

# A (The Blue Horse) Squadron Newsletter



April/ May 2013



Cover image: 2<sup>nd</sup> Tp returning to MOB Price from an Operation

## **Squadron Leader's Foreword**

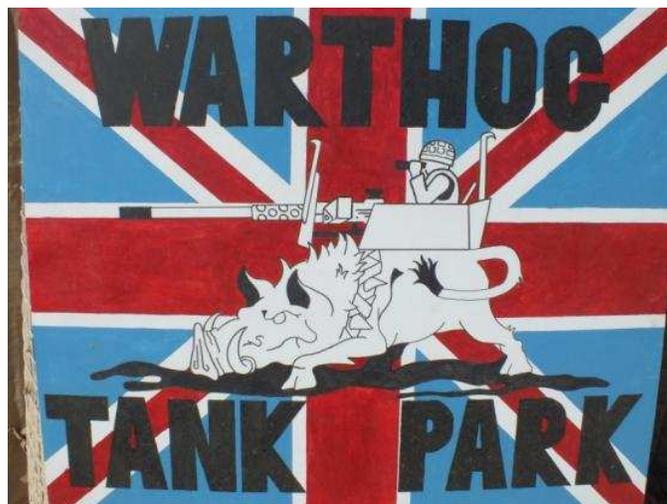
Major Yann Searle

It has now been about two weeks since the last PMAG elements of the Regiment returned to the UK, and we came under the command of 1 Mechanised Brigade, and more immediately the Household Cavalry Regiment. It has been a period of relative quiet in Helmand with the poppy harvest having been in full swing.

Meanwhile the temperature has risen into the mid- thirties, with the slightly surreal experience of dust storms interspersed with thunderstorms. We have now been joined by our first members of Badger Squadron 2 RTR, our replacements, and have started to say goodbye to the first members of the Squadron to deploy. Although we are conscious that we have a small number of volunteers who deployed even earlier with the PMAG, and have now been in Theatre for over seven months.

The Squadron's focus in the last few weeks has very much been on preparing for the arrival of our successors, but this has included working with the new Brigade Reconnaissance Force and Brigade Operations Company, both training within Bastion and out on the ground in our usual haunts.

I hope you enjoy the next few pages which give a flavour of life here for A Squadron, and very much look forward to seeing you in early May!



The sign at the entrance to the tank park



Sunset over a desert leaguer

## **Squadron Headquarters**

Tpr Sam Tudor

Over the past month we have seen the tempo of operations reduce and we have found ourselves with time on our hands to work on the vehicles, get fit and make plans for our return to the UK. It can get pretty dull behind the 'wire' in MOB Price but there is always something to do, be it catch up with friends, send emails home or book holidays for our Post Tour Leave.

We have been out on a couple of Ops over recent weeks, and it looks like there might be a few more to come before we return home. I was involved in two of the Ops and it was nice to get back into the vehicles and out and about again. The training we have been doing whilst in camp has certainly kept us sharp for any Ops that come our way. We have also had a chance to do some training in preparation for our return to Catterick and the usual training year. Mandatory Military Annual Tests come around every year and this year is no exception, it is a chance to refresh our skills in weapon handling, first aid, military law and a number of other subjects – it keeps us fresh and sets us up for the year ahead.

As I write this we have less than 14 days left in theatre. With thoughts turning to home and our loved ones, this is a great opportunity to squeeze in a few extra gym sessions or a bit of time in the sun, so we can return home in great shape and looking good. The topics of conversation are rapidly turning to where and how we will spend our Post Tour Leave, the friends and family we will see and how we might spend (or save) our tour bonuses. Another favourite topic of conversation is the food and drink we miss the most and how much we are looking forward to having them when we get back!

We miss you all and can't wait to see you soon!



Despite all the sunshine, the rivers and fields remain full of water



Lt Vine's Warthog in a spot of bother!

## 1st Troop

Tpr Aaron Crompton

I will start this final instalment from 1<sup>st</sup> Tp reflecting on the celebrations held on St Patrick's Day and of course, the remembrance of Capt Oates. It was humbling to spend a day in deepest Helmand commemorating such an integral part of Regimental life. The first activity began with the relay race which consisted of teams competing to race through a series of eating challenges, whilst the rest of the Squadron did their best to abuse those taking part. After the first stand had been completed, clearly with the Officers having been humiliated, we moved onto a series of stands throughout the day. The Tp did well and put in a good show on most events. As the day moved to its close, the Tp were horrifically beaten by the Officers in Tug o' War, who we believed must have been on some sort of performance enhancing substance; however as it turns out they had all eaten their vegetables when children, just as their mothers had taught them. The day climaxed with a chariot race in which we were pipped to first place by a resurgent 2<sup>nd</sup> Tp.

After the memorable events of St Patrick's Day we all focused back on reality. Although the pace of Operations has slowed somewhat since late-Feb, we have to maintain ourselves at constant readiness; which entails much training and preparation of vehicles. We have remained focused throughout and although most are now extremely excited about returning home, we all realise that we may be called upon at a moment's notice. We have kept up a steady stream of Operations throughout March and April which has retained our sharpness. In between operations we have filled out time with various training events and courses aimed at preparing us for future roles within the Regiment and assisting those about to attend promotion courses and such like. We have also had the time to complete our annual training tests, which should hopefully alleviate time pressure when back in the UK.



Cpl Hurst and Tpr Calder in the middle of the poppy

The days pass by and in between Operations with routine maintenance and we are now starting to prepare for handing over to the Royal Tank Regiment, the first of whom have now started to arrive. With only 2 weeks to go, Sgt Appleby and Cpl Hurst are getting to grips with the administration required for handing over. The Tp Sgt and Mr Vine's nightly briefs have kept us in check throughout, enabling us to have a clear picture and understanding of the situation. In the meantime the Tp Cpl keeps us concentrating and working hard to ensure that we are always ready. If it wasn't for the 3 leaders in the Tp, I think the capability

and focus would have been different. I finish this article as the Sqn prepares to go out on another Operation. We still have a few more to go, but the finish is very much in sight. It is with great pride and pleasure that I can say I have served alongside my fellow brothers in 1<sup>st</sup> Tp and A Sqn. Huge congratulations to all and we look forward immensely to seeing our families and loved ones once home.



The Brigade Ops Company prepares to dismount from 2<sup>nd</sup> Tp's vehicles

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Troop**

Tpr Will Owens

Since returning from R&R, Op tempo across Afghanistan has slowed down, with Afghan forces taking control more and more each day. This has given 2nd Troop and the rest of Warthog Group a lot more time to get the fleet of wagons to a great state ready for handover to 'Badger' Squadron 2RTR when they begin Op HERRICK 18. As a squadron we have also been able to conduct a lot of training, including a number of MATTs. We have also had a chance to relax, catching up on our tans and also celebrating St Patrick's Day with some members of B Squadron who came up from PB 2 to visit us.

We as a troop have also recently returned from conducting training with the Brigade Ops Company (2 Coy Irish Guards) in Camp Bastion which was a success and will leave them in a good position with knowledge and understanding of the Warthogs. Cpl Bergin was also able to meet some fellow Southern Irishmen that are serving with 'The Micks'.

We had the chance to work with the BOC again in the Arghandab River Valley confirming the training we conducted with them, as well as introducing them to 1<sup>st</sup> Troop as it was an operation involving the whole squadron. With over two hundred ISAF (International Security and Assistance Force) soldiers on the ground in support of Afghan forces it proved quite a successful Op. Several of the Irish Guards were to be heard complaining about the cramped conditions in the back of the Warthogs, but it's better than walking! As extra morale, the first of Badger Squadron's advance party, Sgt Baldwin, was able to come on the Op with us riding in Sgt Speight's wagon.

Over the next few weeks we will begin to get ready for our handover, whilst maintaining operational readiness. Now that we have started packing some of our kit into freight, we can see the end is near and we will soon be moving out of our tents where we have been for the last six months in preparation for handing over the accommodation.

Coming to the final two weeks of tour we have had to say goodbye to two of our troop, as Cpl Buck and LCpl Walley have now departed to return home to England. It will be strange going out on Ops without LCpl Walley checking that we are wearing our Tier 2s (protective pants) before we leave!

As a group, we have fully enjoyed this tour, been through highs and lows and with the end now in sight, morale is high and preparation for time off is underway. As a Squadron we thank you all for your support and wish Badger Squadron and all the others a very safe Op HERRICK 18.

*Quis Separabit*



Cpl Buck checks the depths of a 'small' stream



SHQ support operations in Nad-e Ali



2nd Tp on the way through Gereshk

