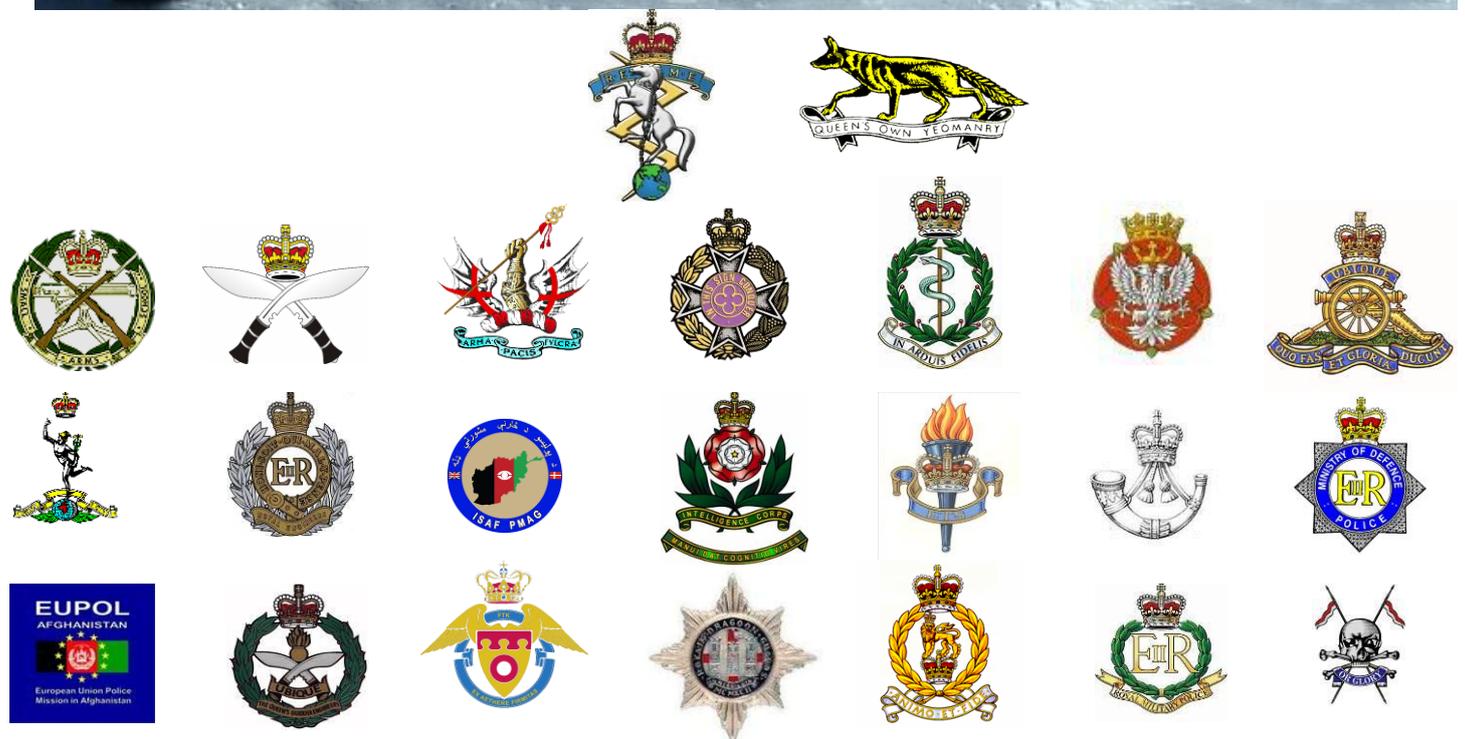




The Pomegranate

Issue Three: December 2012





The Pomegranate H17_003



Cover Image: Capt Adam Crookshank, Lance Corporal Nick Webb and Corporal Robbie Harmer, (The Royal Dragoon Guards' contribution to Walking with the Wounded's *In the Footsteps of Legends* expedition) reach the South Pole.

Commanding Officer's Foreword



Well, the Christmas season has at last come to Central Helmand and it has been accompanied by some pretty poor weather. As a consequence, we find ourselves surrounded by mud rather than snow, and lots of it! A brown Christmas is perhaps not the most festive backdrop one could imagine, but at least it feels seasonally chilly and is a change of scenery!

Despite this climatic challenge, the boys remain on really good form. They have been inundated by Christmas parcels from our friends and families, and also from some extremely generous, anonymous Regimental benefactors. It is really quite humbling to see; thank you to all who have contributed to this yuletide support. In addition, R&R is now in full swing and for those who remain here over Christmas, there is little time to dwell on being away from home as we continue to be pretty busy.

Over and above continuing to deliver our mission, we have been involved in a number of high profile visits over the last month, including the Prime Minister, the Chief of the General Staff and the next Commander ISAF. You will be pleased to hear that they have all been full of praise for what we are doing and how our soldiers are performing. You will also have heard the Prime Minister's announcement, made just prior to his visit, on the planned troop reductions in Afghanistan next year. I expect that you will have wondered how that will affect us on this tour. Firstly I would say that, contrary to what some of the media might suggest, the drawdown is not unexpected; it is absolutely what has been forecast in line with the increasing capability and confidence of the Afghan National Security Forces. This is what operational success looks like. It is the right time to stand back and allow the Afghans to lead in delivering security here, but we will remain in sufficient numbers to provide support as required. For us, this means that a number of PMAG soldiers will return in February (up to 75 personnel across all cap badges) but the remainder (and those in the Warthog Group) will





see out the tour. There will be a small impact on R&R for some of those coming home early but we are avoiding disruption wherever possible and the Welfare Office will keep you informed of any changes in good time.

So that is it from here. We are not only celebrating Advent but also, for most of us, our half-way point. The tour is simply whipping by and, whilst we remain focused on the job in hand, we have already begun to plan our return in the spring. I hope that you have seen our Christmas message on the Regiment's Facebook page but if not, from all of us in Afghanistan who cannot be with you over the festive period, we wish you a merry Christmas and a happy New Year.

Quis Separabit.

Lt Col Jamie Piggott
Commanding Officer

Editor's Welcome

Christmas is without a doubt my favourite time of year, and whilst we all would love to have had the opportunity to spend it with our families, you will see from the articles in this month's edition of *The Pomegranate* that we have made the most of it out here.



By the time you read this, we will have celebrated the start of 2013. We are over half way through the tour already and time doesn't seem to be slowing down! *The Pomegranate* serves as a record of our tour in Afghanistan and this month's edition sees the largest number of contributions from around our Area of Operations yet- this in spite of the fact that our successes have meant ANCOP Barracks no longer has an RDG presence and as a result there is no longer an ANCOP Barracks submission.

As we pass the half-way point, we feel it is important to remember the wider community of the RDG and this issue also contains articles about Royal Dragoon Guards outside Afghanistan. Christmas is obviously the main theme, but the British preoccupation with the weather is clearly evident... it may not have rivalled what you have experienced back in the UK but after becoming so used to summer days, the sudden change has clearly come as a shock!

I wish you all a very merry Christmas and a happy New Year and hope you agree with me when I say that we have raised the bar once again with this issue. Until next time.

Lt Bobby Crean
Editor



Police Mentoring and Advisory Group (PMAG) Headquarters

Lt Bobby Crean

As the Commanding Officer mentions in his foreward, this has been an incredibly busy month for PMAG HQ and the Commanding Officer's Rover Group, with a large number of visits and a lot of press interest. We have welcomed Capt Onai Gwachiwa, another Cultural advisor (and second ETS officer) to the Headquarters and have been joined by Lt Chris Clover. With so many Police Advisory Teams lifting off, the RDG presence in MOB Lashkar Gah has seen a noticeable increase. Senior military and political figures have visited the headquarters and with Christmas approaching, we have had a range of journalists and activities to entertain or be entertained by. Greg James from BBC Radio 1 visited the MOB in time for the *Lash Has Talent* show, put on by soldiers and officers stationed here. Unfortunately for Greg, this did not stop the Rover Group beating him through a PT session, something Cpl Thawley took great pleasure in!



The Chief of the General Staff and the Commanding Officer.



The lads wonder when they can stop smiling.

During the talent show, the Pipe Major gave a memorable performance (in a tiger suit of all things!) and Lt Ali Smith and Capt Coker were part of the choir that also took part. Ali was certainly in need of the singing practice, as he was also the eponymous hero in the Christmas night pant, *Aladdin!* Christmas saw the Commanding Officer visit as many of the troops as possible. Doubling as Santa, with a Husky instead of reindeer, he delivered Christmas presents from well-wishers and spread some festive joy. It has certainly been a memorable month, and yet for headquarters' staff these events will be overshadowed by the poetic justice Capt Arrowsmith suffered, when following a typical diatribe against those weak enough to go "man down" with D&V on 21st Dec he had the pleasure of being bedded down in the D&V clinic the very next day!





A)



B)



C)



D)



E)



Photo captions:

A) At least half the Rover Group got it easy during the Battle PT session. B) Cpl Thawley really didn't want to say goodbye to Greg. C) The Pipe Major and a "willing" volunteer perform during the talent show. D) No caption could do justice to this photo. E) Lt Clover greets Capts Mackey and Monk, respectively on the run from TSU and the OCCP.





A)



B)



C)



D)



Photo captions:

A) The MOB Lashkar Gah choir, including Lt Smith and Capt Coker, get to enjoy the other acts during the Lash has Talent show. B) Some camera shy Santas pick up the presents at Oullette. C) The padre leads a Christmas service at LTC. D) The CO and RSM get a little over enthusiastic loading up the Rover Group with presents.





Photo captions:

A) When Santa looks like this, you'd better hope you've been good this year. B) Some of the Multiples from LTC take time out to pose. C) Mixed emotions expressed by members of the Rover Group over the nature of their Christmas meal. D) The Commanding Officer takes care of the most important gifts (sadly all non-alcoholic)





Lashkar Gah Training Centre (LTC)

Introduction

Capt Steve Stewart

As the curtain closes on another year and the first three months of Op HERRICK 17, what have we learnt here at the Lashkar Gah Training Centre (LTC)? Well, LTC continues to surge forward in terms of moving towards transition, which means SHQ are always on the go, pushing the training teams to maintain the momentum gained. We have grown as a team, working together and understanding the differences between the different ISAF elements that make up LTC, but, and I believe more importantly, we have fully embraced the value of the trained Afghan national policemen we develop here. On arrival at the LTC the recruits may look dishevelled and lost but this provides us with the perfect opportunity to mould the recruits into policemen that will eventually return to check points across Afghanistan. ISAF troops at the LTC may not be involved in the “kicking in doors” at sunrise, or out on patrols facing insurgents on a daily basis, but the job we do cannot be underestimated, as a well-trained ANP patrolman who has received the correct training from the MOI here at the LTC is worth his weight in gold, as he fully understands the role he has to play in the defence of his country against the insurgents.

In last month's *Pomegranate* we looked at the role of the RMP in LTC, this month's edition broadens that scope to include submissions from the other ISAF elements and we hope to continue this trend next month.

Squadron Headquarters, LTC

Cpl Chris Button

This month the weather finally broke with quite frequent rainstorms, but they haven't dampened our mood. The Headquarters has settled into as much of a routine as is possible considering the number of visitors we have who are interested in seeing the work we do. Clearly Christmas and R&R have been our main topics of conversation and as the Christmas spirit descends upon LTC, it seems to have had a funny effect on the Sqn Ldr, who has now instigated weekly, collective, PT sessions. These may be good fun but they are hard work at this altitude. We hope that all this exercise will help counter the increase in food we've been eating and make us as fit for R&R as possible. As you can see in the picture bellow, the Sqn Ldr leads from the front in all areas less the PT sessions.



If he ever catches them up, the Squadron Leader will be having words with the lads about the speed with which they set off!





Multiple One

Sgt Andrew Percy

Thursday afternoons are spent conducting ISAF training. This can include things such as judgmental training, weapon handling tests, ranges, first aid, basic language lessons and many more skills which we need to operate effectively here at LTC. The judgemental training is normally run as a background activity while carrying out various shoots on the range, we enjoy all this, and it's great to see how we are improving with our Dari and Pashtu, as every week we pick up extra words and continue to build our vocabulary.



Multiple 1 on the range.

As a multiple, we manage to undertake road moves 3-4 times a week, these have been trouble free, although some of the local children have clearly heard about the quality of *The Pomegranate* and we've had the odd pomegranate thrown at us! Most of the time the locals don't mind our presence though and the kids are given sweets and pens when we can. That said, travelling at night is a very different experience, due to the fact that most of the cars don't have lights and generally just pull out at the last minute!



Spotting the camera, Cpl Groves takes a break from prepping a vehicle prior to a road move to strike a pose.



LCpl Willett taking a break from Guardian Angel duty.

Multiple 1 is also responsible for mentoring the Toli Commander. This job is to ensure that he is happy with the day's lesson(s) and is able to put the right instructors to them. We will also help account for and control the movement of both students and instructors to and from





classrooms or training areas throughout both the literacy and tactics phases of the course. The mentors to the instructors have a similar responsibility, by which I mean they are to help and guide the ANSF instructors, giving them hints when instructing the ANSF students.



SSgt Blume and Cpl Groves prepare to brief the Toli Commander

Multiple 2

WO2 Raju Durra

Just as there are two sides to a coin, so there is an intimate relationship between teaching and learning in mankind. Generally, Afghan Uniformed Police (AUP) and Afghan Border Police (ABP) come to us from their own areas, where they used to work as local, untrained police. Upon their arrival at LTC and following CSI Miami style biometric enrolment, the issue of uniforms and hygiene kits (Shampoo, Towel, tooth brush, Tooth paste, Boot Brush, Shaving cream, Comb a pair of shocks etc), the process of teaching / learning starts.

Large numbers of the Policemen are illiterate, so literacy assessments are conducted in order that we can target our delivery to their needs. The course is designed by the NATO Training Mission, Afghanistan and the Ministry of Interior, Afghanistan and involves two weeks' basic literacy and six weeks of tactics. As a multiple, we are proud of the fact that much of this is now delivered by their own Officers, albeit mentored by ISAF.



Multiple Two mentors Toli 1



Multiple 3

WO2 Bishnu Thapu

Multiple 3 has really been feeling the winter weather in the last few days, yet it hasn't put off the Afghans and the number of AUP recruits is soaring.

We are involved with courses run by MOI (Ministry of Interior, Afghanistan), ISAF, American Civil Instructors and both British and Danish Police. The two main spoken languages in Afghanistan are Pashtu and Dari, and whilst Gurkhas have a natural affinity with the students and can converse with many in Urdu, the mix of languages can cause chaos in some of our classes. That said, it's a rewarding job and the students are building in confidence... so much so that they are even offering suggestions in ways we can improve our lessons!

Work doesn't stop because of Christmas, but we were sure to put time aside to relax and celebrate the day with carols etc. and we are raring to continue meeting the challenges as we enter the New Year.



Range training for both the mentors and mentees

The G4 Team

SSgt Gary "Cos" Cosby

The Logistic and Supply (G4) team in LTC is made up of 7 personnel and with such a small team, we have each made certain roles our own. As this is our first submission, we thought we'd introduce ourselves. I work as the SQMS so my main role is to co-ordinate the running of the G4 department and mentor the local supply officer within LTC. Cpl Blackery (son of John Christie) is the Motor Transport/Fuel and Lubrications NCO, but we believe that his main role is to wax his shaved head, and Cpl Milven, known to all as 'Side Show Bob', is the main Armourer. A practical joker, he seems to have made it his mission to keep our moral high whilst at the same time putting years onto the SQMS.

The rest of the team includes the 'Ginger Hulk', LCpl Bromley and the attached arms of Cpl Murray and LCpls Winton and Joss. We're really bonding as a team and are going to make the most of our Christmas together.





The G4 Team: thrilled not to be on R&R



Dr Who



Health and Safety lessons with two jokers (great!)

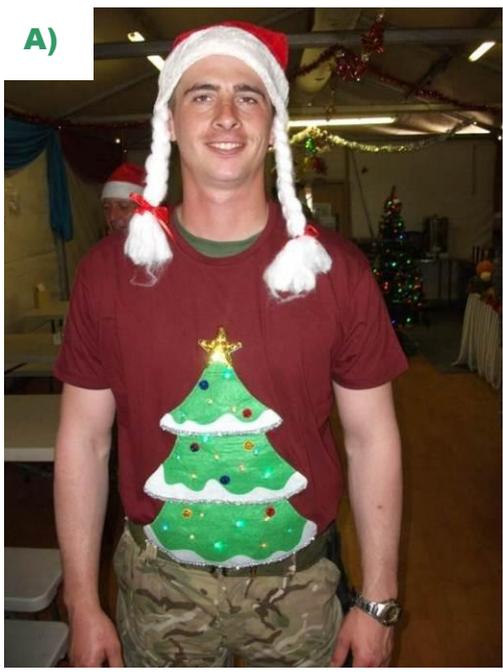


Guess which one's the Small Arms Instructor.





A)



B)



C)



D)



E)



F)



Photo captions:

A) LCpl Swift, all dressed up and he still can't get a kiss from 'Lofty' Bateman! B) SSgt Bluhme, WO2 Bishnu, SQMS Cosby, WO2 Raju ready to deliver presents to the boys. C) G4 workhorses Cpls Milven and Blackery enjoy the festive lunch. D) Our Gurkha colleagues look impressed with their Christmas lunch! E) WO2 SSM Ross having an MS (Merry Santa) moment with the CO. F) LTC Christmas night quiz in the welfare room organised by Sgt Kaye.





Nad-e-Ali



District Advisory Team (DAT)

Lt Giles Moon

This past month has been a roller coaster with many changes – notably Lt Johnny Clover and Lt Sam Secombe's Police Advisory Teams (PATs) having been redeployed. Whilst they will be sorely missed and did a great job, their departure does signify progress in Nad-e-Ali and the continued transition to Afghan National Security Forces.

As the PATs reduce their footprint in Nad-e-Ali, the Afghan National Police continue to show improvement and that they are clearly capable of operating without the previous levels of mentoring. That said, the Squadron has maintained a high level of operational tempo, with joint operations ranging from single PATs to Squadron level (giving the Squadron HQ an excuse to escape the confines of the District Police HQ!).

As we near the end of the year, the weather has taken a turn for the worse, with temperatures hovering around zero at night and when it rains... it pours, turning the camp into a quagmire. The weather has meant that we have had a couple of new additions to our tents, including an intimidatingly large and wild ginger tabby which has occupied Capt Adam Tyler's bed whilst he has been on R&R, something which will certainly have implications for his OCD! The upside to this is that the said ginger tabby has rid the Officers' Mess tent of our mouse problem. A robust mother, she has abandoned her kittens, who have found more palatial lodgings amongst Troopers Jamie Ramage and Stewart McDougal's body armour. Nevertheless, the DAT is enforcing a policy of 'tough love,' ensuring that our feline friends maintain their killer instincts. In reality, their size alone means we steer well clear of them!

With Christmas around the corner the OC, Maj James Lance, has made Lt Guy Amir 'Officer Commanding all things Christmassy' – a natural choice. Lt Amir has assured the boys that they are in for a real treat! First and foremost they will have a much deserved lie-in until around 0600 when they will be woken with (non-alcoholic) gunfire. They don't know it yet, but Father Christmas will be paying them each a visit as they sleep obliviously in their cot-beds, leaving a little treat in their stockings. The Officers and SNCOs will cover sentry duty during the day, allowing the boys and girls to enjoy a delicious Christmas dinner with 1 MERCIAN who live next door to us in FOB SHAWQAT. As if that wasn't festive enough, we will be rounding off the day with a Christmassy quiz and film night. Perfection manifested!

Before signing off for another month, I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for their continued support – especially with your plethora of Christmas parcels and letters. They bring a huge amount of smiles and morale, and are greatly appreciated. Finally, we would like to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy 2013!





Silicon 51 (1st Troop, C Sqn QRL)

Lt Nick Bartram

For 3rd Troop, life in the District Police HQ is very busy. Sadly, we have said goodbye to The Royal Dragoon Guards' Police Mentoring Team, who have moved elsewhere in Helmand. This means that our own area of operations has now grown from two Police Precincts to six, and our focus is to train as many of these Police as possible for the rest of the tour.

With a larger area of operations comes the need to drive further afield and over the past few weeks the rain has been falling; not nearly as much as the rain that has fallen back in the UK but the water has nowhere to drain so it makes for interesting driving conditions. Drivers Tpr Jack Morgan and Tpr Daniel Lawton have been driving in all elements and perfecting their rallying skills.

One of the major undertakings that we have done over the past few weeks was a joint operation with the Police and the ANA. We deployed carrying all our kit, which weighed in at about 50kg, probably more for LCpl Michael Pannell and Tprs Jamie Ramage and Daniel Lawton, who were carrying an excruciating amount of equipment. We met up with the Police and after the first (and longest) day, our overnight accommodation consisted of an Afghan Local National compound complete with cattle.

I mentioned in the last newsletter that we were aiming to get the Police to attend a training package so that they could continue training themselves once we had left. I'm proud to report that in the last month we have run two such events, both of which were a great success. PAT attachments Cpl Cheryl Fray (RAMC) and LCpl Lisa Pattinson (RMP) have been key to this; teaching lessons on everything from evidence handling to medical skills. Like us, the Police found it difficult to remain focussed during the evidence handling sessions, but really enjoyed the detention techniques!

Over the last two weeks we have also had an American team with us, who have been great fun. The Americans mentor the Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP) and we have been showing them around the ANCOP checkpoints within Nad-e-Ali. Apart from our pronunciation of the English language, we are very similar to our transatlantic counterparts. However, they do have an affinity for ANCOP Velcro patches and now The Motto, which is a great bargaining chip and is cheerfully being swapped for American rations and clothes.

At the time of writing we are five days away from Christmas, I know you won't read this until after the event, but would like to thank you for all the kind parcels and welfare packages; every tent now looks like Santa's Grotto, with tinsel from floor to ceiling and small Christmas trees springing up in every corner of the accommodation. This is not the only thing that has been appearing in the tents, as Tprs Jamie Ramage and Stuart MacDougall regularly find 3 kittens hiding in their bedspaces. Christmas in Nad-e-Ali should be a great day; I doubt it will be a white Christmas but with more mince pies, crackers and Haribo than you can shake a stick at it, it shall certainly be one to remember. We wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New year!





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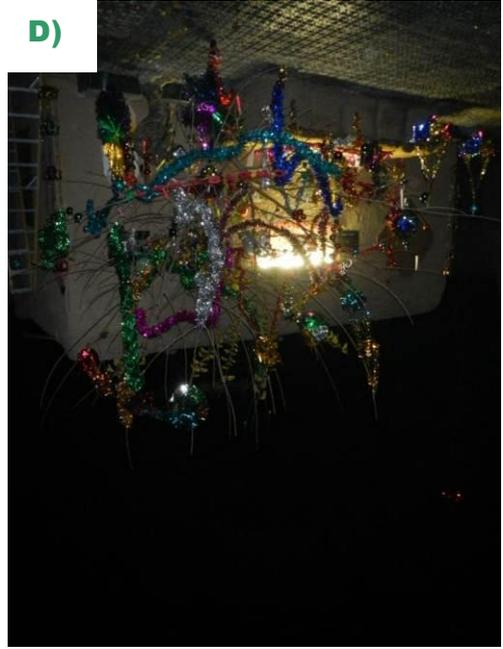
B)



C)



D)



E)



Photo captions:

A) Too cool for school. B) Out on patrol and not a wise man among them! C) Taking a minute to pose for the camera when visiting a check point. D) Nad-e-Ali's attempt at a Christmas tree. E) Officers and SNCOs staging on for the lads during Christmas Day.





Silicon 52 (2nd Troop, C Sqn QRL)

Lt Charlie Gray

December has been the month of change for Silicon 52. The PAT has had a rather busy month with new personnel, a new home and preparation for the festive season. With all of this in the balance, everything is going well and we are enjoying our time in Helmand Province.

There have been a number of developments in the PAT over the last month. The first being the transition to a new Troop Sergeant. With a tear in our eye, we waved good bye to Sgt Dave Smith, as he returns to the UK for his posting to Bovington, and have welcomed Sgt Chris Fowler into the hot seat. Sgt Fowler has taken the bull-by-the-horns (so to speak) and is clearly enjoying his new role.

Operational requirements have seen us move from our original home in PB Wahid to PB4. The move was completed in two parts, to allow for the transport of the rather modest amount of luggage, stereotypical to any fine Cavalry Regiment. The PAT somehow managed to fill all 4.5 tonnes of load capacity on the three Huskys, and I'm afraid to say that I may have been the main culprit! In between bouts of rolling his eyes and shaking his head, Sgt Fowler did eventually agree to humour his PAT Commander in this epic feat. The move was completed successfully and has enabled the boys more down time, as the commute to work has been significantly reduced; a benefit which requires no military background to understand!

With new surroundings, comes new Police and we welcomed the addition of a police force based temporarily in PB4. The Police are friendly and are getting on well with the PAT. We will be spending much of our time in the new year training these police and taking them out on patrol in their new area.

With Christmas just round the corner back in the UK, we have ensured that no one is left out in PB4. The number of 'Secret Santa' present raffles would equal most offices back home and everyone is keen to get involved. PB4 is the envy of Helmand, with probably the best Christmas tree in the province. Actually, 'Christmas tree' is a loose description as the tree itself resembles something that might delay traffic on a busy road after a storm. Yet everyone has got involved and the amount of decoration on it would rival Oxford Street's performance.

The festive season is clearly a harder time for those back home as well as those of us who are deployed. We are all eternally grateful for all of the shoe boxes, sweets and gifts that you have sent out to us. The attention and care provides a huge amount of comfort in what could be a bit of a miserable time. We wish you all a Happy Christmas from Helmand Province and look forward to seeing you in the New Year.

Silicon 53 and Silicon 57

Lt Sandy Nightingale

Silicon 53 are already nearing the end of their tour and so we are currently going through the procedures for moving our vehicles and several HERRICKS' worth of kit back to Bastion. However, we can't complain as the reason for this move should not be understated. The





hard work of police advisors over the course of several years has put the southern part of the Canal Zone into a state where the Afghan Police are capable of running their own security.

When driving around the areas of Precincts 5 and 6, Silicon 53 regularly see the AUP conducting Vehicle Check Points without any ISAF instruction or influence. Before leaving Nad-e-Ali, the PAT has managed to complete two 'Train the Trainer' courses, which produced a good number of AUP instructors. The benefits of these courses became immediately apparent, as our students stepped up to the challenge eagerly and were keen to pass on their new found expertise to the rest of the Police in their Check Points.

And so we say goodbye to Helmand for the last time. Almost all the Gurkhas in the PAT have been here before (some from as early as HERRICK 4) and December has been a nostalgic time for them. They have been among the first and last boots on the ground in an operation which has dominated their careers. Nevertheless, it is another sign of success that in the two years since we deployed on HERRICK 12, the area has changed to the extent that this Callsign received no significant contacts for our entire tour.

Despite remaining in Afghanistan, Silicon 57 will be working in a significantly changed state. Not only have they had to say cheerio to their commander - CSgt JP (who did a fantastic job at moulding a team from across the whole of 1RGR), but they have also had to cope with a significant extension to their Area of Operations. Nevertheless, the PAT is in excellent spirits. The leadership of the NCOs is particularly impressive, from Acting Sgt Dhiraj (who has had to cope with an enormous amount of responsibility for someone of his rank) to Cpl Kesh, the 4th best shot in the army and who also has the grip of Ironman. Cpl Kesh has taken it upon himself to become my Nepali tutor and although I keep telling him that education in the Western world is not like Nepal, he is insistent that mistakes will not be tolerated and will be result in pain... Each mistake earns me 10 press ups and I get set homework every night!

All in all, although work continues for Silicon 57, there have already been positive developments in terms of training the Police in our new Precincts and we can celebrate Christmas and the New Year with optimism.

Silicon 54 (2nd Troop, C Sqn QRL)

2Lt Jimmy Wilcox

Life rolls on at Patrol Base Wahid. Most of the guys are now half way through their six month tour and enjoying the run up to Christmas and in a primarily Gurkha camp, The Queens Royal Lancers' tents are seen to be a small oasis of Lapland in the Afghan desert. The arid surroundings and constant patrolling have made the run up to Christmas a less than normally festive time, however, we have big plans for the day. Unfortunately for me, these are so far centred on the PAT Commander staggng on while the rest of the PAT enjoy a round of secret santa!

Considering the fact it is Christmas, volleyball is still a major feature of our down time and Silicon 54 fought a close battle with the Gurkhas during the PB Wahid Christmas Duathlon (Volleyball and Quiz). The Lancer team may have been cut down in their prime during the first round, but with minimal training against a numerically superior force the outcome was still deemed a success by all members. The second round of competition was then the quiz,





both The Queens Royal Lancers PATs had been practicing hard in preparation but, unfortunately, the Gurkhas pulled a second win out of the bag. We believe this could be due to the numerous questions on the well-known general knowledge subject of 'Gurkha history'. That said, out of every defeat rises a victory and this time the inter-Troop Queens Royal Lancers victory went to 2nd troop.

Silicon 54 has now spent a lot of time camping in patrol base Salaang, strangely it almost feels like going on holiday for the lads, as we are all cramped into a small tent with the inevitable consequences of endless banter and giggling. This has worked well to break up the tour with new surroundings and a new group of police to work with, however, we have still maintained the luxury of a comfortable home to return to in Wahid.

As the R&R cycle sets in there is a constant stream of happy soldiers heading off on leave and slightly less happy soldiers arriving back. This is a welcome change to the pattern of life, as it shows that the tour is passing, but it does mean a bit more stag and a few less days off for all the lads. The stories of who did what with whom on R&R also bring a message from home and a feeling of reality to those who have still not made it home for their leave.

Warthog Group



1st Troop of the Line

Lt Stu Vine

The time since writing my last *Pomegranate* article has witnessed another busy period for 1st Troop. We found ourselves back with the ANA in the Upper Gereshk Valley re-cultivating





the already well-established Green Zone and continuing to build relationships with the locals, including the children who, around Zumbalay, are extremely light fingered and seemingly impervious to deterrence methods! The last month has also seen the return of Tpr Cowan, bringing the number of jocks up to a welcome 5, although at times it can now feel like we are in 1 SCOTS!

December also saw the Troop spend 12 days rolling through a series of Operations in support of the Duke of Lancaster's Battle Group and the Brigade Operations Company. This gave us the opportunity to see some more of Afghanistan's varied countryside, as we explored the irrigated dashte/green zone to the south of the NES Canal and north to Yakchal. By supporting infantry operations we have been responsible for clearing swathes of ground and both supporting and emboldening the ANSF.

Unfortunately, these operations just add to the never ending cycle of vehicle maintenance. Each vehicle has developed its own character and mine decided it was a good idea for the wheel to set on fire during a move down Highway 1. Not to be outdone, Cpl Hurst's Warthog divorced itself crossing a 'ditch too far.' This resulted in a taxing operation to split an articulation unit in the darkness of the Upper Gereshk Valley, but with Christmas so close, even this couldn't lower our morale! Speaking of morale, R&R is on the horizon as I write this and the Troop are looking forward to a well deserved break, we can't wait to see you all.

Tpr Matthew Trounson

The sign by the cookhouse reads, "BEWARE morale snipers seen in the vicinity of HMS Price" and over the Christmas season we are all doing our best to keep our spirits up and smiles broad. Although we were able to sunbathe on Christmas Day, the weather in Price has really taken a turn for the worse, and I speak for everyone in my tent when I say thank you to all the Squadron miscreants who ensured the accommodation tents had such good flood defences. As a troop we were the first to embrace the welly fashion, but while the rest have jumped upon this band wagon, there are still those who give us stick over the new Troop jacket and T-shirts. It is our firm belief that those outside the troop are jealous, as there can only be one top sabre troop and we all know it's called "First" troop for a reason!

The troop has spent most of the past few weeks out of camp as part of the Warthog Battlefield Taxi Service provided by the RDG. The infantry may mock us as battle taxis but they seem to be pretty pleased when we turn up and they don't have to plod any further. We all enjoy getting out on the ground, not only are we having a positive effect, but it gets us away from the standard vehicle maintenance and the Royal Artillery! In fact, now that I mention the RA, I'd like to ask our attached artillery to pass a request from 1st Troop up your chain of command; can you please ban all firing between the hours of 2100 and 0800? This would be much appreciated. Actually, the gun crew have a lot to answer for as they have taken to shouting "firing!" a good forty minutes before hand and whispering the order before actually shooting the guns. We're sure they must have someone taking photos of us all standing there like fools with fingers in our ears and nothing happening! Anyway, I'm soon heading home to check on the bees and partake in some much anticipated ornithology, but for those we can't meet up with, a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from all 1st Troop.





Photo captions:

A) Our very own OP OLYMICS saw the guys having to compete in a number of different challenges. B) The finishing touches being added to improvised blindfolds. C) Pinning our colours to the mast in the Christmas photo. D) National pride distorting geographical accuracy. E) Out on one of the many operations conducted this month.



2nd Troop of the Line

Tpr Matthew Passmore

I have been attached to 2nd Troop, A (The Blue Horse) Squadron since June 2012 from my parent unit, A Squadron, Royal Mercian and Lancastrian Yeomanry (RMLY), a Territorial Army unit based in Dudley. During the past seven months I have progressed through a successful MST with the Warthog Group (WHG) and the training I received from exercises to in house training has fully prepared me for operations here in Afghanistan. Since arriving into theatre we, as a Squadron, have been extremely busy and yet somehow we've still managed to find time for continuation training and a bit of down time with barbeques and film nights. My time spent with the WHG has been enjoyable and with this being my first tour, the troop I'm working with has embraced me as one of their own. This is particularly surprising considering my hair is the colour of a Jamaican sunset, but as the Troop Sergeant is also blessed with this hair colour I seem to get fewer digs than I expected!

I am part of a BARMA team which consists of 5 members, one commander, a second in command and 3 searchers. It is our job to clear through vulnerable points or areas on the ground and search for any improvised explosive devices (IEDs). We also clear night locations known as armoured boxes so that the troop can conduct admin and sleep

Being able to work in a dismounted role has meant that we have got to know the interpreters within the troop really well, which allows us to interact with the locals and learn more about them. We often operate away from other ISAF bases where the locals may not be used to seeing us, but by getting out to these areas we are able to give them reassurance and build relationships.

My time with the RDG is flying by and I look forward to another busy few months before returning home for R&R, but before I finish writing I'd like to wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, from all of us serving with 2nd Troop.

Tpr Andrew 'Graham' Norton

I have been in the Royal Dragoon Guards for four years now. Deploying on Op HERRICK 12 with C Squadron in the Police Mentoring Role, it certainly didn't feel like much time had passed before Mission Specific Training (MST) started again. At the start of MST, I joined A Squadron and took on the role of Warthog driver. MST seemed to fly by, almost as quickly as this tour seems to be passing, and in October we deployed as a Squadron to Afghanistan.

As a Squadron we have been busy with the high tempo of work needed to keep the Warthogs on the road and ready for operations, but with Christmas approaching we have also found time to relax and enjoy ourselves. This hasn't been hard when you have the likes of Tpr Wilkinson coming up with comments such as, 'I joined the Regiment to fly Apaches' and others which would make Karl Pilkington proud!

The tour is going at a steady pace and morale has remained high. With Christmas Day in full flow, the Squadron, somewhat predictably, took the opportunity to turn the Christmas dinner





into a cacophony of jokes, party poppers and whistles. All too quickly the Squadron was back to work preparing for future ops as we await 1st Troop returning from their R&R and 2nd Troop heading back out on the ground in the next few days.

B 'The Black Horse' Squadron

Maj Hugh Pearce-Gould

December has seen the Squadron transform our approach to mentoring, as the Afghan police gain in confidence and ability. We are now focussed on enabling the Police to train themselves and conduct more complex operations with the Afghan Army. The soldiers of B Squadron have shown a great flexibility of mind as they have to constantly re-assess and adjust their role; you should all be very proud of their successes and the professional way in which these have been achieved.

Christmas is a hard time of year to be away from home but the Squadron is still in excellent spirits, with decorations and the increasingly "Catterick style" weather keeping us in the festive mood. We have received a fantastic amount of post from home, with gifts and welfare parcels piling up under the tree, we can't thank you enough for all for your continued support. We all wish you a very merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Squadron Headquarters Troop

Lt James Heath

The month of December has brought mixed emotions for the Black Horse Squadron; on the one hand everyone was looking forward to the planned Christmas celebrations, whilst on the other; there was the dawning realisation that many would be spending it away from their friends and family. With R&R starting to gain momentum, a lucky few would spend Christmas at a home, but as the majority of B Squadron would be in theatre for Christmas, preparations to inject some much needed Christmas cheer began early. The boys started by decorating their own bed spaces (and those of some of the less enthusiastic Officers) with the decorations that were kindly sent out by many of you at home. Work then quickly moved on to the welfare tent, where a resplendent Christmas tree was erected, complete with plenty of Christmas welfare parcels to open on the big day. Unsurprisingly, none of the boys wanted to put their own parcels under the tree! As Christmas day drew closer and closer, the turkey and all its trimmings finally arrived, and everyone, including the biggest scrooges (Cpl Reeves...) began to get excited. Luckily we welcomed an additional Chef (Pte Petinger) earlier in the month and our Christmas lunch promised to be one to remember.



Unfortunately as Christmas day approached an unplanned Operation began in our area which meant the men of B Squadron were required to be out on the ground every day for



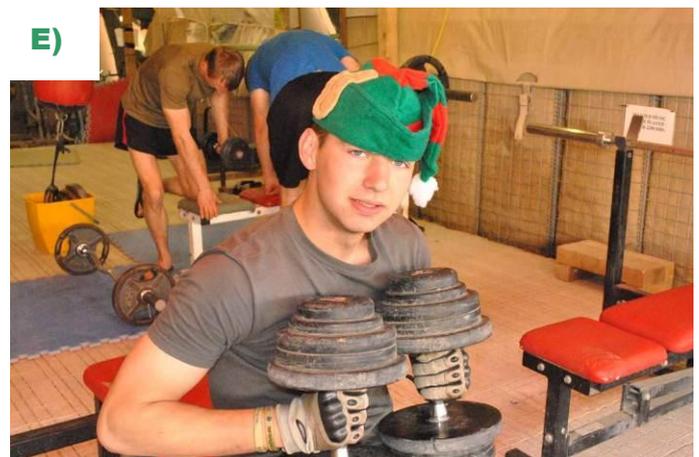


Photo captions:

A) Full of the joys of Christmas B) Ssgt Booth & Cpl Holbird RMP reminisce about November C) Cfmn Duff, Pte Grey, Pte Pettinger, SSgt Bradley D) The Christmas Pudding E) Cfmn Duff in Santa's Work "out" shop





long periods of time. Everyone had their fingers crossed that the Op would finish before the big day and we could enjoy as much of it as possible; but to the disappointment of many, at the time of writing the Op is still on going and the Christmas spectacular has been postponed. Even more frustratingly, these operations continued over Boxing Day and I missed the chance to snap up a pair of cut price 'Gucci' loafers in the Gereshk bazaar sales!

The level of professionalism shown by the Soldiers and Officers of B Squadron who have continued to soldier on through the majority of the festive period with very little complaint is highly commendable. Morale remains high despite the difficult circumstances and this is mainly thanks to the fantastic support we continue to receive from friends and family at home. Everyone is now looking forward to our delayed Christmas dinner and getting back into the normal working routine and we would like to take this opportunity to wish everyone at home a belated Merry Christmas.

Gereshk PAT

2Lt Simon Ramage

The past month has seen a rise in chapped upper lips as the warm, bristling slugs of Movember have given way to the biting cold of December. The soldiers of Silicon 21, after a huge amount of protesting (mainly Cpl Tom 'Sellick' Chapman), have shaved off the proud moustaches that adorned their chiselled features for a whole glorious month. As we near Christmas, this new, tash free, month has seen a rise in expectation in the quality of food. Sadly this has not been the case, as rations have made an unwelcome return but Ladies of England, please don't despair as Tpr Bowes has still retained his hard won puppy fat around the chin!

Christmas spirit has been in evidence from early in the month, as fairy lights were put up and paper chains were constructed and forcibly hung in certain officers' bed spaces. This provided some much needed, if unlooked for, festive decoration. The Spirit of Christmas, the schizophrenic alter ego of Sgt 'Six Pack' Jackson, was seen on the streets of Gereshk handing out presents and also at the District Police HQ, encouraging the Muslim policemen to celebrate with him in style. At first a little baffled, the policemen soon bought into the intended spirit, but Sgt Jackson was heartbroken upon learning that Cpl Chapman, his one time greatest fan, was actually the Grinch in disguise and hated both carols and traditional festive music. The only cure to this was the Troop Leader waking him up every morning with a new and exciting carol played at full volume...surprisingly, I found this to be badly received.

The most exciting work related development has been the transition of the PAT to a District Training Team (DTT). This means that we have been put through a rigorous course in which we have been taught to teach the AUP to train themselves. We hope to start this training in the near future. This re-rolling has been overshadowed by the collective pride of the PAT over the birth of the first children of two of our members. LCpl Ratubalavu and LCpl Rothery are now the proud fathers of sons. On behalf of the PAT and all of NES DAT, many congratulations to Mrs Ratubalavu and to Miss Crowe! We are all extremely proud of you both and thrilled that the new families are doing well. Having seen photographs of





Photo captions:

Left; The quantity of Christmas jumpers being sent out has been astonishing. Each soldier has received them with a different emotion, but here we see what true joy looks like!

Below; The Gereshk Competitive Tanning Team take the opportunity to pose for a picture before the weather takes a turn for the worse.





Ratty's son, we all agree that there is no difference between the two and I am sure he is already more capable than his father at driving the Ridgeback

Finally, a note to say that the amount of support and welfare the PAT has received over Christmas has been nothing short of astonishing. We have felt greatly appreciated and cared for and would like to offer a huge thank you to all who have taken time and effort to post gifts over the last month. We are all extremely grateful.

Happy Christmas to you all from us here and a prosperous New Year. We look forward to seeing you all in 2013.

PB2 PAT

Capt Tom Shorland Ball

The men of Silicon 26 decked the halls of PB 2 early and were bracing themselves for the whirlwind of Christmas cheer which rages through Helmand Province each year!

The day started with the opening of presents, which took quite some time thanks to everyone at home sending fantastic numbers of parcels; you have been wonderfully generous and this has given the morale of every member of the PAT a considerable boost. The tent was looking festive indeed, with the addition of the Christmas tree loaned to us by the AUP on condition of an invitation to the Christmas party. Later, we held a volleyball tournament in the middle of the day in the chilly sunshine. I pleased to report that the boys delivered a sound thrashing to the Royal Engineers. A couple of hours later Christmas dinner was served by the officers and SNCOs, but special credit must go to the chefs who did a sterling effort despite the austere conditions, feeding over 100 mouths, with a full dinner which included all the trimmings. The day was rounded off by skits, allowing all to let off steam and truly communicate their opinions on certain characters in the PB. Needless to say, both Sgt Stead and myself took a fair beating, but nothing in comparison to some other nameless attached arms present in the PAT Blind Date reproduction; I'm left wondering how many friends we still have in the PB!

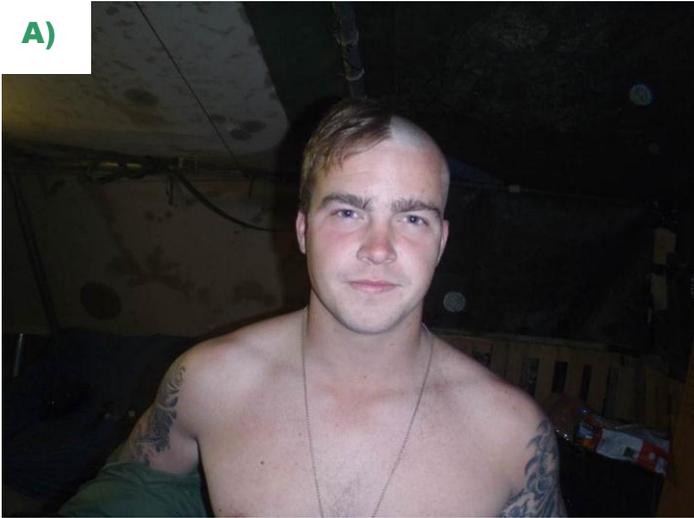
The police are improving as a result of our continued mentoring efforts. They becoming more independent and needing less direction, which is really encouraging.

On a less work-related note, volleyball remains an important part of our downtime and the boys have been practising against the Gurkhas. Lest our occasional victories go to our heads, we continue to lose against the ANP. The police are volleyball ninjas and we are sure that when they know a match is coming up, they go and recruit the best talent from the surrounding area! That said, there has been huge improvement and the team headed up by Cpl Hurst, LCpl Hill and Cfn Holmes has improved hugely over the past weeks. Volleyball isn't the only form of fitness we undertake. Sgt Stead and Tpr Clark are encouraging a fearsome gym routine, which should see a good number of sculpted individuals return home for R&R or at the end of tour.

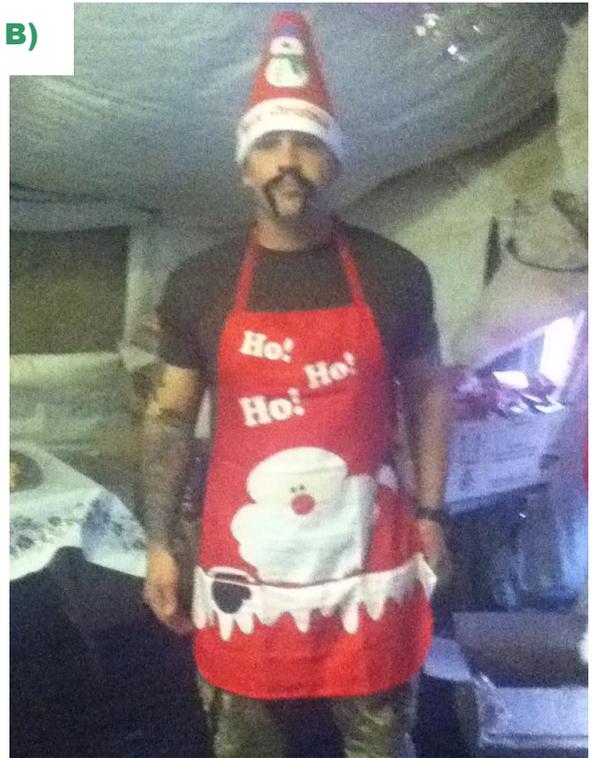




A)



B)



C)



D)



Photo captions:

A) Tpr Bedford half way through his new hair do... he didn't follow our advice to leave it like this! B) Sgt Stead happy to be serving Xmas dinner C) Tpr Wells overcome by the hilarity of the skit! D) Sgt Stead and Cpl Hurst feeling festive





A)



B)



C)



Photo captions:

A) The PAT at PB2 wish you a Merry Christmas. B) Capt SB post mince pie. C) The PAT Christmas tree... thanks for your generosity!





We are currently in the full swing of the R&R rotation, with Sgt Stead and LCpl Lawrence heading home, so as ever, all are working very hard to fill the gaps left by those away; but work is continuing well and everyone is returning from R&R invigorated and ready for the next few months. As for the remainder waiting to go, I don't think it can come quickly enough for anyone!

Many thanks again for the incredible support shown by everyone back home, Christmas may be over but please do keep the parcels and letters coming, they have a huge effect and are enormously appreciated. So, from all the members of Silicon 26, we hope you had a Merry Christmas and are looking forward to a very Happy New Year!

ANCOP PAT

Lt Andrew Moncrieff

Silicon 18 has continued mentoring 4/5 ANCOP Kandak in Combined Force BURMA. The PAT is now over half way into their tour, with spirits remaining high, especially now that R&R has begun. As a PAT, we continue to visit CPs up and down Route 611, enjoying Afghan hospitality and being warmly greeted by the ANCOP wherever we go. The ANCOP and the PAT have developed a very good working relationship forged over the past two and a half months and we are now advising ANCOP led operations.

The main distraction away from patrols has been the gym, with all members of the PAT being determined to be in better shape than when they left the UK. Under the watchful eyes of our PAT PTI, Trooper Sanson, and our Arnold Schwarzenegger shrine, everyone is reminded, "today Oulette, tomorrow the world!" The biggest excitement this month has undoubtedly been Christmas, with Santa not arriving on a sleigh pulled by Reindeer but rather an ISO container pulled by a truck containing all our mail. The PAT, after a busy morning on the ground, returned to Oulette for Christmas lunch, followed by a well earned afternoon off to open parcels and watch DVDs. Although away from home, we all enjoyed the day together, making it a different but pleasant way to spend Christmas. The remainder of the PAT are looking forward to their R&R and all are happy to be over the mid point of the Tour.





Christmas jumpers at last making a show!



The PAT admire their handy work



ANCOP PAT and friends



Christmas day at FOB Oullette





D 'The Green Horse' Squadron Helmand Provincial Police Headquarters



Tpr Lake, the OCCP Christmas Elf: Armed and dangerous!



A Christmas present from our Afghan friends!

Introduction

Maj Ben Watts

December has continued at a hectic pace for D Squadron, as the Police Advisor Teams continue deploying on operations to mentor the Afghan Police as they apply pressure to the insurgency across Lashkar Gah. On top of the normal routine of patrolling they are also engaged in an intense period of training for the Police, as we surge one last time before the PATs start to trickle home in the New Year. In District Police HQ we continue to assist the Chief of Police in his efforts to professionalise his force; through close cooperation with the logistics officers and Precinct Commanders, Capt Walton-Rees and Sgt McCartney work to improve the command and resupply procedures and to encourage the Lashkar Gah police to commit manpower to the PAT's training events. In Provincial Police HQ nothing happens quickly, but the QM, RSO, Intelligence Officer and I continue to make steady progress with the development of the various functional branches of Operations, Logistics and Personnel.

As ever with being on Tour over Christmas, the big day itself tends to creep up largely unnoticed and it is only the constant stream of perfume adverts on BFBS and the ever increasing flow of welfare parcels that reminds us what time of year it is. The big day itself went very well; the PATs were able to sit down together to enjoy Christmas lunch in MOB Lashkar Gah, whilst the Master Chef kindly freed up one of her staff to spend the festive period in the OCCP kitchen; we were over the moon with what a good job he did feeding us and the US Marines who live in PPHQ with us.

Never far from our thoughts at this time of year are LCpl Alec Waters, his wife and family. Alec was very seriously injured whilst supporting an AUP operation at the end of November





and spent several weeks in the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham. It is testament to his character and determination that he is making a remarkable recovery, so much so that he was allowed out for the day to spend Christmas at home. He is in our thoughts and we all look forward to catching up in the New Year.

Lashkar Gah District Centre Police Advisor Team (Silicon 41)

Lt Ali Smith

Silicon 41 have now settled well into our role of mentoring the Afghan Uniformed Police (AUP) around the Lashkar Gah District Centre. We have got to grips with the vehicle fleet we are using and the area we are operating in, as well as building good relationships with the police we are mentoring. The relationships we have built with the Precinct Commanders have been particularly encouraging and we now very much look forward to our meetings with them to find out what they have been up to and where we can assist. Additionally, three of the four Precinct Commanders we have been mentoring have recently been promoted, so we must be doing something right!

As a result of the ever-improving security situation around Lashkar Gah District Centre we have been able to focus our efforts on the training of the AUP. We have managed to identify and build a relationship with an AUP Training Officer in each Precinct and by tailoring the training we deliver to their requirements and assisting them with training methods, we are enabling the AUP to reach a higher level of training than they have ever reached before. However, more importantly, we are enabling them to continue to be able to train themselves once ISAF are no longer here. Our attached RMP and US Embedded Police Mentors have been invaluable in achieving this and are an integral part of the successful team that is Silicon 41.

Being based in the Main Operating Base in Lashkar Gah continues to yield benefits other than the gym and occasional piece of sirloin steak. A number of members participated in *Lash Has Talent* attended by Radio 1 DJ Greg James (check out the video on YouTube). Sadly, none of us were quite able to attain the dizzy heights of a podium finish. In the run up to Christmas we are looking forward to the Carol Service and the Panto.

All that remains is to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from everyone in Silicon 41. We look forward to seeing you in 2013!

Highway 601 Police Advisor Team (Silicon 43)

Tpr Tom Collings

December in PB Attal has seen quite a drastic change in the weather. The warm sunny days have become as cold and bitter as the nights and (as predicted) the rain is finally here. This has transformed the dry, dusty landscape into an oversized muddy sty! It may be Christmas, but there has been no let up and, if anything, the work load has increased as Silicon 43 and other elements of the ground holding force have undertaken a number of operations.





LCpl Wepener, Silicon 43's Military Linguist, proudly displays his effort for November



Going native!

Under the umbrella of Op QALB 11 we completed no fewer than 5 separate operations between the 9th-15th December across our area of operations. Many of these operations also included brigade assets such as the Warthog Group from A Sqn and the Brigade Ops Company and together we were very successful, helping the AUP make significant ground throughout the area and building an even stronger relationship between ISAF and the ANSF. Not only have the efforts of all involved be hugely beneficial to the lives of many innocent civilians but they have also denied the local insurgency money to carry on their fight. Hopefully the good work and strong relationships will continue to grow and last for the foreseeable future. Furthermore, the results of the past month mean that we can celebrate Christmas with a real sense of accomplishment.

Silicon 43 would like to join in the chorus of other contributors and say Merry Christmas to all our friends and family back home and a huge thank you for the parcels, letters and messages of support! We're all looking forward to seeing you soon.



Cpls Smith and Palmer take a break



Hearts and Minds



Lashkar Gah District Training Team (Silicon 44)

Lt Conor O'Shea

Greetings from Lashkar Gah! Silicon 44 have been an extremely busy body of men since we last sent an update. Throughout November our daily foot patrols and deliberate operations with the Afghan Police continued with great enthusiasm. As always, the Afghans have been fascinating to work with, one can't fault their enthusiasm and their hospitality is second to none. We have formed strong bonds with the Afghans we work with whilst on joint patrols, which we really enjoy. Unfortunately, this month we have had to leave our AUP friends on route 601 due our redeployment to Main Operating Base Lashkar Gah.



Silicon 44 complete at PB Attal



A civilised sit in the shade

We have been redeployed as part of the drawdown of ISAF forces in Afghanistan. Our new job title is the District Training Team and means we are now providing very specific training to Afghan Police, with a view to qualifying the best Police as Instructors, so that when we leave the training we have provided can continue, only given by the Afghans themselves. The withdrawal is very much the name of the game out here now. That means everyone on the ground (including us) has to be open to regular change, something which certainly makes the time pass quicker. What does this mean in reality for Silicon 44, though? Lots of moving of kit! At least we are now comfortably placed in MOB Lash, which is considerably larger and thus nicer than PB Attal, where we have been until this point. MOB Lash has fantastic facilities including a coffee shop, an amazing cookhouse and working internet... What a treat!

With Christmas in full swing, Silicon 44 couldn't wait to decorate the accommodation with many a festive ornament, there's even been a few festive hats seen floating about! Many of the decorations have been sent in care packages from home and as always, we can't express our gratitude enough for all the packages you have been sending. The morale boost from receiving some post cannot be emphasised enough; thank you!

Until the next update, Merry Christmas from Silicon 44 and a Happy New Year!





LCpl Priestley and Tpr Rimmington strike a pose.



Lt O'Shea attempts to sell some potatoes to a key local elder. Despite LCpl Birch trying to help, there was no sale this time.

Royal Dragoon Guards Around the World

Lt Bobby Crean



Without a doubt, the story to get the most press coverage recently involves Capt Adam Crookshank, LCpl Nick Webb and Cpl Robbie Harmer, who have been part of Walking with the Wounded's *In the Footsteps of Legends* expedition

to reach the South Pole. The team, put together and co-led by Justin Packshaw, formally a captain in the RDG, retraced the route taken by Captain Oates on his fateful journey with Captain Scott 100 years earlier. It was taken up by The Sunday Times as its sponsored Christmas appeal, hopes to raise over £1million and was followed intently by all of us serving in Afghanistan.

The lads were part of a team including Olympic Gold Medallist Matthew Pincent. After a challenging 97 mile long journey, and averaging just 7 miles a day, the team made it to the South Pole at 1220am (UK time) on 11th December. We are hugely proud of them.





The team take a well deserved break near the South Pole.



The Welfare Team smile, happily oblivious of the nightmare to follow.

Closer to home, the Welfare Office has been raising money for both those serving in Afghanistan and the charity, *Stand Up to Cancer*, a cause close to all of us considering the battle with cancer SSgt Hickinson's father has been facing. Not content with just having a whip around, the team decided to generate interest by running a 79 mile Ultramarathon across the Yorkshire Wolds! They were incredibly disappointed not to be able to finish this huge undertaking, but they completed 60 miles in 21 hours, and the weather had been punishing for the last 15 hours or so of this. They should be very pleased with their achievement and would like to thank everyone for the support and funds received.



Our thoughts have obviously been with George Hickinson and his family, and it was great to see such positive comments about him in the press, as he played his part in guiding England to victory against New Zealand on Saturday 1st December. George was SSM with 4/7 Royal Dragoon Guards and was asked to give a pre-match talk to the England team as well as issue each player their match shirt. The talk highlighted the





fact the Regiment were in Afghanistan and would be watching the game so they should, "fight hard against the All Blacks because the Regiment are fighting hard for them." After the game the England players thanked George for his pick me up speech and said it was instrumental their win! He was joined by another former Regimental SSM, Alec Kalanski.



Like father, like son. History repeats itself, as SSgt Bob Hickinson mirrors SSM George Hickinson's pose.

Chaplain's Corner

Padre Andy Harding

I write this the day before Christmas Eve and I am eyeing up the packages that I have received from home that I know are full of food, but which I am saving for Christmas day. Christmas Eve is the day when we set out and tour the bases where RDG and PMAG troops can be found. I believe that each trip has been strategically planned around meal times, a trick I learnt as a Vicar. I learnt other tricks as a Vicar too. I learnt to drink tea very quickly, as I had to move on to my next appointment... and of course people loved asking me if I would like a cup of tea so they could at some stage utter the immortal lines, "more tea Vicar?" Tea drinking has become part of tour life as well. The Afghans love a cup of chai and the best way I can describe it is similar to green tea, but very sweet and generally with strange bits of vegetation lying at the bottom of the cup. If I'm honest, I must admit that I quite like it, and so of course I did my normal thing of drinking it quickly the first time I was offered some. As soon as I finished, our hosts would fill the cup up again. After I had drunk more cups than I care to remember, I noticed that the other RDG soldiers had hardly touched theirs and were drinking it very slowly. Soon after I noticed this, the rice and meat were brought out. Eating this with only my fingers, I managed to get it all over me, but the Afghans didn't seem to mind and found it fairly amusing. Again I noticed that I was the only RDG who seemed to be necking the stuff.



Eventually someone piped up, "The trick is Padre, to eat it slowly so you don't get given more to eat because it can disagree with our stomachs," they said. I've always had a constitution like an Ox, so I just carried on. It wouldn't affect me.

24 hours later I was repeating what I had eaten to a Nurse, and while she was writing it





down, she shook her head. Then she led me out of the surgery into the medical tent where I was isolated for the next two days.

So, I for one will be watching what I am going to eat this Christmas but rest assured that we are going to make sure that everyone has a great time over the next few days, eating plenty and opening lots of gifts. While we do this we of course will be thinking of you back at home this Christmas and we all send our best wishes and love as we celebrate the birth of Jesus this December 2012.

Merry Christmas! X

