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ROYAL ANGLIAN NEWS

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## **BATTALION ACTIVITIES**

### 1. **1<sup>st</sup> Battalion**

September and October have been frenetic and focused for the 1st Battalion as it prepared its troops for deployment to Afghanistan.

A (Norfolk) Company, C (Essex) Company and D (Cambridgeshire) Company, returned to Helmand this October for a six month tour in support of 11 Light Brigade. The Battalion was chosen in mid August to provide 380 troops to assist in the counter-insurgency mission in Afghanistan. The three companies have been sent to reinforce different Battlegroups across Helmand Province.

The Vikings were chosen to become part of a reinforcement package after a very successful summer when the Battalion had an excellent TESEX. This was a three week Battlegroup level exercise on Salisbury Plain where the Vikings fought against a free thinking enemy force in a complex environment. This exercise took place during the five month period in which the Battalion served as the Spearhead Land Element Battalion - a contingency force which is held in the UK at very high readiness to deploy anywhere in the World. This training meant that the Vikings were probably the best prepared Battalion available and were able to start an intensive, bespoke, six week, Helmand specific training package. The package was excellent and was a real improvement on the training received prior to the Battalion's last tour. It was supported by recently returned troops who were able to pass on the most up to date tactics and techniques, and the soldiers were equipped with all the specialist kit available in Afghanistan.

Overall the last six weeks have been a hectic and challenging period during which the Battalion has received training on new equipments and tactics for Afghanistan and practiced and honed our shooting and field skills. The culmination of the training was an in-depth package based on Thetford and Otterburn training areas, supported by a huge array of specialists from across Defence including Attack Helicopters, Support Helicopters and Fast Air. The Battalion's preparation included use of the state of the art training facility in Thetford where replica Afghan villages, Forward Operating Bases and re-creations of the notorious 'Green Zone' are set up, complete with Afghan speaking civilians and an enemy force provided by ex Ghurkha soldiers. This then switched to Otterburn, Northumbria, where live firing from 105 mm Light Guns, AH64 Apache and 81 mm mortars, supported complex Infantry ranges including compound clearances and simulated casualty evacuations using Merlin helicopters.

Once this package was complete there was a short period for leave before troops deployed to Helmand. A Company are supporting the Household Cavalry Battlegroup in

Musa Qala, C Company are with the Grenadier Guards Battlegroup around Nad Ali and D Company are attached to the Danish Battlegroup around Gereshk.

For those left back in Pirbright, life remains busy with much work going into supporting the families of those deployed, whilst many of the soldiers are training hard in case they are needed to reinforce the companies in Afghanistan. These have included 6 soldiers who have recently passed the Queen's Division Fire Team Commanders' Cadre in Brecon.

## 2. 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion

The Poachers have had an active and rewarding October, forming 2 R ANGLIAN Battlegroup on Exercise GRAND PRIX in Kenya. The Poachers were bolstered by J Battery of 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Horse Artillery and 2 Squadron, 32 Engineer Regiment, along with many other individual augmentees. The Battalion was also joined by a 4<sup>th</sup> rifle company in the form of C Company, 7 Kenyan Rifles. The exercise marked a major development in the Battalions' preparation to be the Afghanistan Theatre Reserve Battalion.

The advance party deployed in late September to prepare for the deployment of the sub units in early October. On arrival the companies and attached arms moved straight into the field to their first exercise locations. During the first 10 days of the Exercise the Battlegroup was split roughly into direct fire and indirect fire groupings; the rifle companies deployed to Mpala Farm Training Area whilst the J Battery group (including the Mortar Platoon) moved to the warmer environs of Archers' Post to pepper the arid landscape with high explosive.

During this first phase the rifle companies were given a large amount of space, time and resources to continue developing basic individual skills, building on previous training whilst beginning to operate in a Battlegroup environment with Engineers, Fire Support Groups (FSGs) and Fire Support Teams (FSTs). The company commanders initially put their companies through their paces on low level live firing, building up to platoon live firing. The first period also saw the companies run through a 4 day DTES package to begin to introduce force on force, complex human and physical terrain and the realities of casualty evacuation (Casevac) to test all skills. At many times the Casevac chain was tested for real with Elephant charges, snake bites and the effects of the uncompromising heat.

After the first 10 days the centre of mass of the Battlegroup moved to the northern Archers' Post Training Area to focus on Combined Arms live firing. The companies were put through a testing live firing package by the excellent 4 SCOTS Permanent Range Team. The package included a number of company attacks in varied terrain, with the Mortars and 105mm Light Gun in support throughout. Most memorable for the majority of soldiers was the new Forward Operating Base (FOB) defence shoot in the far east of the area. The recently completed Afghanistan style FOB was easily big enough for a company in defence and could have held far more. The mortars and 105mm fired in the support role from inside the FOB replicating practice in Afghanistan and allowing the soldiers of the companies to see indirect fire in action. The 360 degree arcs of fire provided by the huge Kenyan training area were a new experience for the majority of the Battalion and the memory will not fade quickly. The final part of this phase was the first Battlegroup level activity - the Battlegroup Live Attack onto a complicated compound and trench system. The attack provided the Headquarters with the first opportunity to conduct battle procedure and gave the light step-up headquarters its first run out. The attack was a great success with the complexity of combined arms well integrated, whilst Commander 7 Armoured Brigade looked on.

After a day of maintenance on well worn kit and equipment, the Battlegroup began its build up to the Collective Training Level 4 event with a Battlegroup FTX. The Commanding Officer took the opportunity to exercise his companies around the massive Ol Kanjo (Big Elephant) feature, giving the Regimental Signals Officer something of a challenge at the same time. The three day run out provided the Headquarters with its first challenge and saw the Battalion 2IC, Major Mick Aston, stretching his staff officers to their full potential. A busy time ensued with conventional attacks, an element of Counter Insurgency operations and concluded with a Strike Operation by C (Northamptonshire) Company.

The final phase of the exercise was, after more maintenance and a 150km Battlegroup move, the deployment onto the test exercise - the Brigade FTX run by Commander 7 Armoured Brigade. The exercise scenario saw a complicated enemy picture with both conventional forces and an element of insurgency, though the conventional aspect came to dominate the exercise. On the first day (courtesy of a 'blown' vehicle bridge), the Battlegroup deployed solely on foot to the scenic Lolldaiga Training Area in the Kenyan highlands. The rifle companies inserted into the area under cover of darkness and quickly cleared their areas of operations, proving the Battalion to be swift and agile.

The following 5 days contained a series of ever more arduous attacks onto the elusive enemy (5 RRF and 4 SCOTS) as they retreated to the north. Throughout, the ever present 360 degree insurgent threat reminded everyone of the Afghan training goal. The final attack of an arduous and testing week involved a long Battlegroup move, prior to a classic dawn attack onto an enemy headquarters. Whilst challenging in terms of the harsh terrain, distances and a thinking enemy, to a man the Poachers rose to the challenge. The reward for the Battlegroup came in the After-Action Review in which the Brigade Commander applauded the Poachers' performance and awarded the sought after Collective Training Level 4 to the Battalion. In his assessment the Poachers had been particularly strong at the junior command level where many Battalions falter; surely an aspect that bodes well for the future.

After the hardships of a month on exercise, the Battlegroup spent the final few days in Kenya handing over equipment to 2 PARA and enjoying adventure training across Kenya. A (Lincolnshire) Company enjoyed an African experience in the Kenyan highlands; B (Leicestershire) and D (Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire) companies enjoyed the sun, sea and sand of Mombasa; whilst C (Northamptonshire) Company enjoyed the activities on offer at Lake Naivasha. After a few days relaxing all members of the Battalion can now reflect on a job well done in Kenya and look forward to Christmas in the knowledge that the Battalion is thoroughly prepared for Pre-Deployment Training after Easter.

### 3. **3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion**

October started with the last few days of our Texan Exchange, which was principally spent in London on R&R. On the 1<sup>st</sup> October, the Battalion Officers and Warrant Officers held a joint Mess Dinner in the Tower of London. The Dinner was attended by GOC 5<sup>th</sup> Division and Colonel Lacey and, following the Ceremony of The Keys, a late night visit to Covent Garden was enjoyed by all. The next day 20 Texans were allowed into the Buckingham Palace Forecourt for the Queens Guard Mount and a further 30 had a guided tour of the Houses of Parliament. These events ended the exchange which was an excellent experience for all Steelbacks who were engaged in it.

In Kabul, 11 Platoon have continued to conduct routine patrolling in the City Centre against a back drop of suicide attacks on other NATO forces in the City. Their R&R is now firmly underway, but the manning situation has been eased by the inclusion of a German Multiple into the Platoon ORBAT. 12 Platoon arrived in Musa Qalah in mid October, after conducting an 8 day RSOI package. They have also been on patrols in the town and the Green Zone. However CSgt Shaw and a small team are currently in Kandahar, in order to train the Musa Qalah Police Force prior to mentoring them back in Musa Qalah.

Apart from operations, the other key event this month has been the near implementation of Tranche 4 of the MOD Austerity Measures. Owing to the Battalion's future Op TOSCA (UNFICYP) deployment, the Steelbacks would not have been affected as much as most units; but as the plan was pulled together, there was a decision to return funding to Tranche 3 levels. It will be mid November before the Battalion knows exactly what funding will now be issued; however it is likely to be sufficient for Training Nights and four weekends up to April 2010.

The Battalion managed to host 214 cadets in Thetford, just before all training was stopped. The cadets, from both ACF Detachments and CCF Contingents, conducted 4 main stands: Section Attacks, Support and HERRICK Weapons, GPMG/LSW Live Firing and Paintball CQB. Each stand had a series of background activities and the cadets undertook a night patrol exercise. They were visited by ACF and CCF commandants who, after a presentation and discussion with the cadets, had a meal with Colonel Lacey. Finally, the cadets were issued with a certificate and badge by the CO on Sunday before departing.

Towards the end of the month, the Battalion executed its strategy for the Brigade exercise, Ex POLAR FOUNDATION, the aim of which was to conduct MATT training within a series of contemporary operating environment stands. This was the first full weekend for the new Training Major, Major Ged Murphy RRF.

November will see members of the Battalion taking part in Remembrance Day parades across the region but, because of budgetary cuts, they will not be able to assist in the normal admin tasks and the Band will not be able to play. However, companies have organised a winter Adventurous Training trip at the end of the month, which was put in place due to the earlier withdraw of funding and will now continue, at no public expense!