartons of milk to Jan at our apartment in Ashrafiieh and we drank milk till we were almost sick

Jan and Beirut

My wife joined me in Beirut in May from Canada – she came over without any military approval –officially the Canadian military did not know –or acknowledges she was there –in Beirut, Jan had spent her teen age years in the Gold Coast now Ghana. When Independence came to Ghana all the British diplomatic and business people left (were asked to leave!) as were all the Lebanese merchant class. So Jan had many many friends in Beirut invading her best friend from Gold Coast days –Dolly Mawhdi = a Maronite Christian Jan’s age. Dolly found me an apartment for Jan in a week fully furnished to rent.



It was in the Christian area and Jan’s Lebanese “god father “- actually Dolly’s father who had influence passed the word in the community that “we” Jan and I – were part of the “community” and were to be treated as such. He was a “Godfather” in more ways than one ! (Ever seen the movie?) so we were well protected. Godfather would ask at suppers at his place “how were we treated” –“what prices were we charged by such and such merchant” etc. If we were overcharged then the merchant was “spoken to” :>)

Buying was easy in Ashrafieh- a vendor would come around hollering what he was selling- if you wanted to buy you lowered a basket – yell /bargain the price- then commodity would be pulled up in the basket and money lowered down in the basket.No muss – no fuss – and perfectly safe for Jan



I was only UNEF1 Liaison Officer in Beirut -worked at airport as Movement Control - looking after almost daily flights of Canadian Caribous from Gaza and El Arish and

RCAF flights from Europe (the latter unofficially as I was technically “UN peacekeeper ” and not Canadian NATO !



Above is our first Christmas in Beirut – Christmas tree is an actual live tree brought in from Norway – we paid an arm and a leg to purchase

Anyway I smuggled Jan into Beirut - bought a BOAC ticket through the black market. The Egyptian money was overvalued in Egypt but an Egyptian pound could be bought in Beirut for ½ to 1/3 the so called value in Egypt. So I bought Egyptian pounds in Lebanon at a “money changer” and marched into BOAC office in Cairo and bought a ticket at half price of less from Canada to Beirut for Jan.

Jan arrival at airport in Beirut was like a “Greek Wedding” and there were at least 3 to 400 Lebanese people to meet her. All her friends she grew up with and families - Chamouns /Helous - she was part of several family

clans



Above picture on first saw of airport building at Beirut

As mentioned an apartment was found for us in Ashrafieh - West Beirut - Maronite aka a sort of Catholic. The word went out quickly in the neighborhood that "we were family" to the neighbors and more important by her Lebanese Godfather. We hardly ever visited the American or British cantonment -didn't have to - you could buy then anything in Beirut! Anything! You wanted a shot of penicillin or hashish or even "stronger". All you had to do was walked into a drug store and ask for a "shot" which pharmacist gave you in back of store. Or at a restaurant you ordered hashish instead of desert.

We had three taps in our apartment – hot –cold and drinking! Rule was –on tap number three "drinking" was to boil this water for 3 minutes on stove – heated by propane tank – and put water so boiled in Fridge ,Jan and I suffered from gastro enteritis our whole tour!



Above picture of our posh UNEF 1 Office Beirut airport

I was officially asked by Canadian Army to "take a second tour" in Middle East specifically Beirut -
Why??



- UNEF and Canadian military had never been able to keep an officer in Beirut for more than 2 months before officer was hauled out as a drunk or “incapacitated ..they did not call it the *Paris of Middle East* for nothing! With Jan we set into settled a domestic routine - beach .supper ..TV.. movies. And as mentioned we were ..shall we say protected.

We stayed in safety in Beirut neighborhood -when I went to airport I knew the score after 7 months in Gaza strip. I soon learned what areas were -lets see - Sunni area/Shiite area/Greek Orthodox area/Marrionite and god help me the Druze area - plus don't go near the refugee camps. But they all lived together in a delicate ecological balance!!!

All was great for 11 moths - the the Arab Intra Bank collapsed financially ' and the whole Lebanon *House of Cards* fell but I am getting into Lebanese politics - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intra_Bank

Israel for some stupid reason raided Beirut airport /US Marines moved into my MEA building-I left and since ecological balance had been disturbed a civil war in Lebanon escalated. After I left US Marines landed and someone (a young lady fanatic as reported to me by a Lebanese friend) drove a truck into my old MEA building at airport and killed 282 servicemen in one blast -mostly but not all Marines. The most killed I believe till 9/11