

THE BLYTHE SAPPERS
76th MANAGEMENT MEETING
1100hrs Thursday 4th December 2014
THE ARMY AND NAVY CLUB, LONDON

Present:

Sapper Scott Robinson
Sapper Hooky Walker
Sapper Alasdair Wilson
Sapper Charles Holman
Sapper Carel Bouwens

Chairman
Vice Chairman
Chairman Elect 2015
Honorary Membership Secretary
Honorary Secretary

ITEM ONE. Introduction.

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

ITEM 2. Apologies for Absence.

Apologies have been received from Sappers Stuart Sinclair, Peter Clayton, David Hamilton and Roy Carlisle.

ITEM 3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting.

The minutes of the 75th meeting were accepted as a true record.

ITEM 4. Matters Arising.

The Secretary confirmed that the minutes of the previous meeting had been amended to show the election of Sapper Robbie Hall.

ITEM 5. Finance Report.

- a. On behalf of the Treasurer, the Secretary reported the current financial position for the Society, as:

Cash at Bank	£14,066
Lunch 4 th December (approx.)	(£6,866)
Available cash	£7,200

On the basis that approximately £4,500 should be retained in the fund to cover unforeseen eventualities, £2,500 is available for donations to charitable causes.

- b. The Committee agreed to make another donation of £500 to the Samaritan Fund of the REOWS as this would be directed at a particularly needy widow of the Corps. As there were no other ideas put forward the Committee agreed to delay any further decisions to its February meeting.
- c. The Committee heard that there are 324 paid up members of the Society and a few who appear not to have submitted subscriptions; the Treasurer will be working with the Membership Secretary to finally identify the status of these non-payers and will report back at the February meeting.
- d. 17 new members have been recruited in the last 12 months. There remain a few who have been elected but who have not yet confirmed their willingness to join by making the necessary financial arrangements.

ITEM 6. Corps Report.

The Membership Secretary provided a resume of the Corps Report which had been circulated prior to this meeting; a copy is attached to these minutes.

ITEM 7. Casualties.

- a. Deceased: Nil.
- b. Resignations: Nil.

ITEM 8. The Blythe Sappers Cup.

The Secretary informed the meeting that the Chairman of the REAFC had been advised in a letter that the Blythe Sappers' Cup would be redeployed to the RE Games; a response, which is not expected, had not been received. He continued that he has as yet to write to the Corps Colonel to finalise the arrangements and terms. The Committee was advised that the Secretary RE HQ Mess had identified a plinth and glass cabinet that would be suitable for the Cup and would be speaking to the Corps silversmith in the new year to make plans for the new plinth.

A draft citation to accompany the Cup was circulated to Committee members prior to the meeting and they recommended that it be reduced in length to reflect the salient points that soldiers would appreciate. As a final point the Secretary advised that the medal for the REAFC man of the match had not yet been identified but told those present that the Treasurer would be working on this in the new year.

ITEM 9. Nominations for Membership.

The following nominations have been proposed and seconded for membership of the Blythe Sappers:

<i>Nomination</i>	<i>Sponsor</i>	<i>Secunder</i>
Col John Fitzgerald	Sapper Angus Cross	Sapper Timothy Brand
Col Andrew Wood	Sapper Robert Murfin	Sapper Richard Elvidge
Lt Col John Killip	Sapper Jeremy Blades	Sapper Jonathan Welch
Maj Robert Barlow	Sapper David Clements	Sapper John McLennan
Capt Mark Wills	Sapper Snelling-Colyer	Sapper Alan Miller

There were no objections to these nominations and consequently they will be notified by the Membership Secretary of their promotions.

ITEM 10. Attendance and Arrangements for Today's Luncheon

Principal guest: Ms Fiona Stubbs, Vice President Blackrock Alpha Strategies Group

Subject: "Golden Years; our enduring relationship with the precious metal"

Total numbers attending: 118

Number of Guests: 23

Those to rise: Sappers Geoffrey Hyde, Ray Bradbury, Robbie Hall, Kevin Claber, Simon Sole and Martin Heffer

ITEM 11. Any Other Business.

The Chairman thanked the members of the Committee for their support throughout his year of office and wishes his successor the best of fortune in the following year. The Vice Chairman, who is also standing down gave his full support to these sentiments.

ITEM 12. Next Meeting.

- a. The date of the next meeting is set for 1100 hrs Thursday 26th February 2015.
- b. There being no other business the meeting closed at 1130 hrs.

Sapper Scott Robinson
Chairman, the Blythe Sappers

Sapper Carel Bouwens
Honorary Secretary
The Blythe Sappers

CORPS REPORT 2014

2014 sees the end of an era of contemporary campaigning and a return to contingent deployments. Offensive operations in Afghanistan have finished and by the end of the year there were more people on Operations in Sierra Leone than in Afghanistan. The Corps continues to support the rump of operations in Afghanistan but at a cost of a handful of people only.

On the 1 Aug 14 the Brigade reached its A2020 structure with the formation of 25 (Close Support) Engineer Group. This is a particularly notable both in terms of capability and in establishing our collective identity. The Brigade is thoroughly integrated with a mix of 10,500 personnel, regular and reserve, in 20 units. It is still some time until we achieve Full Operating Capability (FOC) in every area but we now have almost every aspect of military engineer support, EOD and Search, Military Working Dogs, Ammunition Assurance and CBRN Area Surveillance and Reconnaissance all within a single coherent structure. In order to command such a large organisation effectively, we have developed the Brigade Command Model, which focuses principally on the relationships between the one-star level and the OF5 (Colonel) Group level. Although separate levels of command, together these two layers make up 'The Brigade level', with both working together as a blended headquarters to command the Brigade.

Activity levels across the Brigade remain high, but at a sustainable and achievable level. Our commitment to Afghanistan has reduced significantly and will reduce to just a handful as we transition to Op TORAL at the end of the year. The Corps is proud of its success in Afghanistan; its record over the last 13 years has been exemplary, both in combat support and wider stabilisation roles although we must not forget the considerable sacrifice made by so much of our Corps.

To the future, the operational landscape is full of intractable problems offering challenge and opportunity aplenty; the deployment of 62 Works Group, supported by elements of 39 Engineer Regiment, to assist with the UK's effort to combat Ebola illustrates this. But other opportunities have come to the fore, with elements in Sierra Leone and across the broader Middle East. In addition, we have a considerable commitment to contingency, and I have been reassured by the appetite to make use of these elements. More widely the Corps is demonstrating its utility across a spectrum of tasks: a major project in the Falklands is developing well and will provide a superb operational construction focus for the next two years, renewing the Corps' links with some rather barren parts of the islands. In parallel with this, we are doing excellent work to develop the infrastructure in Kenya. Defence Engagement has also now started to gather momentum, with the Brigade realigned to South Asia and formal links starting to be established.

We are currently poorly established to deliver these likely tasks and considerable effort is going in to reshape the Corps' structure and organisation for the 'brave new world'. Army 2020 is not yet complete and changes continue to drop out of this work. The Corps has just begun work to review its career structure for both Regulars and Reserves, to bring them in line with new organisations and aspirations.

None of this can be achieved without appropriate funding and alongside structural and organisational change, the Corps' capability development agenda continues to pitch in a challenging fiscal environment. Although funding has been secured for future mobility support, including bridging and wide gap crossing capability hurdles remain. Austerity remains our watchword and we must work to ensure current and future Sapper capability requirements are understood and articulated by those we support.

Amongst the Corps' greatest challenges remains the delivery of a credible, usable and relevant *integrated* force of Regular and Reserve Sappers. Recruiting the Reserve is making progress but neither so far nor so fast as would be liked. Whilst Reserve and Hybrid units are in the vanguard to deliver this task, there remains a mountain to climb and every member of the Corps is part of the effort to deliver.

Significant work is going into developing the Integrated Army. We are putting considerable effort into recruiting, but this is just the first part of the challenge. Every unit is either paired (regular - reserve) or fully hybridized, both of which achieve much closer integration and strength. We are redeveloping the reserve career path so that the regular and reserve elements spend more time together during their individual training and then train more frequently together on collective training. We are also completely redeveloping the reserve artisan structure to deliver a formal, viable path that delivers the construction capabilities needed in an Integrated Army whilst also providing a challenging and rewarding career for individual reservists.

8 Engr Bde Executive Summary

- **Bde Direction.** The Bde Plan 14 has been revised and was issued at the inaugural 8 Engr Bde Comd Conf in Sep 14.
- **MSSG.** MSSG has re-subordinated from 8 Engr Bde to the Security Assistance Group.
- **Op HERRICK.** By Dec 14, Op HERRICK will be complete with BSN and KAF remediated, in line with the completion of UK combat operations in Helmand Province. Thereafter operations in Afghanistan will be under the banner Op TORAL focusing on support to KABUL based troops.
- At very short notice, the Brigade deployed engineers to scope, design, construct and project manage the provision of 580 hospital beds in Ebola Virus Treatment Units spread over 6 locations and a World Health Organisation Training Facility for Health Workers in Sierra Leone.
- 8 Engr Bde has provided support to Air operations in Iraq and across the broader Middle East.
- The Group lead for operations in the broader Middle East has transferred from 12 (Force Support) Gp to 170 (Infrastructure Support) Gp.
- The design phase of the Falkland Island Radar Heads project is progressing at speed. 36 Engr Regt deploys to the Falklands in Jan 15 and will be providing enabling activity. The main construction phase is due to commence in Sep 15.
- 8 Engr Bde's geographic area has now been revised to South Asia; the 8 Brigade Plan gives unit – country affiliations. Support to other Defence Engagement activity has included deployments in support of the Australian and New Zealand Engineers to Papua New Guinea and Niue Island.
- **12 (FS) Engr Gp:**
 - **A2020.** 75 Engr Regt and 65 Fd Sp Sqn have now re-subordinated to the 12 (Force Support) Gp.
 - **Operations.** The tempo has been high supporting operations
 - **Defence Estate.** 20 Wks Gp RE (AS) continue the transition of Estate Services on 6 UK Main Operating Bases, alongside preparing for the handover of Middle East infrastructure responsibilities to 170 (Infra Sp) Engr Gp.
- **25 (CS) Engr Gp:**
 - **A2020.** 25 (Close Sp) Engr Gp was formed on the 1 Aug 14.
 - **Operations.** Personnel are currently deployed on Op HERRICK, Op TOSCA and support to UK's response to Ebola in Africa .
 - **Training.** The HQ supported 3 (UK) Div's (CT 6) validation Ex IRON RESOLVE in Sep 14.
- **29 (EOD and Search) Gp:**
 - **EOD and Search Career.** Work to develop the Regular and Reservists career stream is ongoing and will form part of a wider RE Trade Review led by DComd 8 Engr Bde.
 - **UK.** The Gp has continued to support a high number of CMD and IED callouts alongside the NATO conference. The Tactical Response Force (TRF) has been validated in Ex BORDER FIST, a Police and Government led exercise.
 - **Overseas.** The Gp have provided support on across the Middle East and in AFG. STTTs deployed to Pakistan, Tunisia, Columbia, Egypt and Morocco.
- **170 (Infra) Engr Gp:**
 - **A2020.** 125 Fd Sqn, 75 Engr Regt disbanded in Aug 15 and its remaining elements amalgamated with 225 Fd Sqn (M).
 - **Operations.** 170 (Infra Sp) Engr Gp remains heavily committed to operations and is currently deployed in Afganistan, West Africa and the broader Middle East.