



The Squadron Newsletter

6 February 2009



Address from Maj M Coles BEM RE OC 131 Indep Cdo Sqn RE(V)

Although belated, may I take the opportunity to wish you all a Happy New Year. Already now a couple of months into 2009, I'm convinced this will be an exciting year for the Sqn with the personalities changing, overseas exercises and the recovery of H9 personnel. The new PSAO, Maj Andy Miller (ex-Airborne, but we can forgive him for that!) is now firmly entrenched into G1 and I must say settling into the role very quickly.

HERRICK 9 is now looming for its conclusion apace with the majority having taken R&R and now commencing the final push into the final month. The conclusion I reach at this stage is one of quiet content, I think the integration, performance as a whole and experience gained will hold the unit in good stead for a time to come. Why quiet content you may ask? With still a month to go and Post Op Reports to be served I will wait to see the final outcome before shouting from the rooftops; although our humility in success should always be evident, I know you would agree. Throughout the deployment I must thank unsung heroes like Capt William Denning and WO2 Al Stewart for their constant and continued effort in the welfare of our soldiers and their families – a sterling job carried out by both.

For those who have not heard, the Sqn Nordic Ski Team – supported by Spr Ben Cottom attached from 59 Cdo – have achieved huge success during the winter championships. 131 now have the glory of being RE Corps champions, Divisional TA champions, (2nd overall on performance) and coming 7th in the Army and National Championships from a total of 22 teams competing. To note, they were the only TA team invited to compete in the Nationals, no mean feat in itself. Ben Cottom achieved National Junior Champion and Rob Cowan 2nd Senior Novice – outstanding results, surpassing both Fran's and my expectation. Fran should be extremely pleased with the outcome of his hard work and dedicated efforts, I for one stand proud of what they have achieved.

What next? Well, March will see the Sqn deploy approx 20 Ranks to Norway alongside the RMR and in June we go to Fort McCoy in the USA, so no peace for the wicked, just as it should be: striving in pursuit of knowledge and experience.

As stated in the first paragraph, an exciting year ahead. Recovery from Operations and an opportunity to build on the

lessons learnt, new personalities Maj Andy Tustin MBE OC (Des), a new QM (to be confirmed) and the majority of PSIs to be replaced – so turmoil and disruption but still exciting in the challenges presented. I am confident we will overcome and drive into the future.

To those who are either retiring or leaving on posting, we thank you for your support, loyalty and commitment that you have shown the Sqn over the last few years. To Tim Harnett and his family, we wish you well on your new career, whatever and wherever it may be.

Yours,

Mick C
OC 131



Sgt Gannon, Spr Cottom, Capt McIntyre, Maj Coles BEM (OC 131), WO2 Franzese, Spr Gibbs, LCpl Cowan at Ex SPARTAN HIKE, Serre Chevalier, France.

Nordic Ski Team Success! By Capt McIntyre (SHQ)

This year, following an absence of two seasons, 131 once again participated in Nordic ski and biathlon training and competitions. Under the direction of team captain and Nordic ski guru WO2 'Fran' Franzese, this seasons team comprised of: Capt Donald McIntyre (veteran novice), Sgt Rick Gannon (veteran 'nearly a novice'), LCpl Robert Cowan (senior novice), Spr Ben Cottom (junior, attached from 59 Cdo) and Spr Craig Gibbs (senior).

For three months we would be learning to ski (for the novices!), training and eventually competing. Our aim was to prepare well, work hard and perform to a high standard against other TA, Regular Army and other service units. Along the way, we would have to gel as a team and live/work together in an everyday close-knit environment – mostly a joy, sometimes a challenge!

So, in early Nov 08, we dusted off the Sqn ski kit, bought a mountain of food and with this seasons must-have Lycra, we headed

off to a dark and cold part of Norway – to start training. We began a hard routine of skiing, shooting, eating, waxing skis, weapon dry-drills training, more eating and some sleeping. As our training progressed, so did an obsession with the finer points of our new sport and gradually more time was spent on techniques that would shave seconds off a race time: adjusting pole straps on the move, a well-timed double pole and a kick in the right place, longer/shorter stick-wax areas, downhill and stepping round corners – snow-plough bad, kicks and steps good!

After a month of training in Norway and Sweden the competitions began. First up was the Royal Engineers Nordic Ski Championships (Idre Fjall, Sweden), where we finished as RE Corps champions. After a short Christmas break back in the UK (4 days!) and a period of continuation training our next competition was the Divisional & TA Nordic Ski Championships (Serre Chevalier, France) where we finished as TA champions and second placed team overall. Our season highlight was competing at the British National, Inter Service & Army Biathlon & Cross Country Ski Championships (Obertilliach, Austria) where we finished seventh team overall. Notable individual achievements were Spr Cottom (National Junior Champion) and LCpl Cowan (second place National Senior Novice).

After an intensive 3 months the team returned home 'all skied out' and have gone back to their various employments. No doubt, after a short period of rest the painful memories of skiing up hills and the frustrations of shooting small (moving?!) black dots will be replaced by a strong desire to wax-up and get onto snow again. We look forward to next season and hope to ski faster and shoot sharper!

With increased fitness levels and with some experience of what 131 is all about, LCpl Cowan (Sp Tp, ex-151 Regt RLC) and Spr Gibbs (301 Tp, ex-Royal Mons) now return to their Troops to begin commando training. Thank you for representing the Sqn and helping to achieve such good results. Good luck with commando training!

Following his successful season, Spr Cottom will once again join the National Development Squad (for a second year). Thank you Ben for proudly representing the Sqn – good luck and we look forward to seeing your future as a biathlete progress!

On behalf of the team, a massive thank-you to Fran for all his efforts in preparation, organisation and training throughout. Fran's love of biathlon & cross-country skiing is huge and the team's success is a reflection of the hard work he put in to maximising the performance of all members of his team. Thanks Fran!

SHQ & Sp Tp – 020 8238 0813 300 Tp – 01752 251 429 301 Tp – 0121 743 2416 302 Tp – 01225 427 747

131 Independent Commando Squadron Royal Engineers (Volunteers)

Nineteen personnel from 131 deployed on Op HERRICK 9 and are embedded across the Squadrons within the Joint Force Engineer Group.

A further nine personnel from 131 were mobilised in early November and are preparing to deploy to Afghanistan for the remainder of Op HERRICK 9.

Op HERRICK Welfare Briefing By Capt Denning (SHQ)

Firstly, a belated Happy New Year to you all. I hope you survived the festive season and the assault course that is eating and drinking over the holiday period. I imagine there is now probably a period of abstinence and de-toxing in some households. I hope that some form of contact by phone or email was possible for families of those still serving in Afghanistan during the Christmas New Year period.

A number of the Squadron personnel returned to the UK just before Christmas having completed over 4 months of intensive mobilised service in various locations around Afghanistan. I am glad to say they are now on some well earned Post Operational Tour Leave (POTL) and hopefully enjoying the time with family and friends and getting used to some home comforts. We look forward to seeing them after their leave and when they feel ready to return to the TA environs.

The Squadron had a further 9 personnel deploy out to Afghanistan in mid December and they are now well and truly settled into their troops and work locations for the remainder of the deployment. I know they had an early Christmas with family and friends before they left and had a second Christmas celebration with their fellow service friends in various locations in Afghanistan. We wish them well and that they have a safe and rewarding deployment.

For the remainder of those deployed in Afghanistan the job of assisting the local populace continues on a daily basis with no let up in trying to improve the conditions and infrastructure for all both military and civilian alike. As mentioned in a recent email there is a tremendous amount of construction work and

improving local facilities which does not make the UK TV media or press as it is not considered as headlining news. This is a pity as it would show the good things that are being done for the Afghan people and that they are benefiting from the assistance from the British forces.

By the time of this newsletter most of those personnel on the full 6 month deployment will have had their R&R and been back to the UK for their well earned break, some still have that pleasure to come and I am sure they are looking forward to that immensely.

Details of a parade and medal presentation to be held in Braunton, Devon on the return of 24 Commando Engineer Regiment in early April is starting to be planned. It is hoped that these events will take place before all 131 personnel moved to Chilwell for demobilisation and commence their Post Operational Tour Leave it will also include those members of the squadron who returned back to the UK in December 08. The event is open to all family and friends who may wish to attend. Further details will be distributed as widely as possible when they are firmed up.

As ever, keep well and stay safe.

Paddy

POSTAL ADDRESSES

Units based in Camp Bastion:

**Rank Name Number
Title of Troop/Department
Title of Squadron
Op HERRICK 9
BFPO 792**

Units based in Lashkar Gah:

**Rank Name Number
Title of Troop/Department
Title of Squadron
Op HERRICK 9
BFPO 715**

Note, individual service numbers are useful for addresses but not critical.

With match day set for the 29th Nov 2008 and looming large on the horizon. There was a lot to organise aside from convincing people to play we needed a football strip to play in (thanks 59 Sqn for the loan!), the pitch at Millbay (booked through 29 CDO Regt RA) with food and drink also required for the day to be arranged (cheers SSgt Robertson). The most difficult part was trying to arrange a referee but with this final hurdle conquered we proceeded to meet 2 hrs before kick off to practice throw ins and basically find out who could kick a ball and who was going to be on the side lines supporting our efforts. With the team chosen we were each given a position and got changed into 59 Sqn's ALL WHITE STRIP!!! We felt and looked like footballers although some of our skills were a little rusty!

6 Rifles were in a similar situation to us with team members travelling from all over Devon and Cornwall to be part of 6's team. The game was keenly contested for the most part in good spirits. With no problems for the Cat of 131 Sgt Needham. Highlights of the match were some great moments of individual skill from our midfield dynamo Mick or should it be Maradona Jarwood, the defence tapping out to their midfield in the closing minutes and an incredible team effort from everyone for the whole 90 minutes. From the cat in goal to the subs on the sidelines, 110% given for the team and the score line reflected the commitment shown 9-1 to the mighty 131.

The semi final over preparations started for the final. Exeter UOTC would be the other Finalists on the 24th January 2009 again due to Exeter UOTC not being able to get a pitch Millbay pitch was to be the venue. The team remained the same with a few people changing positions. Being the final the standard was obviously better and feel proud that the team once again gave all they had. All players showed that commando spirit that sets us apart for the whole 90 minutes, showing they had learnt a few tricks from watching match of the day (no names Dave C after taking out one of the forwards on the edge of our 18 yard box standing up with a look of innocence my kids would be proud of, hands miming the shape of a ball and protesting his innocence "I got the ball ref!"). The cat was at it again making some tremendous saves although a couple of times he got caught ball watching as it went past him.

The team from Exeter UOTC played a good game plan and obviously had played together. They eventually won the game 3 - 0 and now progress to represent 43 Brigade in Aldershot as part of a national competition, the team and I would like to wish them well. We also look forward to locking horns again in the future hopefully with a different outcome!

At this time I would like to thank SSGT Clive Robertson for his continued support in getting these matches played. 24 Engr. Regt. namely 59 Sqn for the use of their football strip and finally a really big thanks to all players and supporters whom turned up on both cold wintery days to support 131 Indep. Cdo Sqn RE(V) in this adventure.

OP HERRICK 9 131 Welfare Team

The Squadron has a Welfare Team that will be available and is on call whilst members of the Sqn are deployed on operations in Afghanistan.

PSAO 020 8238 0801 / 07810 528 005
Capt Paddy Denning 07767 864 466
WO2 Jill Greenfield 07917 750 424
WO2 Al Stewart 07855 451 051

43 Brigade Football Cup Competition

By Cpl J P Smith (300 Tp)

Back in September 2008, an invitation appeared in my mail slot inviting entries into 43 brigade football cup competition. Even though the closing date for entries had past, enquiries were still made as to whether we could still enter a team. As luck would have it we were allowed to submit a team to play our first match against 6 Rifles. This turned out to be the semi final of the cup.

Finally I would like to close this piece looking forward to later this year competing again in whatever sport or activity it may be promoting the good name of 131 Indep Cdo Sqn RE(V) to the rest of the TA or regular forces while having a great time. Thanks for taking the time to read about our exploits in this article and if there are any keen footballers out there in the Sqn interested for next time please contact Cpl JP Smith 300 Tp (Plymouth).

Ex VINTAGE BLACK SPANNER, Nov 08 By Sgt Hobart REME (SHQ)

Exhausted, cold, wind howling, horizontal rain lashing down followed by freezing hail, temperature dropping to minus 6 and eventually snow falling heavily enough to make roads impassable sounds like the ideal weather for Commando training in Norway not Norfolk!

For several years now (operations permitting) members of 131 Indep Cdo Sqn REME have teamed up with 151 (London) Tpt Regt RLC REME LAD to compete in EX SOUTHERN CRAFTSMAN. This EX tests REME personnel under time constraints on technical ability as well as infantry skills. This year we came eighth out of fourteen teams from all the TA REME Units within LONDIST and within 4 Brigade. Due to our involvement with 151 (London) Tpt Regt RLC REME LAD we have established a professional working relationship between both units and were delighted to be contacted by Capt Karen Callaway OC 151 REME LAD who asked if we could assist 151 in working on the vintage vehicles of the Muckleburgh Collection.

The Muckleburgh Collection is the UK's largest privately owned Military Vehicle Museum founded by the Savory family it continues to grow under the ownership of Sir Michael Savory, an Alderman and a former Lord Mayor of the City of London. The Museum is located at the former Army and RAF camp of Wellingbourne on the coast of Norfolk in Cromer. The site includes tank sheds, hangers and old accommodation with a main corrugated building used for the Museum. The Museum website www.muckleburgh.co.uk (gives a tour and shows in great detail the 120 vehicles, armour and anti tank weapons that are on display).

The plan was to travel up on the Friday, spend Saturday servicing and repairing the Abbots', a FV433 series, Self Propelled Gun and after a REME Mess Dinner, on the Sunday take the Abbots' out for a ride within the grounds to test and adjust. The proposed repairs included a turret change and repairing a final drive. To this end 151 were deploying with their Foden Recovery Vehicle.

Originally the 131 REME team members from EX SOUTHERN CRAFTSMAN, Cfn Kate Dunscombe, Cfn James Weir Dunne and myself were attending. I asked Captain

Callaway if I could open it up to the Troop POMs. (Royal Engineer Plant Operator Mechanics). Permission granted, I could take two green lids: Sprs Mark Hester a former REME VM2 and Spr Mick Slinn, fresh back from OP HERRICK 9 who served with 9 Regt in Afghan.

Spr Slinn was attending a medal parade for 9 Sqn RE so he made his own way to the Museum and met us upon our arrival. Unfortunately his flight from Dubai was delayed so he wound up doing all of this and flying back in the same weekend (that's commitment!). The rest of us once we had got a mini bus off the current mobilised Sqn members on their return from Lydd set off. The closer you get to the museum the narrower the roads become, and the wetter and colder it became. Black ice formed and suddenly the new shiny Vauxhall (speed restricted to sixty mph) mini bus had the handling characteristics of an elephant on a skateboard!

We arrived at the gate in pitch darkness and established the gate guard was a Harrier. We were greeted by AQMS Mark Gilbert and directed to an eagerly welcome brew. No time wasted it was heads down ready for an early reveille. It was one of the coldest nights we have ever endured as the temperature fell dramatically, the wind howled, sleet and rain continually lashed against the Museum. Sleep was in fits and starts punctuated by grabbing every piece of clothing I possessed and either wearing it or throwing it in the sleeping bag. The Craftsmen and Sappers were in one of the vehicle sheds sleeping on tank transporters and other vintage vehicles; they also had a grim night. Cfn Dunscombe and the other girls slept in the Cavalry part of the Museum within sight of an enormous mounted Cavalry exhibit and a stuffed bear!

We were woken to the strangled strains of the Museum PA and the joys of George Formby. AQMS Gilbert had discovered how to work the PA. The psychological warfare of Gracie Fields would continue throughout the day. A very welcome hot breakfast ensued before a revised Safety Brief to all ranks. It was clear that the planned work outside was a no go, as we would have had hypothermia within an hour.

After a meeting with Sir Michael Savory, and ensuring all risk assessments were completed and in place the REME teams lead by a senior rank were established. 'Plan B' came into force and each team would work on the vehicles housed within the main display area of the Museum. Sir Michael informed us that they had not run for ten years. The museum staff bought in space heaters, fuel, batteries and chargers and the teams were assigned to vehicles, briefed and off we went.

The main hall had everything from the 88 mm gun used in "Band of Brothers" to an 8th Army BSA. Stalwarts, Ferret and Saladin scout cars, Bren Gun Carrier, a turreted "Pig" Saracen car and some American and Soviet vehicles we had never seen or heard of.

131 Comd REME team chose a 1943 Daimler armoured car and set to work. The training value of being confronted with a large mechanical vehicle and having to apply Basic Fault Finding Principles cannot be overstated. It was to be a big learning curve and a challenge. Locating power switches, working out the wiring, removing the decks and identifying the ignition and fuel systems all takes time. Spr Hester was invaluable. We were beaten by the complex wiring, which even with the assistance of a Class 1 VE proved to have too many shorts to start. The radiator started to leak so after informing the staff and carrying out spillage safety we abandoned the vehicle.

Determined to get a vehicle running we moved on to the Saracen an armoured "Pig" familiar from the "troubles" in Ireland. Oil, coolant and all levels checked, the points and plugs were removed, cleaned, oil put down the bores and the keyless ignition system traced. All back together and all the master switches and choke identified. Spr Slinn got the honour of turning it over.

As the battery terminals were missing a boost pack was attached to the leads and taped off, we stood back and attempted to start it up. The engine turned but did not fire. Spark plugs out revealed no fuel flowing from the tanks. A hidden fuel tap was located by following the fuel lines back, but still no joy. Removing the air intake and pouring neat fuel into the carburettor with suitable fire extinguishers ready we tried again. The engine ignited and then died. One quick flame out and it fired up with a loud rumble. What a tremendous feeling for us all.

We finishing up at 1600 hours and bussed down to a nearby swimming pool for a swim and a well deserved shower. The death water tubes were enjoyed by all so was the heating! Completely refreshed we changed into our evening attire Mess Kit, Lounge suits and Cocktail dresses (Brigade policy was observed – females only!); back to the Museum for a REME all ranks Mess function. The cafeteria had been transformed. Silver and candelabras were dressed accordingly on the tables with serviettes in Corps colours. The snow on the plastic roof altered the lighting and gave it a cold (well freezing) Christmas feeling.

Sir Michael Savory, Col Owsnett REME LONDIST SO1, LCol Oliver 151 (London) Tpt Regt RLC ASM Duffin REME LONDIST, RSM Eaton 151 (London) Tpt Regt RLC were the VIPs, and we joined the 151 REME LAD and former members of 151 REME who were being dined out. A very high profile dinner. The Chefs had produced a fantastic meal worthy of the occasion. All the VIPs who had toured the Museum earlier had also met all REME members and guests and found the visit excellent technical training value. We continued into the early hours sharing the experiences that we all had achieved during the day. The 131 Comd REME contingency was highly praised for their participation and commitment by LCol Owsnett and Capt Callaway.

Sunday back to work, again the challenge was continuing working on several more vehicles that also eventually started, the Museum was cleaned and handed back. It became a race against the closing in weather. With our minibus skating sideways and having to be pushed up the hill, the convoy escaped being snowed in. This was an outstanding technical opportunity to get real 'hands on' experience and one which we hope we are invited to again. Special thanks to OC Major Coles, QM Major Leigh, Sir Michael Savory, Capt Callaway, AQMS Gilbert and all the members of 151RLC (Tpt) Regt REME LAD.

Commando Engineer Database Can You Help?

Ray Elliott is a former member of Condor Troop, 59 Commando Squadron, who is working to create a database of Commando RE personnel, past and present. This is in association with the recently formed Commando Engineer Branch of the Royal Engineers Association (REA). The aim is to put together a living record of the 6,000 or so Commando Engineers (plus attached personnel) who have served or are serving with the various Commando Engineer units.

It is intended that access to the data will be limited. Respondents can select what information they wish to provide and how this could be made available in the future. You can reach Ray on relliottent@aol.com or, if anyone is concerned about emailing their details, he can be contacted by post or phone: Ray Elliott, 36 Sandyhill Avenue, Shotts, North Lanarkshire, ML7 5EG. Tel: 01501 821543 - Fri/Sat/Sun.

Army v Navy Rugby Match Sat 02 May 09 Twickenham

Once again the Squadron will be planning a social day out to the above event and this will consist of (numbers permitting);

- Breakfast at KB
- Tickets for the match
- Wrist bands for the corps tent
- After match drinks /social

This is a great day out – ask those who have attended previous games. It is open to all serving ranks, wives, girlfriends, boyfriends. So put the date in your diary.

More details, ticket prices, breakfast timings etc will be published when known.

Contact Capt Paddy Denning
(m) 07767864466
(e) Paddydenning@hotmail.com

COMMANDO ENGINEER REUNION 12 – 14 JUN 09, RMB Chivenor

As usual, the weekend promises to contain a feast of food, the finest beer and above all, outstanding company. There will be enlightening information on the core business of the Regiment and how 24 Commando Engineer Regiment are progressing. There will also be an opportunity to play golf locally; don't forget your clubs and also the opportunity to go for a surf.

Attendance Proformas are to be returned as soon as possible to the Reunion Secretary (Miss Clare Howard). The all in cost for this cracking weekend, including food and accommodation is £40.00.

If you have any queries or questions regarding this event, please phone either the Coordinator of the event, Mark Woodward on 01271 857 831 or the Secretary, Clare Howard on 01271 857 229 who will be able to assist you.

The Squadron Newsletter

Date of next issue:
3 April 2009

News articles, photographs, comments, letters and contributions welcome! Please send by email to 131IndCdoSqn-SRT@mod.uk
Articles for next Newsletter to be received by 24 March 2009.