

23 May 2014

Lieutenant Colonel James Roddis
CO Manoeuvre Battlegroup
4 SCOTS
Camp BASTION
BFPO 792

Dear Sirs,

This will be my last dispatch from Afghanistan as our Tour ends on 30th May when we hand over the Manoeuvre Battlegroup to 5 RIFLES. It has been a privilege to command the Battalion and the Battlegroup on operations, undoubtedly the highlight of my career. And now, we are all looking forward to going home as over eight months away has been a long time, but, there is a palpable sense of a job well done and we have played our part in what has been a significant period for Afghanistan.

To give you a sense of what we have done a few statistics might help, over eight months we have: conducted over 80 operations of which over 15 have been at the BG level; we closed and recovered 3 bases moving over 600 shipping containers; we deployed over 645 to and from theatre, with 200 of the Battalion winning their Afghanistan medal and at our highpoint having 334 in theatre; and at home we have deployed soldiers to Kenya and Jordan, successfully competed in skiing and cross country and sent over 100 adventure training. This all comes from a huge amount of hard work and I pay tribute to the BG and ROG HQ staff who bear the brunt of my good ideas....



The last convoy from STERGA 2

Since I last wrote the operational focus has been on over-watch for the national elections; defending Camp BASTION in depth; and completing the recovery of the last US and UK bases in Northern and Central Helmand. Much has been written on the elections already but they were a real success with a 58% turnout, only 1% less than the UK's last general election, and very limited violence – in 2009 in Helmand there were 109 kinetic events in 2014, just 21. From a personal view, Afghanistan embraced the opportunity the elections provided and many including the insurgency underestimated their enthusiasm. We wait now for the run-off.

We continue to conduct company operations in depth of Camp Bastion to protect the base but we are increasingly looking to hand these off to the Afghan Army. These operations have shown the utility of the MASTIFF and given us a head start as we prepare for our next role as

mechanised infantry in this vehicle. I cannot say too much more for obvious reasons here as the operations are ongoing but we have had success.



D Coy and the ANA protect Highway 1

To recover the two remaining US bases in Sangin was a Brigade effort led by Regional Command (South West) (RC (SW)). Our part in the plan was to support the Afghan Army in their securing of the major arterial route of Highway 1 and operate in depth to disrupt the insurgent. We deployed the Battlegroup and conducted operations both east and west of the river Helmand to support the RC's plan. The 'big idea' was for the Afghan Security Forces to work alongside us in this recovery as an equal partner. This succeeded and bodes well for the future.



Hldr Cochrane, D Coy, speaks to local children as part of Operation PALANG-LEE to close bases in SANGIN

The operation to collapse STERGA 2, the last UK patrol base in Central Helmand, was unexpectedly quiet with little enemy interference. We were blessed just before the closure with a visit from the Secretary of State and he thoroughly enjoyed his time in the OP and was impressed with the work of the Recce platoon in keeping the exposed location safe for the eight month tour. The actual operation to close the base itself was a cross-coalition multinational affair with the Afghan Army providing the defence in depth and US logistic assets embedded in the final convoy to give us some extra lift. In a change of approach from our recovery of Lashkar Gah Durai, we did not put our own forces on the ground as a deterrence leaving this to the Afghans and keeping only a reserve forward mounted. This worked well, and showed the capability of the Afghan Army and their ability to work in parallel with us to achieve common goals.



The BGLO, Capt Gentry REME, talking to the Secretary of State for Defence and DCOM ISAF

Many have now returned home their tour complete. B Coy handed over the Regional Corps Battleschool to the Queens Dragoon Guards on 4 May and are now back in Fallingbostal. In their time at the school the Company as part of this flagship cross-coalition multinational effort trained over 4000 Afghan Army soldiers on 23 courses. This school was at the forefront of capability development of the 215 Corps in Helmand and for such a low cost project had a high impact. The cross-coalition nature of the organisation and its success make it a model for future operations and the officers and soldiers involved have learnt a huge amount and gained a valuable experience for the future. Our A2 echelon has also handed over and returned home. They have again done a sterling job, setting up the echelon from scratch at the five month point of the tour 'in contact' but never missing a beat. They hand the G4 over in good order to 5 RIFLES.

When we arrive home we will be under the steady hand of the RSM to prepare for the presentation of medals and homecoming parades. Work on the drill has started in theatre and 5 RIFLES are slightly surprised to see officers with wooden swords out in the cool of the morning – but needs must. We are honoured and delighted that the Duke of Edinburgh has chosen to travel overseas to present our medals, it will be a great day and one that will live long in the memory. For our homecoming parades we will be marching in Stirling as part of the Armed Forces Day celebrations on 28 June, Inverness and Aberdeen before taking part in the dedication of the new war memorial and laying up our old colours. This promises to be a tremendous week and, if you

can, I would ask you to turn out and give the boys your support – please encourage friends and families to do likewise.

This is the last chance I will have to write before I hand over Command to Lt Col Leigh Drummond MBE on 20 June. We have done a lot together, as a Battalion, in two and half years: overseas company exercises in Gibraltar, the Falkland Islands, and Jordan; BATUS; Mission Specific training and now an extended operational tour as part of a multi-national Battlegroup. Commanding this superb team has been an unforgettable experience and it is a memory I will treasure as I grow older.



Mortars firing illum in support of the closure of STERGA 2