



## ERE AUTUMN 2017 UPDATE

### Commanding Officer's Introduction

A busy period since the last update marred by the tragic deaths of Corporals Hatfield and Neilson. We have had Squadrons deployed to or recovering from Canada, continued support to training on SPTA and FALCON has continued to develop the Area Surveillance and Recce capability. We have achieved a great deal so far this year and our focus has now switched to commemorating the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Battle of Cambrai.

### AJAX (Challenger 2 Squadron)

AJAX have provided the armoured squadron to the UK Training Support BG (UK Trg Sp BG) throughout 2017, a role which saw us return to our old A Squadron 1 RTR roots; providing the armoured expertise to a number of different courses such as crew commanders and the urban operators instructors course. The Squadron deployed onto SPTA for a total of 11 weeks in all, either as individual vehicles, troops or as a full 18 tank Squadron. To spend that long on tanks is a rare thing these days, and to have the Squadron hangers chock full of CR2 even more so – it was hard work but we relished the opportunity to hone our core armoured skills, and the role has left the Squadron a much more experienced sub unit as a result. Alongside our Trg Sp role we also deployed to Castlemartin in Aug for a 2 week range package where we achieved a 93% first time pass rate on the annual crew test (ACT) and we have taken part in a number of conceptual study periods focussed on operations in the urban environment. As part of that urban focus you will have no doubt seen the footage of our two “Berlin Brigade” camouflaged CR2 which have attracted a massive amount of attention across defence, and are a small but very obvious example of the various ways in which we are seeking to optimise the use of heavy armour in complex terrain.

Away from tanks, the Squadron has managed to maintain a healthy level of extra-curricular activity with the troops taking part in sporting competitions, “bake offs” and an initiative exercise which saw crews spread right across the south of the UK completing challenges such as “score a try at a premiership rugby ground” to “milk a cow” or “make a big mac”.

With the UK Trg Sp BG tasks now complete, the Squadron are looking forward to the Cambrai celebrations and some much needed Christmas leave before re-joining the RTR BG for the 2018 season.



First round down range for AJAX at CMR



Berlin Bde  
Camouflage

## BADGER (Challenger 2 Squadron)

There is no denying that the Squadron's activities of the last six months have been overshadowed by the tragic deaths of Cpls Nielson and Hatfield in June. Following hot on the heels of BADGER's Troop level exercise, ranges was going well, in no small part thanks to the Gunnery Instructors – with Cpls Nielson and Hatfield being two of them. Achieving a 90% first time pass rate at ACT showed promise for subsequent activity when the fatal incident halted everything. In the following weeks it was humbling to witness the turnout for the funerals from across the Army – serving and retired alike.

Elements of BADGER started to deploy to BATUS from the end of July, building up to a deployment on 11 September on Ex IRON STRIKE 2 alongside DREADNAUGHT, BGHQ and Y Coy, 1RRF. Unlike any other BATUS exercise, the following three weeks saw the Squadron conduct a series of Squadron lanes against the HCR as they tested different formations for the future employment of AJAX and the STRIKE concept. Frequent pauses to allow the HCR to regenerate their fleet gave plenty of time for Squadron training in the margins, including some Urban Warfare with our Fusilier colleagues.

Now returned and rested, the Squadron is looking forward to the centenary commemorations in Cambrai before entering the Experimentation year and working alongside the 1RRF Battlegroup.



From hot....to cold!



BADGER manoeuvre

## CYCLOPS (Challenger 2 Squadron)

CYCLOPS have had a relentless training period since the last update. The Squadron deployed with the 1 MERCIAN Battlegroup (BG) as a dangerously aggressive OPFOR for Ex PRAIRIE STORM 1 and 2. The soldiers of 'Denovia' took both the 1 R WELSH and 1 YORKS BGs to the brink of failure and beyond in every hard fought mission, day and night. There was some stand down time in between exercises to allow for AT (mountain-biking, horse riding, canoeing) and trips away (New York, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Hawaii, Montana, Banff, Calgary and Mexico). The CVR(T) fleet was handed over to BADGER before CYCLOPS flew back for Summer Leave. On their return to Tidworth and ecstatic to be back on CR2, the Squadron quickly moved up to Telford for some intensive gunnery training in preparation for Annual Firing at Castlemartin. The Annual Crew Tests were executed well. 11 Troop, under Cpl Green, won the coveted Silver Sabot for best Troop with Tpr Davis winning best gunner. The minute CYCLOPS returned from Pembrokeshire, they then rolled onto Salisbury Plain for the first iteration of the new Battle-Craft Syllabus (BCS), practising individual, crew and troop skills. CYCLOPS will complete the exercise in early November before refocusing on Cambrai Rugby and Football and Cambrai 100. Capt Will Hall deploys to the Afghan National Army Academy shortly and will hand over to Capt Guy Peters. The Squadron will then roll out on exercise again in December before closing down for Christmas leave and a well-earned break. The men and women of CYCLOPS have worked hard, will enjoy some time off and then continue the pursuit of armoured excellence into 2018.



CYCLOPS at CMR



Bournemouth Airshow



C/S DESTROYER: CYCLOPS OPFOR 2017

## DREADNAUGHT (Command and Reconnaissance Squadron)

Since the last update, DREADNAGHT has conducted some excellent training. In June, the Squadron deployed to Castlemartin Ranges to conduct live fire training. The Squadron performed to a very high standard with all crews (Challenger 2, Scimitar and Variants) all achieving a first time pass at the Annual Crew Test. Recce Tp also qualified 6 new Gunners and managed to get to and passed, first time, the Annual Section Assessment. The highlight of the year so far was the deployment to BATUS, Canada as the Opposing Force (OPFOR) for the Household Cavalry Regiment on Ex IRON STRIKE 2. This wasn't a normal BATUS exercise, as the premise was experimentation for the future STRIKE concept. DREADNAUGHT was split in 2, with Command Tp conducting its normal function and the remainder of the Squadron forming up as Manoeuvre Group 2 (MG 2). MG2 was pitted against the 'Treatment Squadron' for the majority of the exercise and we enjoyed employing OPFOR tactics, which offered us greater freedom of movement and allowed us to be more aggressive. Comd Tp and MG2 gained vital experience which can be taken into next year, although no one foresaw the addition of Arctic Warfare training, after the temperature dropped to -16 and the snow rolled in. Having now returned to the UK, the Squadron is focussed on preparations for Cambrai 100. Maj Pilsworth will hand over to Maj Blakey at the start of December, who will command the Squadron into the 2018 Experimentation Year.



The OPFOR Battlegroup lined up and about to deploy onto the training area



CO's Gunnery Inspection prior to Castlemartin Ranges

## EGYPT (Support Squadron)

EGYPT have been heavily involved in Ex IRONSTRIKE 2 in BATUS as the OPFOR for the HCR STRIKE Experimentation Battle Group. Initially aligned to supply minimal support to OPFOR for Ex PRAIRIE STORM 2, EGYPT had to quickly respond to the ever changing plan to reconstruct the planned training cycle in BATUS to an experimentation exercise to prove the low tactics of a Light Cavalry Strike Battle Group. An Activation Party was quickly formed, which consisted on mainly individuals from the QM's and QM(T)'s department and the LAD. They deployed at short notice on 27<sup>th</sup> of July and were responsible for inspecting, repairing and readying the OPFOR fleet in preparation for the arrival of the Main Body, who were due to arrive in the last week of August – first week of September. The RTR OPFOR Battle Group deployed on Ex IRONSTRIKE 2 in the second week of September for a 26 day exercise. Over the period of the exercise the OPFOR experienced unprecedented vehicle availability, maintaining an average of over 90% availability throughout. This was in no small part due to the hard work and great forward planning that the Activation Party had put in during the early phases. A1 and A2 Echelons were worked extensively throughout the exercise, and although not all elements deployed into the field (working from Force Maintenance Area) a great deal of experience and knowledge was gained by all for the planned training in BATUS next year. During the period EGYPT have also had to support two CR2 live firing periods at CastleMartin Ranges and support AJAX whilst they conduct the UK Training Support tasks on Salisbury Plain. A busy period which sees the final elements of the Squadron returning from BATUS in the last week of October and rolling straight into the preparation for the Cambrai 100 celebrations in France.



The RSM's bivvie following the great storm of 2K17



EGYPT and the SSM relaxing at Lake Louise, Canada



BGHQ at night

## FALCON (Area Survey and Reconnaissance Squadron)

FALCON have spent much of the second half of 2017 helping to write the Area, Survey & Reconnaissance Battlecraft Syllabus and then institutionalising it within the annual training cycle. Furthermore we continue to seize opportunities to experiment with RP&C, EOD&S and 20Wg RAF whilst continuing with the technical live agent certification exercises. Earlier in the year Ex FALCON WALK (CTC1 Validation) saw the Squadron deploy onto SPTA to further refine SOIs, with a particular focus on 'surviving & operating' in a dirty environment and recovery. It also provided an opportunity for FALCON to engage with industry through the auspices of the Autonomous Hazard Scene Assessment (AHSA) Project. The project seeks to minimise (human) time spent in the dirty environment by increasing situational awareness and the ability to confirm or deny the presence of CRN agent at the front end. Where previously this may have been considered a threat the men of FALCON see it as an opportunity to be at the leading edge and recognise that unmanned systems are an augmentation of the AS&R capability, not a replacement. More recently FALCON have been validated to CTC2 by CO 22 Engineer Regiment with technical assurance provided by DCBRNC TSG. The exercise took place on STANTA over 2 weeks and encompassed a BCS pilot week as well as a 400 mile road move to and from the Norfolk training estate. This was the first FUCHS road move on UK roads in nearly a decade and was achieved without losing a single vehicle. Needless to say that the exercise was a great success and focused in on the lessons learned during previous CT1 and BCS exercises. Additionally it allowed Junior commanders time and space to experiment with Black Hornet UAS as we seek to grow the capability beyond current FOC definitions. As a niche and specialist capability FALCON continues to draw attention from wider defence and have recently completed a full visit programme that has seen Comd 25Gp, AH Combat Support, Comd 1AI Bde and GOC 3(UK) Div visit Harman Lines. Each visitor has commented on the professionalism and intellect of the FALCON soldiers which is a reflection of the amount of time they have dedicated to "owning the problem" and developing their own part of the capability. It follows that will be conducting both physical experimentation with RP&C and EOD&S and Advanced Live Agent Training (ALAT) at the end of the year in preparation for High Readiness in 2018. This in itself is a focal point and many of the aforementioned visitors have commented on just how deployable the squadron is which will hopefully yield an overseas deployment during 2018. Either way, both the immediate and long-term future of FALCON looks busy and exciting.



OC FALCON talking through the C-CBRN(E) CR options



FALCON LAD conducting a pack lift on Ex FALCON RUN