



A Parrot's Tale in a Camel Tail

An Exercise in Saudi Chain Yanking and a bit of Christmas Cheer...

Abdul Parrot and I started our tour in the land of the eternal dune at the same time. He had been a gift by an acquaintance who apparently saw the thing hanging in some shop and thought it might be the perfect companion for someone heading for Saudi Arabia. I was amused, but not terribly impressed at the time, and almost left ol' Abdul back in North Idaho when I was packing. In retrospect, I'm most glad that I chose to take him with me, as he gave me a way to continually yank the tail feathers of our hosts. Abdul did his job well and is still one of my most prized possessions from those far off days!



Hartnett and Culver in the Dunes

I initially had Abdul, perched appropriately on a brass ring and hanging from a light fixture in my new digs. Abdul sat there in apparently contented silence until my old compatriot Skip Hartnett showed up to help train our newly assembled Camelnecks. During one of our field exercises we had used a fair amount of pop-up parachute flares. Policing the area to get rid of our "*debris de guerre*", we picked up a number of expended nylon parachutes used to suspend the flares. It would also seem that Skip had a roll of heavy braided nylon cord that set his inventive mind to racing. One of the nylon parachutes (after a session through the washing machine) did nicely for a gutra (the traditional Saudi head cover). Taking the cord, carefully measuring the length, and fusing it with a match flame he came up with a sort of mini-gal look-alike (the legendary camel hobble used on top of the traditional Saudi head covering). Blackening the improvised "fan belt" with a magic marker and placing it on Abdul's headdress made a complete rig to top off Abdul's bare dome. The finished head topping looked for all the world like what we infidels irreverently called the "table cloth and fan belt", officially known



Abdul was always a Rebel

of course, as the gutra and agal. The newly adorned Abdul now hung in my quarters as a sort of dig in the Saudi ribs. Somehow I could almost see Abdul apparently smiling in his new role as an Arab harassment tool.

Now the Arabs absolutely knew we were screwing with them, but weren't exactly sure how! Abdul simply hung there without comment and caused a bit of head scratching on the part of our hosts! We of course, went our merry way with tongue-in-cheek. The usual visitors to my quarters remarked that I was a-fixin' to get my feet beat with a split bamboo cane for screwing with the Saudis, but the effect was so delightful I decided to leave Abdul in place until they came to drag me off to the local Bastille... I don't think they ever caught on in almost three years of Abdul's piercing stare while hanging from my overhead¹, always adorned with a headdress appropriate to the season!

I took my first R&R in October of 1985 up in London Town, and hit Harrods's Department Store (where the Queen shops), and picked up all sorts of Christmas decorations. Actual Christmas ornaments were difficult to acquire in Saudi since the Muslims were noticeably cool about the celebration of

Christmas. I personally LOVE Christmas and wasn't about to be deterred by some Rag Head reservations about our celebration of the birth of Christ. Now the Muslims acknowledge Jesus' existence and in fact consider him to be a great prophet, but not the **greatest** prophet – that honor goes to Mohammad himself! Both Christians and Jews are considered to be fellow “peoples of the book” (the Old Testament) by the Muslims, however they tend to get very upset when you try to celebrate Jesus' birthday. They consider Jesus to have been a very holy man, but also a normal human being, i.e. **NOT** the Son of God (or Allah in the Arabic Language).



Abdul with his Arabic Headdress – The Classic Gutra and Agal



Abdul Claus celebrating Christmas

While the celebration of Christmas is officially discouraged by the Muslims in general, you must understand that the Saudis in particular and the businessmen never let a shekel sneak out of their pockets. “Holiday (or Seasonal) Trees” were sold quite openly in the Souks and finding one to decorate the quarters was a non-problem. With my Christmas Tree erected, and the tinsel strung, Abdul looked almighty lonely hanging there in his everyday Gutra and Agal. Not only that, but Abdul's Gutra was white, which is a traditional summer color, and here it was in December. A bit of head scratching and eureka! Abdul



Christmas in Jeddah '86

needed a Santa Clause hat! A red sock was rounded up, and a large cotton ball attached to the top. The new headdress pulled down nicely over his head, and lo and behold, there in all of his splendor, hung Abdul Claus!

Now the Saudi building superintendents had free run of our apartments but never a word was ever said about Abdul, but I'd bet **BIG** Hollalas² that they were biting their tongues. I even considered giving Abdul a light coating of pig fat so that if anyone ever tried to take him down, they'd be in deep Muslim doo-doo, but somehow I don't think he'd have looked good with greased feathers, so I just left him in his adorned (but ungreased) splendor. I figured that if they ever **did** try to unhook him, I'd simply tell them that I had anointed him with an emulsified porcine lubricant to give the perpetrator a cardiac arrest!

Abdul came home to North Idaho to hang in an honored place in my kitchen window appropriately suspended by some nylon fishing leader from a swag hook so that he could look out over the field and remember our far off days in the dunes.

ROC

End Notes:

¹ "Overhead" is "Navy/Marine – speak" for ceiling...

² Hollalas are fractional Saudi Coins of relatively minor value. Counting your hollalas would be like counting your pennies.

