

OOHldrs Association Dinner Feb 6th 2010.

1. This brief report is split into 3 parts as follows;
 - a. Past seven months from Jul 09.
 - b. Present & look ahead to Jul 10.
 - c. Current Issues.

2. Past seven months: Jul – Dec 10.

The pace of life in Germany after Post Tour Leave picked up very quickly as the Battalion found its feet again and sub units began to train and work as formed bodies for the first time in 9 months. To begin with the Battalion organised a Beating Retreat, Cocktail Parties and Highland Games weekend which was a huge success and enjoyed by all. Support Company won the Highland Games.

a. The Commanding Officer (Lt Col Alastair Aitken MBE) and his Command Team allocated 'troops to tasks' so Company Commanders could concentrate on specific operational / training issues for the remainder of 2009;

b. A Company (Major Neil Tomlin) would conduct local low level training in preparation for supporting 2 Royal Anglian on their 6 weeks Exercise 'Grand Prix' in Kenya. (Sep – Nov 09). The Company equipped itself very well; running 'Live' Field Firing Ranges and acting as the Enemy on 'Blank Firing' Tactical Exercises.

c. B Company (Major Ross Hunter) conducted a Homecoming Recruiting Tour to the N and NE but the shine was taken of the tour when Hldr Scott Bain was killed in an RTA near Kingussie. In Oct 09 the Company deployed to Belize to support the Platoon Commanders Division who are now based at Brecon, Wales on the Young Officers Final Exercise – Ex Grim Warrior. B Coy did not disappoint and messages of thanks were very positive.

d. D Company (Major Barry McMaster) were tasked to support The Edinburgh Military Tattoo in Aug 09 as Tattoo Admin Coy and Arena (Esplanade) Party, which was deemed a great success, before training up 8 man patrols to take part in the Cambrian Patrols Competition in Wales (Oct 09) where they received certificates, having completed the course and tasks successfully.

e. Support Company (Major Jonas Fieldhouse), have been busy. The Chief of The General Staff (CGS) tasked the CO and thus the Recce Platoon (Capt Neil Cargill) to represent the British Army in an International Patrols Competition in the Atacama Desert in Chile in Sept, against 'specialist' teams from Chile, US, Canada, SA etc. The Recce Platoon won comfortably to the huge satisfaction of CGS! Support Company's main task however was to act as Falkland Islands Reinforcement Infantry Company (FIRIC) over the 6 weeks Christmas period. (Nov 09 – Jan 10). They had a great tour, where they were able to 'hone' their Fire Support Group (FSG) skills on Onion Range in East Falkland. An FSG is a large Platoon sized group (36 men) with Anti-Tank, Mortar, Sniper and Heavy Machine Gun assets, which directly support the Light Role Infantry Companies. Cpl Scott Robertson and his Section hit the headlines as they assisted 2 injured Farmers; Worm, Tag and Castrate 5500 sheep in a week, no small task – not to mention the smell!

f. The Pipes & Drums (PM McDonald and DM Oag) were on the 'Piping Circuit' (Jul 09) and then the Edinburgh Military Tattoo (Aug 09) where they were regarded as the 'Best Band'. The PM planned and organised the Battalions - William Dickie Piping Competition which was won by Cpl Andrew Reid, who is now on his PM Course in Edinburgh. In November the Band took part in the Fulda Tattoo, closely followed by a Commissioning Parade at Sandhurst before jetting off in January 10 to Australia for the Sydney Tattoo. (Spin off from the Edinburgh Military Tattoo).

g. The Battalion has been keen to maintain 'traditions' planned and organised the following events where the Diary allowed;

1. In June / July 09 they ran a 6 week Junior NCO Cadre which saw Hldr James Parkin awarded Best Student. Overall 24 Hldrs were promoted to LCpl.
2. In Sept 09 the Duke of Rothsays Dirk Competition (DORD) was run in the Sennelager region. This was a 65km route march with 'test' stands at irregular intervals, which had to be completed in under 26 hrs. 1 Platoon, A Company (Lt Dan Herlihy) were the fastest but it was 5 Platoon, B Company (Lt Ben James and Sgt Tuach) who triumphed overall and were crowned Champion Platoon by Lt Gen Andrew Graham CBE (Colonel of the Regiment).
3. Major Ross Hunter led adventure training, where jocks had a great opportunity to take part in Baltic Sailing, throughout Sept.
4. The Battalion has had the opportunity to resurrect 'sport' and the Rugby, Football, Cross Country and Shinty teams have all done well. All companies took part in the annual sport competition; The Elgin Rose Bowl, which sees teams participate in; Rugby, Football, Basketball, Volleyball and Hockey. Support Company triumphed.
5. The Traditions of Assaye Day were maintained with a Muster Parade / Review by Lt Gen Andrew Graham on 23rd Sept 09. The theme was continued for Dargai Day (20th Oct 09), with a Muster Parade and account of the Battle.
6. Signals conversion Training for BOWMAN (BCIP 5 – new signal / radio equipment) took place throughout Sept.
7. The Battalion had an active role in the 7 Armd Bde Remembrance Day Parade at Becklingham War Cemetery, near Hohne in November.
8. Throughout November / December, Officers Mess members were heavily involved with the CGS Briefing Team, the Bobby Jones Golf Competition, St Andrew's Night, and SCOTS and Highlanders Regimental Dinners in Edinburgh.

h. After Christmas Leave the Battalion re-roled and created a Herrick Orbat, which consists of; 2 x Rifle Companies, an enlarged Support Company (168 men) and 2 x FSG's (4 & 8 platoons).

3. Present / look ahead: Feb – Jul 10.

Having re-roled the Battalion will now begin the 'work up' training to take their place within 3 Commando Bde for deployment to Helmand on Herrick 14 next year. The CO is due to hear from Comd 3 Cdo Bde at the end of the month as to which specific role the Bn will fill in his Orbat. Ground Holding, OMLT to ANA / ANP, Asslt (Fix & Destroy) etc.

a. Low level and live firing training will commence around Fallingbostal and at Sennelager in February and March, where troops will get the opportunity to patrol collectively in mock 'Afghan' villages and conduct IED awareness. Battle Group HQ will start CATT / CAST training (Operational procedures training) using the Battle Group Simulator / Trainer (BBGT). FSG's (4 & 8 platoons) will be integrated into A & B Light Role Infantry Companies but it wont be all work and no play as troops will get the opportunity to Alpine Ski in Bavaria .

b. On return from Easter Leave in March the Battalion will deploy to Salisbury Plain for 6 weeks to take part in Company Group Training and exercises - Druids Dance and Wessex Warrior. These exercises take training to the next level and will test all procedures.

c. In May / June the Battalion will conduct a Junior NCO Cadre, Pre Brecon Training for LCpl / Cpl's, and Support Company specialist cadres. A composite Company of 150 will return to Scotland for a month to conduct Public Duties (General Assembly of the Church of Scotland) etc.

d. The Cabar Feidh Rifle Meeting is scheduled to take place at the end of June. whilst July heralds the Duke of Rothsays Dirk Competition, Baltic Sailing Exped and the annual Cocktail Party, Beating Retreat and Highland Games.

At the end of the month the Pre Tour Deployment period starts and this is where all ranks can expect to receive numerous briefing as they build upto deployment on Herrick 14.

4. **Issues.**

a. **Manning:**

1. Against Armed Infantry Establishment - Battalion is 172 bodies short. However against new Light Role - Battalion is 96 short, almost a Company! MOD have currently reduced recruits going through training at Catterick but come Aug 10 that restriction is likely to be lifted and the Regimental Priority will switch to 4SCOTS so Battalion should be correctly manned for Herrick 14.

2. **Retention:** Highest level for years, very few soldiers signing off.

3. **Long-term ill / permanently downgraded:** Medical staff are working hard on broken soldiers, with deployable figures on the rise.

b. **Re-ORBAT:**

1. Battalion has made the smooth transition to the new ORBAT with Support Company the healthiest it has been for years. Now awaiting a decision from 3 Commando Bde as to what role Battalion can expect to fulfil in Theatre so 'force preparation' can begin as appropriate.

5. **Highlander Newsletter 2009:**

The Highlander Newsletter 2009 is available on line and is a good read.

Go to Cabar Feidh or Stag Heed Websites and you will find the link or I can give it to you afterwards. Type in the link below;

<http://www.cohortsbydesign.com/fbook/highlanders09/>

This is a flick book system. You can zoom into pages to read at larger size, you can jump to sections by going to contents in bottom left and it can be downloaded as a pdf by you. You don't even have to turn the pages.

6. **The Highlanders Museum, Fort George, (Housing the QOHldrs (Seaforth & Cameron) Collection.**

You will probably know that The NMS have in the past 3 years laid down several policies and regulations in respect of the display and maintenance of collections. The QOHldrs collection is one of the biggest and best Military collections in the Country established in earnest by Col Angus Fairrie from 1980. The revised NM policies, adopted by Government and therefore the MOD has ment that the Hldrs Museum has had to apply for Accreditation to indicate that it meets the standards now required. Currently we are awaiting Full accreditation and thanks must go to Dr Alix Powers-Jones the Museum Director for her efforts in getting us this far. The accreditation process however highlighted the Museums shortcomings and it was agreed by the QOHldrs Trustees that to survive and be allowed to remain open for the next 25 years that an Upgrade was essential or we would be closed down. To this end it was agreed to launch a Highland Heritage Appeal Ph2 to raise £2m in 2 ½ years to undertake the necessary Upgrade.

The Trustees agreed to take on a Professional Fundraiser and we were lucky to recruit Mr Peter Guthrie (Pete) from Inverness BID. Prior to that he had been the Fundraiser on the £4m Eden Court Project. His knowledge of Fundraising has been invaluable to the Trustees and he has already secured several £10k from Individuals and Grant making bodies but he, indeed we have miles to go. A private launch took place on Nov 6th last year and a public one will take place in about 7 months, this very much includes you as the Regimental Family. Pete is pursuing HLF, HIE (Leader Funding) and ERDF funding and is making good progress but we will have to match that funding to reach our £2m target. The Trustees (PGP, SHRHM, NJR, GSJ and AH-C), Dr Powers Jones and Pete put out regular Newsletters (like this) explaining what has happened, progress and what is due to happen next. If you would like to receive one please tell Pete after Dinner.