EXERCISE

ASKARI STORM

PARAS JUMP INTO KENYA

AAC EXERCISE IN KENYA
EXERCISE ASKARI LYNX WAS THE 669 SQUADRON GROUP ELEMENT OF EXERCISE ASCARI STORM

OPERATION HERRICK
THE JHC LOGISTIC AND ENGINEERING SUPPORT STORY

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47 AIR DESPATCH SQUADRON RLC OPERATION SHADER
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MESSAGE FROM THE COMMANDER

I would like to take this opportunity to wish you all a Happy New Year and thank you all for your hard work during 2014.

The JHC achieved much last year, both at home and overseas. We successfully completed almost 9 years on Op HERRICK and seamlessly transitioned to Op TORAL. At home we demonstrated the agility throughout the Command, both in the air and on the ground – for example on Op PITCHPOLE - and continued to train for contingent operations. The training stood us in good stead on Op SHADER, where 47 Air Dispatch Squadron, as well as numerous individual augmentees, were critical in the delivery of UK aid to the Iraqi people. You should all be proud of your contribution on these operations, I certainly am.

Throughout the year I had the privilege to visit many of you on exercise, often on these operations, I certainly am. As a result, I can honestly say that all should be proud of your contribution on these operations. I certainly am.

Looking to 2015 you can expect many more exciting opportunities as we move forward from contingency to operational employment. We already have personnel deployed in Sierra Leone (Op GRITROCK), Iraq (Op SHADER) and Afghanistan (Op TORAL) and a very busy pipeline of exercises around the world and in the UK. Keep up the hard work; the traits you all demonstrate are what make us who we are.

The interoperability training we undertook during the preparation of this magazine is now paying dividends and will sustain us to 2040 and beyond. This is not just about the new aircraft and equipment to the JHC. The Capability Directorate have been working hard together with you to introduce new aircraft and equipment to the JHC. These exciting capabilities will ensure the JHC is at the forefront of future operation and will sustain us to 2040 and beyond. Looking to 2015 you can expect many more exciting opportunities as we move from contingency to operational employment. We already have personnel deployed in Sierra Leone (Op GRITROCK), Iraq (Op SHADER) and Afghanistan (Op TORAL) and a very busy pipeline of exercises around the world and in the UK. Keep up the hard work; the traits you all demonstrate are what make us who we are and will lead to our future success.

Once again, thank you and good luck. 2015 will be another challenging and enjoyable year.

Maj Gen Richard Fulton CBE, Commander JHC

I was very impressed by your continued professionalism, teamwork and dedication. The interoperability training you have been conducting will be critical to our future success on operations. The Capability Directorate have been working hard together with you to introduce new aircraft and equipment to the JHC. These exciting capabilities will ensure the JHC is at the forefront of future operation and will sustain us to 2040 and beyond. Looking to 2015 you can expect many more exciting opportunities as we move from contingency to operational employment. We already have personnel deployed in Sierra Leone (Op GRITROCK), Iraq (Op SHADER) and Afghanistan (Op TORAL) and a very busy pipeline of exercises around the world and in the UK. Keep up the hard work; the traits you all demonstrate are what make us who we are and will lead to our future success.

Once again, thank you and good luck. 2015 will be another challenging and enjoyable year.

Maj Gen Richard Fulton CBE, Commander JHC
We are currently within what is set to be the biggest shake up of military assets in our lifetime, particularly for the JHC and Fleet Air Arm. With the introduction of the Wildcat, F35, Queen Elizabeth Class Carriers and the handover of Merlin Mk3/3A from the RAF, the winds of change are blowing strong. However even the most technologically advanced, most capable, state-of-the-art assets are worthless without the aircrew, engineers and support personnel that make it possible to operate them.

Notwithstanding the planning, re-organisation and effort required to generate the 37 crews needed to operate the Merlin under a new owner, another challenge has been ensuring that the correct amount of Suitably Qualified and Experienced Personnel (SQEP) engineers are available to recover and regenerate the aircraft.

In early 2012 just over 30 engineers, selected from the more experienced elements of the Commando Helicopter Force (CHF) Sea King and Royal Navy grey Merlin contingents, made their way to their new home at RAF Benson in Wallingford, Oxfordshire. This marked the beginning of the balancing act of RAF and RN personnel; maintaining suitable levels of experience in all areas whilst keeping the numbers moving towards a RN majority in time for transition.

When multiple organisations come together there is naturally an element of turbulence. For many reasons the RN moving in on ‘RAF turf’ was no exception. It is a huge credit to all those involved that once differences in working practices had been identified, and the language barrier broken down, there has been an ever increasing ‘one in, all in’ attitude as opposed to the ‘us and them’ atmosphere that might have been apparent initially.

It is surprising in our tri-service world of Military Aviation Authority, Continuing Airworthiness Management Organisation and the Duty Holder construct just how different procedures and practices are at the coalface between units, forces and services. It has been a testament to the ‘can do’ mind-set of those involved to see the ‘we’ve always done it this way’ attitude ditched in favour of a much more pragmatic approach to finding the most effective way of working rather than the most familiar. The majority of personnel agree that both Services have learned a great deal from each other, but there is always room for improvement.

In recent months some big changes have been implemented including a watch routine alien to RAF Benson (24-about with a night watch) and a trial of the RN style tool control system where entire tool outfits are allocated to specific airframes, which is different from the current RAF system where individual tools are signed out to a person, not an aircraft.

Looking to the future, 78 Squadron disbanded and 846 Naval Air Squadron stood up on 30th September 2014, coinciding with the handover of Duty Delivery Holder responsibilities and control of the Merlin Force handed to the RN. Many of the personnel necessary for this to happen were already incumbent on the future 846 NAS, with many more occupied on her sister squadron, 28 (Army Cooperation) Squadron. RNAS Yeovilton will see the arrival of the first 846 NAS Merlin aircraft around March 2015 with an Operational Conversion Unit/Flight remaining at RAF Benson. Currently planned for summer 2016 will be the 845 NAS move back to Somerset, taking with them all of the remaining Merlin.

In the meantime AgustaWestland will be looking to start the conversion of some of the existing airframes to HC (Mk3 standard; a modification programme that will make the aircraft more suited to embarked aviation. This will include the addition of a folding main rotor head. This programme is set to start towards the end of 2014 with the iMk3 Release To Service to be issued towards the end of 2015, and will provide an interim solution whilst further modifications are made to deliver the Merlin HC Mk4.

With the transfer of ownership of the green Merlin from light blue to dark, it is important to wait two marching paces to appreciate the colossal efforts and tireless hard work that has taken place, and will continue, at every level. We have grown both as individuals and as a force. Personnel on both sides of the handover/ takeover can look back with pride and call upon the experience they have gained during transition to help them wherever the future may take them.
An Army aviation regiment has celebrated the achievements of its soldiers in Afghanistan.

Regiment Army Air Corps (Reg AAC), which is based at Wattisham Flying Station in Suffolk and operates the Apache attack helicopter, held a medal parade (13th November) to mark the return of its final contingent of troops from Helmand Province. Lord Tollemache, Lieutenant Colonel of Suffolk, presented Operational Service Medals to 54 soldiers from 662 Squadron, which returned last week as British combat operations in Helmand ended.

Praising the success of the tour, Lord Tollemache said: “662 Squadron has made a quite extraordinary contribution, undertaking five tours over the course of the campaign in Afghanistan. It is therefore fitting that they should be the Squadron entrusted with protecting Camp Bastion as coalition ground forces extracted and handed over the security of Helmand Province to the forces extracted and handed over the Camp Bastion as coalition ground forces.

Major Charlie Hillman, officer commanding 3 Regiment AAC’s Commanding Officer, said: “This parade has been an occasion for us to come together as a Regiment to welcome our soldiers home and recognise their important contribution to operations in Afghanistan this year. The Apache has again proved to be a highly capable and versatile aircraft, which is to the credit of our soldiers, both Regular and from the Reserve, working in the air and on the ground, many of whom have completed several tours.”

As well as precision strikes in support of ground troops, the Apache’s role in Afghanistan was to escort helicopters and land convoys and provide a near all-weather surveillance capability. Apaches from 3 Regt AAC have flown approximately 29,000 hours in support of operations, with 662 Sqn having completed five tours since 2007.

Major Charlie Hillman, officer commanding 662 Sqn, said: “It was a great honour to command 662 Squadron as we took the Apache ‘over the finishing line’ in Afghanistan, especially as I had served as a pilot in the Squadron’s first tour in 2007. This tour was comparatively quiet in terms of operational flying due to the reduction in ISAF troops on the ground, with the Afghan National Security Forces in the lead. We were on call to provide assistance if required but we were mostly busy protecting Camp Bastion and were the last to leave. "Each of my soldiers can be proud of their contribution to this final tour and it’s great to be back to see our families, who have been really well looked after by the welfare team. Among soldiers receiving a campaign medal, awarded to soldiers after their first tour, was Airtrooper Owen Jones, a class 2 Apache groundcrew soldier. The 19-year-old from Buckley in north Wales said: "It has been a proud occasion to receive my campaign medal alongside the friends I served with in Afghanistan. As groundcrew our role is to refuel, rearm and move the Apache on the ground so it is ready for operational missions. The tour was a great opportunity to do my job for real and put into practice the skills I’ve learnt since joining the Army."

Airtrooper Mike Colton was one of four Reservists from 6 Regiment Army Air Corps to deploy with 662 Sqn. The 31-year-old from Taunton, who works in the security industry, said: “The tour was a really good experience and we all worked really well together as a team. ‘I’d always wanted to join the Army when I was younger, but life and my civilian job took over. Suddenly realised four years ago that I was only getting older and had to do something about it, so I joined the Reserves. It’s been a different challenge and I’ve learnt some interesting new practical skills, as well as developing my confidence and teamwork.’

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**OPSHADER**

**47 AIR DESPATCH SQUADRON RLC**

Written By: Cpl Chris Kent, Dispatch Crew Commander

On 7th August the Sqn received a call activating two Air Despatch Crews from our Very High Readiness (VHR) National Standby rotation.

After initial briefs at the Sqn and a full deployment check, the team was poised until the final command was given to deploy. Once we received the order, we returned to the Sqn and commenced work to ready loads from UK Aid for despatch. Intense activity followed with support from across the whole Sqn to rig and prepare air freight to accompany us. The aid wasn’t initially ready to despatch, so we began configuring loads and individually filling water containers, which took considerable time. Hard graft and good planning allowed us to prepare 12 tonnes for initial despatch.

I would take the lead as Despatch Crew Commander on that first drop onto Sinjar Mountain DZ. Once rigging was complete, we loaded the aircraft. Working with RAF Load Masters and ground engineers frantically preparing the aircraft for imminent deployment (complete with media coverage), we were soon on the line of Departure and ready to go. The remainder of the crews joined us at the aircraft for the 6½ flight to RAF Akrotiri which was to be the Forward Mounting Base (FMB) throughout. Arriving at RAF Akrotiri, non-essential equipment was offloaded and we commenced final checks on the 12 X Container Delivery System (CDS) loads for the airdrop that night. We sat about centralising all the UK Aid pallets, the amount arriving on Antonovs, C-17s and Voyager aircraft was astonishing.

It hour arrived and the crew deployed with weapons and body armour on the two hour flight to the Iraqi border. We opened the Para doors to begin Door Observing, checking for small arms fire, RPG’s and other ground threats. With ten mins to P-HR, we prepared the load, pulling pins to make the load live. On ‘GREEN ON’, the load was despatched with the crew quickly following it out and getting eyes on to record the 100% parachute deployment success rate. We re-commenced Door Observing until safety cleared the flight path.

On return, the rest of the AO Deployment were just getting up after four hours sleep for another days vigils. Reinforcements from 47 AD to sustain the operational build up arrived from 47 AD to sustain the operational build up. The tour was a great opportunity to do my job for real and put into practice the skills I’ve learnt since joining the Army.”

The crew flew an additional two sorties despatching 16 and 12 tonnes respectively to thousands of displaced refugees.

Personnel continued to arrive as the build up of forces continued and the Tomedo force moved in also. There was substantial media attention for interviews and the Defence Minister visited to see the Joint UK military effort for humanitarian relief. As we entered an operational pause, we enjoyed some much needed relief and downtime, recuperating after a hectic period. Reflecting on what we had achieved, we were all exceptionally proud to be able to directly contribute to the welfare and conditions of those most vulnerable and in desperate need on the ground. Eventually the operation was tagged a success and we moved back to the UK to resume our VHR National Standby commitments for the next operation - wherever in the world it will be.

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**APACHE REGIMENT MARKS ITS FINAL HOMECOMING FROM AFGHANISTAN**

3 Regiment AAC’s Commanding Officer Lieutenant Colonel Mike Neville said: “This parade has been an occasion for us to come together as a Regiment to welcome our soldiers home and recognise their important contribution to operations in Afghanistan this year. The Apache has again proved to be a highly capable and versatile aircraft, which is to the credit of our soldiers, both Regular and from the Reserve, working in the air and on the ground, many of whom have completed several tours.”

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Eleven members of The Royal Irish Regiment deployed to Burundi in East Africa to assist the preparation of the 30th Battalion, Burundi National Defence Force (BNDF), for their one year tour in Somalia as part of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) during the period 29th September to 10th October.

The training mission was led by the Regiment’s Army Reserve Battalion, 2nd Battalion The Royal Irish Regiment (2 R IRISH); with support from three members of its sister Regular Army 1st Battalion The Royal Irish Regiment (1 R IRISH). This deployment to East Africa underlines the utility of the modern reservist, and the solid reputation they have gained in the British Army and increasingly, with foreign forces. 2 R IRISH are no strangers to East Africa. In the last three years the Battalion has deployed ten training teams to Uganda, Burundi and Tanzania; four of these were to Burundi alone.

The deployment of 1 R IRISH and 2 R IRISH in this joint Short Term Training Team (STTT) confirms the success of the pairing of the Reserve and Regular Battalions. The working relationships forged between the Battalions during operations are now being used to great effect to support STTTs such as this.

The wealth of experiences that the different members of the team, both regular and reservist, bring to the task is a real positive. Ideas can be discussed and viewed from different perspectives to give a more rounded way forward and, more importantly, suitable strategies for working with the Burundi soldiers.

It was also an opportunity for those conducting the training to develop personally and professionally. Sgt Stewart from 1 R IRISH said, “Working under and with 2 R IRISH adds a different dimension to training. They are hugely experienced in Africa and they can think about problems differently to produce results best suited to the local military solutions. Working with 2 R IRISH and training the Burundians was a fresh and new challenge that I relished.”

Sergeant Richard Aicken from Ballymena gave his impression of the deployment and the Burundian soldiers he had worked with. “This has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my professional career as a member of the Army Reserve. The positive attitude, enthusiasm and willingness of the Burundian soldiers to learn have greatly added to the satisfaction.”

The deployment experience was expanded on by Sgt Ghisletta, serving with B Company 1 R IRISH, “Burundians are a friendly people with a great sense of humour. The country is very clean, and when the team received language training in Kurundi, it really broke down the barriers.”

Not only were the team a dynamic force of regular and reservist, it also included five Danish Officers, specialising in CMIC and C-IED, one American Officer and a Sgt as well as a South African civilian team advising the Battalion on policing TTPs. This diverse and multinational Team built a fantastic working environment which aided the development of the Burundi forces in their effort to help stabilise Somalia.

Over the course of two weeks the team delivered a training package, with the initial part concentrating on basic level patrolling skills by day and night, FOB routine and C-IED training. The culmination of the training was a three day exercise stitching together all the lessons taught. During the final exercise the commanders had the opportunity to not only practice with their soldiers the skills learnt, but also to plan and execute their own ideas.

Initially some team members thought the motivation and quality of the local troops might have been to a low standard as their average wage is approximately only $60 per month and they often go for periods without pay. When the Burundians are in Somalia on operations, they receive about 15 times that salary per month. However, they have shown a pride in their soldiering that was both impressive and encouraging. They were keen, willing and showed a genuine interest to learn and develop their soldiering. They ask questions and challenged the lessons, which adds an interesting dynamic from a teaching point of view. One such question was during the FOB sentry lesson whilst explaining that the sentry would provide early warning and over watch; a puzzled looking young soldier asked through an interpreter “what about when the sentry is up there asleep?”

The British Council, especially Lydia Maxwell, have done a fantastic job training the military interpreters who assisted the team during the training. They are instrumental in the delivery of lessons and forming a good instructor-interpreter bond early, which was a vital contributing factor to the success of the team. Over the past 18 months of sporadic language training (Burundi Officers also have their military training and other studies to complete) they have developed an understanding of British language and sarcasm, however, some did struggle with the accent of Sgt Aicken and the ‘jokes’ told by Sgt Ghisletta!

The training culminated in a ceremony for the soldiers of 30 Battalion BNDF on Friday 10th October. The soldiers now await a date to deploy for their year long tour of Somalia’s Sector 5.
As Op HERRICK ends, now is a good opportunity to also reflect on the achievements of the JHC Logistics and Engineering Support personnel, other JHC staff branches, key MoD enablers and industry who have supported or deployed from JHC.

You will not find it difficult to prove that battles, campaigns and even wars, have been won or lost primarily because of logistics.

Dwight D. Eisenhower

Within the first six months of deployment, JHC aircraft (Apache, Chinook and Lynx) had already transported 23,342 passengers, and over 1,000,000kg of freight. In the first year alone JHC aircraft flew over 10,385 hours, supported by the suppliers who satisfied more than 400 “aircraft on ground” demands for spares. To achieve the flying hours in the first year, Tactical Supply Wing personnel provided the 5,963,057 litres of fuel required, more than the volume of two Olympic sized swimming pools.

As soon as they were deployed, JHC Logistic and Engineering Support personnel were enabling a wide range of operations by JHC aircraft, from the insertion of US personnel to secure the area of a US Apache crash to a Joint Personnel Recovery extracting key personnel who had concealed themselves in the hills. The operational tempo continually increased with JHC helicopters supporting casualty evacuations, reconnaissance missions, insertion and extraction of troops, support to troop contact, resupply and the extraction of those killed in action, both UK and allies.

Work undertaken by JHC aircraft was extensive and during the deployment over 720,200 passengers were transported, over 24,808,500 kg of freight was moved and more than 13,380 casualties extracted. These efforts required over 125 million litres of fuel to be stored and pumped by Tactical Supply Wing.

The logistics and engineering element of any military endeavour is frequently overlooked despite Eisenhower’s words above. Joint Helicopter Command’s contribution in Afghanistan over nearly nine years has been underpinned by an impressive logistic and engineering effort. The statistics below speak for themselves and JHC’s Logistics and Engineering teams across the Command have delivered magnificently.
Simon Jenkins of Nationwide says: ‘For many leaving the service the temptation to be your own boss is tempting, but what do they really mean?’

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The mission utilised a combined allied force of over 40,000 airborne troops. Operation Market Garden was ultimately unsuccessful and resulted in heavy losses to the Allies with around 17,000 soldiers losing their lives.

Op Market Garden is important in Army Air Corps history because of the actions of the Glider Pilot Regiment. During the 17th to 19th September 1944 over 1,300 pilots landed in the Netherlands carrying troops and equipment, of these, 229 were killed and 469 wounded or taken prisoner.

For the 70th anniversary of Op Market Garden, the officers and Soldiers of 1 Regiment Army Air Corps visited Arnhem for the commemoration. Greeting the veterans of the Glider Pilot Regiment for the first time I felt very humbled.

These men put in an incredible effort 70 years ago and come back year after year to pay respects to their fallen comrades. The Dutch people were very welcoming; we were invited in for tea and coffee before the parade started and it was a welcome surprise to see how well educated the local children were on Operation Market Garden.

One of the veterans, Sgt Arthur Shackleton told me about Elshout and its significance. He pointed out a small mill 70 years later in his late 90’s who supplied the Allies with rations and shelter in Elshout during Op Market Garden. Dutch civilians had hidden the Allied soldiers in their homes for up to a month while the Nazis where looking for them, taking an incredible risk to help our troops.

We attended a battlefield tour by members of the SNCO Command Leadership and Management Course who did a great job of explaining the events that took place. We visited the LZs and DZs used for the initial drops, Col John Frost Bridge and the crossing point over the Lower Rhine used in the evacuation. It was a great experience to stand in the actual positions and imagine what had happened 70 years before.

The memorial at the Oosterbeek Airborne War Cemetery was particularly moving; over 10,000 people were in attendance, as well as numerous camera crews and news reporters. It was the biggest memorial to be held during the commemorations and the sheer volume of people involved was quite overwhelming.

Personally, it was another great opportunity to see and speak to the veterans, having the privilege of escorting a Polish veteran to the front of the colourful parade. He told me about his service with the Polish Army during the war and his service with the British Army in the post war period.

The event culminated in an Army Air Corps and Glider Pilot Regiment Dinner at the Har Haus Hotel. It was another great opportunity to talk about the events of the past few days and mingle with the veterans. The reality is that the number of veterans gets less each year, and the chance to speak to the amazing men of the Glider Pilot Regiment is becoming more difficult; it therefore is a real honour to have met them.

The British Army’s rapid reaction force. Therefore is a real honour to have met them. It is important that we remember those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice. It is important that we join with the community to mark Remembrance and it will be a proud, but poignant moment, to represent the military during the silence before the match at Portman Road.

Personnel from the Commando Helicopter Force currently in northern Norway on the annual Ex CLOCKWORK detachment held a Service of Remembrance at the Royal Norwegian Air Force base in Bardufoss.

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Members of the Norwegian Air Force and Army joined CHF for the parade and service, which took place on the 11th November at 11 o’clock. Two children from the local school were given the honour of laying the wreath on behalf of the CHF personnel and members of the Fleet Air Arm Association also laid their own poppies.

After the service, the Norwegian military personnel, the veterans and the school children were invited to join CHF back on the Clockwork base for tea and cakes and treated to traditional British fish and chips for lunch. The parade was organised and commanded by CPO Steve Bright, Clockwork Senior Maintenance Rating. This is the second year the Norwegians have taken part in the parade which has become an established event continuing the tradition of British and Norwegian forces working together and building strong bonds.
Belgian city of Ypres.

memorial services in the

took part in Armistice Day

Station Yeovilton in Somerset,
based at the Royal Naval Air

Commando Helicopter Force,

Royal Navy personnel from

Written By: Miss Kerry Randall

SERVICE

DAY MEMORIAL

ARMISTICE

847 NAS

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DAY MEMORIAL

SERVICE

IN YPRES

T his year’s memorial service held at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing was all the more poignant as this year marked the 100th anniversary since the outbreak of the First World War. A detachment of 14 personnel from 847 NASparaded through the City of Ypres, the scene of some of the Great War’s worst fighting, before joining representatives from other members of the Armed Forces, Police & Fire Brigadepers, The Royal British Legion and members of the local community in paying their respects to all those who gave their lives in the line of duty.

The Menin Gate Memorial marks the starting point for one of the main roads leading out of Ypres that led Allied soldiers to the front line. Inscribed with the words “To the armies of the British Empire who stood here from 1914 to 1918 and to those of their dead who have no known graves” the memorial commemorates the names of 54,896 Commonwealth servicemen who died on the Ypres Salient but whose bodies have never been identified or found.

POAET Thomas Fox who laid a wreath at the Menin Gate on behalf of 847 NAS said, “Taking part in these centenary commemorations has been a humbling experience, coupled with a sense of pride in representing 847 NAS and the Royal Navy on such a prestigious occasion.”

On completion of the service the squadron visited Tyne Cot Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery situated on the outskirts of Passendale West Flanders, it is the largest cemetery for commonwealth forces in the world for any war and contains the graves of 11,954 of which 8,367 are unnamed. During the visit to Tyne Cot, members of the 847 NAS contingent laid poppy crosses at the gravesides of members of the Royal Naval Reserve who are buried in the cemetery and alongside 17,000 other Royal Naval personnel who gave their lives on the Western Front during the Great War.

The final service of the day took place in Ypres where every evening since 1928 the last post has been played under the Menin Gate. On transfer to the Royal Flying Corps in 1915 so that he could join up with his brothers who were already serving in France, he earned his wings on 1st October 1917 and returned to France.

Lt Geoffrey Witton MC served with the Sherwood Foresters and upon his death in 1978 his name was commemorated on a brass plaque and placed in St Georges Church Ypres where he saw service during the First World War.

AET Witton’s other great grandfather, John Edwin Carrall, lied about his age in 1915 so that he could join up with his brothers who were already serving in France. He served firstly as a Private in the Royal Fusiliers before being selected for Officer training and returning to France. While fighting at Oopp Wood, near Arras in France (1917) he offered to take the place of a friend to deliver a message up the lina. John Edwin Carrall was never seen again and no remains were ever found; his name is remembered on memorials in York Minster, York Cemetery Memorial, the Arras Memorial, the Opypp Village memorial and in the church and school that he attended. He was 19 years old when he was killed.

AET James Witton said, “It was a particularly moving experience following in the footsteps of my great grandfathers as they had given so much so unselfishly in the service of their country.” He added, “It was a proud moment for me to visit St Georges Church in Ypres and my great grandfather Geoffrey Witton’s memorial plaque, to place a poppy beside it like my grandfather and father had done before me was a moving moment.”

For two of 847 Naval Air Squadron’s Air Engineering Technicians the trip to Belgium was all the more moving as they followed in the footsteps of their great grandfathers, who 100 years before them made the same journey under very different circumstances to see service on the front line.

AET Robert Harrop’s great grandfather, William Harrop, served in the Royal Pioneers during the early part of World War I he was awarded the Military Medal in December 1916 for actions in “no man’s land”. He was later mentioned in dispatches.

On transfer to the Royal Flying Corps as an observer/gunner aboard a D.H9 of 104 Squadron, he became a World War I flying ace with five aerial victories, he was later shot down and captured but escaped. William Harrop went on to become a Squadron Leader serving his country again in World War II.

AET Robert Harrop said, “Going back to where my great grandfather fought is a huge privilege and gives a chance to show my respect for all the brave servicemen and women who died in the Great War is an honour.”

AET James Witton had two great grandfathers who fought on the Western Front during the First World War. 2nd Lt Geoffrey Witton MC served with the Sherwood Foresters and upon his death in 1978 his name was commemorated on a brass plaque and placed in St Georges Church Ypres where he saw service during the First World War.

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You could be in the Algarve, relaxing in the sun...
On the morning of 13th October 2014 aircraft from No. 22 Course of the Merlin Operational Conversion Flight, 28 Squadron RAF, embarked on a trip across Europe to deliver three Merlin Mk3s to Cyprus.

The aim of the trip was twofold; to deliver three Merlin Mk3s to RAF Akrotiri for the overseas detachment again the following day with onward trip to environmental training exercises in the middle east and for the aircrew on the course to experience operating the aircraft abroad.

The morning of the departure had been preceded by three months of meticulous planning, from preparing the maps for the 2,000 mile flight to booking accommodation, transport and the diplomatic clearances to fly through the airspace of five different nations. However, like most plans it failed to survive first contact with both the weather and aircraft serviceability which delayed the departure. Two of the three aircraft departed from RAF Benson on schedule to embark on a picturesque flight to the Greek Islands. Unfortunately bad fortune struck the third aircraft once again later that day as it went unserviceable following shutting down for a refuel in Corfu. The resulting engineering work determined that a new engine was needed which would have to be flown from the UK, all but ending hopes of making up for lost time and reaching the final destination of RAF Akrotiri within striking distance the following day as scheduled.

The final day of the transit went without incident and following a refuel in Rhodes the third aircraft landed at RAF Akrotiri at around 1500 local on the 16th only a matter of hours behind schedule despite the multiple delays over the four days. Not only was the original aim of delivering the aircraft (two out of three) achieved but valuable experience at operating the aircraft in different and challenging environments was gained by all of the aircrew on 22 Course. The aircrew got the opportunity to gain valuable “hands on” experience with the far more complex and capable avionics suite and many of the “Junglies” from Sea King Mk44 backgrounds were suitably impressed with the performance of the aircraft in its ability to comfortably cover long distances in a timely manner. It is without doubt that all involved will be quick to volunteer to take the new “Jungle” aircraft abroad at the next available opportunity!

COMMANDO-HELICOPTER FORCE

Commando Helicopter Force (CHF) currently consists of three Naval Air Squadrons (NAS); 846 NAS and 28 Sqn Royal Air Force at RAF Benson, with 846 NAS being the Royal Navy counterpart of 28 Sqn, RAF. It is deployed from NAS to support amphibious assault operations, with 846 NAS having been deployed to the Joint Helicopter Force (JHF) to protect Keevil Airfield, which was home to Apache, Lynx, Merlin and Chinook helicopters of the Joint Helicopter Command, flying in support of infantry units. JHF is designed to provide defence against low-flying helicopters and aircraft to a range of five and a half kilometres, guided by passive sensors that give no warning to the enemy that they are being targeted. It fires three tungsten darts at three and a half times the speed of sound, designed to knock down targets through the force of an impact.

During the exercise, Apache attack helicopters, operated by 4 Regiment Army Air Corps, carried out a mock attack on the airfield. Bombardier Aaron Edwards, 23 from Blackpool, said: “Our equipment is primarily designed to target attack helicopters and the Apache is recognised as the most sophisticated aircraft of that type, so this has been a perfect opportunity to train against each other.” The Apaches were flying at low level trying to attack the airfield without being detected and engaged, and our aim was to target the aircraft before it could strike. I would say that it finished 2:1 to us, but I’m sure they would score it differently!”

12 Battery, based at Thorney Island in Hampshire, has recently taken on the role of providing air defence to 16 Air Assault Brigade, which maintains a battlegroup at high readiness to deploy anywhere in the world to conduct the full range of military operations.

Captain Glyn Forster, the unit’s operations officer, said: “We are the only battery in the Army providing light role air defence and, below us, the only defence against air attacks is a soldier with a machine gun.”

“This is the first time we have deployed on an exercise that has air defence worked into the scenario. Since the Falklands, the British Army has not had to deal with a credible air threat on operations and we are looking to redevelop the air defence capability, both our own skills and the understanding in other units of the threat and how to work with us. “Currently we can deploy by helicopter and are working towards an airborne capability, so we would be able to parachute in and provide immediate air defence on a drop zone.”
Ex ASKARI LYNX (Ex AS) was the 669 Sqn Group (Gp) element of Ex ASCARI STORM (Ex AS) which saw three Lx Mk9A deployed to Kenya in support of 2 PARA BG.

The Sqn deployed on Ex AL ahead of the main BG in order to complete desert environmental training and ensure the Sqn Gp was at a suitable start state to support Ex AS. Unfortunately Ex AS was postponed but the decision was made for 669 Sqn to remain in place and conduct its own training, in line with the original exercise dates. A short and intensive planning period provided an opportunity to re-calibrate expectations and an ambitious collective training (CT) 1-2 plan was drawn-up, including ground LFTT, air to ground ranges and intensive ground training serials. Incorporated into this plan was a complete Sqn Gp deployment, Ex ASKARI TEMPEST (Ex AT), Judgemental Training (JT) and Army Aviation Standards assessments. This required the Sqn planning team to liaise closely with the BG and reconnoiter aviation operations in the contingency operating environment (COE). The new exercise was formed of three distinct phases:

Ex ASKARI STORM (Ex AS). Support to 2 PARA BG including recces, ISTAR tasks and LIFT as well as education in the form of Air Skills days. This was conducted largely from Laikipia Air Base (East) (LAB(E)).

Ex ASKARI TEMPEST (Ex AT). A full Sqn Gp tactical exercise deployment in field conditions. This was conducted at various locations within APTA.

Judgemental Training (JT). A five day package delivered by Air Manouvre Planning, Training and Advisory Team (AMPTAT), largely in the low-level environment and also in red-illumin conditions in mountainous terrain at 9000’ DA. This was conducted on the Lolldaiga Training Area (LDG).

In training for contingency operations, the transition to the non-permissive FCOC environment proved challenging and highlighted a variety of key learning points, from which future training will be moulded in order to establish sound TTs and SOPs at the tactical level. Likely future operations will no doubt require the versatility and flexibility of Light Utility Helicopters combined with ISTAR and ABCCC capabilities. The training achieved has enabled the Sqn Gp to enhance its capability with regard to a broad spectrum of tasks that may be required in the future, including under-slung loads and heli-assisting as well as fires and ISTAR. With an eye on the future and the potential to be deployed to a non-permissive air environment, future exercises may build on the baseline of capability achieved by increasing the IR and RF threat to one resembling a near-peer adversary, ultimately providing the Army with a better trained, more agile and robust asset.

The end state was a Sqn Gp, fully desert trained and having provided the field army fires, ISTAR, trooping and under-slung load tasks as well as real-time force protection. This was achieved, at times, operating from the Kenyan bush in field conditions. The exercise was a success and the output was a light utility helicopter sqn validated at CT2 and prepared for contingency. The lessons of Op HERRICK are not to be forgotten. Indeed the delivery of appropriate, timely and directed aviation support to ground forces has proved its worth time and again. However, in a battlespace that will not only see the air environment potentially contested, but also lack the kind of established support infrastructure we have come to know and depend upon, we must find a way to deliver these effects with greater flexibility and through deeper integration with the end user.
APACHES PREPARE FOR FUTURE OPERATIONS

From facing the threat of air defence missiles to refuelling from the back of a Hercules transport aircraft, the soldiers who fly and maintain the Apache attack helicopter have been training for the next operational challenges.

Regiment Army Air Corps (RAAC) has been deployed in command of an Aviation for Exercise Wessex Storm. The unit deployed in command of an Aviation Task Force of nine helicopters and some 250 soldiers, controlling Apache, Lynx, Merlin and Chinook flying in support of infantry training on the ground.

The exercise is a key milestone in the shift for 4 Regt AAC from operating the Apache in Afghanistan to preparing for future operations anywhere in the world as part of the British Army’s rapid reaction forces. The three Apaches on the exercise were from 4 Regt AAC 444 Squadron, which deployed on a four-month tour of Afghanistan at the beginning of the year.

Major Simon Wilsey, Officer Commanding 664 Sqn, said: “The difference between this exercise and Afghanistan is striking. Camp Bastion was a comfortable place to operate from with stable work patterns, but the operations we are training for now is very different.

In Afghanistan, the Apache crew had to refuel helicopters from a fuel bladder in its hold. Airtrooper Michael Moran, 28 from Southampton, said: “I deployed to Afghanistan this year and this exercise has been a very different style of working. This is the future – we don’t know where we’ll be going and what logistic support there will be, so it’s important we can operate tactically and in austere conditions.

“When we arrived we had to set up our living and working accommodation, thinking about being able to defend ourselves as well as operating the helicopters.”

Exercise Wessex Storm saw the British Army’s airborne and armoured reaction forces come together, with the fast and light forces of 10 Air Assault Brigade training with slower but more powerful troops from 12 Armoured Infantry Brigade. It placed troops in a scenario where the airborne infantry had carried out the theatre entry phase of an operation and cleared the way for heavier mechanised forces to take over.

Company, 3rd Battalion The Parachute Regiment carried out an airborne assault on Salisbury Plain as part of Exercise WEEX STORM.

Some 100 paratroopers jumped from two RAF C-130 Hercules flying at 800 feet onto the Fox Covert drop zone. The Coldstream-based troops jumped in Overhead Assault Mode, wearing body armour and webbing with weapons and daysacks strapped to their legs.

The soldiers regrouped on the drop zone and sent out reconnaissance patrols before a night attack to capture the mock village at Copelhill Down. After fighting building-by-building and street-by-street to secure the position, they defended it until relieved by the mechanised infantry of 1st Battalion The Scots Guards that night.

Major Bob McKay, Officer Commanding C Coy, said: “As we move on from Afghanistan and prepare for the next operational challenges, we are going back to basics in our training and focussing on our core skills as airborne infantry. This particular mission is exactly what The Parachute Regiment was created to do, and it can be found many times in our history – to parachute in, capture a strategic objective by surprise and then hold it until heavier forces can relieve us.”

“This exercise has been an interesting opportunity to work with the Scots Guards and understand the different way they operate as mechanised infantry, how we can work together and what we can learn from each other.”

The parachute jump was an opportunity for the paratroopers to practise a key skill for their role in the Air Assault Task Force (AATF), which is held at high readiness to deploy anywhere in the world to conduct the full range of military operations.

Private James Newson, 19 from Grimby, said: “An overhead assault jump puts us on the ground in a matter of minutes and, if the situation demands it, we would be ready to start fighting as we land. I was the 17th man to jump out of the second aircraft on the first wave, and it was a very impressive sight to see all the parachutes in the sky. Anyone who says they’re not nervous before a jump is lying but, for me, once I’m out of the door training takes over and I’m thinking about the landing and what I need to do on the ground to achieve the mission.”

Exercise Wessex Storm saw the British Army’s airborne and armoured reaction forces come together, with the fast and light forces of 16 Air Assault Brigade training with slower but more powerful troops from 12 Armoured Infantry Brigade. It placed troops in a scenario where the airborne infantry had carried out the theatre entry phase of an operation and cleared the way for heavier mechanised forces to take over.

Further Reading

The Apache Helicopter entered service with the British Army in 2001 and is flown on rotation by 3 and 4 Regiments Army Air Corps. The two units provided a continuous presence in Afghanistan from 2006 to 2014. Operation UNIFIED PROTECTOR. Second line maintenance on operations is provided by the Army’s Rapid Reaction Force (ARRF). Aircrew have been presented with the challenge of creating a functional airfield from what was an empty field when we arrived.”

A key test for ground crew was running an Air Landed Aircraft Refuelling Point (ALARP), which saw an RAF C-130 Hercules land at night to refuel helicopters from a fuel bladder in its hold. Airtrooper Michael Moran, 28 from Southampton, said: “I deployed to Afghanistan this year and this exercise has been a very different style of working. This is the future – we don’t know where we’ll be going and what logistic support there will be, so it’s important we can operate tactically and in austere conditions.

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Training

JUNGLES ON EXERCISE ALBANIAN LION

Two Sea King Mk4 helicopters and 52 personnel of 845 Naval Air Squadron deployed on Exercise Albanian Lion, along with two full companies from 40 Commando Royal Marines, for what will be one of the last overseas deployments of this type for the venerable ‘King’ of the Junglies.

Written By: Miss Kerry Randall

Exercise Albanian Lion is the first phase of the Cougar deployment. Cougar is the UK Armed Forces major overseas amphibious exercise, taking place annually and involving a significant UK task group and several partner nations. It has also contributed to the UK’s strategic response to global contingencies. In 2011 it provided maritime attack in Libya and in 2013 humanitarian aid in the Philippines.

Initially, A Flight, 845 NAS conducted helicopter work-up serials with RFA Lyme Bay, HMS Bulwark, HMS Ocean and RFA Waveknight in order to deliver training with machine-guns and mortars. The exercise was also supported by a Chinook helicopter from RAF Odiham. The training is a key opportunity for the reservists to hone their skills as an element of the UK’s very high readiness formation, the Air Assault Task Force. The AATF sits at a very high level of preparation to go anywhere in the world at short notice to carry out the full spectrum of operations from war-fighting right through to stabilization.

Lt Steve Pearce, 845 NAS engineer, said, “The flying has been fantastic. With deployments like this, we Junglies are renewing our expertise as the amphibious aviation specialists. Operating a battlefield helicopter at Sea is uniquely demanding: there is no greater feeling than finding your ship in the dark after a successful mission and landing on a rolling and pitching deck.”

Exercise Albanian Lion culminated in a simulated large-scale amphibious assault in Albania. The detachment was able to provide round-the-clock availability of both aircraft for tasking. Working closely with RAF Chinook crews, operating from the capital Tirana, two companies of elite Royal Marine Commandos were swiftly delivered from the Task Group to their objectives in two major assaults over a four day period.

All of this was achieved with a detailed tactical overlay that effectively reflected a modern complex battlefield, all planned, controlled and conducted from the impressive Command and Control hub onboard HMS Bulwark. The detachment saw the first Jungle use of a synthetic Temporary Aircraft Shelter (TAS), which had been erected on the flight deck of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary Lyme Bay. The innovative installation of this simple temporary structure greatly improved the flexibility and maintenance of organic helo operations onboard.

Another reason for the exceptional level of serviceability was in no small part thanks to the ingenuity and hard work of the 845 NAS engineers. Lt Marc Stone, Detachment Air Engineering Officer, said: “Our ability to operate and maintain two Sea King Mk4s from an unfamiliar platform whilst achieving the high flying and serviceability rates seen throughout Exercise Albanian Lion bears testament to the adaptability and ingenuity of the embarked Flight.”

With Albanian Lion complete, and the aircraft having flown an impressive 80 hours, the Task Group heads South through Suez. The period sees the flight working with a German, US and French ships. Capt Jonathan Huxley, Commanding Officer RFA Lymebay said, “This is the first time that a detachment of two Sea King Mk4s have been embarked in a Landing Ship Dock Auxiliary (LSDA) with a TAS. The 845 NAS Det have worked hard with Lyme Bay ship’s company to develop the procedures necessary for the squadron to deliver their full range of operational capabilities to the Task Force. Exercise Albanian Lion during the first stage of the deployment provided an ideal opportunity for the squadron to demonstrate that they were a significant force multiplier for the Amphibious Task Force. As the ships of COUGAR 14 head east through Suez, 845 Det are more than ready to deliver any operational capability that may be asked of them.”

The Sea King has seen extensive use in every major British theatre over the last 35 years. The next Cougar deployment for the Junglies will be with the Merlin, recently transferred to the Royal Navy from the Royal Air Force. 

Rapid reaction reservists go into action

Airborne Reservists from across the country have been training for their rapid reaction role within 16 Air Assault Brigade.

Exercise Black Jaguar, is run by 4th Battalion The Parachute Regiment, the Para’s Army Reserve battalion. Troops from the battalion’s different companies in Edinburgh, Glasgow, London, Liverpool and Newcastle Upon Tyne converged on the rugged terrain of Otterburn in Northumbria to conduct live firing training with machine-guns and mortars.

Lt Marc Stone, Detachment Air Engineering Officer, said, “Now that we have the same equipment as the regulars, it makes the training far more realistic. Some of our guys are on five days notice to move which, as a civilian, is a real challenge. We are the only reserve infantry unit tasked with supporting two regular battalions at the same time. We pair with 2 and 3 PARA as they alternate between being the lead infantry unit in the Air Assault Task Force. We have to maintain our connections with the regular units because if they go anywhere, we’ll go with them.

“For this exercise, we have gone right back to the basics. We are making sure that the guys’ specialist airborne infantry skills, weapon drills and ability to use the latest night vision equipment are up to scratch so they can operate side by side with their regular counterparts.”

Among the soldiers taking part was Private Carl Toddan, a theatre technician from Salford who joined 4 PARA earlier this year. The 27-year-old said: “The challenges of the Para was something I always wanted to do and 4 PARA’s reputation appealed to me a lot. You’re trained as a regular in your spare time so I’ve got the best of both worlds now - I work full time and I’m training to be a Para.”

Airborne Reservists from across the country have been training for their rapid reaction role within 16 Air Assault Brigade.
EXERCISE JEBELBLADE

Written By: Miss Kerry Randall

With the dust having barely settled after the handover of the Merlin HC3 from the Royal Air Force to the Royal Navy, the reformed 846 Naval Air Squadron embarked on Exercise Jebel Blade to complete Desert Environmental training for both aircrew and engineers. The aim of the exercise was to train the crews to operate in the hot, dusty conditions that prevail in the desert. The main problem with landing a helicopter in sand is that the downwash whips up a cloud of dust just at the crucial moment before touching down; if the cloud is dense enough, the pilot can lose his visual references outside and become disorientated. Here is a specific method to landing in the desert, which mainly involves keeping the aircraft ahead and outside of the ‘lost cloud’ right up until the last moment of landing. Despite most of the CHF aircrew experience of desert flying in Afghanistan and Iraq the bigger, heavier but more aerodynamic Merlin flies quite differently to the Sea King and so many old Sea King habits had to be unlearned and new techniques assimilated. Once again, the remaining RAF aircrew were on hand to provide continuity and advice as the force builds collective experience on its new steeds. Only once suitably competent at landings and underslung loads, both by day and night, can aircrew be considered environmentally qualified.

As Ex Jebel Blade concluded, sixteen pilots and sixteen aircrewmen had renewed their environmental qualifications. They then began preparing to deploy for a week in support of 3 Commando Brigade, on Ex Jebel Dagger based in a FOX 20 miles to the North of their training base. All the CHF personnel are extremely excited about the return to what they do best; supporting ‘Royal’ as they train the crews to operate in the hard desert environment which mainly involves keeping the aircraft ahead and outside of the ‘lost cloud’ right up until the last moment of landing. Despite most of the CHF aircrew experience of desert flying in Afghanistan and Iraq the bigger, heavier but more aerodynamic Merlin flies quite differently to the Sea King and so many old Sea King habits had to be unlearned and new techniques assimilated. Once again, the remaining RAF aircrew were on hand to provide continuity and advice as the force builds collective experience on its new steeds. Only once suitably competent at landings and underslung loads, both by day and night, can aircrew be considered environmentally qualified.

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A Sea King Mk4 from 845 Naval Air Squadron of the Commando Helicopter Force seized a rare opportunity to visit and train with the French Naval Ship, FS DIXMUDE.

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written by: Captain Hannah Shergold, Flight Commander 672 Squadron, 9 Regiment AAC

in May, 672 sqn deployed to Canada to support the entire BATUS exercise season under the JHC exercise name EX PRAIRIE LYNX.

utilising the existing 29 (BATUS) airframe infrastructure, the deployment consisted of four individual exercises delivering aviation support to the R WELSH, KRH, QRL and 1 YORKS battle groups. To facilitate this, the sqn was split into two detachments, the first covering ex PRAIRIE STORM 1 and 2 (May to August) and following a relief in place the second detachment supported Ex PRAIRIE STORM 3 and 4 culminating in November. this was the first time that Lynx MK9A has deployed to BATUS in ten years and it was a huge opportunity to integrate with the wider Army during Combined Arms Live Fire Exercises and TESEX. it also provided the chance to experiment and refresh Tactics, Techniques and Procedures in a more conventional all arms environment to support ongoing Wildcat force development. the live fire ranges provided many of the more junior pilots with their first experience of joint fires. the Lynx was a highlight of many of the CALFEX serials, attracting the attention of several international visitors to BATUS and proving its worth with accurate ranging and killing bursts from the M3M Crew Served Weapon. the feedback from the ground troops as they bounded forward under suppressive fire from the Lynx was hugely positive. as Ide from CSW operation,

Lynx crews trained with Fire Support Teams, conducting Air Observation Posts (AOPs), emulating AH Close Air Support (CAS) and Emergency CAS. with varying experience levels, JTACs were able to talk the aircraft onto targets both during the day and at night, utilizing the MX-10 camera system and laser to assist with positive identification. during TESEX phases, the training was varied with either a permissive air situation during stabilisation serials or a significant RF threat, which forced crews to operate tactically in the low level environment. as a result of the squadron’s operational focus on Afghanistan, this is something that had not been trained for some time. the crews had to consider the challenges of reduced visibility onto targets, difficult communications with the exercising troops, and the tactical employment of the aircraft against a live enemy. returning to procedures and tactics that were learnt during the Operational Training Phase of the pilots’ course, the aircraft were manoeuvred into Battle Positions to find and track the OPFOR, passing this information back to Battlegroup Headquarters and often guiding simulated fires onto the enemy. for the duration of the TESEX phase for Ex PRAIRIE STORM 2 the sqn deployed a FOBR and a FARP onto the Prairie. this not only reduced the transit time for aviation to get to the battle but also had the secondary benefit of training the squadron’s ground support flight in the tactical operation and construction in the field of this capability. the sparsely populated Canadian Prairie also proved a difficult environment for night flying at low level. under extremely poor illumination levels (half to two millilux at best), the night vision goggles were at the limit of their capacity, yet the crews successfully completed ranges, tactical lift serials and liaison sorties to un-secured landing sites, vastly broadening the experience and capability of each crew from exposure to these challenging conditions.

Notwithstanding these conditions, exercising troops were able to insert OP screens, Fire Support Teams and snipers under the cover of darkness, enabling the training audience to gain significant vantage points onto the enemy prior to dawn TESEX serials. Aircraft serviceability across the exercise was phenomenal thanks to the efforts of two excellent REME workshop detachments, as an example only two sorties were lost to serviceability during PRAIRIE STORM 1 and 2. the Workshop exceeded the requirements of the exercise and although mandated to deliver only two tasklines from three, they often had all three helicopters serviceable at the same time. unfortunately, due to serviceability issues with the ohkosh TAR, the FARP was unable to deploy as planned for Ex PRAIRIE STORM 3. however, the signals detachment deployed successfully across all four exercises providing secure BOWMAN communications links between the aircraft and the Battlegroup over significant distances utilising the secure voice rebroadcast capability. EX PRAIRIE LYNX has been a challenging and demanding exercise and a hugely worthwhile event to transition Army Aviation back into the eyes of the field army outside of Afghanistan. in the past HERRICK era it has been immensely valuable to combine the medium level COIN tactics of the past eight years with conventional aviation SOPs in order to provide a flexible, hybrid multi-purpose capability and there are many learning points that will carry over into the Wildcat training programme. in the meantime, with the demand for Lynx support all over the world, 672 squadron has been at the forefront of this very capable force.
The British Army’s rapid reaction force has shown its ability to deploy and fight on some of Africa’s most challenging terrain.

The British Army’s rapid reaction force air despatch specialists have shown their ability to deploy and work if some of Africa’s most challenging terrain.

The training reflects the type of operations that we could be called upon to conduct as the AATF, both in terms of the tactical challenges and their expeditionary nature.”

The arduous environment and terrain of Kenya, with temperatures over 35 degrees, torrential rain and wildlife roaming the vast range, provide as much of a challenge as the missions the soldiers are asked to achieve.

Warrant Officer Class 1 Adam Proud, Regimental Sergeant Major of 2 PARA said, “The troops have really been put through their paces on this exercise. In tough conditions like these, looking after the soldiers around you becomes vital. You can’t be expected to parachute into the middle of the Kenyan bush with full kit, march for 20km and then conduct a live fire attack if you don’t work as a team.”

Corporal Richard Mullen, 30, a specialist airborne mechanic from 8 Field Company (Para), 7 (Air Assault) Battalion, Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, said “The highlight of the exercise so far has been the jump. It was great to work with the Para Regt lads and see what they get up to. It’s good to mix with soldiers from other parts of the brigade.”

The 1,200-strong 2 PARA Battlegroup that has deployed to Kenya is built around the airborne infantry of 2 PARA bolstered by artillery, engineers, medics, military police, signallers, intelligence specialists and logisticians from 16 Air Assault Brigade. The exercise is split into different phases to allow the soldiers to focus on particular skills before the entire battlegroup comes together for a final mission. A key activity was parachuting and the air-dropping of supplies, supported by a C130J Hercules aircraft and crew from 47 Squadron, Royal Air Force Brize Norton.

Lieutenant Colonel Ollie Kingsbury, Commanding Officer of 2 PARA, said: “The Air Assault Task Force is the only formation capable of securing a foothold anywhere in the world at very short notice. Exercise Askari Storm provides an excellent opportunity for 2 PARA to work along side the other elements of the battlegroup in realistic and demanding scenarios.

The brigade’s core role is to provide the Air Assault Task Force with the potency of Apache attack helicopters. The speed and agility of airborne and air assault troops was the focus of the Apache attack helicopters in this exercise, which worked in concert with the Air Assault Task Force (AATF), the British Army’s rapid reaction force, which is ready to deploy anywhere in the world at short notice to conduct the full spectrum of military operations, from joint combatant evacuation operations to war fighting. The exercise is part of the Joint Helicopter Command, which brings together helicopter forces from the Royal Navy, Army and RAF.

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Colchester-based Training Paras Jump of 47 Air Despatch Squadron Royal Air Force, also from Brize Norton, conducted the equipment drops around the area known as Archer’s Post where the British Army conduct training exercises four times a year. This exercise comes shortly after the squadron played a significant part in recent operations in Iraq where they dropped everything from food and water to vital life saving equipment to refugees near the Iraqi border. Op SHADER, saw the squadron working out of RAF Alconbury in Cyprus to despatch the vital supplies before returning to their very high readiness role in the UK.

Major Nick Galle RLC, Officer Commanding 47 AD Sqn said: “Exercise Askari Storm provides 47 AD Sqn with a great opportunity to train alongside troops that they would most likely support on a military operation. The missions that my soldiers have been conducting are similar to the sort of operations that we have been doing for real in Iraq over the last few months. Training exercises like this ensure that we can practice out specialist skills in the sort of demanding environments that we are called on to operate in at a moment’s notice.”

Private Reeva, from Swaziland said, “Exercising in Kenya has been great. It’s really useful to be able to work and plan alongside the soldiers who we will eventually work with on the ground. Working out in Iraq was quite different as there is a lot more pressure as you are doing it for real, we still got the job done though.”

FURTHER READING
16 Air Assault Brigade is the British Army’s largest and most deployable airborne formation capable of securing a foothold anywhere in the world at short notice to conduct the full spectrum of military operations, from joint combatant evacuation operations to war fighting. The exercise comes shortly after the squadron played a significant part in recent operations in Iraq where they dropped everything from food and water to vital life saving equipment to refugees near the Iraqi border. Op SHADER, saw the squadron working out of RAF Alconbury in Cyprus to despatch the vital supplies before returning to their very high readiness role in the UK. Major Nick Galle RLC, Officer Commanding 47 AD Sqn said: “Exercise Askari Storm provides 47 AD Sqn with a great opportunity to train alongside troops that they would most likely support on a military operation. The missions that my soldiers have been conducting are similar to the sort of operations that we have been doing for real in Iraq over the last few months. Training exercises like this ensure that we can practice out specialist skills in the sort of demanding environments that we are called on to operate in at a moment’s notice.”

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FURTHER READING
47 AD Sqn RLC is one of the British Army’s highest readiness sub-units, supporting tri-service contingent forces globally. The Sqn can deploy as early as 24 hours notice. The Sqn conducts operations both in the maritime or local environment. It can also respond from deepening to the border. The Sqn deployed for Operation Shader, providing support for the UK’s Joint Helicopter Command. This deploy will be the Sqn’s second deployment to the Middle East in less than 12 months. 47 AD Sqn soldiers will be deployed to the Search & Rescue role searching for the stricken Yazidi population in N Iraq early next month. The Sqn has also recently been deployed to the Search & Rescue role searching for the stricken cyclists.”

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DUKE OF EDINBURGH VISIT TO WATTISHAM

From maintaining military vehicles to inspiring the next generation of engineers, His Royal Highness The Prince Philip Duke of Edinburgh has seen the work of 7 Air Assault Battalion Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (7 Air Asslt Bn REME).

The Duke visited the unit at Wattisham Flying Station (Thursday 9th October) in his capacity as Colonel-in-Chief of the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers. The unit is responsible for maintaining the Army’s helicopters and unmanned aerial vehicles, with 2 Field (Para) Company, based in Colchester, looking after the trucks and armoured vehicles of 16 Air Assault Brigade.

The Duke was shown the vehicles the troops work on, ranging from the Apache attack helicopter - which 7 Air Asslt Bn REME troops are currently supporting on operations in Afghanistan - to the Watchkeeper unmanned aerial vehicle, representing the next generation of Army equipment.

Another cutting edge vehicle involved in the day was the Bloodhound Super Sonic Car project, which aims to reach a record breaking 1,300mph. Models of the car were presented to children from Ringshall School who had taken part in a science project organised by 7 Air Asslt Bn REME to build balloon-powered cars inspired by the rocket-propelled Bloodhound.

AAC RUGBY TEAM RETIRE... CPL JAMES ‘BUNGLE’ WALTERS NO 4 SHIRT

Written By: Sgt Matthew Ball, 668 (Trg) Sqn AAC

On Wednesday the 16th of October 2014 the Army Air Corps Rugby Team was invited to take part in the BT Rugby Tonight programme.

The programme is seasonal, and highlights the whole of the rugby union Premierships Season on a weekly show. Each week it hosts five legends of the game to tell their story, including one player that has a passion for the sport and is a part of a new generation of Army equipment.

This season the Army’s premiere team will be putting on a show that tells the stories of its players and their achievements. The programme also features a market place and a chance for the audience to interact with the players.

AAC, who had just six months later was tragically killed whilst on Operations in Afghanistan.

In July this year, completely out of the blue, the AAC rugby team received an e-mail from the producer of BT Sports saying they had seen the tragic news, had remembered Bungle from last year’s show and invited the team back to celebrate his rugby career.

The team was amazed that they had remembered. A week later the Corps team held its AGM and due to Cpl Walters long commitment in representing the Army, Combined Services and for holding the Number 4 shirt and say a few words on Bungle’s rugby career. Secondly, to take our close bond with Cpl Walter’s family. This has been a great success by all that attended and once again was a chance to say our farewells and keep our closer bond with Cpl Walter’s family.

Since his death there have also been several high profile charity rugby games. The first of these was held in Cornwall, this was the day prior to his funeral and a crowd of over 300 turned out to watch the AAC team take on Redruth. After the game it was decided this will become an annual pilgrimage for the Corps side to play this memorial game. The second of the games was played more recently when Wattisham Station took on Hadleigh RFC this was his civilian team that he was captain of Wattisham). All those involved in both events had an amazing time. Both events raised over £20,000 for his chosen charity TSSS (Turner Syndrome Support Society) which his baby daughter Layney suffers from.

A dozen soldiers from 23 Engineer Regiment (Air Assault) set off today (Tues 16 Sept) to cycle the 150 miles from their base at Rock Barracks in Woodbridge to the John Frost Bridge in Arnhem in the Netherlands, the ultimate objective of Operation Market Garden.

The September 1944 mission saw British and American airborne troops land behind German lines with the aim of capturing a string of nine crossings to allow tanks to thrust across the River Rhine in to Germany.

However, strong resistance prevented the sappers cycling out to Arnhem

Woodbridge’s airborne engineers are making a cycling pilgrimage to join commemorations of the 70th anniversary of a Second World War operation that defined the character of the British Army’s airborne forces.

Major Chris Price, Officer Commanding 51 Field Sqn RE, said: “The idea came about because SSAFA doing its Rida of British challenge and we wanted to link in and do our own fundraising in support of a charity giving excellent work to support military personnel and their families.”

Four squadrons of Royal Engineers took part in Operation Market Garden, landing by parachute or glider. The sappers will join colleagues from 16 Air Assault Brigade for commemorative events over the weekend, including memorial services on the bridge at Arnhem and Oosterbeek Cemetery and a multi-national parachute drop on to Ginkel Heath, the same fields used as a drop zone in 1944.

This year’s event is being led by 4th Engineer Regiment (Air Assault), which is based at Rock Barracks in Woodbridge. SSAFA on the way. Their route will see them cycle through Belgium, through northern France to the Normandy beaches and then back through Belgium before withdrawing across the river.

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The Joint Helicopter Command Headquarters conducted a road cycling tour in the Haute-Savoie region of the French Alps (12-20 Sep 14) to allow staff within JHC HQ to challenge themselves in the demanding terrain, whilst developing inter-departmental relationships and forming the base of a JHC HQ Road Cycling Club for the 2015 season.

The tour party departed Andover at 1900 on the 12th September in two vans, and headed for the Channel Tunnel terminal at Folkestone. The crossing, booked for 2230, was uneventful and the 10 hour journey from Calais, past Reims and Dijon became steadily more vertical as the Alps drew near. The accommodation was taken over and kit serviced prior to driving down the valley to Megève for the first ‘big shop’ of the exercise at Interarache before returning to the chalet for dinner and route study. Five days of cycling some serious Tour De France stages and climbs followed:

**SUNDAY 14TH SEPTEMBER**
La Giettaz, Les Contamines, Col des Aravis.
The first day of riding saw the team set off gingerly down hill towards Flumet and Megève after a ‘descending’ brief from Lt Col Bob ‘the mountain goat’ Seymour. This was an introduction day as many of the group had never cycled in the Alps before, so the climbs were kept gentle and the majority of riders scale the Col des Aravis at the end of the ride, slowly pushing up the 10km climb, past the accommodation and stopping to admire the views from the top of the Col. In total, 90 km was covered with 1650m of ascent, a nice little warm up.

**MONDAY 15TH SEPTEMBER**
Col de la Colombière, Sallanches, La Giettaz.
Day two began with a short, sharp 4km climb from the chalet to the top of the Col des Aravis before enjoying a fast, sweeping descent to the ski resort of La Clusaz. From there the group routed NE to begin the famous TdF climb, the Col de la Colombière, a steady 19km route with plenty of switchbacks and impressive scenery. Some struggled up this climb but, after the mandatory photo stop, relished the very fast 16km descent towards Cluses before joining the main road at the bottom of the valley and routing onwards towards Sallanches. Road works meant a route-change and the ‘mountain goat’ suggested a short cut which would take the group up a short but fairly steep back road before joining the road to Megève. Naivity abounded which resulted in a very challenging, painful, 3km climb (averaging 15%, max of 21%), which succeeded in tiring everyone’s minds, however, was the challenge of Alpe d’Huez the following day.

**TUESDAY 16TH SEPTEMBER**
Col des Saisies, Col des Aravis. The third day began with tired legs and slightly tender backsides, but there was no lack of enthusiasm for the day’s climb. The route was described as scenic and gentle, at an average grade of 5% all the way from Flumet, and, with only one (double) puncture on the way down everyone hunkered down to the climb. Approximately 2km through the first switchbacks came the signpost announcing 14km to the top, however the average 5% gradient seemed to elude the team until it became apparent that the 7, 8 and 9%’s were shallowed by some pretty steep downhill sections. All in all, following the long ride the day before, this was quite a quickie route. Coffee was dozed at the top once all the riders had made it up before enjoying the fast but narrow, and at times bumpy, descent to the lunch stop in the pretty village of Gervais Voland prior to tackling the slog back up to the chalet. In total, a distance of 70km was covered with 1450m of ascent.

**WEDNESDAY 17TH SEPTEMBER**
Rest Day. Despite the intention to have a lie in, lazy breakfast and perhaps a stroll around the local shops, the rest day began with a small group heading up Aravis and down the other side for breakfast in the small ski resort of La Clusaz. After heading back up the other side of Aravis to the summit, a well-deserved vat of chicken pasta followed. The weather wasn’t playing, however, with torrents of rain during the 2.5hr drive and dark clouds looming on the horizon. The team was dropped off approximately 10km from Bourg D’Oisans and the base of the famous Tour climb in order to warm up before the work really started. This definitely helped, although the first 1.5km and few hairpins were an average gradient of 10%, so individuals settled very quickly into their own pace and the riders spread out. At a distance of 14km and with an average gradient of 8.1%, Alpe d’Huez was just as tough as advertised and it became obvious, as the sun burned away the low cloud and began warming the road, why it has become a mecca for road cyclists the world over. Although the scenery was breathtaking, the majority of riders gained more encouragement from the handmade road signs and harpin countdowns than the view. The fastest rider completed the route in just 59 minutes (the full Tour route – some finish at the village rather than the Tour finish further on), an impressive feat, with the final rider powering over the line in 1hr 40min. The compulsory celebratory photos were taken before grabbing a coffee and some lunch at the vans; the next phase was back down the mountain and onwards, north, to the Col de Glandon/ Croix de Fer. This turned out to be the hardest part yet; 28% unrelenting climbing at an average of 8%. This certainly sorted the ‘men from the boys’ as it were, and after tackling Alpe d’Huez earlier, there were unconfirmed reports of grown men sobbing. The field split as the kilometres ticked past, but the end was in sight.


who attended Ex SAVOIE OWL.

and the RNRM Sport Lottery for providing

like to thank both the RAF Sports Lottery

Army and Tri-Service events. We would

aim of which will be to compete in both

with more experience. Above all, it has

effective end-of-season training for those

etiquette associated with the discipline,

insight into the training requirements and

JHC HQ tackle the French Alps. Those

camp which saw nine members of the

arduous but rewarding road cycling training

plans to tackle it all again next year.

at around 2300hrs, tired but with growing

the team arrived back at Marlborough Lines

Duty Free and desperate calls home to find

counter driver fatigue. Both vans reached

journey, so multiple stops were taken to

time had been factored in to the return

beginning the long drive to Calais. Extra

last minute sweep of the chalet before

and a few beers; thoroughly well deserved.

chalet ready for the early morning departure

spent packing the vans and cleaning the

PB! The remainder of the afternoon was

in style, heading down the mountain

Rather than getting in the support vans

more an exercise in keeping warm than

weather had taken a turn and the 15

boredom at times!), although the

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3 REGT AAC

THE PARAGLIDING PADRE

Written By: Padre (Capt) Martyn Groves

“OK Padre, come to me”, said the instructor. I took a few

steps forward and I could feel the wing already rising
effortlessly above my head. A quick look up to check and I

could see that it was fully inflated and the lines all clear.

Paragliding

adre, off the risers… now run like you’ve never run

before”, what had been a fairly calm process and now

transformed into a mad dash to get some groundspeed and some

lift. No more than five seconds later I was gently floating

off the training slope and all my trust in a

wing, take-off, into the sky. I had the voice of Dickie, our instructor

clearly guiding me over the radio.

“Well done Padre, your flying, left hand
down, turn into the wind, LEFT HAND
DOWN, BRAKE, BRAKE, BRAKE, ready
to flare, PUSH ALL THE WAY DOWN PADRE!”

Impact… it wasn’t the most dignified

landing, but, I was on the ground and

nothing broken. Then it was a case of

bundling the wing up, walking back up the

training slope, setting out and doing it again.

A few weeks previously when I was

asked if I wanted to go to Oberstdorf in

Bavaria for the Paragliding Elementary

Pilots Course, I’ll be honest, I laughed. Not

being someone who is too keen on heights

I didn’t think it was for me, it was going to
take me well outside of my comfort zone.

But that’s the point of AT – doing something

challenging that you wouldn’t normally do and

building up those reserves of physical courage.

The course was ten days long and

located in the stunning Algaia region of

the Bavarian Alps. As we drove along the wide

meandering valley to the lodge we could

see high above us dozens of paragliders

soaring. At this point I had another wobble –

not a chance I was going to do that.

There was no time to back out though.

The morning after we arrived we had our

kit issued, and we were off, straight to the

training slope, no gentle classroom start

– not a chance I was going to do that.

soaring. At this point I had another wobble

– I didn’t do the mountain jump – but

it would be too easy to focus on the
disappointment with myself. Where I

had started from ten days previously,

I had progressed so much, confidence

had started from ten days previously,

it would be too easy to focus on the

significant summit to launch from.

On the return home I had plenty of
time to reflect on my experience (a 20
minute minibus journey was more than
great enough in 2014). A bit of disappointment –

I didn’t do the mountain jump – but

it would be too easy to focus on the
disappointment with myself. Where I

had started from ten days previously,

I had progressed so much, confidence

had been built, and actually I did enjoy it.

So – here comes the mandatory Padre

wise words at the end of an article. I
could talk to you about faith (trusting

in something you can’t see), or the

power of prayer (I was definitely

praying at the top of the slope)

Actually, it’s about failure and
disappointment and how we get over

that; it’s about knowing that you’ll pick

yourself up and give it another go;

it’s about not dwelling on the failure,

but seeing the journey you’ve made.

I’m reminded of the famous speech of

Theodore Roosevelt – in summary he said

the important thing is not that you didn’t

succeed, but that you had the courage

and grit to get in the ring in the first place.

ARMY AVIATORS

SCALE NEW HEIGHTS

A team of soldiers who operate the Apache attack helicopter has

sealed the highest trekking peak in the world.

“My mountain experience has
gone through the roof”, he said. “I’ve

completed my alpine foundation
qualification, which is about the skills

needed to go above the ice line and

onto glaciers, and I am looking to go

on and do mountain leader training.”

Lance Corporal Robbie Dhaaliwal, 31

from Ilford, said: “I have done a fair bit of walking in the Alps and

Himalayas, but nothing of this scale, and
doesn’t people look to me because of

my experience. Trekking above the

snowline was a real challenge and I’ve
developed new skills which I’m keen
to maintain, but we also got a chance
to experience the culture of Nepal.”

Captain Tom Stack organised
the expedition as a different
challenge for troops to mark the
end of 4 Regt AAC’s involvement
with operations in Afghanistan.

He said: “Afghanistan has kept
the regiment very busy since 2006
and this expedition has been a good
opportunity for the guys to develop
their skills in a different direction.
Nepal was a really rewarding experience
for all and I have seen everyone develop,
both through the experience of high
altitude mountaineering and the
exposure to a different culture.”

VISIT WWW.LZDZONLINE.CO.UK

THE JHC DELIVERING JOINT SUCCESS ON OPERATIONS

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THAMES PATH TREK

On 19th September a group of nine personnel from RAF Benson and four cadets from Oxford University Air Squadron (OUAS) set out from RAF Benson with the aim of walking the Thames Path from its source in the Cotswolds back to Benson. The catch was that they had only allowed themselves two days to complete the trek, which meant that they would have to cover 40 miles per day!

As well as being a challenge (and hopefully an enjoyable one!), it was hoped that the trek would provide a means to raise money through sponsorship for the John Masefield House, part of the Leonard Cheshire Disability charity, located close to Benson at Burcot near Abingdon.

Setting off from Benson in the SIF minibus at the unfriendly hour of 0530, after a quick stop for a coffee and a bite to eat, the first group, who would be aiming to cover 0515. This left the remainder of the distance, were able to start walking and a bite to eat, the first group, who by 0530, after a quick stop for a coffee and a bite to eat, the first group, who

Disability charity, located close to Benson Marina coming into view. 10.5 hours the end was now in sight, with Benson Marina coming into view. Thinking that they were home and dry, it was a rather annoyed group of six (two of those taking part were only able to do so on the first day) who were caught by the 3 x 40 milers of six (two of those taking part were only able to do so on the first day) who were caught by the 3 x 40 milers. The troops collected donations from commuters, tourists and workers in Liverpool Street, Kings Cross and St Pancras stations and the surrounding streets. The Band of The Parachute Regiment and The Band of The Army Air Corps, both based in Colchester, set the fundraising efforts to music at Oxford Street and Kings Cross respectively.

A printout of 160 troops from the Brigade’s units based at Colchester’s Merrville Barracks and Wattisham Flying Station in Suffolk travelled down to London to raise funds for the Poppy Appeal. The troops collected donations from commuters, tourists and workers in Liverpool Street, Kings Cross and St Pancras stations and the surrounding streets. The Band of The Parachute Regiment and The Band of The Army Air Corps, both based in Colchester, set the fundraising efforts to music at Oxford Street and Kings Cross respectively.

Mid-afternoon provided a good opportunity for everyone to remember why they were walking, as both groups passed John Masefield House, where they were cheered on by Mr Ian Brown (a volunteer at the home) and some of the residents. After approximately 10.5 hours the end was now in sight, with Benson Marina coming into view. Thinking that they were home and dry, it was a rather annoyed group of six (two of those taking part were only able to do so on the first day) who were caught by the 3 x 40 milers of six (two of those taking part were only able to do so on the first day) who were caught by the 3 x 40 milers.

After an early breakfast, it was a repeat of the previous day’s routine, with those attempting the longer route getting dropped off at Newbridge, while those doing the ‘shorter’ route getting dropped off to the north of Oxford. Again making good progress, this time supported by F5 Sue Bedborough, by lunchtime both groups had passed through Oxford and were approaching Abingdon. However, fatigue was starting to take its toll and the rest stops were becoming more and more welcome, as blisters became more and more painful! As the afternoon wore on, it was clear the gap between the two groups was closing, and it would be touch and go as to who would finish first...

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The RAF Servicing Commandos (RAF SC) were formed during WWII to facilitate deployed service support to front line aircraft away from their home bases. As part of this role they provided an aircraft refuel capability wherever and whenever an aircraft required fuel forward from its home base; a role now filled in the modern era by Tactical Supply Wing. For this reason the RAF SC are strongly affiliated with TSW. The RAF SC were awarded the honour of having the opportunity to have a commemorative stone laid within ‘Hero’s Square’ at the National Memorial Arboretum. In honour of the shared heritage between the RAF SC and TSW, several members of TSW expressed a wish to contribute towards the £3,000 cost of the stone, by taking part in a charity fund raising event.

With 2014 being the 70th Anniversary of the Normandy Beach Landings and Operation OVERLORD of which the RAF SC were a part of, establishing a deployed servicing and refuel area at an airfield close to the beach heads. Members of TSW wanted to recognise the efforts of the RAF SC and help raise money towards the memorial stone on their behalf.

Setting the challenge of covering the distance the RAF SC had to cover from their home base in Stafford to Normandy. It was decided therefore that members of TSW, using a mixture of exercise bikes, rowing machines and personnel running on foot, would cover the distance from their home base of MoD Stafford to Normandy. The distances involved were a 200 mile cycle from MoD Stafford to Portsmouth, an 85 mile row from Portsmouth to Caen and a 58 mile run along the length of the beach heads.

On the morning of Saturday 25th October in the Market Square area of Stafford town centre a team of ten personnel from TSW started the ‘journey’ on two spinning bikes, two rowing machines and a mile long loop of the town centre with other members collecting donations and engaging with the public. Throughout the day everyone involved took turns running multiple laps of the town centre and turns on the bike and the rower. This incredibly demanding physical challenge was completed in less than six hours and raised over £1,000. An amazing feat which will go a long way to help secure the necessary funding for the commemorative stone; TSW would like to thank the generous members of the public in Stafford for so graciously supporting this worthy cause.

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