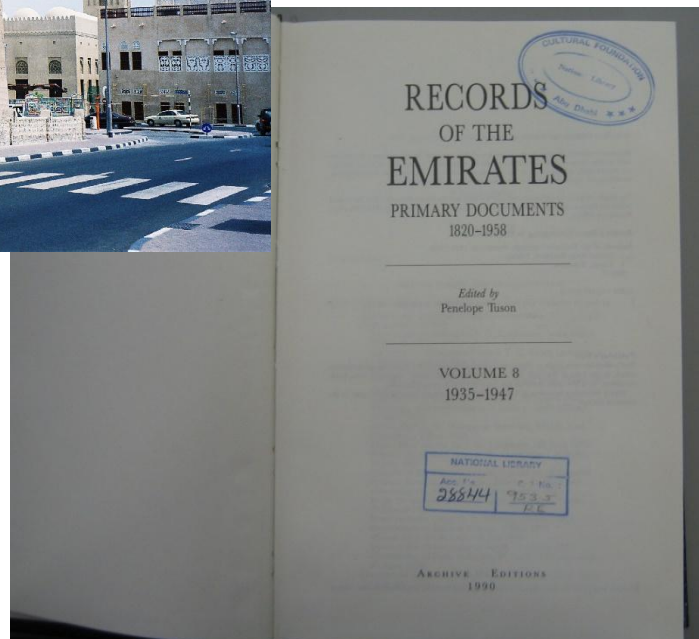


Trucial States early aviation and Abu Dhabi – Dubai wars and disputes 1920-1948



Michael Pierre de Villiers

Trucial States early aviation and Abu Dhabi – Dubai wars and disputes 1920-1948

Michael Pierre de Villiers

Copyright © Michael Pierre de Villiers 2026

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means without the permission of the author.

Any errors that may have occurred are inadvertent. Anyone who, for any reason, detects errors are asked to contact the author, or publisher, so that acknowledgement may be made in any subsequent prints, or editions. All photographs taken and diagrams made by the Author.

Title page: Top to bottom, a photograph of a photograph of Al Fahidi Fort in Dubai as it was many years ago. Built in 1787 it is the oldest building in Dubai. It is now the Dubai Museum, part of which is shown in the next photograph taken by the author in 2002. Bottom a photograph of the book from which most of the information in the articles was obtained in the Abu Dhabi National Library.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Pierre de Villiers was born in Durban, South Africa. He was trained to World Meteorological Organization class one meteorologist and multi-discipline weather forecaster in the South African Weather Service where he reached the rank of Director. He served on a weather ship in the South Atlantic. He served on World Meteorological Organization expert teams and was World Meteorological Organization rapporteur for the Africa region. He was also a commercial pilot and flying instructor. More recently he was a weather forecaster in the United Arab Emirates, then in England. Now retired.

M. P. de Villiers
PhD MSc MDip (FRMetS CMet retired)
2026-03-01

Trucial States early aviation and Abu Dhabi – Dubai wars and disputes 1920-1948

Michael Pierre de Villiers

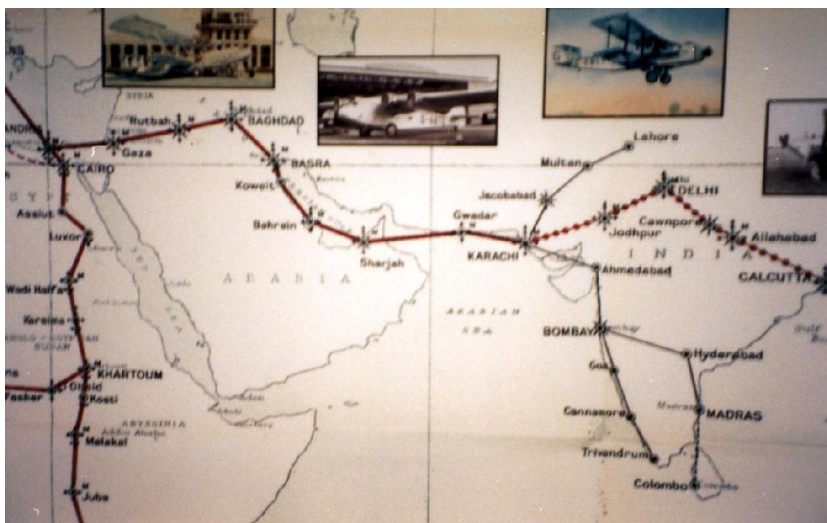
Introduction

While resident and working in Abu Dhabi, I visited the Abu Dhabi National Library a few times, each time for a good number of hours. My intention was to gain more knowledge of Abu Dhabi's history. Unfortunately, the few visits were during the later part of our time there. Cut short by the offer of work in England. At the time the library was located near to the Qasr Al Hosn (Palace Fort), more commonly known as the White Fort. The oldest stone building in Abu Dhabi dating back to around 1790, the original conical tower to 1761 built to protect a freshwater well. The library is now housed elsewhere. I found the bound volumes of Records of the Emirates Primary Documents 1820-1958 edited by Penelope Tuson. In particular Volume 8 1935-1947 pertaining to the early development of aviation in the area and subsequent pages pertaining to the unrest in the area. Most of the information in this article is derived from 31 pages in the volume, garnered in the limited time available.

The advent of aviation in the Trucial States

From around 1920, the Royal Air Force (RAF) operated a mail service through the Middle East to India via the Persian northern side of the Gulf Sea (Persian Gulf). Operation was from strategically placed marked landing grounds with petrol drums that would be manned by the RAF when aircraft passed through. Aircraft used were World War I biplanes, such as the single engine De Havilland DH9A and the twin engine Vickers Vimy bomber.

Imperial Airways took over the route in 1926 with an inaugural flight between London Croydon airport to Delhi in India in 1927. However, regular flights were scuppered, because the British had refused permission to a German airline to fly on from Teheran to Baghdad. This was not to the Persians advantage who removed British transit rights.



A photograph of a map in Al Mahatta Museum, Sharjah taken by the author November 2002 (courtesy Al Mahatta Museum).

It was not until 1929 that agreement was reached with the Persians. However, the Persian government then stipulated a more northern route over the mountains. Meanwhile, at the request of Imperial Airways, the RAF, using twin engine biplane Supermarine Southampton flying boats, surveyed landing grounds and anchorage with fuel depots along the southern Trucial States coast of the Gulf Sea

with political officers to visit the rulers.

The Trucial States

At this point it is appropriate to introduce the Trucial States. British presence in the Middle East dates back to 1798, when the government began enacting policy to protect its crucial overland trade route to India across the Arabian Peninsula. It assumed even greater importance after the construction of the Suez Canal in 1859.

This led to the British a collection of sheikdoms signing protective treaties between 1820 and 1833 to be under British protection and the informal British protectorate that came to be known as the Trucial States on the southern coast of the Gulf Sea then known as the Persian Gulf. The British assumed responsible for foreign policy, defence and arbitration between the rulers of the Trucial States, particularly intertribal raiding parties and warfare, as well as later border disputes after the discovery of oil.

The Trucial States consisted of seven sheikhdoms. Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Ras al Khaimah, Sharjah and Umm Al Quwain signed treaties in 1820. Dubai in 1833 and Fujairah in 1952. Between 1936 and 1951 there was also Kalba which was absorbed into Sharjah. Kalba, on the Arabian Sea east coast of the peninsula, was granted trucial status because it was needed as a diversion landing ground for Imperial Airways flights to Sharjah. It was re-incorporated in Sharjah in 1951 on the death of its ruler.

The primary source of wealth along the Gulf coast was pearl diving. This collapsed in the 1930s due to world recession and the creation of cultured pearls in Japan. This led to the collapse of the economy of the rulers along the coast. The Abu Dhabi Emirate went from a position of relative wealth to the poorest of the emirates. There was the prospect of the discovery of oil to restore the economy. In 1922, the sheikhs signed a contract that the states could not make any oil concessions to any company without the British government's consent. That is, British approved companies. It was not until 1931 that oil was discovered in the Trucial States. However, it was not until 1939 that the first shipment of oil was exported and not until 1958 that large reserves of oil were discovered offshore from Abu Dhabi.

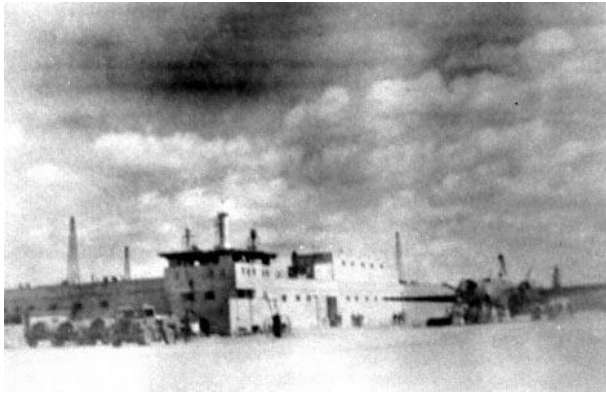
The British government decided in January 1968, that would no longer be responsible for foreign policy, defence and arbitration between the rulers of the Trucial States. In February 1968 the rulers of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, and Sheikh Rashid of Dubai agreed to a union between the two emirates and negotiate with other local rulers to join. During the following three and a half years four emirates to agreed union in July 1971. These were the emirates of Sharjah, Ajman, Umm Al Quwain and Fujairah, Existing treaties were revoked on the 1st December 1971. The following day, the United Arab Emirates was formed. The seventh and final member, Ras Al Khaimah, joined on the 10th February 1972.

Aviation agreements and establishing landing facilities

Air agreements were initially resisted by the rulers, who suspected interference with their sovereignty, however they would also provide a useful source of revenue. Sheikh Sultan bin

Saqr of Sharjah (ruler from 1924 to 1951) was the first person in the then Trucial State to realise the financial potential of landing grounds and offer his emirate for landing facilities.

Sharjah airport opened in October 1932. It was the first British establishment on the Trucial Coast. Dubai was considered but rejected because of the already agreement with the Sharjah Sheikh.



A photograph of a photograph of Sharjah Airport circa World War II in the Al Mahatta Museum, Sharjah taken by the author November 2002 (courtesy Al Mahatta Museum).

Al Mahatta Fort-cum-hotel was built at Sharjah airport in a couple of months during the summer of 1932 to house and protect night stopping passengers and aircrew flying between the UK and India. In the summer heat and humidity, this was some feat.

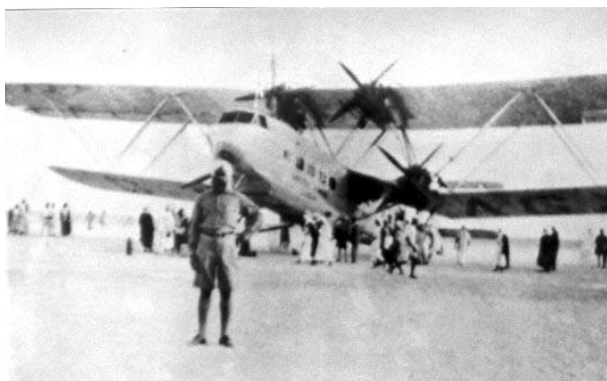
The fort was needed because the airport was about 22 kilometres from Sharjah and the passengers were not allowed into the town without permission from the Sheikh. A British officer who surveyed the site stated that “electric light, fans and a Frigidaire are essential.” All building material, fittings and furnishings were brought by ship from India.



A restored parts of the Mahatta Fort-cum-hotel in Sharjah showing part of the fort and the control tower building photographed by the author in November 2002. Now part of Al Mahatta Museum.



The route was operated by Imperial Airways, a forerunner of British Airways. In 1932 the first of the new Handley Page HP42 aircraft landed at Sharjah. The biplane aircraft, nicknamed the flying banana, had four engines two mounted on the lower wing either side of the fuselage with two more centrally on the upper wing above the fuselage. At the time, it was the world’s biggest civil airliner. It cruised at 168 kph (105 mph) with a maximum speed of 192 kph (130 mph). Imperial airways owned 8 of the aircraft, named, Hadrian, Hannibal, Hanno, Helena, Hengist, Heracles, Horatio and Horsa. Hanno is reputed to be the name of the first HP42 to land at Sharjah. Normally the aircraft carried a crew of 4 and 38 passengers. However, on this eastern route from London to Karachi, it carried 20 passengers and more fuel. The journey took 7 days. Over the Arabian Peninsula, passengers and crew night stopped at Basra, then lunch at Bahrein



A photograph of a photograph of a Handley Page HP42 at Sharjah Airport circa 1930 in the Al Mahatta Museum, Sharjah taken by the author November 2002 (courtesy Al Mahatta Museum).

before night stopping at Sharjah. Then westward over the Hadjar Mountains, across the Gulf of Oman to Gwadar on the south-west coast of Pakistan.

From 1937 for ten years, Imperial Airways flying boats used the creek/khor at Dubai with overnight passengers commuting to the Sharjah rest house/fort. While Adu Dhabi was designated an emergency strip from 1934 to 1956 when it then became a base for oil company exploration.

Emergency airstrips and water facilities for flying boats, were constructed in the region to be maintained by the Royal Air Force. The British authority in the region had to

negotiate terms and conditions and payment for the use of land from the various Sheikhs between 1934 and 1936.

Agreements were not concluded without considerable negotiation. This included negotiation begun in 1934 with Sheikh Shakhbut bin Sultan of Abu Dhabi, in consultation with relatives, for a petrol tank at a flying boat anchorage and emergency landing ground at Bani Yas Island and emergency landing ground with tank near Abu Dhabi. The negotiator, Political Agent (Bahrain) Lieutenant-Colonel G. Loch, in a letter to the Persian Gulf Political Resident confided that discussions were “tedious and confused” and that “we are dealing with a very suspicious, excitable and illogical people and that it would, therefore, be prudent to think out details about material, labour and so on with great care beforehand so that there may not be delays on the spot when the time comes to install the facilities.” The sheikh was also pressing for the payment of arrears from 1931 for a tank installation and use of Bani Yas Island without his permission. As will be seen below in the agreement he duly received Rs.5,000 as a “token of friendship and goodwill.” Other agreements included Sheikh Saeed bin Hamad of Kalba for a site at Kalba now part of Fujairah and later at Dubai in 1937.

Below is an example of a typical agreement was that reached between Sheikh Shakhbut bin Sultan bin Faïd ruler of Abu Dhabi and Lieutenant-Colonel G. Loch, Political Agent, Bahrain for two sites. One landing ground at Abu Dhabi that would be three or four miles away from the town of Abu Dhabi, the other at Sir Bani Yas Island.

The agreement was for the provision of facilities for aircraft at the island of Sir Bani Yas and at Abu Dhabi. It was signed between the RAF and ruler of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Shakhbut bin Sultan bin Faïd “on the night of Tuesday the 12th February 1935 equivalent to the 9th Dhul Qidah 1353 in the Islamic Calendar” (Tuson (1990)). The agreement was for twelve years. The contents of the agreement are summarised below.

A petrol tank will be installed at Sir Bani Yas Island where the seaplanes anchor nearby and a landing ground near the tank for RAF aircraft. About three or four miles from Abu Dhabi there may be a landing ground for RAF aircraft. Sheikh Shakhbut would post guards at Sir Bani Yas Island and near Abu Dhabi for which he will pay.

The High British Government will pay him Rs.400/- per month. Added to this was a one of payment of Rs.5,000/- “as a token of friendship and goodwill” (Tuson (1990). In other words a bribe, or sweetener.

There will be no interference by the High British Government in his internal State affairs. People associated with the aircraft will be no right to interfere with the residents, or others, on Sir Bani Yas Island. This included the diving sailors or with the diving. People associated with the aircraft will have no right to be in the town of Abu Dhabi without his permission. Any misunderstanding or any incident due to his people, will be dealt with by him. In the case of foreigners, he will investigate and inform the High British Government.

Not mentioned in the agreement, although mentioned in a letter accompanying the agreement to the Political Resident, dated 17th February 1935, is the installation of a light to act as a beacon for night navigation each of the landing sites.

The Kalba agreement, signed on the 26th August 1936, 9th Jamad Ath Thani 1355, by Sheikh Saeed bin Hamad of Kalba and Captain T. Hickinbotham, Political Agent, Bahrain, was essentially the same apart from a few notable differences. Namely: A shelter for passengers with permission required for additional buildings; Any buildings erected to become his property on termination of the agreement; Dhows and other craft not permitted to tie to the buoys or anchor nearby; No alcohol (liquor) consumed; No flag flown from the aerodrome buildings; No one to enter his town without his permission; The British Government will give ten rifles for the guards and one rifle for the Sheikh.

The agreement at Dubai was to use Khor Dubai (or Dubai Creek) specifically for flying boats, namely the Short S23 C-Class Empire. Another site, at nearby Umm al Quwain Emirate, was surveyed by the British Admiralty. The Dubai site was preferred. Imperial Airways agreed to use Dubai. Overnight stop passengers had a 5-mile (8km) commute to the Sharjah airport accommodation. Signed on the 7th June, Saeed (bin Maktoum) bin Hasher, Sheikh of Dubai, had more detailed conditions, no doubt being aware of earlier agreements:

The agreement was for a commercial landing base for aircraft of the Imperial Airways Limited. The site will be clearly marked and properly buoyed. The rent of Rs.440/- per month will be paid. This will exclude landing charges that will be Rs.5/- for every landing aircraft. It also excluded rent of building structures. All payable to Saeed (bin Maktoum) bin Hasher, Sheikh of Dubai. Guards and watchmen at the landing base will be provided by him for which he will pay. The agreement was for a temporary period of one year and may be extended for any further agreed period provided the terms remain unchanged.

He will be responsible for construction of the building and other constructions required at the for the landing site in accord with the company’s plans on land owned by him. These will remain his property for which he be paid rent according to the size of the building. All material such as stone and lime required in building and construction work will come from local mines. Natives of Dubai should be employed by the Company for all work for which they are capable. He also reserved the right “to require the company to carry out their own building and construction, in which case a rent will be charged for the sites” (Tuson (1990) and upon termination of the lease all buildings and immovable constructions will become his property.

The motor launch shed and the jetty will be constructed by the company if he is unable to do so. Any dredging in the sea landing area, or other associated work, will be done by and at the company's expense. He will not be liable for any compensation.

If a company employee committed any crime, the Shaikh should lodge a complaint with the Political Resident who will investigate and take suitable action. No foreign employee foreign of the company will be allowed in the town at night. He will not be responsible for any injury or loss incurred. There will be no interference whatsoever in his internal affairs and "no women or sailors should be permitted to seek refuge in the landing base" (Tuson (1990)). (The sailors referred to are pearl divers – author). If there is any injury to aircraft or its people by an enemy, then the Government, should assist him by whatever means necessary. Any liquor for use at the landing base by the Company, shall on no account be sold to the natives and persons residing in the country or town of Dubai.

Less than a year later, according to an incomplete Political Department Minute Paper [PZ 2252/28], interpreting from the text, in March 1928 it states that "arising out of the recent disturbances in Dubai, the Sheikh had indicated that he was not prepared to renew the Air Agreement" (Tuson (1990)). This conflicts with the fact mentioned above that from 1937, for ten years, Imperial Airways flying boats used the Dubai creek/khor. Apparently, the problem was resolved.

Abu Dhabi-Dubai wars and disputes

The region was not without clashes between tribes raiding each other's camels and boundary disputes in spite of signed peace treaties, as evidenced by post-World War II communication between British representatives in their capacity as arbitrators.

In a Bahrain Intelligence Summary No. 15 for the period from the 1st to 15th August 1946 it is reported that rulers of Umm al Quiwain, Ras al Khaimah, Sharjah and Shaikh Muhamad bin Ali bin Huwaidin, Chief of the Bani Qitab, assembled to promote the restoration of friendly relations between the Bani Qitab and the Ruler of Dubai. The Regent of Kalba attended as an observer. The decision reached was that each of the three Rulers write to the Ruler of Abu Dhabi informing him of the desire of the Bani Qitab to restore friendly relations. However, no letter was sent because each ruler waited for one of the others to send the first letter.

In the meantime, more clashes occurred. There was a reprisal raid by the Bani Qitab on Qattarah village in Buraimi. They reported to the Sheikh of Dubai that they killed four or five men. The sheikh "was pleased and gave them lavish presents," Although, only one was slightly wounded. Next, a small Manasir raiding party clashed with Al Bu Shamis and some Bani Qitab tribesmen at Al Murrah well. The latter suffered two killed and lost some camels. They believed to have killed one raider. The third unconfirmed clash at the time of the writing the intelligence summary, was between "about 200 men of the Awamir, Manasir, Ahbab, Al Bu Shamis, and other Abu Dhabi tribesmen on the way to raid the Bani Qitab." Twenty-five Dubai tribesmen confronted them at Shimairikh near Nazwah. Nine Dubai men were reported killed and five injured but they killed five of the raiders, said to the chief of the Manasir, Muhammad bin Nasir Bu Qhai. The Sheikh of Dubai protested to the Residency Agent. He was informed it was best that stopped interfering between the Bani Qitab and the Ruler of Abu Dhabi.

The Political Agent H.D.H. RANCE, on the 26th August 1946, wrote to the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf that the Shaikh of Dubai has claimed for 125 camels which were looted by an Abu Dhabi raiding party. The Abu Dhabi raiding party were returning from Bani Qitab territory and were encamped at Shimairikh when they were attacked by the Sheikh of Dubai's men. The damage suffered by the Sheikh was apparently due to his "unwarranted interreference in the affairs of Abu Dhabi and the Bani Qitab" (Tuson (1990)). Since this, the Shaikh of Abu Dhabi has made peace with the Bani Qitab and the Shaikh of Dubai has again agreed to stop interfering between them.

In a letter dated 2nd of September 1947 to the Political Agency in Bahrain, the Political Resident the Honourable Lt-Col. A.C. Galloway, C.I.E., O.B.E., said that Shaikh of Dubai reported that between the 23rd and 29th July 1947 subjects of the Sheikh of Abu Dhabi or allies, stole 28 camels that belonged to his subjects and the Bani-Qitab tribe and that they retired through Buraimi where the ruler was Shaikh Zayid, the brother of Shaikh Shakhbut the ruler of Abu Dhabi. The Shaikh did not believe that he would get Shaikh Zayid's cooperation to get the camels returned. Hence his approach to the Political Resident for the Residency Agent to intervene. After much toing and froing there was still no solution, the Residency Agent was instructed to delay the "release of Shaikh Shakhbut's quotas of cloth and sugar for the month of September, because it may become necessary to re-impose economic sanctions while we yet have the sugar and cloth to withhold from him."

Another letter on the 15th September 1947, from The Honourable Lt-Col. A.C. Galloway, C.I.E., O.B.E. (he always signed his letters thus), the Shaikh of Dubai stated that; on the 28th August three Abu Dhabi subjects and two Awamir tribesmen stole around 20 Dubai camels from nearby Jabal Ali; on the 1st September six Abu Dhabi subjects stole 18 camels from Wuwaih Abyadh; and on the 7th September a raiding party of 70 Manasir tribesmen stole an estimated 200 camels. During this raid two Dubai subjects were killed and one was wounded. The sheikh of Dubai alleged that "most of the thieves are in the employ of Shaikh Shakhbut, who has supplied the raiders with arms" (Tuson (1990)), with the aim of forcing Dubai to make peace with his former allies. The Shaikh of Dubai decided it was too dangerous to send a party to Buraimi with a letter from the Residency Agent. The Residency Agent was now instructed to temporarily withhold all Abu Dhabi's quotas and to pay compensation to the relatives of the Dubai subjects killed.

The Saudis became involved when the 2nd son of the Shaikh of Dubai, Shaikh Khalifah bin Sai'd on his way home from pilgrimage told Saud bin Jilual, Amir of Rasa, that a Saudi subject, Sal'd bin Suwid a Manasir Chief was in one of the raids. Saud Ibn Jilual sent out word, via a group of 12 men, warning Manasir not to commit any attacks against Dubai.

The Manasir were a warlike and strongly independent tribe that lived and roamed between Buraimi and Qatar from the coast to inland at Liwa. They through date farming, camel breeding pearling and traded goods with camel trains. They were long time close associates with Abu Dhabi's ruling Bani Yas.

There was further much intrigue between ruling sheikhs and diplomatic toing and froing also involving intermediaries, such as Shaikh Rashid bin Rasid of the Al Bu Shamis, to affect a peaceful resolution. Sheikh Hazza bin Sultan Al Nahyan, brother of Sheikh Shakhbut bin Sultan Al Nahyan, who usually resided in Buraimi, was blamed for preventing a settlement. Meanwhile, while trying to make Abu Dhabi responsible for maintaining peace between Dubai and the Manasir, Abu Dhabi was suspected of furtively continuing the war between the Dubai

and the Manasir while themselves benefiting from peace and that sanctions against them were unfair.

To add to the mix the contested border between Abu Dhabi and Dubai was introduced. It was pointed out that it is in the interest of Sheikh Shakhbut and Abu Dhabi that the war between Abu Dhabi and Dubai be resolved before there would be further oil development in Abu Dhabi. No Company would invest capital and bring in men and equipment unless there was stability and security. At the time border was not clearly defined. The local British resident assured those concerned that, if agreed, His Majesty's Government (H,M,G) would impartially judge each party's claims.

Meanwhile, in a letter dated the 10th September 1946 from the J.R.H. Hudson in the absence of the Political Agent, Bahrain, referring to a letter dated 26th August 1946, wrote to the Political Resident, Bahrain that the Shaikh of Dhank and Shaikh Obied bin Jum'ah, Chief of the Bani Fa'ab, told the Residency Agent that they want to mediate to restore friendly relations between Abu Dhabi and Dubai. The Regency Agent thought this unlikely in view of the Sheikh of Dubai still interfering between the Bani Qitab and Abu Dhabi with no intention of stopping.

The letter also documents evasive tactics by all parties. On the 25th August 1946 "Hamid bin Buti, maternal uncle of the Shaikh of Abu Dhabi, arrived at Sharjah with a letter from the Shaikh of Abu Dhabi empowering him to make peace with the Bani Qitab on behalf of Abu Dhabi." Shaikh Muhammad bin Ali bin Huwaidin, Chief of the Bani Qitab, who lived in Dhaid, was supposed to be come to the meeting in Sharjah, but did not arrive in spite of twice reminded of the meeting. His argument was that he not in a position to make peace with Abu Dhabi. The reason being that he had pledged the Shaikh of Dubai not to make a separate peace with Abu Dhabi. Apparently, this was at a secret desert meeting between him and Shaikh Rashid, eldest son of the Sheikh of Dubai. He also received rifles, 5,000 rounds of ammunition, 2,000 rupees cash and provisions. On the 3rd September Hamid bin Buti left Sharjah with no peace agreement.

Furthermore, the letter states that shortly after the 25th August 1946 the sheikhs of Dubai were reminded of their peace promises. The Shaikh of Dubai promptly sent secret instructions to a body of his men camped at Muatha requesting they join the Bani Qitab in a raid against Buraimi. It was confirmed that they raided Sijya and Riqi in Abu Dhabi territory, taking 100 camels, killing one Manasiri and one Amiri tribesman. Mr Hudson informed the Sheikh of Dubai that if he did not desist, punitive measures will be taken against him.

Letter No. C/1180 dated 20th October 1946, H.D.H. Rance Political Agent, Bahrain for Assistant Political Agent, Bahrain to the Political Resident, Bahrain. Reports were received that on the 8th October 1946, a party of Manasir and Awamir tribesmen had raided Bani Qitab at Rafiah, 25 miles due east of Sharjah. Three Bani Qitab tribesmen were killed, two wounded and about 70 camels stolen. The raiders were pursued by about 50 Bani Qitab and Dubai tribesmen. The clash between them at the south-eastern tip of Jabal Faiyah, resulted in two Bani Qitab and three Dubai tribesmen killed and two Dubai tribesmen wounded. The raiders suffered five casualties, but escaped with the stolen camels, although about 19 camels were killed during the fighting. Mr Rance further stated that the Sheikh of Dubai continues to use his influence to prevent the Bani Qitab from making peace with Dubai. He keeps his camels mixed with the Bani Qitab camels and recently gave another Rs. 2000 cash and 2000 rounds of ammunition to Shaikh Muhammad bin Ali bin Huwaidin.

Eventually, Dubai and Abu Dhabi agreed to peace. The ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Said bin Maktum and the ruler of Abu Dhabi, Shaikh Shakhbut bin Sultan, effective from sundown on the 9th March 1947, signed a peace agreement in the presence of G.H. Jackson, Political Officer, Trucial Coast. The terms of agreement were:

- 1 All hostile acts such as raids, plunder, murder and trespass by either side should cease forthwith.
- 2 All claims on account of loss of life or property by either side arising out of the hostilities now being concluded should be dropped.
- 3 Subjects of each Shaikh should be free to move to\in the territory of the other and should continue to enjoy unaltered the rights which they enjoyed before the start of hostilities.
- 4 Each Shaikh should extend this settlement to the tribes who have joined in hostility against the other.”

However, a letter dated 30th May 1948 states that on the 26th May 1948 two encampments in Dubai territory were raided while the men were absent. Eight camels, two rifles and household goods were stolen. Thirty men in two trucks were sent in pursuit by the Sheikh of Dubai. They caught up with them at Bada' Khalifah in Abu Dhabi. Four Manasir were killed, the remaining two captured and taken to Dubai. One person from Dubai was wounded. The captured two were given new clothes and daggers then sent back to Abu Dhabi. Once again peace was made.

Abu Dhabi-Dubai border dispute

Another problem in the region, was settling the boundary dispute between Abu Dhabi and Dubai. Sheikh Shakhbut bin Sultan, ruler of Abu Dhabi was quick to realise that oil would likely be the solution to the emirate's economic problem. In 1936 or 1938 (sources differ) he granted concessions to a British company. At the time he expressed concern regarding the border with Dubai that needed agreement before exploration began. Sheikh Shakhbut of Abu Dhabi and Shaikh Said of Dubai met in November 1937 the two men met to discuss the matter. A verbal agreement was reached that the area to the west of a line south from Bandar Hisyan (probably these days known as Ras Hisyan on the coast) was Abu Dhabi territory, to the east was Dubai territory.

However, this settlement did not prove lasting. During the early days of oil exploration, the rulers had little understanding of the need for fixed limits to their territory and its significance. Furthermore, changing tribal alliances determined the extent of the Sheikh territory. Oil company commercial agreements simply vaguely referred to the territories of the Sheikh.

The border problem came to a head in 1948. In a letter No.145.0220 dated the 17th February, 1948, from G.H. Jackson, Esq., M.B.E., Political Officer, Trucial Coast, Sharjah, to G.J. Pelly, Esq., O.B.E., Political Agent, Bahrain.

He and the Residency Agent spent the 10th and the 11th February 1948 in Abu Dhabi. We were received by Shaikh Shakhbut and his brothers Hazza and Khalid, his uncle Rashid bin Butti, and other members of the family, Shaikh Zayid was in Buraimi.

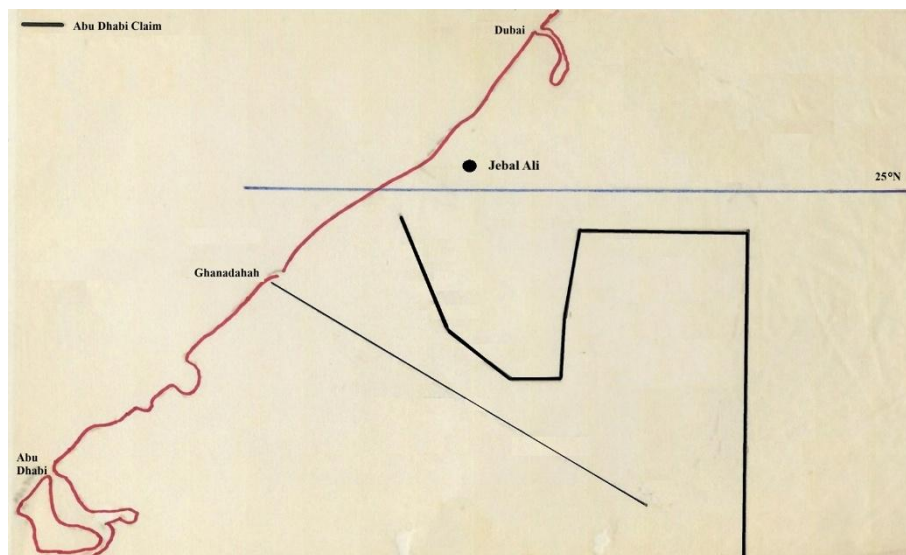
He asked Shaikh Shakhbut if he would agree to H.M.G.'s arbitrating in the boundary dispute and admitted that only H.M.G. could settle the dispute. He was also keen to see oil development. However, he had two concerns. Firstly, while oil development was involved, he did not believe that “an immediate settlement was necessary” (Tuson (1990)). Secondly, due to

ingoing tribal conflict mainly between Abu Dhabi and Dubai and H.M.G.'s displeasure, he did not believe he would be "treated with complete impartiality" and that he considered the disputed Khor Ghanadhah area between Abu Dhabi and Dubai "as unquestionably theirs" with "much to lose and nothing to gain from arbitration" (Tuson (1990).

Apart from the clash on the 26th May 1948, mentioned in the last paragraph in the previous section, by the 7th June 1948, in a letter from G. N. Jackson at the British Agency in Sharjah to C. J. Pelly the Political Agent in Bahrain, it had reached the point where a draft copy of the boundary dispute arbitration agreement was agreed by to Shaikh Shakhbut by way of a signed letter. It remained for the Shaikh Said of Dubai to agree who, at the time, was in Muscat "calling on the Sultan," but was expected back "on about the 13th June."

It would appear arbitration was agreed to by all parties, because I did obtain copies of the assessment process used to determine who had a valid claim. This was based on claims made by Abu Dhabi and Dubai with verification comment and a score. Judging by the points scored Abu Dhabi won by 10 points to 1. Unfortunately, I did not have the opportunity to return to the library to gather more information regarding the final decision.

Below, from Tuson (1990) is a simplified replica map of the boundary claimed by Abu Dhabi. The reason for the faint black line is not known boundary. Perhaps it is the Dubai claim. The direction of the line is similar to the present day boundary, except it now starts further north-east along the coast north of Ghanadhah.



Below is a copy from Tuson (1990) of the assessment process titled Abu Dhabi-Dubai boundary in the Khor Ghanadhah region. Lists the 7 claims of the Sheikh of Abu Dhabi, each with a comment and a score, followed by 4 claims of Sheikh of Dubai with comments and a score. The assessment was originally in the form of three columns.

Shaikh of Abu Dhabi

1. The Khor Ghanadhah belonged to al Bu Falah, the first Abu Dhabi Sheikh. The comment was that there was no recorded supporting history or evidence. No score.
2. Prior to this dispute, only Abu Dhabi subjects had anything to do with Khor Ghanadhah and no one challenged Shaikh of Abu Dhabi's ownership. Comment allowed. Score 2 points.

3, The Shaikh of Abu Dhabi maintained possession of Khor Ghanadhah through leasing fishing traps to Abu Dhabi subjects. This was allowed. Score 2 points.

4. The past 4 years, Shaikh of Abu Dhabi appointed guards for the “Gurm” trees that were used for firewood in Khor Ghanadhah. Statements from the guards were the only evidence. Score 1 point.

5. When Dubai separated from Abu Dhabi during the reign of Shaikh Khalifa bin Shakhbut the boundary was to the eastern side was the Jebal Ali (shown on the map above). This was accepted. Score 2 points.

6. The late Shaikh Tahnun bin Shakhbut granted Khor Ghanadhah to Saif bin Musebbih, an Abu Dhabi subject. A copy of the original document was available. Score 2 points.

7. In 1937, Shaikh of Dubai approached the Shaikh of Abu Dhabi to settle the boundary. Abu Dhabi claimed the agreed boundary was Abu Dhabi to the west of Bander Hisyan-Ghaffat or Ramaq and Dubai to the east (these places could not be identified – author). This was substantiated by a letter in existence from the Shaikh of Abu Dhabi to Shaikh of Dubai dated the 4th November 1937. Score 1 point.

Total 10 points.

Sheikh of Dubai

1. Fifty years previously, a Shaikh of Ras al Khaimah subject’s sailboat was looted at Khor Ghanadhah. The Shaikh of Abu Dhabi referred the matter to the Shaikh of Dubai who paid compensation. This was judged hearsay evidence by two Dubai subjects. The boat owner bring long dead. It was probable that Dubai paid compensation because the robbers were Dubai subjects. Score 1 point.

2. Nineteen years ago, a Bahraini boat sank on the eastern bank of Khor Ghanadhah, near Jarf. The cargo was looted. A complaint was made to the Shaikh of Dubai who paid Rs.5,000 compensation. The decision was that there was no evidence and referred to the last sentence in the claim above. Namely, that the robbers were Dubai subjects. No score.

3. Fifteen years ago, Sheikh Muhammad bin Rasir Bu Qbai al Mansuri and his men fired on a diving boat owned by Dubai subject Abdullah bin Said bin Ghauib at Khor Ghanadhah. Shaikh Bu Qbai apologised. The claim was judged pointless, because the Shaikh of Dubai did not claim compensation. No score.

4 In 1937, referring to the meeting in claim 7 above, the Shaikh of Dubai claimed that the agreed boundary was Bandar Hiayan with a line drawn southward. To the west was Abu Dhabi. The Shaikh of Dubai claimed that in the letter he received later, the Shaikh of Abu Dhabi had altered this to read Bandar Hisyan, Ghaffat or Ramaq with Dubai to the east. The conclusion was that Bandar Hisyan was difficult to place accurately, but that is was certainly south-east of Khor Ghanadhah. Furthermore, if Khor Ghanadhah was a Dubai possession, “why did the Shaikh of Dubai approach the Shaikh of Abu Dhabi, with a request for more land to the south-east of Khor Ghanadhah?” No score.

Total score 1 point.

Bibliography

Everything explained today. Trucial States Explained.
https://everything.explained.today/Trucial_States/ . Accessed 2026-01-28.
Explorer Group Ltd. 2001. Abu Dhabi Explorer. Explorer Publishing.
Kay, Shirley. 1995. Wings over the Gulf. Motivate Publishing. Dubai.

Tuson, P. 1990. Records of the Emirates Primary Documents 1820-1958, Volume 8 1935-1947. Edited by Penelope Tuson. British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data. Archive Editions 1990.

Wikipedia. Manasir (tribe). [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manasir_\(tribe\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manasir_(tribe)) . Accessed 2026-01-08.

Wikipedia. Trucial States. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trucial_States . Accessed 2026-01-28

Zahlan, Rosemarie Said. 1978. The Origins of the United Arab Emirates. 1st Edition. Routledge