

Scratchings

from

The Pen...



January 2013: Scribblings for, and from, members of the Pen & Sword Club

Happy New Year

The Pen & Sword Club started 2013 with the news that Vice President, Major General Greg Smith, has been appointed a Commander of the Bath (CB) in the New Year Honours List.

Our congratulations to General Greg, right and to Lieutenant Commander Brian (Grassy) Meadows, of Royal Naval Reserve Media Operations Specialisation on his MBE.



A successful 2012...on to a new recruiting year

The club can look back on a successful 2012 in which we organised, for the first time, a seminar on Media Operations that drew a professional and interested audience. And some talented speakers! The year also saw a remarkable increase in membership and we passed the 240 mark in December.

Throughout 2013 we will be asking members for their recommendations and sponsorship of new members. Please pass your thoughts and names to the National Chairman, Mike Peters. Details of club membership and the requirements for membership are available on the club web site <http://penandswordclub.co.uk/>

The club ventured overseas for the first time in the year with a battlefield tour of Gibraltar and a deep insight into Operation Flavius on The Rock and the media implications. Our final event of the year was at the Army & Navy Club in December when the Christmas lunch was attended by well over ten per cent of the membership with Air Marshal Sir David Walker, right, and Caroline Wyatt, the BBC Defence Correspondent as our principal guests.



Planning is now under way for the 2013 programme and, at the request of many members we have sought permission to march at the Cenotaph in London on Remembrance Day. Please try and join us in this special year for the military.

On the cards is another seminar in the autumn – ideas and views gratefully received - a battlefield tour to Malta covering the Great Siege and the WW2 battle. We plan a number of

social events including a Ladies Lunch in the Spring, a lunch at the House of Commons in the summer and a Christmas get together.

We will continue to make use of the London military clubs for our monthly get together. Mike would be interested in making contact with any members who have connections or membership of military clubs or messes in Central London where we might gather. Lunch is undoubtedly the most popular event as it does avoid the problems of overnight accommodation in London. Nevertheless we are pleased at the increasing numbers of members who take the time and trouble to make the journey.

The Club wants to improve its infrastructure and is looking for volunteers to work at national and regional level. In particular the National Chairman is hoping to recruit assistance with both Scratchings and The NetWorker. The joint editors are a busy team and if you are able to give time to organisation and help the club continue its work please let us know. We have been without a regional chairman for the Midlands for some months and hope to encourage any members who have time to start organising get-togethers on a county or area basis. Secretary Doreen Cadwallader can provide a county-by-county breakdown for members who want to organise local events.

This bumper first edition of Scratchings in 2013 includes contributions from some of those who spoke at the Club Seminar last September. It is particularly interesting to read Lieutenant Colonel Rosie Stone, the Commanding Officer of Media Operations Group (V) on her take on the future of media operations and BBC Defence Correspondent, Caroline Wyatt on the media's view of embedded journalists.

We hope to have more on the way ahead for media ops from our Royal Navy and Royal Air Force colleagues in the next few months and to publish an interesting response from the NATO College in Germany on the future for information management.

Happy New Year

Staying honest, trying to be fair and as candid as we can.....

BBC Defence Correspondent Caroline Wyatt gives a personal view on media ops and embeds

In June last year, exactly 30 years on from the end of the Falklands War, we went to cover the story of what had happened in the intervening decades - and how the islanders felt now. I tried to imagine what it must have been like sailing to the Falklands in 1982 as a British journalist embedded with the Royal Navy, not knowing what was going to happen nor how long the conflict would last, and cut off from all outside sources of information.



Today, when we embed in Helmand or previously in Iraq, it has been a very different story. There are infinite numbers of ways of finding out information, from first hand interviews to the web, and from Twitter to Facebook and other social media, in which stories are often broken by what we used to call 'the audience', to mobile phone calls from sources even while we are in the remotest part of Afghanistan. But one element is still very

much the same for an embedded reporter today: that sense of voyaging into the unknown and of surrendering your own personal safety and destiny into the hands of often complete strangers - and fate. And, of course, the media operations people you're with.

I remember wrestling over many sleepless nights with my own fears about the weeks or months that lay ahead before we embedded with British forces during the Iraq invasion in 2003, asking myself again and again whether embedding was worth it. Would Saddam Hussein's forces fight back? Would journalists be the targets? Would we deliver too one-sided a perspective on the war itself? And just how long could we eat US or British Army ration packs before our delicate journalistic stomachs rebelled?

But there were crucial differences between embedding in the Falklands and doing so some two decades later in Iraq. By 2003, we had satellite phones, and while still close to Kuwait, our mobiles worked, leading to a surreal phone call from an elderly relative ringing for a chat just as we were crossing into Iraq on the first day of the invasion.

In 1982, the war in the Falklands remains a unique case of modern embedding in circumstances unlikely to be repeated - thanks partly to the remoteness of the islands themselves. It was a war in which a small group of correspondents and crews sailing with the Royal Navy were almost entirely dependent upon the military - not only for access to the conflict, but also for the means of reporting it back to the UK, in the era before mobile phones, BGAN satellites or the rapid dissemination of information (and misinformation) via the internet.

In 2010, I asked Brian Hanrahan, pictured right, what it had been like for those embedded in 1982. Despite initial tensions, he said, it had proved an effective means for the military to manage the coverage while still allowing journalists to tell the story of what was happening. He described it as a kind of pact with the devil.



Inside the military machine, he said, you get much greater access, but in return you give them the opportunity to limit what you can report. "It is a devil's bargain that you strike and hope you can make the best of it," he told me. His memorable phrase about watching British Harrier jets leaving and returning safely came about thanks to the strictures of the military censors. "I counted them all out, and I counted them all back" was a clever ruse to get around reporting restrictions, so that he could say all the jets had returned even though he was not allowed to give the numbers.

For Hanrahan, the Falklands marked a turning point in the military management of the media as the realisation dawned that "the press are a part of the public debate and part of democracy - and are needed for these military ventures. We have evolved from a position where people thought it was odd and wrong that things should be reported to one where it is accepted that reporting is a part of war."

Something which hasn't changed since then is the 'Stockholm syndrome' factor in embedding - the worry for the media that close proximity between journalists and the military over several months can lead to journalists identifying with the military who provide shelter, relative safety, food and briefings, even though the relationship is never without its own frictions.

By the First Gulf War in 1991, correspondents were given military uniforms, so they looked indistinguishable from those they were reporting on - something I suspect most media outlets today would not allow: reporting on your own nation's forces in a war blurs the journalistic boundaries enough as it is as journalists strive for impartiality and fairness.

Ahead of and during the Iraq conflict from 2003, embedding also became increasingly controversial within the media. There were many internal debates at the BBC – and within the MoD – about what the parameters were, and what we would be able to film or do. It clearly was a good way to secure first-hand access to the battlefield, or as close to it as we could get, in order to film what was happening, and see a chapter in history being made, for good or for ill. Yet from that March, in return for signing the Green Book, and becoming a member of the journalists based in the FTU – forward transmission unit – it turned out that we sometimes seemed to know rather less about what was going on than those based at CENTCOM in Doha or even London.



Comms were difficult during sandstorms, and information was at a premium, and getting quick answers often proved elusive. It was, overall, a frustrating conflict to cover, in which we could only be certain of what we had been able to see and verify for ourselves. All other information had to be heavily caveated by specifying which source it had come from, not least when several contradictory statements could be made in one day.

And despite the sometimes scratchy relationship between the embedded journalists and the units we reported on, there were fears amongst media bosses back in London that the 'embeds' had gone native. All our reports were prefaced on air with a health warning that we were reporting under military restrictions - not dissimilar to the warnings the BBC had given about the despatches from its correspondents reporting from Saddam Hussein's Baghdad during the earlier conflict.

The debate over the Iraq War still rages too intensely to make a judgment on whether journalism or self-censorship and military management of the media triumphed. The BBC's own internal report concluded that many lessons could be learned on both sides.

For us today, though, the use of embeds is now a matter of routine in Afghanistan for those wishing to report first-hand on the Armed forces' side of the campaign – though at the BBC we try to ensure that all sides of the story are covered, especially by keeping a bureau with

correspondents in Kabul who go out to report on what ordinary Afghans are doing and thinking, outside Helmand, the tiny prism through which much of our reporting is done.

With media employers more mindful of safety than ever, embedding is often seen as a less 'risky' proposition than sending un-embedded reporters to places such as Helmand. But even embedded journalists face real risks, as the death of the Sunday Mirror's defence correspondent Rupert Hamer, and the severe injuries suffered by his Mirror colleague, photographer Philip Coburn, in Afghanistan while reporting with the US Marine Corps showed in 2010.

There is still, though, debate over whose system of embedding is better – the UK's or the American system. Journalists and photographers embedding with American forces are allowed relatively unlimited access to speak to troops, with no 'media minder' present, while we will always have military 'media minders' with us in some shape or form, whether that's a unit press officer or someone from the media operations centre. But it seems clear that these days, military 'media operations' are far more organised and structured than they were back in 1982 – the product, perhaps, of many years of sometimes bitter experience.

What we get from them remains a delicate balance between what the MoD or military want us to see, and what actually happens while we're filming, when events don't always conform to anyone's plan. I remember last December going up to the Upper Gereshk Valley, where the story was about a unit whose task it was to keep safe a crucial road. As we drove up it, an IED went off, killing at least 18 Afghans in a minibus. We filmed and reported what happened, because that was what we saw and filmed that day. That wasn't the kind of story that Task Force Helmand had hoped would go out on the news that night, but they did see that all we could do as journalists was to go, film, ask questions and try to report fairly and put into context what we'd seen and heard.



So for us, are embeds worth the compromises made in return for that crucial access to the frontline? I'd say yes - as long as media outlets are able to deploy 'non-embedded' correspondents too. I was fascinated in both Iraq and Afghanistan by the different answers given by local people in response to the same questions asked by us when accompanied by British or American soldiers, and the same questions posed by non-embedded journalists, especially if asked by their compatriots.

Often, the answers to fellow Iraqi or Afghan journalists were rather blunter than what we had been told, and I think it was essential for us to be able to reflect that. Yet the job we do has changed a lot since the Falklands. The almost total control of the means of reporting in the Falklands by the Navy or the Army would be unthinkable in most warzones today. And the growth of 'citizen journalism', or tweeting and blogging by those living through a conflict, whether in Afghanistan, Syria, Libya or Iraq, now means that there is almost always another side of the story and a much freer flow of information and pictures than there was in 1982 in the South Atlantic.

But that again is changing what we do and how we do it. It means faster reaction times, often far faster than NATO or ISAF can get a press release or an answer out. The Taliban and others work in much quicker time, too.

It also means it's harder to work through the noise generated on the web, the responses on Twitter, the cacophony of commentators on TV, with stories that develop and unfold rapidly,

demanding a response fast, even before the original information is clear. I'm not sure that our job as journalists, and the way we work with media ops, has changed dramatically since the Falklands. But what is far harder now for both sides is filtering out the noise, trying to get to the part of the story that really matters, and conveying that to our multiplicity of audiences and trying to be as accurate as possible while finding the right balance.

What remains crucial for us is staying honest, trying to be fair, and being as candid as we can about what we don't know, as much as saying what we do.

ARMY 2020 – The Recognition of Media Operations as an Influence Asset



In 1998 the Media Operations Group (V) selection process required me to submit a portfolio of media work and clearly demonstrate my aptitude for the role. My Regular Army counterparts were issued a new posting order and learnt by trial and error on the job. The majority of MOG (V) tasks involved SIMPRESS exercise support in training officers and soldiers how to handle the media in a tactical environment and give a good interview on camera if required, writes Lieutenant Colonel Rosie Stone, Commanding Officer of MOG (V)

A number of TA officers deployed to Bosnia and Kosovo as specialists in their operational role; they were experienced civilian practitioners in uniform. The largest 'call up' came in February 2003 when a complete MOG (V) tactical Press Information Centre of 18 personnel operated in Iraq during the initial war-fighting phase of the land campaign. Almost ten years on the realities of enduring operations have meant that reservists now regularly deploy as media specialists.

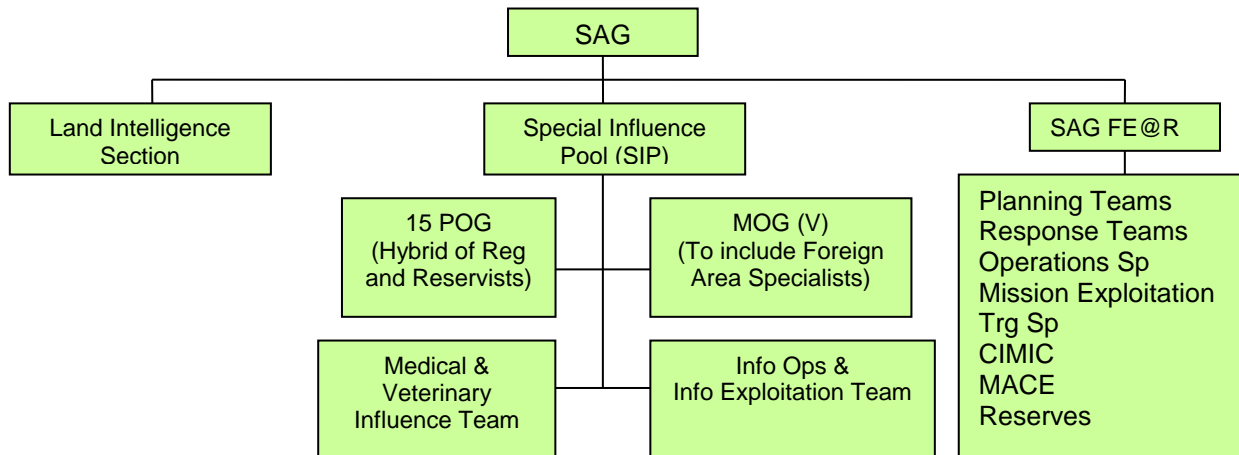
The Defence Media Operations Centre (DMOC) was created which provides a range of training courses that are compulsory for all personnel nominated for a media operations role. This indicates that progress has been made but the results are cosmetic and will remain only skin deep until media operations is fully utilised as a force enabler and not just as a public relations and information support tool.

Previous lip service has been paid by senior officers to the importance of "the media" in modern military operations. Not necessarily because it could shape public opinion but, said Professor Phillip Taylor, in a Media & Defence lecture at Geneva in 2007, because in the era of evolving satellite technology and creation of 24 hour news "the media is like rain, and soldiers are going to get wet!" That means journalists will appear in alarming numbers at the first hint of a fight and we will have to deal with them. This proved true in both Kosovo in 1999 and Kuwait in 2003.

Since then, political and military failures in Iraq, the enduring nature of our involvement in Afghanistan and uprisings in the Arab Spring, combined with a surge of communication innovations fuelled by social media, has forced the military to begin rethinking how we conduct media operations and where it fits in the 'effects based' Comprehensive Approach to Conflict. Terms like 'Influence' and 'Soft Effects' are being pushed to the fore as we struggle through a mire of fresh doctrine, policy and confusing terminology.

The biggest shake up in recent history of the British Military began last summer with confirmation of a complete restructuring of the Army. It involves a rebalance of regular and reserve numbers and an increased focus on upstream activity dealing with conflict prevention and capacity building overseas. The majority of 'soft effects' assets have been grouped together under the banner of the Security Assistance Group (SAG).

More interestingly MOG (V) has been placed alongside 15 Psy Ops Group and the Information Operations/Exploitation team as part of a new initiative called the Specialist Influence Pool as per the diagram below.



Army 2020 is the ideal opportunity to redefine the role of Media Operations and ensure that its full range of capabilities are properly engaged as well as developing further capabilities to enhance operational effect.

What could UK Media Operations look like by 2020?

Media Operations as an Early Warning Asset. The creation of media focussed Foreign Area Specialists whose job is to intimately understand the media and communications environment in a specific global region or country is a positive step forwards. Social media in particular is a good thermometer to measure the temperature of a particular audience. Understanding Twitter trends or who the influential bloggers and Facebook groups are and what they are saying could be key to identifying issues before they manifest themselves more seriously.

Even in a rural or remote operational environment radio broadcasts and local community outlets may offer up relevant threats and opportunities. As an example, the African Union Peace and Security Department has a computer system, based on a European model, which monitors media online coverage across the Continent using key words. Analysts on duty 24/7 then collate and report summary findings to the relevant key personnel. *MOG (V) has been tasked with creating a pool of FAS.*

Media Operations as a Knowledge Development Asset. Social/cultural information and maintaining a picture of the operating environment can be enhanced by including media research, *multimedia* monitoring (not just the cheaper option of daily print news clippings and an online summary) and media relations as part of the overall military information campaign.

In the same way that journalists gain information from Media Ops personnel about the military situation, Media Ops personnel can receive updates about the local population or protagonists from journalists that operate across all boundaries and consistently ask who, what, why, when and where? The Media Operations Centre (MOC) is the shop front that should be a positive environment for media relations and an opportunity for open exchange of information. *At least one Media Operations specialist LO will be established in the Land Intelligence Section.*

Media Operations and Capacity Building Overseas. Accurate and unbiased reporting of events within a theatre of operations is desirable, as is the truthful and timely release of information. Many countries throughout the world have state run media communications,

poorly trained journalists and a military that is not required to think of public responsibility or the need to engage with the media.

Joint FCO and military Media Training Teams should be an integrated asset as part of all capacity building initiatives in order to develop capabilities that enhance international understanding and regional accountability in a pre or post conflict environment. *This will require a much more direct and robust relationship with the FCO, Stabilisation Unit, NGOs and host nation organisations to achieve any credible effect.*

Media Operations and Strategic Communications. It is standard practise now to develop a campaign narrative and create key messages that are handed down from the political to MoD level and from there cascaded out to the various commands. These are 'Top Down' communications that often have no resonance at the operational or tactical level. Media Operations key role should be to act as an interpreter or buffer zone delivering 'Bottom Up' messages from the coalface that are understood by and 'stick' to the relevant target audiences as well as translating the UK messages into a useable operational format.

This is an area where Information Operations, Psy Ops and Media Ops liaison and deconfliction are vital to ensure credibility of messaging whilst maintaining consistency across the information domain.

Media Operations Analysis & MOE. Currently Media Analysis on operations is usually contracted out to a civilian organisation and MOE is defined as particularly difficult to achieve due to the complexity of media communications. As an example of best practise 15 POG have professionally developed Target Audience Analysis and created a training course for Psy Ops operators to attend. *A Media Analysis Cell with properly trained and resourced specialists should be incorporated into every Media Operations Centre by 2020.*

Media Operations and Social and Digital Media. This is the biggest area of change and development in the last decade. Prior to the emergence of Digital Media one could differentiate between Psy Ops and Media Operations because Psy Ops owned the communication outlet and, therefore the message, whilst Media Operations went through the filtration process of a media organisation.

Now we, as media operators, also own the means through websites, blogs, YouTube, Flickr, Facebook etc. This is where Media Operations can truly flourish as a direct influence asset communicating with our spectrum of audiences instantly and globally. And it is where we must continue to maintain our credibility and reputation without constraining the effects due to fear of OPSEC issues and dehumanising the story through centralised control.



I could also wax lyrical about the continuing global importance of radio and associated online audio podcasts for which MOG (V) is advocating specific training for UPOs and Regional Information Officers. But copy space is limited and I shall conclude with the observation that all the above new concepts and developments for Media Operations will achieve nothing unless it is considered at the very beginning of a planning process and fully integrated into the subsequent Operational Order (OPO).

Similarly the crucial progress required for effective upstream activity is strong liaison across all government, non-government and military organisations. Operations in Afghanistan have gone some way to developing this liaison but it has also highlighted the weaknesses in the relationship that need to be addressed.

Media Operations is an influence asset and this has been formally recognised within the A2020 proposed structure for the Security Assistance Group.

Sea survival, bird routes and replacing a female reporter's high heels: the varied life of a naval press officer

One day they might be crafting a line on the future of the nuclear deterrent, the next they're finding suitable footwear for journalists, wrote Lieutenant Jeremy Olver, right, a member of the Royal Naval Reserve Media Operations Specialisation, in the Guardian Professional column in early January. Working with the navy presents particular challenges for press officers: they have to balance the need to be open with operational security, he says.



A Royal Navy warship is overflown by a suspicious aircraft during an international exercise. Meanwhile, the operations room is packed with personnel, their faces lit by the glow of radar displays. The media operations officer churns out press releases while those around him react to simulated battle damage and fictitious casualties.

Public sector communicators find themselves in all kinds of situations, but when it comes to variety or extremity, few can compete with the media operations specialisation of the Royal Naval Reserve. The training includes sea survival, fire fighting and a helicopter escape simulator known ominously as “the dunker,”

The government's Future Reserves 2020 study has set out plans to expand the use of Britain's reserve forces - including those whose job is to communicate the work of the armed forces and escort journalists in operational theatres. The naval environment presents particular challenges for communicators: balancing the desire to be open against the need to protect operational security; working with countries where attitudes to the media are different to our own; and getting journalists to sea in the first place.

However, lessons learned are equally transferable in other communications roles. A junior officer briefing a ship's captain before an interview requires the same mix of credibility, confidence and tact as a civil service press officer needs when briefing a government minister.

Sometimes a reservist can bring a completely fresh perspective, free from the usual conventions of military thinking. One example is the employee of a wildlife conservation organisation who, when mobilised to serve on a frigate off Iraq, helped to produce a programme for BBC Radio 4 on migratory bird routes in the North Arabian Gulf, delivered naval messages to a previously untapped audience.

In the past few years, the Royal Navy's media specialists have filled headquarters roles in Afghanistan, Iraq, Bahrain, Naples and the UK. Media officers have also served at sea off the coasts of Libya and Somalia, in the Gulf and the Caribbean as well as at the London Olympics. The fact they have been so busy is testament not only to the high tempo of operations, but also the importance of communications to defence.

The day-to-day work of media operations includes escorting journalists to deployed ships and operational theatres, advising senior officers on communications strategies and briefing them before interviews, generating stories and co-ordinating output, monitoring foreign media, training personnel prior to deployment, and shielding service personnel and their loved ones in emotionally charged situations.

They handle everything from the grand strategy downwards: one day wrestling with lines-to-take on the future of the nuclear deterrent, the next hunting for a spare pair of shoes for a journalist who's turned up to a ship wearing high heels.



Media interest is inevitably highest during times of conflict, such as in 2011 when broadcasters descended upon HMS Ocean to witness the first Apache helicopter strikes over Libya. However, flying the white ensign is a powerful gesture, and Royal Navy media operations officers can find themselves making a direct contribution to the UK's "soft power". A press conference on-board HMS Albion in Abu Dhabi last year helped reassure allies in the Gulf of the UK's continued ability to meet its commitments in the region following the strategic defence and security review.

Similarly, in 2010, a media operations officer on board RFA Largs Bay played an important role in managing coverage of the UK's response to the catastrophic earthquake in Haiti.

Like the Royal Navy, the Army and RAF also have their media specialists drawn from the reserves. Many work as journalists in civilian life, or have previously served full-time. They provide a wealth of specialist manpower, either for ad-hoc duties, or mobilised for a full operational deployment.

No one can predict with complete accuracy what challenges the UK may face in the future, but the Future Reserves 2020 review states that employing reservists as specialists is a cost-effective way of importing civilian expertise, and recent experience suggests communications skills will continue to be in demand, ashore and at sea.

Christmas comes early....

Pilot Officer Cameron Rennie returned from Afghanistan just before the festive season following his first media operations deployment with 7644 Squadron, Royal Auxiliary Air Force. Back in his civilian role he reflected on a busy 2012 for the Squadron, which culminated with a morale-boosting assignment to record Christmas messages from deployed military personnel.





Will they want to use it? 'That question hangs over you after you've returned the camera to its box and closed the door on the editing suite. 'Does the programme producer like your product? In the case of reservists from 7644 Squadron these questions are particularly pertinent, because we go back to our day jobs and have little time to 'sell in' our stories to media channels.

It was very heartening, therefore, to know that in the time before Christmas the Daybreak programme planned

to broadcast the Christmas Messages from Camp Bastion and Kandahar Air Base that the Air Command Mobile News Team and I had filmed.

I was particularly pleased for the families and friends of my colleagues in Afghanistan. They saw that the UK's general public are interested and enthusiastic to see the range of skills deployed by British forces in Afghanistan.

The RAF police who provide security to the airfield; the RAF Regiment who patrol the surrounding areas; the air traffic controllers, the medics, the chaplains, the aircraft and helicopter engineers who make sure that close air support is available whenever needed to support troops on the ground.

The RAF, like its sister services, relies on a remarkable range of professional skills among both uniformed personnel and the civil servants and contractors who support it. Many of them are now working in an advisory role alongside their Afghan counterparts. I felt proud when, in a break from recording personal video messages from my colleagues at Camp Bastion Airfield, the RAF Fire and Rescue Service told me of the mentoring process as they help train the Afghan Fire Service.

I can reflect that I found my first deployment, particularly rewarding. It's encouraging to learn first-hand from the men and women who are out on the ground where progress is being made in Afghanistan. Many of these airmen, soldiers and sailors have served previously in Helmand or Kandahar and so they have a benchmark for comparisons.

In less than a year since my commissioning I have had the privilege to see the RAF past and present. The heritage was brought to life through meeting people at the unveiling of the Bomber Command Memorial in June and the Battle of Britain Service at Westminster Abbey in September.

The same spirit shines through among those currently serving whom I interviewed at the Altcar Military/Skills Competition in Merseyside in May as well as in this latest assignment to the UK's main theatre of operations.



It has also been a pleasure to see how the work of the RAF integrates with the Army and Royal Navy. I hope that you became aware that the Daybreak Christmas messages come from all three services. On behalf of all at 7644 Squadron, may I wish you all the best for 2013?

Leaving No. 10.....



Pen & Sword Club member, Major Vickie Sheriff, the Prime Minister's official deputy spokeswoman is to become Director of Group Communications at the Department for Transport.

Vickie, a former member of the Media Operations Group (V) – and the Commanding Officer Designate -- is currently second-in-command of The Inns of Court Signal Regiment and Head of News at No. 10 Downing Street.

Vickie has been at No 10 for the last three years and says she has had a very interesting time in Downing Street working through the transition from Gordon Brown's

Government to the Coalition.

Vickie said: "I am ready for a change and another challenge and wanted to do a much more strategic communications role using a range of channels."

A khaki brick in the centre!

Philip Trousdell reflects on his days as Director of Public Relations (Army)

I was Director of Public Relations for the Army in the mid to late nineties when the focus of the appointment was to brief the members of the media on what the Army was doing, put the best possible flavour on the less savoury stories, organise visits to units especially those about to deploy to the Balkans or Northern Ireland and through the media team at what was then called Land Command ensure that there was a steady stream of local boy stories.



Pictured left: Lieutenant General Sir Philip Trousdell, formerly GOC Northern Ireland and now a Vice President of the Pen & Sword Club.

There was also a requirement to organise media training for senior officers and to lecture three times a year at the Junior Division of the Staff College (I always thought that not lecturing to the Command and Staff Course at Camberley was a rather significant omission). I had very little exposure to the media on operations.

There was a permanent state of tension in the MoD where I, along with my RN and RAF colleagues and our small staffs was based. This tension arose because of the three-way pull between the Press Secretary who was our boss on the central staff, the staff in the main office where the media enquiries were handled and our responsibilities to our single service chiefs.

The three DPRs under one of the seemingly endless MoD restructurings had been taken away from the single services and moved in to the central staff area. Those of you who have mastered the subtle and complex art of reading government department wiring diagrams would readily recognise that DPRs were solid line to the PUS via the Press Secretary and dotted line to the General Staff; in the terminology of the day "A khaki brick in the centre."

I often felt that the central staff PR effort was all about making the Secretary of State and the MoD look good in the eyes of the media. This was frequently at variance with my job of explaining all sorts of things about the Army even if those explanations didn't do the MoD any favours. This creative tension was recognised by the General Staff and put most succinctly by CGS who fixed me with a beady eye one day and said: "Don't ever forget who you really work for." This was the sort of career advice which it would have been foolish to have ignored.

The task, I felt, was to get alongside the media in London so that there would eventually be some level of trust. This had been sign-posted to me by a remark made by Mark Laity, the BBC defence correspondent, who took me out to lunch and explained that I was about to find that I had a considerable number of new friends but that they wouldn't be my friends as soon as I ceased to be DPR!

The military-media relationship is, anyway, mutually supporting since both sides need each other if they are to achieve their required outputs. I learnt a lesson early on where a story I had helped a journalist research and bring to print was published without the final and all-important explanation paragraph over which we had both sweated and compromised.

When I rang to complain of lack of fair play and breach of trust I got an earful of vitriol not about me or the Army but about the sub-editor who during the night had simply amputated the final paragraph in order to fit the article in to the allotted space.

This was, of course, about the Army when off operations, matters of policy explanations about procurement and how the families felt about such matters as selling all the quarters to a commercial organisation.

A keen supporter of Help for Heroes, General Philip has raised over £5000 for the charity on events such as cycle rides to Paris and Arnhem.

Where I was not involved was on operations which is, of course, where the media interest in the Army is at its most intense. There were steps that could be taken which would help the media understand what the mission was going to be and how the Army was intending to tackle it.



An example of this was taking a large group of journalists to Tidworth to be briefed by the then Major General Jackson who was preparing to deploy his division to the Balkans. On another occasion I escorted a group of journalists to BATUS in Alberta so that they could see the enormous potential of an armoured battle group going about its business.

Whitehall only agreed to pay for this and editors only agreed to release their correspondents because the Defence Minister Nick Soames was going to be out on the prairie; the lesson here is that you need a media magnet in order to attract the press.

Handling the media during an operation was left to the deployed force. Multi-national HQs would have multi-national press handling and this needed a good degree of coordination to ensure that there was a central message which was used by all the media outlets. This was made more complex by the fact that each National Contingent would to some extent preserve the right to deal with their national press in a way which pursued their national requirements both military and political.

This helped to add another layer of complexity when there were several nations combined at a tactical level; I think of the French led multi-national division in Mostar as being an acute example of this.



The media are, of course, producers of influence over a wide variety of different audiences. This is nothing to do with any black arts or propaganda it is simply a fact that 24 hour media on a very varied collection of delivery systems swiftly creates points of view. This is increasingly so when in order to limit the torrential flood of media the audience can filter out the bits they don't want to hear and filter in the bits that for one reason or another appeal to their viewpoint.

This was certainly true in Northern Ireland where on one occasion an irate politician left my office summoning a press conference on his mobile phone as he stormed down the corridor. By the time he reached his car he had in place a press call to all those outlets which supported his point of view and thus could reach all those who supported him and none of those who didn't. Under these circumstances you need to have a press team who are absolutely in your mind and who are agile enough to put out some balance through other channels very swiftly.

My experience of media on operations, and these are very ancient memories and in theatres which were benign compared with Iraq and Afghanistan, were not dissimilar to those in Whitehall. You needed to work out what you wanted to achieve. You needed to work out and confirm what it was that the media wanted to achieve. You had to recognise that both you and they were subject to pressures from head-office and that politics were going to play a major part in what you could do or allow them to do. So like everything else it needed a bit of thought and analysis and a realisation that you both needed each other to some degree if you were going to succeed.

The final point I would offer is that media handling is too important to approach in anything other than a most professional manner. The deployed commander needs to have a dedicated team who are acknowledged by the rest of the staff as being an important part of delivering mission success. The head of this branch is as important to the commander as his legal adviser.

In my time as DPR and then in the Balkans and Northern Ireland I only came across one directive to the head of the press handling team, in this case a Lieutenant Colonel, explaining his duties, his relationship with the commander and the other staff branches. This was issued to the media handler in General Rupert Smith's headquarters during Gulf 1. I do not know if a copy is held in the archives but it would be a useful document to examine and see what effect it had in shaping our perceptions and that of the embedded journalists as that campaign progressed.

The Tale of a Torn Shirt

Club member Roger Goodwin, a Trustee of the Lancashire Infantry Museum at Fulwood Barracks in Preston tells a short piece of military history that connects with the Pen & Sword Club:

In last year's Networker No 12, Major Gerry Nicholas related how his experiences during a single week as a TA press officer with the 1st Battalion The Lancashire Regiment in Aden in 1967, started him off on his 40-year career in Army media operations.

That was during the last few violent months of Britain's Aden tenure. It was a hard operational tour for the Lancashires. They lost a young officer and three men killed, five severely wounded, and many more hospitalised. Crater, the Argylls' and "Mad Mitch" may have usurped the national headlines, but it was the Lancashires who left "Bloody Aden" as the Army's most-decorated and successful battalion, with a DSO, two Military Crosses, three Military Medals, an MBE, six Mentions in Despatches and three C-in-C's Commendations.



As s Gerry related, the battalion provided a rich stream of copy with which he kept the editors of Lancashire and Yorkshire more than happy – and one exclusive which hit all the nationals about Lieutenant Martin Scrase, who was left with a torn shirt and two grooves across his chest after the narrowest of misses by an Arab gunman.

Well, Gerry and other club members might like to know his story, at least, is one out of the thousands which he must have written in his career, which did not finish up "wrapping up the next day's fish and chips."

Martin Scrase's torn shirt, together with Gerry's photos and a copy of his story as it appeared in the Daily Mail, are now permanently displayed in the Lancashire Infantry Museum in Fulwood Barracks, Preston, where they are on view daily to the public.

Sadly, Lt Col (Rtd) Martin Scrase died just last year. Unfortunately, we have no contact with Sgt Dewhurst, who also featured in Gerry's story, but if anyone knows where he is....?

As for Gerry I hereby extend the warmest of invitations to him to come and “visit” with his old story whenever he likes. I can promise him the very best of Lancashire welcomes. The Lancashire Regiment was short lived, and Aden was its finest hour. Formed in 1959 by the amalgamation of the old East Lancashire and South Lancashire Regiments, it was amalgamated again in 1970 with the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment to form The Queen’s Lancashire Regiment, itself now part of the Duke of Lancaster’s Regiment. The Lancashire Infantry Museum represents the 169 antecedent constituent formations of The Queen’s Lancashire Regiment).

What do you do when you aren’t ‘playing at being soldiers?’

Robert Partridge of Perdix Firearms takes a tongue-in-cheek look at his connections with the film industry and media ops



Apart from being a former member of the Her Majesty’s elite shock troops known as MOG (V), I have to confess to having an even more ridiculous civilian occupation which attracts a certain amount of unwelcome attention. As a special effects armourer in the film industry, I probably have had more than my fair share.

Any number of well-meaning members of a film crew, seeing me on location up to my elbows in gun oil and bent return springs, usually feel the need to bend my ear as well. Inevitably there are always a few opening remarks which run along the following lines which Mr Hammond himself could have drafted – “Those guns aren’t real, are they? Is it a Magnum? Do blanks hurt? Were you in the SAS? My dad’s got a shotgun.”

This is usually followed by some story about when ‘said bloke’ was in the States and fired a few holes in paper targets and nearly broke his wrist.

But what does the term ‘Film Armourer’ mean? Well, it’s a mixture of things. First and foremost, it’s not the same as a REME armourer. Actually, it’s more like a cross between an alchemist and a hooker. For a start, there are no books on the subject and with the exception of some military weapons; most firearms are not designed to fire blank ammunition. This means you need to start cutting bits off them to make them work. If you cut the wrong bits off they have a tendency to blow up. This is both expensive and painful.

I won’t bore you with details of the number of items that I have reduced to useless bits of twisted metal. But it’s not all doom and gloom. Sometimes it’s immensely satisfying. I rang Steyr Mannlicher in Austria about a troublesome machine pistol, the TMP – that’s not what TMP stands for but it’s an accurate coincidence.

I had blown up one and they were about £800 a gun and I was asking for some help as I was running out of time, guns, money and ideas. It is not possible to make zis veapon fire ze blank ammunition”, the technician informed me in a faintly patronizing tone over the ‘phone. Having finally got the thing to work I rang him back and yelled into the ‘phone, “Remember the TMP? We’ll have some of this” and fired off a 30 round magazine of blanks into the handset. I don’t think I deafened him - much. Dangerous? No. Childish? Yes... but immensely satisfying.

So why is the job like that of a hooker? Well a hooker is someone who is not necessarily skilled in their own technical performance but is however, highly skilled at making their client think that they (the client) is a world expert.....Well, that’s how we really earn our money. We take some poor actor who has a ludicrous piece of dialogue to deliver, dressed in a costume that almost fits, covered in face paint, plugs jammed in each ear, wires from exploding bullet hits taped under his shirt trailing out of each trouser leg and we train him and

convince him that his weapon handling skills are such that he could, no should, have been on the balcony at Princes Gate and we do whilst it making sure that no one else gets hurt.

In my youth, it was without doubt the best job in the world. We would fly in the front end of an expensive airplane (not a C130 in sight) and drink as much as possible before it could land. We would stay in five star hotels and eat as much as possible (we were young, remember) without worrying about our waistlines. We would get up at 0500, work until 2100, drink until midnight and then do it all again. I think we probably did some other unforgettable things too but perhaps that's wishful thinking.....These days I have grown up enough to just want my own bed.

Foreign locations were full of excitement; we would film in the most exotic and seemingly inappropriate places. In Ethiopia, in 1992, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) had just kicked Mengistu from government and was ruling the country with an AK47 toting guerrilla army. Where else would you want to make a film and what's more ridiculous, where else would you expect to export Kalashnikovs? Talk about coals to Newcastle.

However, many of the items needed for filming were not brought from the UK. The costumes had to be procured locally and as our costume designer meandered through the market place in the ancient capital of Gondar in search of the appropriate frocks, some starving waif tried to steal an orange. Retribution was swift and brutal. The EPRDF guards in the market opened up on the poor child with a belt fed PKM machine gun.

We all tried to get minimalist in the cracks in the mud and pretend to be flat worms. All that is with the exception of Ivan, the half Welsh, half Russian costume designer, who remained upright, immaculately dressed complete with monocle in place. When the shooting had finally finished (I think the belt had run out) we looked around and fortunately no one was hurt. The orange thief had escaped to steal again.

Shakily, I got to my feet and asked Ivan "Why didn't you lie down you stupid arse?" Camp as a row of tents and flapping even less came back the answer; "Darling, I was wearing f@#@ing silk! Get me a large Tanqueray." You couldn't make it up.

When I retired in 2008 I thought I would never return to the business of getting up at 0500 and getting to bed at midnight but I was lured by the technical challenge of firing machine guns (silently) in Trafalgar Square on 'The Sweeney', to meet Dame Diana Rigg on Dr Who and to work on 'Skyfall' – my first Bond movie. Perhaps the little boy who wants to play with guns is still here and I haven't grown up after all.

Strategic Communications at the tipping point?

Club Vice President Mark Laity, former BBC Defence Correspondent gives a view from SHAPE

When I was made SHAPE's first Chief Strategic Communications (StratCom) in 2007 it was a new departure for NATO. So I Googled the term to get a definition.



It didn't help overmuch. There were hundreds, and institutions like the US government had different ones for different departments. What was clear was that everyone knew the term but no one seemed to agree on what it meant – including the professionals. So, five years on where are we?

What we can say is that the importance of StratCom is recognised far more widely and that is a major shift, but sadly we are to some degree still in 'definition wars'. It reflects a continuing battle between national perspectives and even more within the information disciplines. Rather

like the old joke of tourists asking a taxi driver how to reach a certain address and are told, "Well I wouldn't have started from here."

But we did, and despite the drag anchors of previous practise slowing it down the good ship StratCom is moving forward. However after five years have we achieved critical mass? Has the importance of information not only been recognised but absorbed into the way we do business both within the information community but also the overall political/military system? The jury is still out, and curiously more because of what is going inside the information community than beyond.

I have a lot of engagements with senior commanders and the fundamental intellectual battle has been won in that I rarely have to argue that StratCom is vital to success. They get it, something much aided by the fact that counter-insurgency (COIN) is of all forms of conflict the one most influenced by information campaigns.

The problem then is not commanders rejecting what I call the StratCom mindset but then knowing how to move on to the next step and know how to best implement StratCom. This is far from easy and making it happen is to a large degree our job as advisers, professionals and practitioners, and so the fact it often does not is in part our failure. This is not to go down the 'blame the messenger' road, but the results of our information campaigns have not matched the efforts put in.

Analysing why, it is easy to highlight the flawed strategies and policies and we all know about 'painting lipstick on a pig' or 'polishing turds', but how good have our information systems been? Have we made the best of what we have? I think not.

No one would surely argue anything other than that our StratCom record in Afghanistan has been distinctly mixed. Looking back it is often dismaying to see the same arguments and the same problems still with us. At a time when the importance of StratCom has never been better appreciated we have not exploited it and turned this into structural and permanent improvements in how we do business. This conclusion has made me increasingly radical in my views on what has to be done, because we are now at something of a tipping point with a choice between continuing information fratricide or combining to create information critical mass.



At present we do not have that critical mass producing a variety of mostly inter-related consequences:

We are too small within each information discipline and at each level of command. Typically the information staffs are counted in tens (and sometimes less) not hundreds or thousands within our armed forces. We then divide them into PA, PSYOPS and Info Ops, and then sub-divide further for each level of command. Then on top we have PSYOPS and InfoOps having a different C2 chain to PA.

This adds to the coordination issues once we are on operations, which having sliced and diced our information staff vertically and horizontally, are considerable. This in turn means a lot of time spent 'coordinating' in meetings, telcons and VTCs, while our written products face delays, as they have to be cleared and coordinated in so many places. And of course with the info staffs being so small to start with this plethora of coordination has disproportionate impact. Overall it makes us slower, less flexible, more bureaucratic and reduces the scope for creativity.

This also answers one of the apparent contradictions I noted very early from my time in SHAPE. If you add up the actual number of people involved in the information disciplines it is quite significant, but once divided up as above we are overstretched and understaffed everywhere.

In supporting ISAF the ideal I tried to work towards was creating in effect two StratCom teams, 'in-theatre' and 'out-of-theatre'. This meant synergising the efforts of three HQs, NATO HQ, SHAPE and Joint Force Command Brunssum, which is easier said than done. I would also argue that the splitting of ISAF's C2 in Kabul into ISAF HQ and the IJC (ISAF Jt Cmmnd) has not helped our StratCom effort.

We are too low-ranked to get enough influence. In institutions numbers have a quality all of their own. Even NATO's smaller nations have militaries numbering many thousands, but our information staffs as noted above are often in the tens. It means the most senior full-timers (if there are any) will be at best be colonels or half-colonels. Even the US peaks at 1-star, and only one for each service. The military is hierarchical and rank counts.

On operations when the decisions are made we are usually in the room, but we are often the most junior there and our ability to speak is dependent on the commander's support. Outside operations our presence is far from automatic and often focussed more on PA support to the commander's media engagements – which is not StratCom.

In medium and larger armed forces this low ranking is accentuated by the division of the information disciplines into three, which tend to fight each other for resources rather than combine to gain joint growth and influence. It is as if the Royal Artillery divided itself into air defence, light artillery and heavy artillery.



Not enough career opportunities. Simply put, if you want to make general, admiral or air marshal would you want to specialise in any of the information disciplines? This is not to say that a tour in PA (in particular) isn't helpful on the climb up the greasy pole, but it's a tick in a box not a career choice. Again the information disciplines, small and split up as they are, simply cannot offer an ambitious officer what he/she needs.

Interestingly, one feature of ISAF is that the general officers who run the Communications Directorate are not information specialists, nor had specialist training. This is not the first time. Regardless of their personal qualities (high), is it not sad that apparently the information disciplines cannot provide anyone to run their own shop?

We are lacking in expertise. The regular staffing of PA/PSYOPs/InfoOps shops with barely or untrained amateurs is a standing joke within the NATO information community. While our commanders and politicians routinely lament our StratCom problems we continue to give people a couple of weeks on a course and fire them off into the unknown. The British military with their high average standards adapt better than most but in no other area of the military would such amateurism be tolerated as it is in the info disciplines.

StratCom is more amenable to applied common sense than many other areas of abstruse military specialism, but it is also in terms of mindset and approach very far from the normal activity of the military – it doesn't come naturally. This lack of expertise is accentuated by the fact most people do one tour and that is it. And given the lack of career opportunities why would anyone want to do more.

We have insufficient education and training. Given the above this is hardly a surprise. Because we are small, we lack career opportunities or high-ranking advocates. Further, because the information arena is little understood and disparate as we are we have been

unable to make the case for the broad-based but comprehensive approach we need. The consequence is that our commanders know they need StratCom but mostly lack the depth of understanding to be an 'intelligent customer', while those who are meant to serve them as their StratCom/PA/PSYOPs advisers are very frequently themselves little more than amateurs with limited education and training.

We have complex, sometimes contradictory structures and doctrines, varying between and within nations. Because nations do different things in different ways when we combine it can be a mess, especially as the relations between the information disciplines can be hugely variably.

There is a tolerance of practitioners 'doing their own thing'. The lack of commonality in national and multinational doctrines, allied to the fact information shops are often so small,



can produce dramatic changes as personnel change. Both on operational deployments and within our permanent establishments the change of a single individual or middling staff rank can and frequently has made dramatic differences for both good and ill in how we do StratCom. This is both in terms of individual relations and structures.

We are vulnerable to change by personal whim. On operations StratCom has been subject to dramatic change on virtually every commander's rotation. Change is of course a commander's prerogative, but the lack of professionalism and institutional influence has made us poor advocates for our own field making some of these

changes less than helpful and hindered sustained the creation of an effort. We have poor lessons learned, low institutional memory, and an inability to sustain good practice when we do succeed. Given the above how could we be surprised?

I do not want to produce a dialogue of despair as in many respects we have moved forward in the last five years, but the incremental progress has to be mixed with confronting some of the more fundamental issues.

We need the synergies that come from seeing all of the information disciplines as a single career field with a consistent C2. This should not be a merger between PA/PSYOPs etc, but recognition that shared interests outweighs our differences. Although still small, combining our efforts will enable us all to compete in a bigger field and gain the resources and influence we need. Outside the information disciplines many are frankly baffled by our continuing squabbles.

Within some parts of the information community in some countries StratCom is seen as just another turf fighter. For me StratCom should be a champion and advocate for all the information disciplines. A lot is expected of StratCom – we have all been victims of demands for some information 'fairy dust' – and together we can better resist the unreasonable and deliver more of what we should.

Marching to the Sound of Guns, Dogs and Tractors



Media Relations at the Countryside Alliance presents formidable challenges, says Matt Finch, a former Land Command media operations officer and defence industry communicator. Matt, in his TA role, is the Unit Press Officer of The Royal Yeomanry. He recently took up the appointment of Head of Media Relations at the Alliance

As someone whose delivery of magazines includes only two titles: PR Week and The Countryside Alliance Magazine, you could say that taking

up a PR role at the alliance was something of a dream job. assessment and when you add in that the chairman, Lt-Gen (Retd) Sir Barney White-Spunner, was Chief of Staff when I was at Land Command and is now Colonel of my yeomanry regiment and it makes one feel very much at home!

But Alliance HQ is anything but a cosy billet for a public relations practitioner. The first thing that strikes you is that we have a vocal, influential opposition and that we are outnumbered.

Since the Industrial Revolution, the majority of population of the UK has become progressively more urbanised and removed from the land many were once tied to and which still provides much of its food. Yet country sports and a rural way of life have continued in parallel and largely unchanging. The urban majority and rural minority have had little reason to connect and so haven't done so – until relatively recently.

Media is central to this change and the clash of cultures and ideologies. As the recent badger cull debate showed, some urbanites view and want to influence rural activities from a distance and their message of saving photogenic furry creatures is an emotive and popular one – which plays well with the media who love a conflict at home or abroad. For the same reasons the hunting debate, which is far from dead, will continue and the press will find it catnip with its echoes of class, its tradition and striking pictures, not to mention the passion it elicits on both sides.

Country people are not used to having to gain authorisation to go about their business from their urban cousins and - due to the general live-and-let-live attitude, which used to characterise town versus country relations - have not in the past put effort into convincing city dwellers of the virtues of their way of life. Arguably all that changed with the 2005-hunting act and so the first audience the communications team at the Countryside Alliance must address is the rural populace including its own membership.

Bad news stories sell themselves but, rather like dealing with publicity-shy soldiers, it is a constant battle to persuade countrysiders with positive stories to blow their own trumpets. One initiative to overcome this reticence is the Countryside Alliance Awards – 'The Rural Oscars'. This is a platform to highlight the successes of rural businesses countrywide and produces a wealth of good local and regional stories and refreshingly little controversy. In an outright PR coup, this year saw Owen Patterson, Secretary of State for DEFRA join the judging panel for the awards.

Convincing the rural population that they must assist the effort to communicate with the urban masses, who hold political sway in our democracy, is only part of the battle and the campaigns team at the Alliance is the spearhead of the external comms effort. I am often told that the Countryside Alliance needs more media exposure, but a quick internet research reveals plenty of op-eds, articles and quotations, particularly from General Barney who has become a reliable source for expert comment for publications on many issues over the last few months.



As readers of Scratchings will know, overt credits are just the tip of the iceberg with a host of other articles and broadcast programming enabled by the press office.

The profile of the Countryside Alliance is greater than other countryside organisations of similar size, but that isn't the only thing that marks it out as different from many which line up to campaign on this rural issue or that. Far from being a single-issue body, today's

Countryside Alliance represents rural views on whole range of issues from affordable housing to broadband provision as well as the field sports participants who make up much of the membership.

Many of those who benefit from the campaign team's public affairs and public relations work are not members and have no idea that there is someone behind the scenes working on their behalf. The Alliance does not pretend to represent every person living in the country, but can invariably be found on the side of a working, economically viable countryside; we're all about country *people* not just the look of the land itself.

So life in the alliance press office is one involving conflict with a determined opposition and while a stint in Army PR may not have prepared me with that, working for the Defence Industry certainly did; those protesting against DSEi are the same mob who spend their Saturdays sabbing. Rather like defence manufacturers, country people are challenged over something which the British have a strong heritage in – which seems enough reason for some people to want to bring it down.

Are we on the right track in this war? The Chief Executive of the League Against Cruel Sports says that "Hunting.....has a good PR agent"; praise from one's opponents always sounds sweetest, but it's not just hunting, it's rural people in general that the Countryside Alliance represents and that's a much broader constituency.

Firmin Sword of Peace awarded to 15 (UK) Psychological Operations Group

In recognition of their work in Afghanistan 15 (UK) Psy Ops Group has been awarded the Firmin Sword of Peace. Says National Chairman, Mike Peters: This prestigious award comes as a recognition of the work of the unit in Afghanistan and is given to the unit or establishment of each Service judged to have made the most valuable contribution to humanitarian activities by establishing good and friendly relations with the inhabitants of any community at home or overseas.

The Chief of the Defence Staff General Sir David Richards, pictured right, presented the sword to the Commanding Officer, Commander Steve Tatham, who previously served in Strategic Messaging at the MoD.



A small team, 15 strong, has been continuously deployed to Helmand for the last six years where it has worked predominantly with the Afghan civilian population and sought to inform, reassure, educate and through the promotion of free and unbiased discussions persuade Afghans that their futures are best served not with the Taliban, nor with ISAF, but with themselves and their elected government.

The unit runs a network of radio stations employing local Afghans as DJ's, broadcasting music, poetry, debate programmes and even a Helmand soap opera, as well as producing graphical posters, and leaflets to communicate in an area where literacy rates are only around 20 per cent.

Recent projects include information campaigns from farming and veterinary workshops using their radio stations and promoting debate on political issues of the day.

Presenting the award the Chief of the Defence Staff said: The work of 15 POG has made a very significant contribution to fostering positive relations with local Afghan communities and building vital understanding of our role and the role of the Afghan Government.

Firmin & Sons is a long established supplier to the UK military and has been presenting a Sword of Peace since the 2005 when Wilkinson stopped the production of swords

A message in a bottle.....a gift to media ops



Captain Gerry Northwood, RN, talks of the UK counter piracy domain and the experience of command and media operations

Delivered via a bottle thrown from the ship into the sea, the message from the crew of the Italian cargo ship *Montecristo* was “11 pirates on board with automatic weapons and RPG. All comms on ship are down. Crew are safe in engine room and have control of engine and steering. Please help.” Help them we did. However, as the boarding party started the assault on the *Montecristo* to capture the Somali pirates and free the crew, Sky News was already reporting success.

From a command perspective, there are three notable lessons to be learnt from this markedly public episode of counter-piracy operations.

From the moment we responded to the call to assist the *Montecristo*, UK and RN reputation was on the line. While the full capability of our boarding teams had not been openly declared to NATO, the actual capability was known by my NATO commander, an Italian Admiral. There was, therefore, an expectation in the NATO *and* Italian chain of command that we would execute an opposed boarding should that be required. Therefore, backing off at the last moment through a failure to achieve Rules of Engagement, or a decision that the boarding



would place too high a risk on lives, would no doubt have resulted in significant amounts of negative publicity.

Secondly, the decision to break the news about the event was not taken at a UK national level. The Italians took unilateral action to make an announcement, for their own politically expedient reasons. In other words, we had no control over timing or content for something that had international reach and would ultimately excite a huge amount of national interest.

Finally, the message in a bottle was a media and communications gift. It was the perfect hook to capture the imagination of the UK broadcast and tabloid press, presenting a unique opportunity to put some broader messages across to a wider public.

The UK counter-piracy Task Group consisted of RFA *Fort Victoria*, HMS *Somerset*, occasionally US and Italian warships, Fleet Contingency Troop Boarding parties, a Lynx Helicopter Flight and a joint surgical medical team. It was deployed to the Indian Ocean to counter Somali piracy from September 2011 to February 2012. In simple terms it was a surge to lend greater weight to the international effort to protect merchant vessels and their crews from being victims of Somali kidnap and ransom.

In Maritime Security Operations, as in so many other areas of our recent “wars among the people”, the military contribution is a single element in a much bigger picture. An illustration of tactical action having strategic effect was the capture of 14 Somali pirates on 13 Jan 2012. This occurred six weeks before the start of the London Somalia conference, and not surprisingly grabbed the attention of Whitehall decision makers very quickly. With the UK national media looking on through the eyes of an embedded journalist from the Daily Telegraph, all the stops were pulled out to achieve a “legal finish” - an agreement with a third party nation to take the Somalis for prosecution.

Once again, UK national and RN reputation was on the line. Without the legal finish, the tactical success of capturing the pirates red-handed attacking a merchant vessel, would have been exposed as a sham if the culprits were put ashore in Somalia, effectively being freed to have another go at piracy at a later date.

I should outline at this point some of the rudiments of my campaign plan for the deployment. I established five Key Tactical Initiatives. These were headline objectives against which I could monitor our progress and in broad terms measure success. These covered the development of Intelligence, Information Operations, Counter-Piracy doctrine and Regional Capacity building. The first among them though was that which concerns us most when considering the nexus between the command appreciation of operations, and the communication through the media, and elsewhere, of our progress and success. This was: “To enhance the reputation of the UK and Royal Navy in counter-piracy operations”.

Following the capture by the Somalis of the yachting couple, the Chandlers, in October 2010, the Royal Navy reputation has been recognised as being at a significant low. We were seen in some quarters as weak and ineffective at achieving decisive effect. But enhancing RN reputation runs at several levels. Intra MoD and Intra coalition as well as the more obvious enhancement of reputation in the media. To meet the needs of the coalition we were assigned to NATO command. A real strength in so many ways, though as was the case during the *Montecristo* incident, it did not always leave us in control of our own destiny.

I should come clean about my interest and motivation to marry media ops very closely with all aspects of the operation. My HQ structure did not include a Media Ops staff officer. There were a number of reasons for this. A passive media policy would have left a media ops officer twiddling his thumbs for much of the time. Second, I deliberately biased the HQ toward



intelligence gathering, as this is where I wanted strength in depth. To say this used up my manpower allocation is stretching it, but I would have had to fight very hard to increase the numbers any further.

I also wanted to keep the upper echelon of SO2s lean (just 4 - COS & Plans, Intelligence, Logs, and Ops). When I needed additional people to provide more horsepower, or intellectual

rigour, I was confident I could draw on the Task Elements working for me, all of which were staffed with good officers. So I effectively made myself my own Media Ops, and then franchised the task to members of the Joint Surgical Medical team. They did a brilliant job!

At any one time, one of them was Media Ops, while another was understudy, to take over when the lead left the ship during the next roulement of medical staff. They in turn looked to the PR Officers in each of the Task Elements to field their local level stories.

Clearly this kind of structure entails some risk, so when the embed was nominated I insisted that a Media ops from the UK accompany the embed. A Daily Telegraph investigative reporter on-board a ship for three to four weeks was clearly going to require more looking after than I, or the co-opted medical team, had time for.

Finally, I anticipated good media support from UKMCC at Bahrain. I submitted a media plan to PJHQ Media prior to deploying. These included utilising the Fleet Mobile News Team to collect library footage, embarking a RUSI academic, embarking a journalist, and an Op Ed piece in a national paper. However, with a legal finish of any pirate captures being traditionally difficult to achieve, PJHQ was reluctant to embrace any of these initiatives until we visibly demonstrated success.

During four months of operations, the Task Group achieved the safe release of 43 hostages from Somali pirate control and the transfer of 36 Somali pirates to third parties for prosecution. Most of these Somalis have been successfully prosecuted and sentenced to between seven and 12 years in prison. A further 22 Somali pirates were released back to Somalia without their equipment. We captured two dhows, two whalers, six skiffs, and a multitude of weapons and other pirate paraphernalia. In effects terms, we successfully Deterred, Disrupted, Contained, Denied and Protected.

The media impact was significant with the passive media policy giving way to a proactive one on each occasion of counter-piracy success. This included a RUSI piece examining the geo strategic impact of piracy by Dr Lee Willetts, a Telegraph magazine feature, an opinion piece in The Times and numerous international, UK national and regional broadcast and print reports.

The above provides a necessarily brief account of some of the significant events that helped define the Royal Navy counter-piracy surge to the Indian Ocean. Written from a commander's perspective, decision-making and response to the media was undoubtedly influenced by my personal experience of media operations derived from my previous appointment to Defence Media Centre.

The enduring question for me as I reflect back on the operational and media events of the deployment is; *could we have gained greater advantage from a more forward leaning media posture from the outset?* As it happened, we were lucky. Consistently positive operational results made for positive media coverage of our exploits. Yet this happened in a way that was contrary to the media plan and on most occasions it was in fact the media that set the pace of reporting.

SWANS, WALLABIES, CUTS & CRIME... ALL IN A DAY'S WORK

Spellbound - as Rachel relates her transition from military advisor, police spokesperson to the birth of a new communications agency

Back in 2010 I saw the post of Head of Corporate Communications for Gloucestershire Constabulary advertised. I knew Gloucestershire only as a quiet rural area with beautiful scenery and, having worked in a large metropolitan police force previously - and only recently having returned from four months in Helmand - I thought it would be a great job in a slightly more sedate setting than I was used to. I was right on the first count but wrong on the second...says Rachel Smyth, right, founder of Spellbound Communications.



My only reference for what life might be like in my new role came from the Hollywood blockbuster 'Hot Fuzz'; a ridiculous portrayal of rural policing in Gloucestershire which focuses on police officers catching swans and patrolling village fetes. There is no doubt all of that *is* part of rural policing, as a recent article in the Sun featuring Gloucestershire officers proved...

But policing an area like this one is very much more complex than first meets the eye. My role, running a department which dealt with media relations, marketing, internal communications, online engagement, web development and print products was a challenging one for all sorts of reasons; not least the economic climate we found ourselves in.

The organisation was reducing in size from the moment I arrived and making large-scale redundancies and restructuring always needs carefully considered communications. Tricky for an organisation with no internal communication capacity – a problem we quickly remedied!

In fact, effective internal communications were to be the key to keeping the organisation functioning over the next two and a half years. Once described by David Cameron as the 'last great unreformed public service', policing has been subject to wave after wave of change, cuts and reforms ever since I arrived in Gloucestershire; leading to discontent, strikes and officers marching across London in protest. The speed and scale of reform has been extraordinary, often leaving staff struggling to keep up – a unique communication challenge and one where the penalties for failure are high.

Nothing evokes emotion and volatility quite as much as news which impacts personally upon individuals. When people are unsure about whether they will have a job or be able to pay the mortgage in a few months time, communication must be so carefully crafted. It's not just the factual content that matters, tone and timing are crucial.

Gloucestershire Constabulary became the first force to speak publicly about the effect of the cuts when a council tax freeze, combined with national cuts and unique local funding arrangements, meant that the Constabulary was beginning to cut into frontline policing. We said we had reached a 'metaphorical cliff edge', a catchphrase which caught public imagination and, bit by bit, other forces followed suit, speaking up about the repercussions of cuts on the ability of police to keep people safe.



And with all of this turbulence internally and externally, the day job rumbled on in the background – everything from ensuring bundles of evidence reach juries on time to the printing of parking tickets; issuing CCTV, running press conferences, monitoring social media, working on documentaries and providing communication and marketing support for a whole host of incidents ranging from missing people to escaped wallabies (I kid you not).

The beauty of running a communications capability for the police is that it is truly varied. When you look around the office wondering where everyone is, only to realise that one is in a meeting about a murder, another about a celebrity wedding, two are preparing for the Olympics and one is answering media enquiries about swans, wallabies and any number of other matters deemed in the 'public interest' while you are wrestling with the announcement of the resignation of the Chief Constable or an imminent arrest under the Terrorism Act, several words spring to mind. 'Sedate' isn't one of them.

When I arrived in Gloucestershire there was no Corporate Communications Department; instead there was a press office and a few individuals fulfilling a communications function dotted about the organisation. In my last month working for the police our fully integrated

communications team was named '2012 Communicator of the Year' at the Gloucestershire Business Awards - a real team effort and something that was well-deserved by each and every member. It seemed like the perfect end to a great two and half years and time to launch into a new endeavour.

So late last year I set up my own consultancy - 'Spellbound Communications' - and 2013 is already shaping up to be another exciting year. www.spellboundcommunications.co.uk

Collect, edit and distribute - the combat camera team on Op Herrick 17

It's been an extremely interesting time on Operation Herrick 17 writes Captain Tony Booth, MOG (V) pictured below with video operator Corporal Mike Hubbard.

The role, he says, gives the team the freedom to travel Afghanistan collecting stories as well as seeing the range and complexity of the campaign across many locations. I would recommend it, and MOG (V), to any Reservist interested in a media role on operations.

Electronic newsgathering specialist, Mike Hubbard is also a member of MOG (V). Cap-badged to The Rifles, Mike says the job is "a million miles from my civilian career working for BT Global Services as an Account Manager."

Brighton based Tony, deployed to Helmand in April 2012. A former Regular as an education and training services officer he served for 17 years before joining MOG (V)



Operation Herrick 17 is in a fascinating period as the transition process matures in many areas, bases close or handover and we look towards drawdown and redeployment of troops in 2014. The scale and process is huge and complex and the challenge for the CCT is to show this in an interesting way which reassures the public back home that it is being conducted in good-order and in the most cost-effective, efficient manner possible.

Despite this task, support to current operations is the on-going priority and the team has been involved in the main operations - often Afghan led - including operation Tufaan or *Storm* and Operation DAAS or *Heart*. On the ground it is the evolution from combat operations to the training/advising role across Helmand which is the predominant activity.

Although difficult in some regions the target that 75% of the Afghan population will live in areas with Afghan-led security is a realistic Afghan solution to the issue. This includes the Nahr-e-Saraj district in Helmand, the third and final district within the UK's Task Force Helmand where the majority of British forces operate. An on-going and increasingly emerging story is that of the contribution of the Reserves to operations following Army 2020. Here we are clearly the experts and we

have completed a number of stories demonstrating the role of the Reserves at the centre of operations in Afghanistan. It is surprising to note that reservists in some units make-up a good deal of the troops – especially for the more specialised units such as the Military Stabilisation and Support Group (MSSG) – where they make up almost half of their staff.

All our other day-to-day work is on-going which includes covering the major occasions (Remembrance Day, St Andrews Day, Christmas etc.) where we have had some successes with news (Scottish TV) as well as other media outlets. We have also contributed to a number of documentaries and other commissioned pieces such as 'Trooping the Colour' (a documentary focussing on the Welsh Guards out in July 2013), Brize Norton Super Base (out January 2013) and the British Military Tattoo (out 9 December 2012).

Here the team is very keen to participate which I initially found surprising, however, these pieces are guaranteed to make the media often to millions of viewers which is, after all, the primary role of the team.

Social media has a part to play in all this and we have actively engaged across many areas including Twitter (@combatcamera17), You Tube ('My Job in Afghanistan') and the UK Forces pages on Facebook and the Army Blog.

The Combat Camera Team is a HQ Joint Force Support unit whose role it is to collect edit and distribute media content (video, print, stills, and radio) from across Task Force Helmand and wider theatre. The team's role is to support strategic messaging from Defence Media and Communications via the Afghanistan Media Operations Cell operating out of Camp Bastion.

THE BRITISH ARMY'S ANTIQUES ROAD SHOW



Alan Grace, former BFBS station manager and broadcaster, is custodian of the services' radio archives. Here he relates a heartening tale from the Second World War.

During the late 1940s and early 1950s Soldier Magazine's reporters produced a series of articles about the work of the Monuments, Fine Arts and Archive Officers (MFAA).

One such officer was Major Ronald Balfour, a former Fellow of King's College, who joined the King's Royal Rifle Corps in 1940 and served in North-West Europe as a Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives Specialist Officer.

In the Spring of 1945, as the war raged through the Rhineland towns, he darted in and out of shattered churches and museums, carrying to safety statues, paintings and carvings. With his own hands he salvaged from the rubble the archives of several towns, including Goch, Cranenburg and Xanten. Today these towns are among the few to retain their complete medieval records.

However, on March 10, he was killed by artillery shell fragments as he was carrying two sculptured altarpieces from the 14th century Stifts Church of Cleve.

Little by little, through the post-war years, German burgomasters and architects pieced together the story of this British officer who with great discrimination and energy, and at the cost of his life, helped to preserve so much of their Rhineland treasure.

In 1956 the town of Goch decided to dedicate to his memory its newly completed archives room inside the famous 600-year-old Steintor. This gesture by the German town is all the more impressive when it is remembered that Goch was almost annihilated by aerial bombing and ground fighting.

To many soldiers in 1945, it seemed illogical, even absurd, that British officers should be trying to save the enemy's treasures, when Germany was being pounded and pattern-bombed by day and night. Also that strategic buildings should be barred to them by signs reading: NATIONAL MONUMENT; OFF LIMITS TO ALL ALLIED TROOPS, EVEN FOR MILITARY INSTALLATIONS.

The monastery at Cassino had been pulverised: so why worry about a few statues and altars in Hitler's Germany? Why waste time sorting through the remains of gutted libraries? It was easy to feel like that at the time, but it is now clear that the labours of this little-talked-of military branch have yielded an impressive dividend of goodwill.

The same attention was also given to the archaeological treasures in North Africa. British Forces had occupied Cyrene for several months in early 1941 but the Italians re-took the area in the late spring of 1941, and by summer had produced a pamphlet called 'What the English did in Cyrenaica.' It was illustrated with photographs of smashed statues, impolite graffiti and empty pedestals and it accused the Allied troops, and in particular the Australians, and of breaking up priceless treasures. The accusations were false. The Italians had taken the missing statues and the damage to various artefacts had been caused by time, not the British Army. The graffiti, although genuine, were not on monuments.

The propaganda effects were unpleasant. However, it brought to the notice of Allied leaders the danger to which works of art might be subjected during modern warfare. Before the Alamein push of 1942 special instructions were issued to Montgomery's Forces "To preserve any archaeological monuments, which might come into their possession."

When Cyrene fell, Lieutenant Colonel Mortimer Wheeler, right a Director of the London Museum, and later knighted for his services to archaeology who had moved up with the advanced forces, posted guards on the antiquities, cleaned up the inside of the museum, boarded up the windows, and locked all the doors. Those Arab guards who had remained at their posts were retained and supplemented by British NCOs. When, in the following year, an enquiry was made into the amount of damage done by Allied troops, it was found that there had been only two cases, and these of minor importance.



However, minor damage still occurred – as at Leptis, where the mosaic pavements were damaged by military boots. But such cases were rare, and the general tendency among the troops was a heightening respect for these magnificent monuments. So successful had been the educational work of the antiquities department that when troops who were digging a gun position in the sand hills east of Leptis came upon a Roman villa, they cleaned out the ruins. They made plans of the buildings, photographed the well-preserved frescoes and filled in the site with sand to secure its protection before shifting the gun pit to a new position.

All of this activity resulted in a Proclamation on Preservation of Antiquities which set out the rights vested in the British Military Administration and forbade 'the excavation, removal, sale, concealment or destruction of antiquities without license.'

As the war moved towards Italy, the newly acquired respect for the monuments and fine arts of the past moved with it. In spite of the terrific 'softening up' that Sicily received, the casualties among the antiquities of that island were miraculously light. The trend of the fighting on the mainland of Italy was one of swift advances followed by periods of intense static warfare.



General Eisenhower and General Omar Bradley inspect recovered Nazi loot

Only when the advance was swift did the monuments escape. Of the areas affected by the heavier fighting, Lazio and Tuscany (both rich in relics and works of art) were the two most severely hit. The celebrated monastery of Monte Cassino was the outstanding example; only after some three months fighting, and then reluctantly, were orders given to bomb the monastery.

The Italians safely and systematically evacuated the majority of the movable works of art to regions of safety. Where this was not possible a great deal of damage was done at the hands of the Germans.

The most shameful vandalism was committed in the Royal Society's library at Naples. On September 26th 1944 German soldiers, enraged at the Partisan Resistance, entered the building, covered the shelves and books with petrol, flung in grenades, and, having shot the two guards who attempted resistance, kept the civil fire brigade at a distance while the library burned. About 50,000 volumes were lost in the flames.

With the invasion of France came a new phase. The first MFAA officer was in Normandy within a week of D-Day, when the Allied forces held only a narrow coastal strip extending, at its furthest, to Bayeux. As the armies moved forward, the responsibility for monuments devolved on to the Line of Communication troops who, in their turn, handed over to the French authorities.

In certain places where national monuments were in danger of being damaged by the presence of Allied troops, the now familiar notices were prepared informing all servicemen

that the building was a National Monument and off limits to all Allied Troops. This was in striking contrast to the attitude of the Germans, who used one 13th century chapel as a fodder store.

Once in Germany, there was also the problem of safeguarding movable treasure rather than the preservation of buildings which, in the main, already been destroyed by the large-scale air bombardment. The possibility of further looting by the many thousands of DPs had to be considered, and protection provided for the treasures. Many of the existing German repositories were, for reasons of damp or proximity to inflammable material of little use, so new buildings had to be found. Little could be done to restore the churches. Many of the Nazi deposits of treasures, both German and from occupied countries were found in the shafts of mines.

Perhaps the outstanding example was the case of the Heeresmunitionsanstalt at Bernterode. This was a salt mine which since 1936 had been used as an ammunition plant and storage depot. In the body of the mine about 400,000 tons of ammunition and quantities of other military supplies had been stored. Seven men from an American ordnance unit, with bomb disposal experts, inspected the contents of the mine on 27th April 1945.

In the course of their investigations they noticed a masonry wall built into the side of the main corridor about 500 metres from the elevation shaft. Noticing that the mortar was still fresh, they made an opening, and, after tunnelling through masonry and rubble to a depth of more than five feet, uncovered a frame lattice door padlocked on the opposite side. Breaking through this, they entered a room divided by partitions into a series of compartments filled with paintings, boxes, tapestries, and hung with brilliant banners.

Among the contents of this room were the coffins of Field Marshal and Frau von Hindenburg, Frederick William the First and Frederick the Great. Also found were the crowns of the coronation of Frederick the First and Sophie Charlotte in 1701 (the jewels of which were missing – having apparently been sold), various pieces of State jewellery, and a collection of priceless paintings including Watteau's 'Embarkation of Cythera', and Chardin's 'La Cuisiniere' and several Lancret's. This was Hitler's private store of treasure.

One of the most unusual items to be rescued by the Army was a piece of fossilised brown bone, something like a misshapen coconut shell. At the time it rested in a cardboard box in a small villa in the German University town of Bonn. It was the Neanderthal Skull, two pounds of bone without price, which the Army recovered from its wartime hiding-place.

The skull had been in Bonn in 1939 until it was evacuated. First it went to an ancient Westphalian castle. From there, carefully packed in a wooden crate, it went to another German castle. Three or four more transfers followed until, towards the end of the war, it was buried in a deep bunker at Siege, in the Rhineland. While battles raged, the skull, more than 60,000 years old remained undisturbed – and forgotten.

Army Intelligence had been told the skull had been sold during the war for an astronomical sum to a collector. Then one day, an Army truck drew up at the Bonn Museum and a bored driver asked for a signature for a "few boxes" he had collected from the Americans for delivery to the Curator.

The Curator, Dr. Edward Neuffer, signed and took the boxes into his office. Inside one he found Pith Nean, safe and sound. "So I put him in my cupboard," he told SOLDIER. "He's safe enough there. He can't be sold on the Black Market." The Neanderthal Skull had no market value; it belongs to Mankind.

In 1946 the Army had recovered from German castles, mines, deep air-raid shelters and remote dwellings in the forests, a vast array of art treasures. Unofficially and irreverently, this project was known as Operation Rattle. If art can be measured by the ton it is correct to say that 1800 tons of the most prized paintings, statues, church relics and holy images were tracked down, collected and stored until the churches, art galleries and museums from which they came could house them again.

The job began when Major Murray-Bailie of the Intelligence Corps and Majors Perry and Steer, all peace-time art experts, were ordered to trace the treasures which the Germans had removed for safety from the big towns.

With a dozen trucks from 36 Transport Coy, RASC and about 20 men at his disposal, Major Murray-Bailie got to work sifting through masses of information, checking rumours, questioning hundreds of Germans, and maintaining contact with the Americans, who had huge dumps of recovered art treasures in Bavaria.

Officials of the Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives Division of the Control Commission, with Mr. Hartley, one of the foremost experts on German Church treasures at their head, worked with Major Murray-Bailie establishing exactly what had come from where.

Sometimes the hiding places were well nigh inaccessible, as when a convoy had to be backed three miles up a steep cart track barely wide enough to take the trucks, to reach the castle in which pictures and ancient manuscripts had been stored.

Another time a bunker dug into a hill and facing an ideal parking site was found to contain some long-sought examples of French painting. When Major Perry arrived to collect them he found that the American Army had cleared the site and established a gun park. The American battery commander took quite a lot of persuading before he agreed to move out his 155's and allowed the pictures to be taken to the main collecting castle at Grevenbroich, in the Rhineland.



In this castle, guarded by a company of the Black Watch, were housed such famous pictures as Rembrandt's "Self-Portrait," pictured right, Renoir's "Mr and Mrs Sisley," and works by Rubens, Gauguin and Van Gogh.

The castle was also the temporary home of Essen Cathedral's 11th Century Madonna. This figure of wood, plated with gold, is perhaps the finest example of church statuary of that period in existence. No value can be placed on it or other relics of a past age.

Among the other treasures recovered were statuettes of St. Ursula and the 11,000 virgins from the Church of St. Ursula in Cologne. St. Ursula was an Englishwoman who in the 7th Century set out from Britain on a pilgrimage to Rome with 11 virgins. The Huns massacred St. Ursula and her companions in Cologne. By a monks error the number of virgins grew from 11 to 11,000, possibly a piece of early propaganda!

A curious confirmation of the story came to light when workmen clearing the site of the blitzed St. Ursula's Church, found twelve graves in the foundations. Opened by officials of the MFAA, they were found to contain the bones of twelve women who had been dead for hundreds of years.

Apart from the Art treasures, Major Murray-Bailie recovered the Archives and Registers of many German provinces. They also discovered valuable biblical manuscripts including a beautiful Codex of the Gospels written in the 10th century. Its gold leaf decorations were as fresh as when they were limned by a devoted band of monks more than a thousand years earlier.

Of all of these items only two pieces were damaged in transit although the only packing used were a Army blanket.

In the breaker's yards of the Norddeutsche Affinerie at Wilhelmsburg, near Hamburg, the Allies found hundreds of bells that had been looted from the cathedrals and other churches in Holland and Belgium. Many had already been broken up with the great bells used as anvils until the smaller bells were destroyed and then the great bells were smashed. The pieces were melted down and from the molten mass German chemists extracted the copper, the tin and other metals, which they needed. There was gold and silver too. Hundreds of years ago that same gold and silver had been rings, ornaments and coins which were thrown into the molten metal at the ceremonial casting of the bells.



In 1946 the sorting and safeguarding of the stolen bells was just another job for the Control Commission and the MFAA's Captain Willmot. Most of the unbroken bells, right, were sent back as ballast on barges. All the intact bells were labelled and numbered in such a way that the experts could tell from their records which steeple in which village the bells came from. As Soldier Magazine discovered, the man behind this mammoth task was Colonel Professor Joseph de Beer, the curator of the Folklore Museum in Sterckshof, near Antwerp.

Colonel de Beer, through protracted negotiations, was able, not only to save many of the bells in Belgium from falling into German hands, but his headquarters at Deurne became a meeting place for the Belgian underground, even though the Germans were quartered in the same building! He used petrol, allocated to him by the Germans to check on bells, to provide transport to enable British servicemen to continue their escape from the Germans. He also provided forged documents for the escapees.

In all, 60,000 bells from all occupied countries were removed for melting down. Of those, between 40,000 and 50,000 were never recovered. In 1947 the MFAA was closed down. Their legacy was to help to protect many of Africa's and Europe's static antiquities and return vast quantities of the looted works of art to their rightful owners.

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