



The Squadron Newsletter

3 October 2008



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

Finally we get a Newsletter out to you after a long awaited period – my apologies. Much has taken place since June including the mobilisation of our 19 volunteers who are fully embedded and deployed out to theatre. Although we must not become complacent, overall I feel that the process from early liaison with 24 Cdo on requirements to boots on the ground in Afghanistan has gone extremely well, but as expected there are still lessons to be learnt. We as a team here at HQ must become more involved from the early stages to avoid long drawn out debates with RTMC Chilwell and our Sqn pre-training can probably be more specific if we get the feed back from RE's in theatre but in testament to our volunteers the whole integration piece has been painless. Initial feedback from a number of the volunteers is very positive. Again, there will always be areas where life could be better, but the message I'm getting is one we can currently stand proud of.

I thank all of those who supported the families day. Typical of our weather, we were tested to the max but I think we would all agree there was fine food, excellent company and plenty to drink. Many thanks to Paddy Denning and his team.

Exercise Summer Ride is now in full flow which will hopefully see 3 pass on the JNCO's cadre, (congratulations must go to Spr Horton who we know has come top) and another 10 achieve Cbt Engr, C3S or Driver qualifications resulting in the Sqn training something in the region of 32 individuals in their Combat trades this year.

Finally my best wishes and thoughts to all the families who are adjusting (some for the first time) to having their partners, sons or daughters away from home. Please remember we are always pleased to hear from you and if we can assist in any way do ask – we are only an e mail or phone call away.

Yours,

Mick C
OC 131



TA100 London Events By SSgt Jordan (Sp Tp)



2008 saw the 100th anniversary of the formation the Territorial Force, known since 1920 as the Territorial Army. There have been a number of events held throughout the year and across the country to celebrate this centenary and to take the opportunity to publicise the role of the Territorial Army. The following paragraphs briefly describe the events that I have been involved in to some degree.

Service of Thanksgiving

St Paul's is always a good place for a service and the Service of Thanksgiving was no different. After the service we spent 20 minutes forming up then marched the few hundred metres down the road to the Guild Hall. Sgt Elrick forgot where he'd left the minibus and then with Sgt Colhoun navigating couldn't find their way to where we were waiting. After about 45 minutes, we raced off and blagged our way into the reception at the Honourable Artillery Company centre where the top quality canapés and fine wines were in endless supply.

National Pageant

In June the TA100 National Pageant was held at Horse Guards. 131 provided a contingent in the marching troops, with the most notable participant being Cpl Sampson, billowing gently in the wind in his size 18 arctic cam. Several more of us were in the audience with our families to support the event. The displays of the history of the reserve forces were impressive and my children certainly enjoyed the pyrotechnics (not to mention trying to call out to the members of 131 that they recognised). Prince Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall attended this televised event.

Royal Garden Party

A number of us went to a Garden Party held at Buckingham Palace in July. My wife and I went on one of the few sunny days and met up with a group of other Squadron members to enjoy the gardens and sample the cucumber sandwiches. It was a great way for most of us to

offer a little something back to our partners for all the time spent away with the TA.

Other TA100 events have been supported by members of the Squadron, but I drew the line at supporting the Wear Uniform to Work day to my meetings in Dubai!!

In brief...

- Congratulations to 2Lt **Mukhtar**, (301 Tp), LCpl **Ruddock** (301 Tp), Spr **Hearn** (302 Tp) and Spr **Pandya** (Sp Tp) for passing their Reserve Forces Commando Course!
- Congratulations to 2Lt **Ed Dutton** (300 Tp) for being awarded top cadet on his Royal Military Academy Sandhurst TA Commissioning Course!
- Well done to Sgt **Rick Gannon** who finished **first** in the 2008 Gobi Challenge Race!
- Welcome back to Spr **De Pear Brown** and Spr **Sinn** after their operational deployments to Afghanistan on Op HERRICK 8.

Notice Board...

- The **Commando Engineer Branch** of the Royal Engineers Association (REA) was formed on 1 April 2008 and currently has nearly 100 members. This is YOUR association, open to serving and retired Territorial and Regular Commando Engineers. Commando-trained attached ranks of other corps are welcome to join as associate members. Please contact Lt Col Dave Quinn MBE BEM on westheath6@aol.com for more information and application forms.
- **Forces discounts** on hundreds of items are available to serving TA and Regular Armed Forces Personnel, Civil Servants and Veterans. For more information: <http://www.forcesdiscounts-mod.co.uk>
- The **Army Benevolent Fund** are looking for volunteers in the Harrow area. Volunteers are needed to organise fund-raising events and attend meetings throughout the year. Anyone interested can get more information from the website www.armybenfund.org or from Diana Hart, the chair of the Middlesex Branch (hartda@btopenworld.com). All help is greatly appreciated.

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)

Squadron Open Day, 9 August 2008 By Capt Denning (SHQ)

The OC wanted to have a Squadron Open Day and he thought I really did not have a lot to do so he "volunteered me" to organise the event and lead the team. This consisted of SSgt Dimaline (SQMS), WO2 Greenfield (Chief Clerk), Sgt Elrick (Chef) and Debbie Coles (Civilian Liaison Officer!!).

Where and when to have it was a cause of great debate. The OC came in under the radar with a superb location (Duke of Beaufort Estate). Great what the 'Winged Dagger' contacts can produce so the first hurdle was overcome. Next, when to have it? The date almost presented itself due to the mobilised personnel starting their predeployment leave and getting stores and equipment with a late bid from outside agencies. So Sat Aug 09 was the date.

What should the day consist of? SSgt's Butterick and Harnett are canoe instructors and where able to get all the necessary canoes and equipment so that was penned in. Capt McIntyre, cyclist extraordinaire, some mountain bikes and route rec'd, that was sorted. Something for the ladies was provided in the way of a manicurist who was very well received and kept busy throughout the day.

How many would attend? A return proforma was sent out, but in true TA fashion lots of cajoling was needed in some locations to get a response. The OC informed that if 50 or less were going to attend the event was a No Go. As the cut off date for ordering the food got closer and closer and with even more cajoling the numbers started to climb. Shock and horror we had approx 120 names including family members and some old friends from 299 up in Hull planning to come to the event.

Now something to entertain and a bit of fun was required - some inflatables, slide, bungee run, assault course were on hand but the wet weather restricted their use. The ever popular sumo wrestling suits were well used. It was quite refreshing to see how many wanted to take on the OC in the sumo kit, was this an opportunity not to be missed and get in some legal revenge? Along with other sports equipment, footballs, rugby balls, volleyballs and a tug of war rope were also sourced so that was another tick in the box. Well done the officers team for winning the tug of war which was due mainly to some superb coaching. I wonder who that was from???

A feeding plan was required and what should we feed everyone - breakfast sandwiches, light lunch, and a BBQ. The Master Chef produced the plan, but don't know who planned the Delhi Belly that ensued the following day! I gather those who stayed with liquid refreshments did not suffer those ailments, so a lesson to be learned there. Sgt Elrick and Cpl Mahoney,

along with some family helpers, maintained a steady flow of food throughout the day.

Must have a raffle! The OC agreed that money raised would go to the Help for Heroes charity. Out went the letters to companies for contributions to the raffle. Members of the Sqn, civilian staff, friends and relatives were also recruited to get prizes for the raffle. Oh, and how they succeeded - some superb prizes were donated. Tickets sales soared on the day when the prizes were laid out and people could see what was on offer. Jill Greenfield did a cracking job of organising the raffle on the day the excitement growing with each ticket drawn and the individual then drawing an envelope to see what they had won. London came out on top taking most of the best prizes and lots of boos and hisses followed each winner. Hard luck on Spr Ruddock from 301 Tp who won the child's white T shirt. He is looking to sell it but to date has had no takers. The raffle raised £1,100 and in due course was paid to the Help for Heroes on-line.

The day of the event arrived and with wet weather forecast it was with some trepidation waiting to see how many would still attend the event. What a good feeling it was to see the coaches arrive from each location and with the numbers that had been forecast. Some people travelled by private vehicle and that increased the numbers even more.

There was an extra boost to the day as a visit had been arranged to be shown around the dog kennels on the estate which has one of the largest packs in the country. All the other events continued throughout the day and the wet weather did not dampen people's enthusiasm.

Was the day a success? That will be for others to decide, certainly the organising team were more than pleased that their efforts had been well received and there were some very welcome comments made. It had been a long time past that the Sqn had got so many families and friends together in one place for a social day out and the time and effort well worth it.

Watch out the officers of the Sqn - the OC is looking for one to organise the post H9 event in 2009, you have been warned!

The Commando Course, July 2008 By Spr Pandya (Sp Tp)

The engine slowed. We had pulled up to the gates at CTC and the all-familiar sign 'Commando Training Centre Royal Marines' pierced through tired eyes. I was here again. Apprehensive as always. But this time also a little excited. The time of reckoning had finally come. After a year of intense training, of dark, lonely mornings, of missed Friday nights out, this was it. Perhaps this would be the last time as a trainee. For I was about to start the Commando

Course, possibly the hardest two weeks of my life.

And it really was. The first week was essentially a beat-up week. Bottom field pass out on the Saturday morning was the first big stumbling block, and there were a lot of very happy faces on Saturday afternoon, well at least those that had made it. 'I have never passed that Regain in training. I can't believe I nailed it on the day', said one.

And so the week went on. Acquaint. Re-acquaint. Endurance Course. Tarzan. Cliff assaults and river crossings with the Mountain Leaders. Food. More food. Blisters and pulled muscles. The cursing and swearing on the Dartmoor night navex after a draining day with the ML's. 'It should only take three hours,' they assured us. But it didn't. No syndicate was able to find the checkpoints in the ever-thickening fog. The swearing and blisters only increased, and by 0430 when everyone was in, there were few happy voices. 'I can't believe they're doing this to us.' 'Yes', said another. 'There's no way we're going to be able to pass the tests next week if they carry on f***ing us up like this.'

And so it came. Week two. Test week. This was it. Four more days, and assuming no re-runs, I would have my beret. But I didn't think I could do it. The 9-mile Speed-March didn't worry me, no. That was just a run. But I had never passed the Endurance Course. Ever. And as for the Tarzan, there was no way I could knock off a desperately needed 37 seconds. 'You'll do it on the day', Sgt Gibson assured me. But how could I? What difference would a couple of days make?

Saturday morning. Endurance Course pass-out out, test one. I remember running down Leafy Lane. Flat out. I could not go any faster. I arrived at the firing range flustered. Stoppage first round. S**t! Sweat dripping into my eye, I blindly fired off the action. I showed the officer my target. '9 hits. But next time, try not to hit him in the nuts!' And then the names were announced and the times given. 'Pandya...sixty-eight...' I didn't even hear the rest. I could not believe it. I had knocked off more than five minutes. Not a great time by any means, but I was not here to break records. I had passed.

Renewed with confidence after passing the Speed-March on the Sunday, the Tarzan similarly came and went. Again, adrenalin was my friend allowing me to smash my acquaint time and pass.

With Tuesday came the final hurdle. The Thirty-Miler. Brutal. Long. Feet destroyed. Sinews strained on the hills. The heat. The Cornish Pasties which stuck to the inside of your mouth. And then another hill. But I don't think anyone will ever forget that final 200 yards. Cap comforters on, sweat wiped from faces, quick-timing over the stone bridge, and to the applause of trained Commandos waiting for us. Smiles all around. Faces beaming. Tears from some. We

had done it. After all those hours of training, the worries, the injuries, it was over. We had entered the brotherhood...



Cooling off after the 30-miler!



L to R: Spr Hester (Trg Team), 2Lt Mukhtar (new Green Beret, 301 Tp), LCpl Ruddock (new Green Beret, 301 Tp), OC 131 Maj Coles, Spr Hearn (new Green Beret, 302 Tp), Spr Pandya (new Green Beret, Sp Tp)

Intermediate Physical Training Instructor Course, September 2008 By Spr Hester (Sp Tp)

Continuing in my career progression as one of the Squadron's PTIs, I arrived at the Army Physical Training Corps in Aldershot earlier in September to carry out the TA Intermediate PTI Course.

After an opening address by the Chief Instructor on the first Monday of the course, it was straight into a Personal Fitness Test. There was an opportunity for re-takes on the Wednesday morning, with the few who failed a second time being RTU. As the week progressed the Combat Fitness Test and Military Swimming Test were part of the routine and, again, if you failed it was time to go home.

In the classroom we learned about different methods of instructing, teaching and coaching, followed by practical lessons. Once this was

done it was our turn to take various lessons and classes for our individual performance tests, followed by the final exam. Those who passed received their PTI Level 2 certificates.

Though the course was very enjoyable, it was also very physically demanding. So if you are thinking of becoming a PTI, make sure you're fit enough!

Combat Engineer Course, July 2008 By Spr Harding (Sp Tp)

Spr Brett and I attended the two-week Combat Engineer Course run by the Scottish TA Sappers, 71 Engineer Regiment, at Gibraltar Barracks in July. We re-did the Basic Field Engineering during the first week, along with various PT sessions, including the Military Swim Test. This involved a gala type race in teams of four, doing press-ups at the end of each length. We also played football, which turned into a competitive England v Scotland match, with England winning 3-2, and took part in various gym sessions. When we carried out the BFE we had various lessons from knot tying to power tools and had a work book to complete as a revision guide.

Because we both were on a Commando Training weekend and got to the course on the Sunday rather than on the Friday, the rooms had already been allocated depending on the 1.5-mile times in the inter-room competition. The two of us were split up, which allowed us to bond with different people. In my room we regularly ordered in food for the evening and watched films with anyone else who wanted to stay in. We also went to the bar on the camp as a course, as well as going to Fleet or Camberley in smaller groups.

Towards the end of the first week we moved onto the bridging phase and learnt how the Medium Girder Over-Bridge went together. After a practice run we had a race in the syndicates, which again promoted team-building and got everyone working together.

For the Saturday we went to the Royal Engineers Museum in Chatham for a guided tour. We then went to have a look around Chatham Dockyard, which houses the vehicles that are too big to fit in the RE Museum and, after dinner, we had a night out in Rochester. On the Sunday we went to the local church, once we found it. At first the QMSI marched us to a house that looked like a church but which had a house number on the door. Having marched into the front garden a neighbour told us the church was at the top of the hill!

For the second week we finished training on the Heavy Girder Over-Bridge and then carried out the demolitions training. This concluded with

a confidence charge which we set up ourselves and then detonated. We then rigged a bridge for demolition over at Minley Manor which was alright until it was my turn to climb on top of the bridge and do my part. We had a climbing harness and were clipped on, but the wind and rain didn't help when you were looking down at a 50-foot drop!

On the final day we completed the Personal Fitness Test to see if those attending had improved on their times since the start of the course. As Spr Brett and I had missed the first PFT because we were on Commando Training, we didn't know the route. However, after getting slightly lost, I still won the run, with a time of 8:32.

We then went into the evening, which included a course BBQ and a football game against those on the JNCO Cadre. The alcohol was supplied by everyone on the course who had accumulated beer-fines during the demolitions phase, so I ended up not having to pay for a drink all night!

Basic Pashtu Language Course, March 2008 By Capt Martin (302 Tp)

I and LCpl Ed Little reported to the education centre at Royal Marines Barracks Chivenor on 14 January for the Basic Pashtu Language Course. We were joined by eleven other students from 24 Commando Engineer Regiment and the Commando Logistics Regiment. The instructor was an Afghan, ethnic Pathan (Pashtu), civilian who had spent his childhood in Kabul and then in the Soviet Union. He became an asylum seeker and is now resident in the UK.

The Defence School of Languages supplied the textbooks and the listening materials. The learning was long and intensive, combining conversational practise during the day and repetitive written exercises for homework during evenings and weekends. One of the most enjoyable features of the course was a dinner at an Afghan restaurant in Hanwell, West London, attended by students, the instructor and several Afghan guests. We squatted on cushions around a feast of Afghan fare laid on a rug in front of us – all very tasty.

The course culminated in a final test which LCpl Little and I are pleased to say we passed, together with some of our fellow students. We are both very pleased to have done the course and look forward to assisting 24 Regiment on its deployment with our limited command of basic Pashtu. It has been a first class, albeit at times challenging, opportunity and we are grateful to the OC and 24 for inviting us to attend the course.

131 Independent Commando Squadron Royal Engineers (Volunteers)

News...

3 October 2008

Nineteen personnel from 131 have deployed on Op HERRICK 9 and are embedded across the Squadrons within the Joint Force Engineer Group. Of note Capt Simon Martin, Lt Mike Gough and Spr Caroline Plank are directly involved in Task Force Helmand's main effort of reconstruction and development. Simon is out meeting the locals in Sangin in order to establish what they think is needed to provide security and improve their lives. Mike is doing the same in Musa Qal Eh. Caroline is using her teaching experience to assist with the improvement of the education system in Lashkar Gah, especially for females. The centre of mass for the JF Engr Gp is Camp Bastion where all equipment, rations and ammunition for the battlegroups is brought into Afghanistan and distributed. Again, 131 personnel here are operating the plant to reconfigure stores for delivery by road, air-dropped from CI30s and underslung from support helicopters. Cpl Sampson is a key asset being the only crane operator in the group. The crane being the primary way ISO containers are moved in Bastion and all the stores are in ISO containers.

The rest of the 131 personnel are out at the Forward Operating Bases (FOBs) with 26 Armoured Engineer Squadron (AES) in the South, 59 Commando Squadron in the North and 77 AES in the North West. The main effort for these Squadrons is to prepare the FOBs for the winter; improving drainage, protective accommodation and sanitation. When they are not doing this they are providing close engineer support to the patrols out on the ground that are mainly there to provide the locals with security to allow them to carry out their normal lives.

Capt Andrew Clarke



Spr Slinn (in green T-shirt) with members of 9 Para Sqn on Op HERRICK 8 earlier this year.



Spr Slinn working on a Self-loading Dump Truck. Now Zad, Afghanistan.

131 Independent Commando Squadron RE (V) OP HERRICK 9 Welfare Team

The Squadron has now in place the Welfare Team that will be available and is on call whilst members of the Sqn are deployed on operations in Afghanistan. The team is made up of:

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

Contact can also be made by e-mail to the e-mail address on the Sqn Welfare Card, copies of which are available to those that require them by contacting one of the team.

The team is there to assist families and relatives in the UK whilst their loved ones are deployed. They are available to assist where necessary and hopefully to prevent a minor problem becoming a major or worrying issue for any family or relative. Please do not hesitate to contact them for any reason.

Contact will also be maintained by the team via e-mail to the addresses supplied by the soldiers deployed and via the Sqn Newsletter.

It is hoped to visit locations from which troops are deployed and have families and relatives come into the TA centres for updates and a social. More information to follow.

KEEP SAFE

POSTAL ADDRESSES

Units based in Camp Bastion:

Rank Name Number*
Title of Troop/Department
Title of Squadron
24 Cdo Engr Regt
Op HERRICK 9
BFPO 792

Units based in Lashkar Gah:

Rank Name Number*
Title of Troop/Department
Title of Squadron
24 Cdo Engr Regt
Op HERRICK 9
BFPO 715

* Individual service numbers are useful but not critical.

FREE PARCEL POST TO AFGHANISTAN

Parcels weighing **NO MORE THAN 2KG** may be sent to personnel serving in Afghanistan **FREE OF CHARGE**. Wrap the parcel securely, address it and take it to your Post Office.

Note, though some parcels may reach recipients within a week, some of the more remote operating bases may not receive deliveries of parcels so regularly. Please bear this in mind when sending perishable foodstuffs, particularly at this time of year, when daytime temperatures may still be in the high 30s.

E-BLUEYS

<http://www.bfpo.mod.uk/ebluey>

Log on to get messages sent quickly, securely and free of charge to your friends and loved-ones in Afghanistan. Those in the main locations will receive their mail in 1-2 days using this system, though it will take longer for them to reach more remote outposts.

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131 Independent Commando Squadron Royal Engineers (Volunteers)

Airborne Commando Engineer Cycle 2008, April 2008

By Capt McIntyre (SHQ)

*On behalf of their TA Squadrons, Captains Donald McIntyre (131 Indep Cdo Sqn RE) and Chris Wilcock (299 Para Sqn RE) cycled the length of France to raise money and public awareness for **HELP for HEROES**. Their cycle challenge started at Bray Dunes on the France/Belgium border on Sunday 20 April and they finished at Cap Cerbere on the France/Spain border on Sunday 27 April 2008. The total distance cycled was 1656 km in 8 days and the fund-raising total currently stands at over £7500!*

Following the success of our John o' Groats to Land's End cycle ride last year (in aid of Teenage Cancer Trust) Chris and I were keen to do another cycle challenge. It seemed that time had erased the memories of suffering, physical pain and bad weather we endured on our journey across Britain! This year we chose to cycle the length of France in aid of **Help for Heroes** – a charity established in September 2007 to support service personnel injured in Afghanistan and Iraq. Our route would include visits to historic sites of Airborne and Commando interest at Pegasus Bridge and St Nazaire.

Pegasus Bridge crossed the Caen Canal at Benouville and was one of the first objectives for the Allied Landings in Normandy. It was captured on 6 June 1944 by glider-borne troops of the 6th Airborne Division. The original bridge was replaced in 1994 and is now sited in the nearby Pegasus Memorial visitors centre.

St Nazaire is a port on the estuary of the River Loire and was the site of 'Operation Chariot,' a daring commando raid that took place on 28 - 29 March 1942. At that time, St Nazaire had one of the few dry-docks in the world large enough to service the new German super-battleship 'Tirpitz' – a sister battleship of the 'Bismarck.' The 'Tirpitz' would be a greatly increased threat to shipping across the Atlantic. Op Chariot was risky and audacious: a modified destroyer packed with explosives and carrying a landing force of Army Commandos would ram the dry dock at full speed. In support, were 18 smaller vessels – gun ships, motor launches and torpedo boats. After deceiving enemy signallers for as long as possible (pretending to be a returning German vessel) the destroyer took heavy fire during its final approach and lodged itself within the main gate. The landing force caused as much damage as possible and the following morning the dock was destroyed when the timed-charge exploded. The dock was not used again until after the war.

Saturday 19 April, and it was the morning after the Airborne & Commando Royal Engineers Officers Association dinner at Chatham that we set off on our journey. The

weather was poor and after the previous night we felt a little jaded however by bike, train and ferry we eventually made to our start line on the France/Belgium border.

The first two days were long stages with late finishes however we had covered a good distance and also reached our first objective – Pegasus Bridge. The roads were good going on fairly flat terrain and our progress was only slowed by our navigation across the large city of Rouen (using small-scale map!). It was during these early stages we established our daily routine of cycling, eating, sleeping... there was no time for anything else. We quickly became dependent on early/mid/late morning coffee/pastry stops – lots of roadside opportunities in France! – to get our first 100km of the day cracked. A hearty lunch then set us up nicely for the hard slog through the afternoon and the last few hours of the day were always a bit hazy. Having a wash, something to eat and then a sleep were big things to look forward to at the end of each day!

On the afternoon of Day 4 we reached St Nazaire. We had planned a short stage that day in order to have a look around the port. We visited the dry-dock, the old U-Boat pens and the Op Chariot commemorative memorial. St Nazaire is certainly an interesting place with a lot of history and also current significance. Of note, it is where the Queen Mary 2 was recently built, it is where the fuselage for the Airbus A380 is assembled and the dock area is currently the focus of long-term regeneration works. The few hours we spent there was welcome time off the bike!

Through the Vendee region and towards Bordeaux the countryside was very open and we made fast progress on quiet roads. For quite some distance, we followed the River Garonne and a canal, which meant there was little climbing to do – however the head-winds ensured that our progress was not made easy. The canal (tow-path) provided us with an easy route through Toulouse and by the end of Day 7 the end was in sight.

The conditions at the beginning of our final day were difficult. We had a strong head-wind for the first 100km until Narbonne and then we hit the coast, turned south and the wind helped speed us toward Perpignan. There was some discussion as to whether our road into and out of Perpignan was a motorway – as the fast cars and the odd 'beep' seemed to suggest – however, with the end in sight (large mountains looming ominously on the horizon), nothing was going to slow our rapid pace... except lunch. Chris's tapeworm had run out of fuel again and required a coffee and sticky-bun top-up!

The roads, climbs and scenery during the final few hours were dramatic. It was a memorable end to our journey as we cycled in the warm evening sunshine along the mountainous coastal road towards the France/Spain border. The old border post was at the top of climb overlooking French and Spanish

towns either-side. It was an awesome feeling to have completed our challenge and we were glad to be met there by a welcoming party (Donald's father) with champagne!

Route Summary

- Day 1: Bray-Dunes (France/Belgium border) – Forges-les-Eaux. 230 km, ave speed 23.0 km/h.
- Day 2: Forges-les-Eaux – Caen. 213 km, ave speed 23.6 km/h.
- Day 3: Caen – Chateaubourg. 169 km, ave speed 23.5 km/h.
- Day 4: Chateaubourg – St Nazaire. 151 km, ave speed 24.9 km/h.
- Day 5: St Nazaire – St-Jean-d'Angely. 236 km, ave speed 26.6 km/h.
- Day 6: St-Jean-d'Angely – Marmande. 209 km, ave speed 26.0 km/h.
- Day 7: Marmande – Castelnaudary. 241 km, ave speed 23.4 km/h.
- Day 8: Castelnaudary – Cap Cerbere (France/Spain border). 207 km, ave speed 23.1 km/h.

The cycle challenge has been an opportunity to raise money and public awareness for **HELP for HEROES** – a worthy cause to that continues to be in the public eye. It has also been an opportunity to visit two sites of Airborne and Commando historic interest, reflect on the lives lost during campaigns of previous generations and also remember those affected by the current conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The fund-raising for **HELP for HEROES** and support we have received has been fantastic. On behalf of our TA Squadrons, thank you very much for all your support!

www.justgiving.com/AirborneCommandoEngineerCycle2008



Job done!

Memorial Service for Spr Rick Mayor, 17 February 2008 By Capt Dudley (Sp Tp)

Serving and former members of 131 attended a service in memory of Spr Richard 'Rick' Mayor of 300 Troop at St Martin's Church in Liskeard on Sunday 17 February 2008. Rick was with a group of nine soldiers from 131 on attachment to 9 Parachute Squadron on Ex Grand Prix in Kenya when he died of anthrax on 4 February 1987. The intention had been to mark the 20th anniversary of his death with a memorial service but the last Afghanistan deployment meant that this was delayed until the 21 year mark – appropriate since Rick was just 21 years of age when he died.

In his young life he had touched the lives of many others – he was one of those rare people that you just couldn't help like – and many who had known him were at the service. From the Squadron side this included Sgt Bob Needham and ex-Cpl Mike Alexander, who were on the same Commando Course as Rick, and ex-Sgt Tony Mossop, ex-Cpl Nick Greenham and myself, who were with Rick in Kenya on that fantastic but ultimately fateful tour. Such was the strength of commitment to remembering Rick's life that ex-members who had not known him also attended, including ex-OC Major Adrian Hicks, former 300 Troop Commander Paul Rowe and ex-302 Squadron soldier Tony Gilbert. At the service we were told about the Rick we never got to know – his life as a child, his charity fund-raising, his civilian job and his further education. The lay-preacher at the church had been Rick's headmaster and his Sunday-school teacher, as well as a family friend, so he spoke with first-hand knowledge of Rick's remarkable qualities as a person. Simon Miller, who had taken Rick through the Commando Course as a young lance corporal, then spoke about Rick's time in 131, about the only time he ever heard him swear and about how he managed to clear the extra time away from work to get onto the Kenya trip. Those who had known Rick, and those who had not, were deeply moved by the service on that glorious February day. It



Former and serving unit members at Spr Mayor's grave.

seemed that so many of the key people in his life were there – only Rick was missing.

The day was rounded off beautifully by a pub lunch in the nearby Barley Sheaf pub, where we were hosted by Rick's parents Brian and Joan, his sister Victoria and his brother Stuart. Much time was spent reminiscing and poring over the photo albums of the Kenya trip and 300 Troop in the mid-eighties. It was all like going back in a time-machine! Many thanks must go to former Troop Staff Sergeant Simon Miller for organising a superb event in conjunction with Rick's family, and to those who drove from as far as Hull to mark the occasion.

In Memoriam Col B H (Bev) Holloway OBE, ERD, TD

Former commander of 301 Airborne Field Squadron and 2IC of 131 Parachute Engineer Regiment, Colonel Beverly Harold Holloway, died peacefully in Geneva on 11 May 2008, aged 93 years. Colonel Holloway was born into a family with a rich engineering pedigree – Holloway Brothers built, among other things, The Old Bailey, Chelsea Bridge, Baghdad Railway Station and much of the Bank of England. In World War Two he served with 3 Parachute Squadron RE, part of the 6th Airborne Division, in Normandy, the Ardennes, the Rhine Crossing, and to the end of the war in Europe (an account of the 3 Squadron's exploits in support of 3rd Parachute Brigade on D-Day can be found at:

http://www.remuseum.org.uk/campaign/rem_campaign_6adiv.htm

Two former unit members share their memories of this fine officer with us:

Maj (Retd) Sir Donald Spiers - Bev Holloway joined 131 when it formed in 1947. I joined the Regiment in September 1954, coming straight from 9 Sqn, and was posted to 301 Sqn in Croydon where Bev was the Squadron Commander. Soon after that he became 2IC of 131 Regiment, which position he held until he left 131 in the early 1960s and moved to Geneva. I remember him taking a great part in annual camps at Scarborough, Weymouth and Stanford PTA in the 1950s, as well as several 131 battlefield tours. He was the leading light in the initial formation of the Airborne Engineer Officers Association (which became the ACREOA in later years) and a stalwart of the famous 131 Regimental Cocktail Parties which always took place on the first weekend of December at the Duke of York's HQ in Chelsea, and where the only drinks allowed were Champagne cocktails with a lot of brandy in each glass! He was an inspirational leader and all the junior officers looked up to and admired him.

Former Sapper Malcolm Reed - I was only 18 when I joined 131 Airborne Engineer Regiment's 301 Squadron. Maj Holloway was OC throughout my 6 years' service with the Squadron before I joined the regular army. In the 55 yrs since, as a sapper and manager in the construction industry, I have always remembered him as a commanding officer his men were lucky and privileged to serve under. Maj Holloway was at that time a director of Holloway Brothers, a very highly respected London-based construction company. I remember seeing photographs of the innovative civil engineering works the company had undertaken. Our OC arranged for the Squadron to 'blow up' a disused 100-ft high brickworks chimney next to the railway at Holloway Bros' plant yard at St Albans. I was doing my turn inside the base structure of the chimney breaking through the wall before setting charges. I was balanced on a scaffold board spanning across the soot pit below me and getting a pretty good shower of soot loosened by the vibrations. There was a tap on my shoulder and in the soot-filled darkness I handed the jack hammer over and crawled out. 'Who's in there now?' I said to my Troop Sergeant. He said 'That is Major Holloway!' My condolences and best wishes go to Colonel Holloway's family.



Major Bev Holloway at Annual Camp in Weymouth - 1948

The Squadron Newsletter

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News articles, photographs, comments, letters and contributions welcome! Please send by email to DonaldMcIntyre@armymail.mod.uk

Articles for next Newsletter to be received by 25 November 08.