



## Commanding Officer's Notes – Lieutenant Colonel James Carr-Smith

Now that the majority of us have just passed the half-way stage of our tour it seems like a good time to issue our second newsletter.

The last few weeks have been dominated by the very sad news that Troopers Ashley Smith and James Leverett have been killed in action. Both were victims of Improvised Explosive Devices. Their deaths have rocked the Regiment but they have not affected our resolve. All ranks have commented on how Ashley and James's sacrifice will inspire them to help defeat the insurgency and assist the people of Afghanistan make their country a better place.



*Trooper Ashley Smith  
KIA 18 June 2010*



*Trooper James Leverett  
KIA 5 July 2010*

All members of the Regiment are performing magnificently and you can be hugely proud of their achievements. During my visits to the Squadrons and Troops I have been humbled by the dedication, bravery and intelligence displayed by our officers and soldiers. They confront danger often on a daily basis but they do so knowing they are making a difference.

They are all aware that we are deployed in Afghanistan to protect our national security. We are here to prevent Afghanistan becoming a safe haven for terrorists from which they can threaten the UK and our allies. We will achieve this by providing security in conjunction with the Afghan National Security Forces such that Afghan governance and economic development can prosper. This is a challenging and demanding task, but one which is absolutely central to our national security.

But despite the outstanding work of all those deployed in Afghanistan I am quite clear that their brave deeds are only possible due to the exceptional level of support they receive from the Rear Party, the Regimental Welfare Office and Home Headquarters. They too have taken the view that they are on a campaign footing. They continue to work tirelessly to support us and our families and friends. Their outstanding work has not been wasted on us and we much look forward to returning home to thank them in person.

## B (THE BLACK HORSE) SQUADRON

### Squadron Leader's Notes – Major Simon Everard

A lot has changed in a month and a half. The Squadron is now split across four locations and, as before, I will let the Troop Leaders tell their particular stories. Suffice to say that for 95% of the Squadron, life on Mastiff continues. The R&R plot is now in full swing and that has meant that every crew has to work that little bit harder. This will probably continue to be the case until late August but, from everything I have seen, there is absolutely no change in the level of support delivered. As we hit the half-way mark, the prospect of going on R&R is now an enormous incentive. I also know that everyone returning from R&R has thoroughly appreciated the time at home with their families and friends – this quality of support and love from the home front is quite humbling. For all the hassle of getting people away from the various Patrol Bases and Check Points, and for all the heart-ache of another good-bye, soldiers do return recharged and ready to see the job through to completion.



The major change has come with the move of 1<sup>st</sup> Troop (previously known as SHQ Troop) from Gereshk to Route 601. A by-product of this decision has been the re-allocation of the Squadron Leader, 2IC and SSM to form the command and control element of the Nahr-e-Saraj (South) Police Advisory Team. This small band of very determined men works for both the 1 RGR BG (as per 3<sup>rd</sup>

Troop) and the Police Development Advisory and Training Team (PDATT). We have about 20 members of 1 RGR BG as our Police Mentoring Teams and roughly 150 members of the Afghan National Police (ANP) to develop, mentor and advise. While it is a real strain to be detached from the Troops, although in almost daily contact with two of them, the challenge in developing the ANP in the area (once known as Babaji) is both substantial and worthwhile. The Police has chosen to support the Government of Afghanistan, they genuinely want to bring security to their villages – 50% of the force are local men – and they sometimes listen to the advice and direction we give them.



They sometimes act on it too. Whilst there are frustrations, we are helping to deliver local, long-term, Afghan-led security and that is one of the major stepping stones to success here.

At the halfway mark of the tour, my time in command is up and I hand over the Squadron to Major Rupert Smith. It has been a fantastic, life-long privilege to 'hold the reins' for the last 2 years, culminating in the Squadron's deployment and ongoing achievements on operations. They are as fine a group of soldiers as anyone could ever aspire to command; professional, responsive, determined and, above all, enormously good company. Thank you all and fare thee well.



**1<sup>st</sup> Troop (attached to 1 SG BG in Lashkar Gah) – Staff Sergeant Marty Pinner (Captain Mike Lee is away on R&R)**



Since the last publication, the much acclaimed SHQ Troop has disbanded and 1<sup>st</sup> Troop, led by Capt Lee, has risen as a phoenix from the flames. We said goodbye to the Danish Battle Group and moved under command of B Coy, 1<sup>st</sup> Bn Scots Guards. The Coy's primary task is to provide security to the Route 601 road that runs from south of Gereshk to Lashkar Gah. This is one of the few metalled roads in Helmand province and is therefore vital to the support we are trying to give the people in the area. Our secondary task is to move into the surrounding area, build relationships and develop an

understanding of the local people. All of this is done working with the local police (ANP). Our new task involved a change of location from the relative luxury of MOB Price to Check Points School House (aka Atal) and Pump House. The Troop has been split in two, with half at each location providing Mastiff crews for two multiples.

B Coy has been more than welcoming in taking us under their wing. The two check points are best described as 'basic' with no running water and electricity provided by generators. Accommodation was initially under a poncho, but now we have tents fitted with thermal sheets to offer some protection from the heat. Each location is neighboured by an ANP check point and we are rapidly learning to live together. So well in fact we have been invited to watch the World Cup on the ANP Colonel's TV until ours arrives! We have been able to provide them with additional military training and LCpl Bulless, the Squadron medic, has provided a mini 'drop-in clinic' for the ANP. Despite these hardships a gym has already been constructed and the engineers, who performed a minor miracle in getting this place fit for habitation, have built loos and showers.



While the focus is our mounted role, members of the Troop have seized the opportunity to do some foot patrols. They are always ready to be the lead man and clear the way for the rest of the patrol with our Vallon metal detectors. Daily routine here is fairly fixed with two days on guard followed by two on patrols. This has given us a chance to see the ground we work in as well as interact with the people and the police. I say 'routine' but really anything can happen, ranging from being given free watermelons on one patrol to walking into a massive field of marijuana, ready to be harvested, according to the farmer.



Another highlight occurred at a routine vehicle check point; when a car was stopped, imagine our surprise when both occupants, a male and a female, had broad cockney accents. They were over here visiting family, allegedly.

Sadly we have had to say goodbye to a few of our merry band for a variety of reasons – Sgt Woods, LCpl Tams, LCpl Swift and Tpr Kitchen have all returned to UK. We all look forward to seeing them on our return.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Troop (attached to 1 LANCS BG in Nad-e Ali) – Captain David Brooks



The relentless pace continues for 2<sup>nd</sup> Troop in the Nad-e Ali District. The Troop remains split between two locations; Forward Operating Base (FOB) Shawqat and Patrol Base (PB) Samsor. FOB Shawqat is situated in the heart of the District Centre and houses approximately 400 British, Afghan and US soldiers who form the Battlegroup Headquarters and supporting elements. Individuals are housed in tents (without air conditioning sadly) but are privy to running water, and therefore showers, as well as good facilities and excellent chefs. PB Samsor is situated to the South West between two large population centres and is the

home to Corunna Coy. Conditions here are a little more basic; soldiers are still housed in tents but with less access to running water. Due to the smaller numbers the PB does not currently have a professional chef, which has allowed Trooper Roberts to hone his culinary skills.

Since the last newsletter we have supported two major operations, in addition to the more routine demands we have come to expect – protecting convoys around the streets of Nad-E-Ali, chauffeuring the District Governor and his entourage, and reacting to emergency situations when on Quick Reaction Force (QRF) tasking. First came Operation TOR MAKHA ZE which involved assisting C Squadron RDG and Corunna Company in expanding their influence South of their respective areas of operations and establishing new Patrol Bases. The operation went well although not without incident and after several days of sporadic bouts of heavy fighting the objectives were realised. It was during one such attack that Trooper Easton, attached to us from C Squadron, sustained minor wounds to his leg whilst providing top cover from the vehicle turret. He is making a rapid recovery and we all send him our best wishes.

More recently the Troop has partaken in Operation TOR LARE PAKAWAL, a clearance operation in support of Somme and Anzio Companies, to rid Route DORSET of IEDs and Taleban influence. A grenade attack against the Troop was successfully thwarted by one of the troopers, attached from C Squadron, who shot the insurgent before he could throw a second grenade. An IED attack by the Taleban also proved ineffective against the Mastiff's armour, allowing Corporal Spencer and crew to drive on with only minor scratches to the vehicle. Overall the operation was successful with Route DORSET cleared up to Check Point TALAANDER, allowing the local nationals unrestricted access and Somme Coy soldiers based there to be more easily resupplied.



Despite working hard, there's still been some time for much needed rest and relaxation. A cricket match between the Troop and a mixed team of Afghan interpreters and local nationals recently took place at the hallowed cricket ground that is PB Shazad. Despite valiant attempts by Lance Corporal Brooke and Trooper Hosford, the Troop capitulated in a manner that would have excused England's recent World Cup performance, albeit in the face of some wickedly fast bowling by the Afghans. Now beyond the halfway point most have either already been on their R&R or will shortly be reunited with their family and friends. The support from everyone back home has been nothing short of overwhelming and is much appreciated by all. The parcels and letters you continue to send never fail to bring a smile to their recipient; please keep them coming.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Troop (attached to 1 RGR BG in Nahr-e Saraj (South)) – Lieutenant Lloyd Walton-Rees

The past couple of months have been a typically busy period for the men of 3<sup>rd</sup> Troop. We maintain our constant commitment as the QRF for the 1 RGR BG based out of PB2 and continue to provide force protection for the movement of vital equipment and stores between Camp Bastion and the Patrol Bases.

Life in Helmand still throws up its surprises. On the return leg of a patrol to escort the District Governor to a high profile *shura* in the area, the Troop received an unexpected 'gift'. The gunners on the



Mastiffs are now well accustomed to having the occasional stone thrown at them by playful children, but Trooper Priestley had the shock of his life catching what he thought to be a rock but was instead a baby owl. 'Ar Judd', as the owl became affectionately known, was lovingly cared for and kept as a Troop pet. Holes were poked into a box, a perch created and 'Ar Judd' seemed to be in his element. Research was conducted by a number of Troopers into the dietary requirements of a baby owl and all were not overly shocked to find that ration pack sausages were not high on its list of favourite foods. After 2 days of the owl not eating this random assortment of food stuffs, the Troop had a pang

of guilt and during an overnight stop at PB1 it was released into the wild. Well, into a hole in a HESCO wall where it then hid.

The area has become increasingly kinetic, but the hard work and focus on training that the entire Troop put in before arrival in Afghanistan is paying dividends. When this is coupled with the use of our Mastiff armoured vehicles with some fairly significant firepower, means that the insurgents are heavily outmatched and think twice before picking a fight. The Troop continues to have some high profile passengers. As part of an escort to the Police HQ in Gereshk, LCpl Wright was somewhat shell-shocked at first to find out that Major General Carter, Major General Mills and the Brigade Commander were all directed towards his vehicle. Allegedly, it was the best if shortest vehicle safety brief he has ever given. Secretly he quite enjoyed his moment in the spotlight.



Temperatures continue to soar, rising higher in some vehicles than others. Trooper Chapman continues to keep both the REME busy and his Troop Leader sweating. Mastiffs can be hot at the best of times, but breaking the fan belt and air conditioning on the same patrol does not help improve life inside one. Morale in the Troop remains high, predominantly down to the antics of Trooper Edwards. His impressions of BA Baracus and his individual approach to darts are particular highlights. The R&R plot has well and truly kicked in and the Troop are all looking forward to their turn to see family and friends back home.

## **C (THE BLACK DRAGOONS) SQUADRON**

### **FOREWORD – Major Sam Bramall**

It is hard to believe that we are now over half way through the tour and a sizeable proportion of the Squadron have already had their R&R! Since the last newsletter was published the Squadron has been busy as I am sure you have heard through phone calls and letters. We have now conducted a number of operations within our area of responsibility designed to push the Taliban out of some of their former strongholds. These have involved the majority of the Squadron in some shape or form. On the whole they have been extremely successful and it is hugely rewarding to see genuine progress being made. Even in the short period of time we have been here we have seen locals returning to their former homes, shops and businesses opening and local Afghan governance taking hold in areas where the Taliban once ruled. The vast majority of the locals are hugely on-side with us and they genuinely appreciate the job we are doing. Regrettably the Squadron has had its first casualties, however fortunately they have been light and every one of them will make a full recovery. It is reassuring to know that we have the very best medical facilities here and help is never far away. As we look towards the remainder of the tour we are consolidating our position and focusing more on improving the capabilities of the Afghan Security Forces with a specific focus on the Police. This will be challenging, however it means that we will be firmly paving the way for sustainable security in Afghanistan. Thank you all on behalf of the Squadron for your continued support and the vast quantity of mail and parcels you send us. I can assure you, it is hugely appreciated by us all.

### **PB CHILLI (MONGOOSE ZERO) – Captain Matt Howden**

SHQ and its various attachments have hurtled through the halfway point of the tour without drawing breath. The boys continue to keep smiling whilst the SSM gets grumpier with the increasingly hot weather (it's hard to describe what 54 degrees actually feels like). While it was never the intention that the Sqn TAC group would turn into a courier service they do spend a lot of time dashing about the area in the two Husky vehicles (think pick-up truck on Valium) dropping off rations, bullets, maps and (thank-you!) mail.

A series of deliberate ops have seen the Sqn providing support to other patrol bases both in terms of manpower and logistic support. The command group has frequently deployed forward to the PBs to help with command and control leaving Sqn TAC in PB Chilli, often on minimal manning, to run a Sqn ops room and guard the base. Our Afghan National Police brothers joined us in Chilli a few weeks ago and our relationship with them varies from the sublime (sharing food and occasional games of volleyball) to the ridiculous (arguments about the right way to deal with a chicken-stealing dog and explaining why it's inappropriate for them to watch us in the shower). Cpl Willis, our attached RAF Police mentor (a good chap, no really) spends many happy hours explaining the intricacies of a properly executed stop-and-search or drawing complicated diagrams to describe the right way to conduct a vehicle checkpoint.

A recent re-think about the way in which the Sqn is distributed across our area of responsibility has seen the arrival of Lt Rob Gough and the men of M34. They happily allowed the way of life at PB Chilli to wash over them and soon embraced the camp dog (called Anzio) and the 'bath'. The bath is actually a dug-out irrigation ditch and not altogether hugely hygienic. If, however, you are prepared to brave the floating cigarette butts and the attentions of Sebastian, the fresh-water crab, then it is a fantastic way to cool off after a mid-day patrol or a spot of PT.



*The might of C Sqn TAC group*

The pace of life currently varies from frantic to tranquil with every stage in-between. The mail is getting through and the sun-tans are developing nicely although the watchkeepers are in danger of returning with less of a tan than they had in Catterick. In short, life for SHQ is pretty good and the time to returning home is passing quickly.

### **SHAMAL STORRAI (MONGOOSE 31) – Lieutenant Nick Landon**

Since our last piece some six weeks ago there have been a few subtle changes in manning here at Shamal Storrai. An Operation further North in Nad-e Ali meant that at one stage we were reduced to 14 soldiers, including four new additions from the Royal Artillery, employed specifically to operate some of the surveillance equipment inside the Patrol Base. In addition to that we are on our third rotation of Afghan National Police soldiers. They are of a mixed quality however they are enthusiastic and determined. Much of our time is currently spent training them and improving their capabilities.

We are now well settled into our routine in Helmand, and balance our time patrolling in Gorup-e Shesh Kalay and a smaller population centre known as Heel Ahern, some 800 meters to our South. The contrast between the two locations could not be more different. Whereas the locals in Gorup-e Shesh are supportive of both the ANP and ISAF involvement and see the benefits that security can bring, Heel Ahern is still very much a work in progress, with a clear Taliban presence.



*Sgt Cunningham and his close protection team*

Our patrolling here involves identifying Taliban locations and routes whilst reassuring the local nationals and winning their support. At the time of writing this article we are joined with some of the soldiers of Mongoose 32, which has enabled us to push a little further into the village than we normally could.

The regular flow of mail into the PB is deeply appreciated by everyone here and should definitely not be under-estimated!

### **BLUE 22 (MONGOOSE 32) – Captain Tom Coker**

Patrol Base Blue 22 has been renamed Shamshad to give it more of an Afghan feel. Shamshad is not only the name of the largest mountain in Afghanistan but it is also an evergreen tree which never bends in the wind, hence the poetry of the cool green and the strength of the mountain...or something like that. It's better than Blue 22 anyway. Owing to our flexibility and mobility the guys have been all over the place recently. We have had guys sent up north to support the Anzio Company 1 LANCS operations and things got a little testy for some of those involved. Cpl Newell and Tpr Hunter were

having a banging time and Tpr Harbridge surprised everybody with his lightning reactions in sticky situations. Aside from the north we were also in evidence down in the south helping out Mongoose 31 (the Landon/Cunningham 'massive') during OP TOR MUGA and joining them on a number of patrols with their Afghan Police brothers. In the PB there have been many changes. The Ops Room has been extensively remodelled (not so much out of choice, more out of necessity since LCpl Exell decided to redecorate the ceiling in an interesting new style called "hint of charcoal". He has since been installed as fire NCO on the basis that he is (so far) the only one to have burned part of the PB down). The gym has been extensively remodelled and is now actually quite impressive (given that it is made of iron stakes, ammunition tins and a rowing machine!). It would be nice to say that Mongoose 32 was able to show up our Afghan partners on the new volleyball court but unfortunately they appear to be better at that as well!

A new team of ANCOP has moved into the area and has proved to be extremely proficient in their role, and has fitted in very well with the guys. Regularly they can be found chatting with the chaps (either in pidgin English or in sign) or playing volleyball.



*Mongoose 32 – pre patrol pose!*

The locals around PB Shamshad are still benefiting from the ISAF benevolence, with radios, prayer mats, pens and even Mosque speakers flying out of the patrol base. The latest project is trying to fix up some of the local mosques. The line-up of PB Shamshad has changed slightly and we have reluctantly released Sgt Cosby to Red Cross, but in the same breath we welcome Tiffy Pordage into the fold. We have also seen the arrival of shiny new Tprs Mahoney and Rodgers who are gradually shedding the 'rabbit-in-headlights' look.

### **BLUE 25 (MONGOOSE 33) – Lieutenant Hugh Vere Nicoll**

The focus for the inhabitants of Blue 25 has recently moved from patrolling the village of Shin Kalay to the training, mentoring and developing of the ANCOP (Afghan National Civil Order Police) with whom we share the Patrol Base.

This training has taken many forms, involving all members of the Troop at different stages: from Tpr Blood leading on the use of our Combat Application Tourniquets and field dressings, to Cpl Kaye expertly teaching detention and evidence handling. One day even saw LCpl Renney teaching a lesson on why running a radio in a Humvee without turning the engine on would eventually run the battery out and prevent the vehicle from working! We have also had extensive weapons training, bringing the ANCOP up to speed on our weapon systems and us on theirs. An interesting lesson when conducted through an interpreter! Partnering the ANCOP has not just involved teaching; much of it is simply living together and learning each other's customs and ways of life. Joint meals are a regular occurrence. Most evenings one or two RDG soldiers may be found tucking into beef, lamb or chicken cooked in a pressure cooker with rice. More often than not most of the ANCOP can be found in our living area, especially now there is a TV to coincide with the football World Cup!





*Mongoose 33 relaxing in Patrol Base Blue 25*

**MONGOOSE 34 – Lieutenant Rob Gough**

All in all a very successful, if a little warm, month for the members of Mongoose 33 and inhabitants of Blue 25. All are much looking forward to the return of those lent-out to other Multiples in the Squadron to enable us to resume a gruelling routine of patrols next month!

As we reach the halfway mark of the tour it has been another busy period for those in Mongoose 34. Normal patrolling around the area of Patrol Base (PB) Blue 17 continued with our Afghan National Army (ANA) partners; the frequent requests for bridges from the locals continued, although sadly we could not get a picture of Tpr Sibson presenting one in this edition! The biggest event of the last few months was the handing-over of PB Blue 17 to the ANA due to the improving security situation in the area. The packing-up and clearing-out took a couple of days to complete, and very much like moving house was an interesting experience that ended up with far more boxes of kit than expected, as well as finding all sorts of things we had thought were lost for ever. This hand-over can only be seen as positive step forward for the Squadron, and for the deployment as a whole, so a big well done to all the hard work from the lads for the last 2 months.

Following our move we were sent north to assist Anzio Company, 1 LANCS for 3 weeks, a period of time that saw us split-up and scattered across several check points and patrol bases.



*Mongoose 34 resting outside an Afghan Police Check Point*

We returned at the beginning of July to our new home in PB Chilli with Squadron Headquarters and we have since been unpacking and adjusting to our new environment. The focus now is on mentoring the Afghan National Police in the area and helping them to develop their capabilities further.

We have had one new addition, Tpr McCrossan, who hails from Northern Ireland, and sadly LCpl Soetendal was evacuated after being hit by a ricocheting bullet. He was casevaced out and should make a full recovery with only a broken jaw, a scar and a good story!

**RED CROSS (MONGOOSE 35) – SSgt Jason Pordage**

Well, doesn't time fly when it's 40 degrees plus and the best entertainment is playing cat and mouse with the local, well 'mice' really. It is hard to put down all the events that have happened, so here are the highlights. Over the last month Mr Vere Nicoll and I have exchanged a few personnel in order that the guys get the most out of the Tour. LCpl Fish and I have stayed, fortunately escaping the four walls regularly by pleading our way onto patrols where possible. We have also had a change of ANCOP recently; a newly trained bunch arrived all keen and bright faced and I'm glad to say that we have bonded well.

During the last month we have continued to seek to build a good relationship with the people of Shin Kalay, and for the most part this has been successful. We will often chat to the residents on the check point and they view us as providing them with a secure environment for them to live and bring up their families. Recently, we had two locals seriously injured in a motorcycle accident and they were brought to the Check Point. Their injuries were quickly assessed to be life-threatening by LCpl Fish and with the aid of Tpr Smith, first aid was given and both men were stabilised. Within 20 minutes a Chinook was landing at high speed. Everyone involved worked very professionally and it was with some pride that I looked back at my small team once the helicopter had left. Two days later we got word that both men were doing well in hospital at Camp Bastion and the ANCOP now hold us in awe. We have continued throughout to carry out our monthly refresher training with the ANCOP and it makes the whole process more enjoyable when conducting it with the Afghan Police.

We send all our thanks for the continued support that you give us, and I must emphasize the huge difference that mail and parcels make to the daily routine. Tpr Fryer is still winning the competition to build a life size St Paul's with empty parcel boxes but the race is now defiantly on. We now have enough shower gel to start putting some to one side to bring back for Christmas presents (you've been warned!). Anyway, we are all well and we much look forward to seeing you on R&R.



*Tprs Edgerton and Fryer on patrol in Shin Kalay*

## D (THE GREEN HORSE) SQUADRON

### First Impressions – Major Denis James

The overwhelming feeling upon landing in Afghanistan is relief. The process of getting here started on 1 Jul last year, when the Sqn rolled on to the prairie at BATUS (indeed many of us were also there for EX MED MAN 1, meaning that the start point can be traced back further), and it has been a fair slog to get to the point of stepping off the plane at BASTION. I can only thank the families for their forbearance thus far, and I can assure them that every night out of bed has been spent on critical activity.

It is hot, as hot as one can bear with body armour and helmet on, but the body acclimatises very quickly. That is not to say it gets much easier, but it does become tolerable; there are various ways of telling that acclimatisation has been achieved, ranging from the amount of water needed on a daily basis (it can be as high as 10-12 litres of water a day to begin with, and without too many visits to the lavatory), to the moment when one feels cold at night for the first time. Anyhow, the general standard of fitness within the Sqn is of great help, particularly as we are at altitude here; on the first days in theatre nosebleeds are common. Apart from the heat and the altitude, the other features of this area of Afghanistan, as with any country in this region, are the glare as the sunlight reflects from the ground, and the dust that blows in as the wind whips up.



*Major Denis James*

The Squadron has now deployed on numerous operations, and we have, in tangible ways, improved the lot of the Afghans here and have had a direct effect on the enemy that we have come across us.

As you know, we have had two of our soldiers, Tpr Ashley Smith and Tpr James 'Levy' Leverett Killed In Action. We will mourn them when we return to Catterick; our thoughts and prayers are with their families. Their deaths have stiffened our resolve.

So on we push; it is too early for me to judge progress, but the Sqn is in good heart and the officers and soldiers have performed magnificently thus far.

### 1<sup>st</sup> Troop – Captain Iain Monk

1<sup>st</sup> Troop deployed to Afghanistan on 3 June. Since arriving, the Troop has been very busy. After just a few days we were on the ground providing security for the visit of the Prime Minister. It turned out to be a very good first Operation, as it was very quiet because there were so many forces on the ground. It was a successful op, it settled a lot of nerves, and we got to see a lot of the area that Task Force HELMAND is responsible for.

After that operation, the guys got a bit of rest and were then tasked to go on an Op LOAM. This is the resupply of the units based in Sangin. It was a long operation and mainly involved swallowing dust being kicked up by the vehicle in front! It was at this point that we received the news from fourth Troop that Tpr Ashley Smith had been killed. He was a very popular soldier, but the troop reacted excellently. We took a moment to reflect and then refocused on the task at hand, because we knew we would get a chance to say a proper goodbye when in camp.

Next, we moved to Nahr-e Saraj (South), where we helped 1 MERCIAN establish a new check point, which is a key sign of progress, as it signifies the slow but sure spread of our influence throughout the Area of Operations. After the first day, as I was dropping supplies at one of the 1 MERCIAN compounds, a Mericans' Sgt approached me. He started thanking me and the rest of the Vikings for the job we were doing. I can't remember exactly what he said, but the Mercians have been hit pretty hard whilst they had been there, and our presence was allowing them to concentrate on the new checkpoint. I have never felt so proud of the Sqn.



*Relaxing (or posing?) before another patrol*

On 5 Jul, having moved to yet another Patrol Base, Tpr James 'Levy' Leverett was Killed In Action. Again, whilst it is a sad moment in our lives, we push on regardless. The Troop is performing magnificently and you should all be very proud of them. The boys are working incredibly hard and we're making a difference, not only on the effectiveness of the insurgents, but also to other soldiers who are around us.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Troop – Lieutenant James Hollas**

3<sup>rd</sup> Troop was the final element of D Squadron to leave Catterick and arrive in theatre. After a brief stopover in Minhad, hosting courtesy of the Australians, we arrived in Camp Bastion and were thrown straight into the RSOI package already started by the rest of the Squadron. What this meant was an element of catch-up for a few days, which the Troop accepted with grace, but we were disappointed not to be ready for the first Viking Group operation. However, 3<sup>rd</sup> Troop seized the opportunity to ensure that it was entirely set for the next, completing our RSOI package with a Battle Exercise run with input from 1 RTR (our predecessors in this role), who were eager to pass on their invaluable experience to us. The end result was a battle-ready Troop, keen to deploy on the ground and put the last 10 months' worth of training into practice.



Our chance came about with the Viking Group's contribution to OP LOAM. It provided us with the ability to 'stretch our legs', as it were, and to get to grips with the new vehicles and the new terrain. As a whole, the Squadron demonstrated its ability to fully utilise the Viking's manoeuvrability and flexibility, securing screening points ahead and out to the flanks of the Talisman and CLP call-signs, resulting in the fastest LOAM to date.

The people are the Key Terrain. It is sometimes frustrating for us not to be able to fully interact with the local population from our turrets in the same way that dismounted troops can. But as the Viking Group moves further into the Green Zone, this may change, and we hope to demonstrate to the average Afghan that the armoured vehicle parked outside their compound is not a threat in itself.



## 4<sup>th</sup> Troop – Lieutenant Nick Chew

On 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2010 the first main body flight of the RDG Viking Group arrived in Camp Bastion, Afghanistan. On that flight were 4<sup>th</sup> Tp of D (The Green Horse) Sqn. The rest is history.

The Troop arrived in good spirits. We turned up as a team and in all honesty, I think it was the first time we truly felt like a settled group. Work on the vehicles and tank part was instant, the checks and servicing and serial numbers and documentation began.



4<sup>th</sup> Troop D Sqn

After RSOI we had our first Op to complete - depth protection during the Prime Minister's visit. It was to be a 3 day Op in and around Lashkar Gah with the Scots Guards. The Op went without hitch and everyone got the opportunity to calm their nerves about what was beyond the wire of Camp Bastion. We operated away from the Sqn, putting in Vehicle Check Points as well as manned a compound just off the route with the ANP. Nervous though we were in that compound in the darkness, we dominated the area well enough for no one to try taking us on.

We were then separately tasked to the Green Zone in southern Nahr-e Saraj. The Troop was attached to a company of 1 MERCIAN who had suffered heavy losses due to enemy pressure and were in need of some form of support. The presence of the Viking and the domination we provided certainly put the enemy on the back foot. We were very successful, but on our 4th day there, whilst clearing a route for the safety of his Troop, Trooper Ashley Smith was KIA. In that same blast Tpr Dalby was also seriously injured but his life was saved by the outstanding skill and urgency of Tprs Clibery, Bentley and Paul as well as our trusted and efficient medic, LCpl Hewitt. It has been devastating and difficult, but the Troop has pulled together amazingly, and I cannot be more proud of the way they have conducted themselves.



## Recce Troop

### Troop Leader's Notes – Captain Jeremy Hann

#### Commander Regional Command (South)'s Force Protection Troop – based in Kandahar

You find us a few pounds lighter as we march, or at the very least drive, inexorably towards the halfway point of our tour in Kandahar. Much is beginning to change in the city; the size of the Afghan National Security Force presence, infrastructure improvements, more Americans, more Governmental involvement from Kabul and ultimately more work for us to do.

We have continued to provide protection and security for the Commander of Regional Command (South) as he moves around the city, and we also ensure Freedom of Movement for other key enablers as Operation Hamkari commences. In addition to our principal tasks we have become the Kandahar Quick Reaction Force. This is a permanent move and sees us at high-readiness every night in order to counter the increased threat of ground assault. The up-coming months also offer some new and interesting work within the city, all of which is most welcome. Variety is the spice of life, as they say.



*Elements of Recce Troop pre-patrol*

At the risk of sounding like a London Cabbie, 'you'll never guess who I had in the back of my cab last week.'.... Recently we have found ourselves working for President Karzai, (the former) Commander ISAF, any number of Ministers, and most recently, what feels like most of the British Media, from the BBC to ITV to The Sun and Evening Standard. This of course has led to any amount of posturing in an attempt to get on camera, and at the moment the media coverage and column inches competition is being headed by Messrs Sherwood and Wright, and if this keeps up there is little doubt that one or both of them will end-up on Dancing on Ice next year!

It has started to get really quite hot, about fifty degrees centigrade. The result of which is that the pounds are starting to slip off us like an ill-fitting negligee on a Parisian woman of negotiable virtue when her rent is late.



*Interacting with the locals*

The boys in Recce Troop have developed a number of different ways of dealing with this problem; they range from the McBride-top-off and sunbathe at every opportunity, to the vampire-like Johnson, who avoids all direct contact with light, to turning the Ridgback air-conditioning units into refrigerators for drinks, to plain and simple sweating.

**Parish news** - The latest arrival, courtesy of the incredibly virile Recce Troop, is Zoe Jackson, first daughter of Cpl Dave and Jess Jackson. Congratulations to you both. Finally, our thoughts are with the Turner family at this time and we all wish Rhys the best.