



# The NetWorker

**Newsletter of the Pen & Sword Club**  
**Issue No: 4 January 2009**

## **Happy New Year!**

It's been a bitter cold start to 2009 and no doubt most have turned up the central heating and dug-in for the duration. But some of us have been out and about among the icicles, including members of the Media Operations Group, who trained in Longmoor Camp, just north of Portsmouth, mid month and also braved some stormy weather and high winds.

Others too have not confined themselves to the fireside and NetWorker's feature masthead this month comes courtesy of Major Willie Morrison. Ever the prolific writer and researcher Willie is also a first class photographer and captured this snow filled scene on Struie Hill near his home in Inverness.

Willie features later in our pages along with news from other club members who have a wide range of interests. Included too is a note from former TAPIO Major Peter Rhodes whose reputation as a features writer grows with his work on Britain's largest evening newspaper, the Wolverhampton Express & Star.

Also in touch with Chairman, Colonel Mike Peters this month has been Colonel Colin Mason. Colin was in Sierra Leone when their emails crossed taking a managerial look at his radio station in that country.

Now moving frequently between his home on the mainland and an island residence in Alderney, in the Channel Islands, Colin continues his entrepreneurial life in commercial radio with his duties as Deputy Lieutenant.

Many thanks to all club members who have been so kind and supportive in their comments about The Networker.

## London Lunch



The January London lunch for club members was held at the Cavalry & Guards Club, in Piccadilly, courtesy of Major John Boyes. Also attending were Colonel Mike Peters, Major Roger Hudson and Major Gerry George (aka Nicholas.) Apologies were received from Colonel Bob Purvis, Colonel Donald Campbell, Maj Doreen Cadwallader and Major Paul Doughty.

Roger is back in the United Kingdom for a few months waiting for the weather to improve to return to his French farmhouse near Angouleme in the Charente. Life in France suits Roger and his small farm and gite keep him busy.



Gerry, pictured above, continues his successful career in the entertainment world including various appearances in films, stage and television plays and commercials. A RADA trained classical actor, Gerry is renowned for his impersonations of Winston Churchill and Captain Mainwaring of Dad's Army. His website makes interesting reading. Take a look at: the following two web sites: [www.gerrygeorgeactor.co.uk](http://www.gerrygeorgeactor.co.uk) or [www.gerrygeorge.freola.com](http://www.gerrygeorge.freola.com)

## **The 2009 Diary of Events**

Wake up in the South East! NetWorker cannot say that the club diary for the year is filling fast. However, there are a number of events in the planning. What is needed is for club members to respond to the ideas put forward by the regional chairmen and others – even if it is only to say thanks but no thanks. While Wales & The Marches and the West country regions have had mostly excellent responses it is rather noticeable that the south east, where many of the club members reside is still very quiet. Please respond to regional chairman Major John Boyes' initiatives to get members together in 2009.

## **Trip to The Rock**

Colonels Mike Peters and Martin Newman are investigating a battlefield tour to Gibraltar. Both Mike and Martin have good connections on The Rock and are proposing a long weekend via Easyjet to investigate Operation Felix – Hitler's plan for the invasion of Gibraltar early in the Second World War.

Martin has the right connections for some military/semi-military accommodation on The Rock through his recent work with the Gibraltar Regiment and the plan is to utilise the services of one of the regiment's local guides. Interestingly there have been some recent discoveries on the upper Rock of a secret hide-away for a stay behind party if the invasion had been successful.

The trip should be some time in mid-summer but early autumn can be fixed if there is an interest. Will members please contact either Mike or Martin. This is also an opportunity to take partners and let them loose to explore the duty free shops.

If you have not been to Gibraltar recently then the changes will surprise you. While the presence of British service personnel is much reduced and it is also rare to see a Royal Navy warship in the harbour the tourist is now king and the redevelopment of new restaurants and marina-side facilities make it a vibrant modern scene. But if you want to explore the old hide-outs and dark taverns of yesteryear they are still there. Irish Town also flourishes.

What are those personal connections? Well if you run foul of the law on The Rock, Mike's son is a barrister practicing in Gibraltar's courts and Martin has set up a new Cadet Force unit for The Gibraltar Regiment.

## **Beating Retreat 2009**



Major John Boyes is calling for names to attend the ceremony of Beating Retreat by the Royal Marines at Horseguards on either June 3 or June 4 next. Please email John as soon as possible to express your interests. Tickets for the event cost about £10 and we want to book early to get a block of seats at the front. This event is also open to partners. If enough interest is shown we can arrange a lunch at around £20 a head, including wine, at The Rifles Club. This is one of the most colourful of the London military occasions of the year.

## **Remembrance Day Parade**

Major Doreen Cadwallader has requested tickets for the 2009 Remembrance Day parade (Sunday 8 November) from the Royal British Legion. There are already a number of club members wishing to attend, and march, in memory of those who have fallen in the service of their country but additionally to show solidarity with those currently serving overseas in the firing line.

This event requires an early start on a Sunday morning with the parade forming up on Horseguards around 0930. If there is sufficient, and early, interest, then Doreen will seek to link up with our World War 2 predecessors - the Army Film and Photographic unit - and see if we can arrange a joint lunch. Please email Doreen as soon as possible.

## **West Country Events**

Regional Chairman, Lt Col Graham Barnett and Sue Nelmes have fixed a date for their first West country event with a lunch, probably in Salisbury, on May 15. Further details later. They still await replies from some members but the response so far has been good.

## **Normandy Battlefield Tour**

Interest in a battlefield tour to Normandy is growing - slowly and Colonel Mike Peters will be asking regional secretaries to confirm numbers shortly. Those who have expressed the wish to attend are divided between traveling in private vehicles or making it a commercial coach trip. Suggested dates, so far, include early June to coincide with the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D-Day or later in the month to avoid the rush of veterans on June 6. Any more suggestions?

## **Longmoor Week-end with MOG (V)**

NetWorker took the opportunity of making a flying visit to see the unit training at Longmoor Camp, just north of Portsmouth, in mid January and met up with some old friends and many of the newer members of the unit as they completed their Military Annual Training Tests.

Fitness is still very important as members of the unit head of for service in Afghanistan. At least six officers are scheduled to take up media operations tours later this year.

Colonel Mike Peters took the opportunity, courtesy of Colonel Martin Newman, and his clients, Revision Eyewear of Canada, to present the very latest in eye protection to those heading towards the conflict zones.

Eyewear protection is standard issue these days and Martin is the Communicado public affairs agency director responsible for promoting the Revision protective kit worldwide. Revision is standard issue for many armed forces around the world and particularly for United States personnel.



***Above: Not afraid to get their hands dirty. NetWorker captured this picture at Longmoor of Lt Colonel Lesley Wilde, right, with Major Sarah Shepherd stripping down rifles after shooting tests. Out of picture was P&S Club member Major Anita Newcourt. Greetings to club members also came from Majors Alan Frost, Jim Gallagher and Dominic Bealey.***

## Where are they now?

**Major Willie Morrison (TAPIO 1979-1992) pictured below at Wadi al Batin in Iraq, 1991**



Speaking to NetWorker just after celebrating Hogmany Willie had this to say: “I retired from the TA shortly after the First Gulf War, rather disappointed that my military services had not been required during that period, and feeling that at 51, I was a little too old to be playing soldiers. I did, however, spend a brief spell in Kuwait, immediately after the action, as the Aberdeen Press & Journal’s reporter visiting Scottish Regiments and filled many pages of that daily with photos and copy.

“The Royal Scots took me to Wadi al Batin, about 35miles inside the Iraqi border, where a few days before they had made short work of a much larger Iraqi conscript unit.

“After taking of my army boots for the last time, I worked as a full time journalist for over 14 years, making two further sorties in civilian life to Northern Ireland to visit Scottish regiments, as I had frequently done in previous years. The second last time, in late 1992, I interviewed four Royal Scots soldiers in the Borucki

Sangar overlooking Crossmaglen Square, only for the building to be firebombed by an agricultural muck spreader a couple of days later.

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After 20 years of separation . . .

**WELL, HELLO BROTHER!**

CHEERS . . . In a break during battle manoeuvres Pte. Sammy Duncan raises an Army regulation mug of brandy in a toast to his long-lost brother, Pte. Gordon McConochie.



TWO hardy Gordon Highlanders wept unashamedly in the middle of a German turnip field yesterday when they recognised each other as infant brothers who had parted to different foster homes 20 years before.

A chance remark to a Territorial Army journalist led to the emotional reunion — in the midst of a major “battle” — between Pte. Gordon McConochie (26), 1st Bn. Gordon Highlanders, and his youngest brother, Pte. Sammy Duncan (21), a territorial with D (Gordon) Company of 251 Highland Volunteers in Aberdeen.

The regular Gordons, at present stationed with British Army of the Rhine at Hemer, West Germany, had been on exercise in Lower Saxony, only 40 miles from their territorial counterparts.

The two battalions were on opposing sides in Exercise Lionheart, NATO’s largest manoeuvres since World War II, but they agreed to a temporary armistice to allow the brothers to meet.

Reunion halts manoeuvres

Sammy was a one-year-old when fostered by David and Frances Duncan, Dalmaik Crescent, Culter, who gave their surname. A bricklayer’s labourer in civilian life, he joined the Territorial Army two years ago in the hope of tracing Gordon and two other brothers whom he knew had enlisted in the regular Gordons, although he could not remember them.

Sammy’s trail grew hot when former Gordons officer Maj. Mike Tait took command of the TA company on leaving the Army.

By chance Maj. Tait had been Gordon’s company commander in the regular battalion. And so alike are the brothers that when Maj. Tait first saw Sammy, he remarked in surprise: “What on earth are you doing here McConochie?” — believing him for a moment to be Gordon.

**Above: This cutting is typical of the type of story that Willie accomplished while working as a TAPIO. On exercise in BAOR, Willie dug this family story out of chance remark.**

“Fortunately I had left XMG by that time, but it made a good exclusive splash for the Press & Journal, as I had photos of the sangar and the chaps in it, who had volunteered for permanent duty there, and who happily were unhurt. Sadly one chap I interviewed at Bessbrook during a heliborne operation on the same visit was later shot and killed by a sniper.

“At the moment I am still in Inverness, living a fairly quiet – and sober – life though I always keep a modest dram of malt whisky for any old friend or acquaintance that happens to call in.

“I’ve been an OAP for nearly three years, but have plenty to keep me occupied. I’ve stopped carrying out holiday relief for editors and reporters on local newspapers, mainly because the Inland Revenue’s demands made me realise

that the limited amount of lifetime left, is too valuable to misuse slaving away for others, when I have so much to do that really interests me.

“Some years ago, when my mother was still alive, I began, with her help, in putting names to faces, to commit old family photos to computer, and this activity has just grown to the extent that I’ve got files with thousands of pictures, not just of family, but of people and events from all over the Highlands. I collaborate closely with other anoraks of the same tendency, including the staff of Am Bailie; Highland Council’s Inverness based history and photo archive, which has an extensive website.

“My wife, Jennifer, complains that I live in the past – but the more photos I scan, the more I become hooked on preserving the past for posterity, especially if I can find lots of information about a particular photo. The lives of ordinary folk can sometimes be more fascinating than those of celebrities, especially some of those who have experienced action and privation in world wars.

“Last Autumn I wrote the editorial and captions for Inverness Remembered IV, the latest volume of an annual series of books by Scottish Provincial Press of old photos pertaining to the capital of Highlands, having the previous year taken over the writing of Inverness Remembered III in mid-stream, when the lady originally commissioned to do so fell ill.



***Above: Major Anita Newcourt and Major Willie Morrison on their way to winning a TAPIO orienteering competition in one of the unit's old haunts near the Air Mounting Centre in Wiltshire.***

In the course of this I received some remarkable colour slides of Inverness town centre as it was before being desecrated in the name of rateable values and redevelopment in the 1960s

“Though sadly these photos are, for budgetary reasons, only reproduced in Inverness Remembered IV in black and white, the man who loaned them gave me permission to commit them in colour to my own personal files.

“It’s a measure of age, I suppose, that I’ve become quite well known for writing obituaries. Two years ago a well known Highland worthy rang me up from his death bed, a fortnight, before his demise, to ask if I could do him the honours when he passed on. It was something, I daresay, of a compliment - and I think I did him proud, with even a large item in the Scotsman.

My latest, last month, was about a gallant old St. Valery veteran of the Cameron Highlanders, aged 91, who had spent five years in German prisoner-of-war camps.

“It’s a change from writing puffs about NATO exercises!”

## **Major Peter Rhodes**

**It’s Ironic really! Peter’s only time in war zones came as a journalist and not a Terrier.**



***Pictured left: Peter Rhodes***

Although not a club member Peter Rhodes came up in a recent conversation about the Ghosts of TAPIOs Past and our former supporters. These included the late Nigel Gillies and Onslow Dent, who was renowned for his depiction, in full uniform, of Field Marshall Montgomery, on Unit Press Officer courses.

NetWorker is pleased to report that Peter is alive and kicking and not so long ago met up with Club members Mike Peters and Roger Goodwin. Peter is still with the Wolverhampton Express & Star – Britain’s biggest selling regional newspaper and is principally a leader writer and columnist.

He’s often called upon to check some of the copy submitted by young reporters who have little or no military knowledge. One recent howler he stopped was a reference to the “Royal Armoured Medical Cell.”

Peter served his first ten years in the Royal Signals with 67(The Queen’s Own Warwickshire & Worcestershire Yeomanry) Signal Squadron and then transferred to the TA Pool. “In the TA I met some of the best people I have ever known and went to places, and did things; I could never have dreamed off, “says Peter. “I resigned in 1992, partly in frustration at the call up procedure (no one told us we had volunteered to volunteer) but mainly because I felt the time was right.

“Those of us who joined as Cold War warriors served in a simpler age when the issues were very clear-cut. The Warsaw Pact held half of Europe, NATO defended the other half. If the worst happened the TA would be mobilised en-masse. After the Berlin Wall came down, a lot of us felt our job was done. The final barometer of this national change of mood was the spontaneous melting-away of the Home Service Force which has always struck me as a very English response.

“Ironically my only time in war zones came as a journalist, not as a soldier. I covered the opening phases of the first Gulf War in Bahrain, winning the UK Press Gazette award for Feature Writer of the Year for my dispatches.

“I was on the first RAF Hercules into Sarajevo, the flight which broke the siege in 1992. It was quite the hairiest thing I have ever done.

“After handing in my boots I had little contact with the TA for some years but then joined my old yeomanry regimental association which is very active running a series of trips to the battlefields of the Great War. It has been a great privilege to have walked the course at Paschendaele and the Somme with survivors of the 1914-18 conflict. In more recent years I have done my bit as a battlefield guide.

“In 2002 I published a little book, For a Shilling a Day based on interviews with old soldiers over the past 28 years. It is due to be republished in a much bigger edition during 2009. Who would have guessed that the “peace dividend” we were promised in 1990 would have given way to so much bloodshed and produced so many more soldiers’ tales?

“It is rather depressing to interview soldiers just back from killing Afghan tribesmen when one recalls how the same tribesmen were our allies just a few brief years ago”

Regards to all who remember me.”

Editors Note: Peter’s report from Sarajevo can be seen at:

[www.expressandstar.com/2008/07/23/time-catches-up-with-karadzic](http://www.expressandstar.com/2008/07/23/time-catches-up-with-karadzic)

While you’re in the E&S web site check out Peter’s column. It’s a cracker!

## History of Military Communications

The plan to write a history of military communications in the Army and, particularly, to capture some of the “war stories” of TAPIO and MOG (V) continues. Could you all please look through your photo albums and see if you have any photos that can be copied to The NetWorker. Pictures from the BAOR exercises such as Lionheart are particularly being sought.



*Pictured left: Shoulder flash of the Army*

*Film & Photographic unit*

NetWorker’s research into the history of military communications has led to an interesting discovery on the web. Visit [www.mmafpu.co.uk](http://www.mmafpu.co.uk) to see the aspirations of a small group who re-enact the work of the Army Film and Photographic Unit of the Second World War.

Re-enactment groups are not always popular and those club members who experienced the 1994 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D-Day at Arromanches can tell some tales of the problems they caused. Nevertheless it is worth looking at this web site because they seem genuine in the interest and portrayal of a unit that often took casualties during the conflict as well as producing most of the photographs now available of the era. The website also has some useful links to the archives of photos taken by the AFPU

Note from the Editorial Team: Keep the ideas flowing please and remember it's your club – use it! Contact: Colonel Mike Peters on 01202 559950 or 07884 473358. E-mail: [michaelpcoms@btinternet.com](mailto:michaelpcoms@btinternet.com).