

Scratching's from The Pen.....



*April 2012: A monthly memo and scribbles for, and from,
members of the Pen & Sword Club*

Susi takes the lead for club's civilian members

Susi Coulthard is to fill the vacant post of club Deputy Chair (MoD Civil). In her new role Susi will represent the interests of all MoD civilian media operations staff to the central team and will identify and recommend new members for invitation.

Says National Chairman, Mike Peters: "Susi brings a wealth of experience of MoD and its media ops staff to the Pen & Sword. She will work in tandem with Lt Col Derek Plews (Deputy Chair, MoD Military) and we hope to see an expansion of Ministry of Defence membership in the coming months.

Susi is Head of Media and Communications at Horse Guards and is currently involved in planning and delivery of celebrations for the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and for the London 2012 Olympic games. Her tasks also include all State ceremonial in the UK, the Royal Military Tattoo, Remembrance Day, the Lord Mayor's Show and Reserve Forces activity in Greater London and on Operations. She also supports the Army's recruiting efforts in London.



Member of Parliament joins *The Pen*



Former British Forces Broadcasting Services journalist, Angie Bray, joined the Pen & Sword Club in April. Angie, who is Member of Parliament for Ealing Central & Acton, was introduced to the club by Major Ian Proud and works alongside fellow club member, Colonel Tony Baldry, MP for Banbury, on the Government benches.

Based with BFBS in Gibraltar, Angie returned to the UK and spent eight years with LBC Radio where she covered a wide range of London issues. Her first job in politics was working for the Conservative Party Press Office and later as Press Secretary to the Party Chairman. She is currently Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General, Francis Maude.

Kevin collects his MBE and adds to seven ops medals



The Queen presented club member Kevin Capon with an MBE in early April. Awarded for his work over 15 years covering every major conflict the Army has been involved in during that time. Ex-paratrooper-turned-Civil Servant, Kevin was accompanied by his wife, Audrey at the Windsor Castle ceremony.

Kevin's MBE sits alongside seven operational medals for his service in conflict zones including Northern Ireland, The Falklands, Cyprus, Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan. In 22 years of Army service the only conflict zone he has not worked in has been East Timor.

Kevin's passion for photography has put him in considerable danger and harrowing positions over the years, including filming orphanages and hospitals in Sierra Leone where children lay with their hands hacked off and the discovery of the first mass graves in Kosovo as the blood still seeped up through the ground.

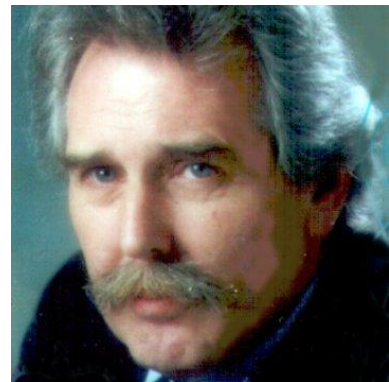
Says Kevin: "Most people with children will tell you that the hardest thing is seeing children suffering. The majority of time as a cameraman, you are concentrating on getting the job done and getting good images, but when you see children suffering it really brings it home. It was the same in the refugee camps in Rwanda."

Kevin's new career is as the Senior Cameraman for the Andover based British Army News Team – a team of civilian and military personnel who report on Army news around the world.

The Most Politically Sensitive Hen in Ulster

Ken tells a tale of an overfed clucker

The Northern Ireland farming community is justifiably proud of its produce and its livestock – with good reason. Through the Department of Agriculture it runs its own Iron Curtain round the import of absolutely anything grown elsewhere and takes a pretty dim view of those flying into Belfast carrying anything potted or bagged and which just might contaminate the reputation of quality produce exported around the world, writes Ken Johnston, Chief Press Officer, Northern Ireland at the Ministry of Defence.



That said, of course, the same Iron Curtain has more holes in it than a kitchen sieve along certain parts of the frontier. It's amazing just how many cattle and sheep can wander back and forwards across the border in the rural pasturelands along the route of the River Blackwater in County Armagh.

Even armed with this knowledge of the pride most farmers I was to be taken aback to be told in the mid 90's by an educated military officer that a hen was politically sensitive. Let me take you back to the time:

In the wake of progress on the political front a number of the former border watchtowers were to be demolished and the military footprint along the rural interface in counties such as Armagh, Tyrone and Derry would diminish. Engineers would move in with heavy plant and sparks from arc welders, thuds from heavy hammers as well as splattering mud from diggers, take down the fortified structures from which many a poor soldier had spent long hours

peering through binoculars noting the movement of vehicles and people in sunshine and in shadow.

Naturally, the media locally and regionally, would be useful in spreading the message that the emerging improvements in political architecture were being reciprocated by the reduced military footprint in a number of key areas. As the towers came down we produced media material both for print and broadcast. It was at one such tower that I found myself face to face with the famous hen. Not that you would have sensed its importance – a rather nondescript looking brown overfed clucker.



As soldiers from the Royal Regiment of Wales provided ground security and engineers started work I scratched around to find out why at this particular base there was a well made hen run with one feathered occupant – hardly enough to produce self sufficiency in eggs for any patrol based there.

It seems that a year or so earlier there had been a huge proxy bomb explosion nearby. Little damage was caused to the watchtower but the blast had caused mayhem across nearby fields. Cattle stomped through hedges in fear and found themselves in pastures that weren't any greener; sheep had done, as sheep are wont to do and ended up getting mixed together as one huge flock in the wrong place. From a farmyard nearby a pile of hens dispersed – most of them stopping to scratch fresh earth only yards from where they started. One hen was more adventurous and was found by soldiers scratching at one of the entrances to their "home from home" base.



The hospitable soldiers adopted this clucker and not only made friends with it but also made it a new run complete with small five star hutch and water on tap as well as a daily diet of anything that was going. Patrols came and went but the hen stayed and developed its own aloofness – until we arrived.

Our primary aim was to capture good footage and stills of the demolition. However, assured that the hen would be found a new home the bonus would be a human-interest piece on this softer side of soldiering. We needed a good context image of tower, hen and soldier with plans for a follow up image of hen and soldier and new home. Easier said than done. By now, the hen had gained such a level of independence that it was almost impossible to catch

inside the hen run therefore, by definition, would definitely not make a suitable sitter for decent photographic portraiture.

Now, its not that I led a totally bad childhood in the rolling drumlins of County Down but I had picked up a few things along the road to puberty – how to tickle trout, how to raid potato fields leaving the tops intact and the farmers no wiser – but most importantly, how to bag a pheasant without resorting to noise. It just might work for the hen but I needed a couple of ingredients and while they were available a couple of hundred yards away it was over the border.

And so, having bagged the insurance shots of the demolition I left my jacket and pass inside the car and as a simple ordinary citizen wandered in sunshine across the frontier to the Irish

grocery store to return with a small packet of Weetabix and a quarter bottle of brandy. The suitably soaked breakfast cereal was quickly pecked up by the hen and two cigarettes later (mine) it was time to take the intoxicated poultry in hand.

We got the image – a drunken hen standing on a soldier's hand looking, no staring, as sparks flew from engineers welding gear and huge chunks of fortification fell to the ground. In a week or so we would get the follow up and have a story to release.

Indeed, a week later I put a call in to 8 Brigade to ask if they could tell me where the hen was. In the return call I was told to forget the hen – there can't be a story as it was too 'politically sensitive'. In colloquial and unlisted English I naturally queried what in the realm of Hades was politically sensitive about a hen. The voice on the other end became more emphatic, 'This has come from the top, and unionist farmers will not like us trivialising the milestones of removing watchtowers to a piece in a rag about a hen.'

Instinctively I knew I wasn't getting any information from Brigade HQ but having invested in a packet of Weetabix and a small bottle of brandy with knowledge MoD would never contemplate compensating me, I wasn't going to give up. A few days later I was at Ballykelly and made a point of tracking down the RRW lads who had been on duty at the demolition.

Anybody know what happened to the hen? I asked in innocence. 'It was roasted,' I was told. I am still out that packet of Weetabix and bottle of brandy – but I did learn a lesson.

Club members meet in the UAE

Graham goes down memory lane with Trucial Oman Scouts

When Graham Barnett, Chairman of the Club's South West region, helped to set up a reunion trip to the United Arab Emirates, he had no idea that he would meet up with fellow club member Richard Eaton, who is currently serving as media advisor to the United Arab Emirates Armed Forces.

Graham, who is also secretary of the Trucial Oman Scouts Officers' Association, became involved in helping to organise the visit at the beginning of 2011. And as a result he found himself working together with Richard on the media plan for the reunion.



Left to right Lieutenant Colonel Graham Barnett, Colonel Tony Cornick, Colonel Rupert Robson, Defence Attache UAE and Lieutenant Colonel Richard Eaton at a reception in the grounds of British Embassy in Abu Dhabi.

A group of 60 servicemen who served in the former Trucial States returned to the UAE in March for a farewell visit, at the invitation of the Chief of Staff of the UAE Armed Forces, His Excellency Lieutenant General Mohammed Al Thani Al Romaithi, to mark the 60th anniversary of their foundation.

The veterans, mostly now in their seventies and eighties flew into Abu Dhabi and spent 10 days in the country, as guests of the UAE Armed Forces. During their stay they had an

opportunity to visit many of the sites of their old squadron locations, including Sharjah, Ras Al Khaima, Manama, and Jahili Fort in Al Ain, the 'spiritual home' of the TOS. They also had the opportunity to witness at first hand, the modern fighting force, which the UAE Armed Forces have become. But more important they had the opportunity to meet old friends and comrades in arms from the Emirates, with whom they served from 1951 to 1976.

Graham greets his former signal sergeant of C Squadron, after 40 years. 'I felt this sums up the whole ethos of our visit,' he says.

Sergeant Ibrahim was one of four members of C Squadron who went on to attain high rank.

He retired as a Brigadier of the UAE Armed Forces.



The Trucial Oman Levies were founded in 1951 as a small uniformed internal security and rural patrol force and by the time that they were renamed the Trucial Oman Scouts in 1956 they had developed into a paramilitary force of 150 British officers and non-commissioned officers and some 500 Arab officers and men, thus reaffirming the traditional partnership between The Trucial States and the United Kingdom.

When the Trucial States united in 1971, the Trucial Oman Scouts formed the basis of The Union Defence Force. At that time the Trucial Oman Scouts was funded by the British Government at an annual cost of £2 million. Later, in 1976, all of the defence forces of the UAE, unified to become The United Arab Emirates Armed Forces.

Says Graham: "The welcome and hospitality we received was quite overwhelming. I am very proud to have served in the Trucial Oman Scouts and to know that we played such an important role in establishing the modern UAE Armed Forces. It was a trip of a lifetime and one which I will remember for the rest of my days.

"And of course it was an added bonus to meet up with Richard."

A decade of service to SSAFA

Gerry's pride in ten years of service

Major Gerry Bartlett, Networker Joint Editor celebrates a decade of service as Divisional Secretary of SSAFA Forces Help, Canterbury, this month. He was "parachuted" into the job in April 2002 by a retired Royal Tank Regiment officer who picked up his application to be a SSAFA caseworker – and promptly decided he would be more useful leading, recruiting and being responsible for SSAFA caseworkers in the cathedral city of his birth.



Gerry's Division is arguably the biggest in Britain, encompassing Canterbury, Whitstable, Herne Bay, Ashford and parts of Maidstone, with an integral 'Ghurkha Squad' of caseworkers, widely acclaimed for their expertise in handling and settling droves of these wonderful Nepalese soldiers and their dependants, currently flooding into Britain.

In ten years there have been many SSAFA service high spots, together with a fair number of lows as well. Inevitably SSAFA Divisions have to deal with “serial spongers,” troublemakers,



and disparate men and women who will weave incredible fantasies and false military records for a fast charity buck they are not entitled to. But the overwhelming number of applicants seeking help from Canterbury Division, have been and are, former and serving Servicemen and Women and their dependants, who are down on their luck, penniless, homeless, often disabled and desperately worried – but nevertheless reluctant to “take charity.”

Major Gerry Bartlett, left, Joint Editor of The NetWorker, and dedicated Divisional Secretary of SSAFA Help in Kent, is pictured at St. Martin's Plain Camp on exercise with MOG (V).

We have repeatedly taken former soldiers, sailors, airmen and their dependants, from every conceivable Services organisation, off-the-streets of Kent, out of grave-yards, woods, allotment patches, shop doorways, rubbish dumps, freezing cold beaches, river banks and car parks – and arranged for them to be given real accommodation with comfortable furniture, warmth and money to pay their bills.

SSAFA has no cash of its own for these functions – it almonises money from Services' Benevolence departments, Council bodies (difficult at the best/worst of times), trade unions, professional work organisations et al.

There have been many proud moments and successes in the Canterbury Division, but one of the finest was button-holing rather heartless bailiffs preparing to move-in on the mother of the first Canterbury-based soldier (an Argyll and Sutherland Highlander) to be blown apart in Afghanistan by a Taliban explosive device.

We were tipped-off by contacts on a Sunday afternoon that the bailiffs were poised to move-in on the dead Argyll's mother at 8am the following morning. With determination and a degree of luck, we eventually contacted the head of the relevant Bailiff's unit, explained that the woman they were about to “raid” was a highly vulnerable old lady with no money, food or comfort.

The final coup de grace were the words: “You take anything from this little old lady whose soldier- son has just been blown apart in Afghanistan fighting for his country, and your department will be vilified across the front-pages of every national newspaper in this country – and we can guarantee it.” And I assure you, we could. They decided not to raid her after all.

The latest “high” happened just a few weeks ago: a former Royal Engineers bomb disposal Sgt rang us to ask if we could help, since Ashford Borough Council had said they could do nothing for him and Porchlight had said the same. He had no money, his landlady had put up his rent to a level he could not afford and so he was out on the streets – looking for a “relatively warm spot” to spend the coming nights in an Ashford, Kent, park. One of my caseworkers – a former Green Jackets RSM and a commissioned Family's Officer – contacted the former bomb disposal NCO within minutes of my call urging him to see the client ASAP.

With my permission, he paid for the former soldier to be placed in bed-and-breakfast accommodation and within 24 hours; we had found him a room he could afford and money from the Royal Engineers Benevolence Dept. to pay minor debts and his rent until he started work as a Security Guard. The former Royal Engineer is likely to become a Canterbury SSFA Forces Help caseworker very soon.

What is SSAFA Forces Help? The Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association (SSAFA) Forces Help, is the national charity that provides practical help and assistance to anyone who is currently serving, or has ever served, in the Royal Navy, British Army or Royal Air Force. Support for families is also at the heart of what we do.

We can help if you are currently serving in our Armed Forces, as either a regular or reservist.

We can also help you and your family if you have ever served, even if it was for just one day. Each year, SSAFA Forces Help provides a reliable, caring and trusted service to more than 50,000 people. Young or old, serving or veteran, if you have a connection to the Armed Forces we are here to assist you.

The passion, energy and commitment of our Canterbury staff of trained volunteers are key to making someone's life better and because we have been supporting the Armed Forces for more than 125 years, we are one of Britain's most trusted charities whose patron is The Queen.

Our volunteers are at the very heart of the work we do. Our trained caseworkers operate through a regional network of nearly 100 local branches to support serving Servicemen and women and veterans of the community and their families. They visit people in their homes to learn about and help with the problems they face. Here in Canterbury we have our own paid debt advisor whose life-saving advice costs the client nothing. The help we offer may be financial, practical or emotional – but it will be adapted to client need.

Whoever you are, you can be certain that your inquiry will be totally confidential and that you will always be treated with dignity, kindness and respect.

Our volunteers provide:

- Experienced, non-judgemental and friendly advice.
- Financial assistance, in association with other charities and benevolent funds.
- Help for those with additional needs for equipment or home redevelopment.
- Emotional support for the lonely, ill or bereaved

Gerry told Scratchings: “ I am so proud of the work SSAFA does and of my relatively miniscule contribution to the efforts of a truly wonderful charity. I wanted to put something back into the military system that gave me so much in my lifetime, and although SSAFA (like every other charity) has its faults and irritations, we all appreciate what a wonderful job it does for the serving and former Services community in Britain.

“I have the most wonderful Division of volunteers and I am very proud of them all. Everyone of them is committed, highly intelligent, compassionate and deeply caring – in ten years not one of them has ever refused a case I have asked them to look at.”

From PR to Recruiting Opposite sides of the same coin

Is it a coincidence or clever design that having been the RAF's DACOS Media and Communication for three years I am now its Director of Recruiting, asks Group Captain Ian Tolfts? Coincidence would be an easy guess but perhaps the significant cross over between the two disciplines means my appointment, as Group Captain Recruiting is a conscious decision.

As the RAF's Director of Recruiting my primary task is to recruit sufficient, quality personnel for both the Regulars and Reserves to ensure the RAF is fully manned. My secondary task is to raise awareness of the RAF amongst the public. But raising awareness amongst the public is also the first stage of the recruiting journey for many people. Despite the RAF being

continually involved in combat operations since the First Gulf War – and intensively since 2003 – the public's awareness of the RAF's role and career opportunities is still somewhat limited. Accordingly, my first task as The Recruiter is to raise awareness of RAF Careers (with its adjacent effect of raising awareness generally).

RAF Recruiting operates using a simple four stage process – Engage – Nurture – Select – Recruit. And it is in the first area – Engage- the amalgam of PR and Recruiting come together. Given the general lack of awareness of the RAF's role and the career opportunities available, the engage element is crucial. Engagement can take place using a variety of means – television and radio advertising, print media adverts, online engagement, attendance at public events and working with school and youth organisations. The aim of all such engagement activity is to create an interest in the RAF and then drive a response amongst those interested to the RAF Careers website – www.raf.mod.uk/careers. Whilst many believe that an online presence in itself is enough, the sheer clutter, noise and size of cyberspace means that people need to be signposted to it.

A lifelong dog lover, Ian, pictured right with two rescue dogs, Labrador Bob and Boxer cross English Bull terrier, Benson, has been involved with Hounds for Heroes from its early days. H4H was

founded to provide specially trained assistance dogs for injured and disabled men and women of both the UK armed forces and civilian emergency services. H4H intends to raise £100,000 to buy five Labrador puppies – the Puppies on Parade Appeal. These will be carefully selected for all the qualities needed to provide excellent assistance dogs. The Charity selects puppy parents to start essential initial training. After 15 months specialist training starts. The dogs will provide help and practical support leading to an enhanced quality of life for our clients, says Ian who with his wife Jo, has been committed to animal welfare for many years The ability to be able to combine his love for dogs with helping injured colleagues means that 'Hounds' is dear to his heart.



The numbers of people that need to be actively involved in the Engage element of the process is significant. In broad order, for every single person who joins the RAF, RAF Recruiting needs to engage (by whatever means) with 100 people. So, for an annual recruiting target of 3000 people, my organisation needs to engage with 300 000 people. Some argue that this is wasted effort. Far from it! Although many people we engage with will not consider joining the RAF, they may still be critical in enabling someone to join.

The engagement element targets four distinct groups: the potential candidate (obviously) but also his or her parents/guardian, key gatekeepers (careers teachers and the like) and the potential recruit's peer group. If all four of these Groups are not engaged, many candidates will not apply as they are either not aware of the RAF or their peers, parents and influencers will not encourage an application. But as well as seeking to ensure a candidate has backing for his or her application, positive engagement with the other 99 people who do not join the RAF is not wasted as they will, hopefully, have a positive attitude towards the RAF.

Ever mindful of the need to minimise cost and maximise effect, RAF Recruiting's engagement effort is directed via an annual Marketing Plan based on a Marketing Strategy. This plan is based on need (the number of people we need to recruit) and then seeks to create the best blend of activity to drive sufficient people to apply to join. In broad order, I need 10 applications for each new recruit (from the 100 people engaged).

Whilst expensive, television advertising is shown to have the greatest effect both in terms of quantity of people driven to the RAF Careers website and for its longevity of effect. Radio and cinema advertising also work well. Attendance at high profile and careers focussed events – such as the Bournemouth Air Festival and UCAS Careers Events – also provide excellent opportunities to engage with a broad cross section of the public, hitting the four key audience groups. The final key element of this engagement mix is a group of small teams who visit schools to carry out Motivational Outreach work which not only aids pupils with core skills such as communication and teamwork but, again, raises their awareness of the RAF.

One final element that adds to the engagement effect for Recruiting is traditional PR. When blended with all the other elements that make up the Engage function of the recruiting model, traditional PR can achieve some helpful results.

So, although outwardly a recruiter, a key element of my role to ensure the Engage element of the recruiting process is effective. I think that recruiting and PR are the opposite sides of the same coin with engagement, in its broadest sense, enabling the overall recruiting effort.

And the coincidence I mentioned at the beginning? Perhaps it is! But if it is a coincidence it seems a little odd that the Royal Navy's Head of Recruiting is club Vice President Captain Mike Davis-Marks (former Head of RN PR, MoD), the Army's Head of Recruiting is Colonel Jonathan Calder-Smith (former DACOS Media & Comms, LAND) and Head of Recruiting Policy in MoD is Colonel Nick Richardson (former SO1 News in DMC). I leave you to decide if it is a coincidence or clever design!

‘They died for this bloody place!’

Stuart Heaver, press officer for SSAFA blogs with Kent Online

It's the 30th anniversary of the Falklands War and I can still remember my thoughts at the moment I saw the islands for the first time. As horizontal sleet blinded me on the forecastle of HMS Brilliant, braced against the howling wind and packed in multi-layers of clothing under my full foul weather gear, I thought: 'My God, they all died for this bloody place'.

The official conflict was long declared over by then time I arrived but the Falklands War was to have repercussions long after the final shots were fired.

Since 1982 more British servicemen who served in the Falklands conflict have committed suicide than were killed on the battlefields or in the ships anchored in bomb alley.



Like the long civil conflict in Northern Ireland its events triggered mental illness and trauma that was to manifest itself years later. SSAFA Forces Help is still dealing with veterans from the Falklands War today. Often clients are still struggling with mental illness and the debilitating effects of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Tragically, you will find many Falklands veterans in prison where the violent mood swings caused by PTSD lands them in trouble with the criminal justice system. Though the price that was paid for the recapturing of these remote and forbidding islands was high, for many

veterans, the Falkland's still represented the good old days of military conflicts. These were the days before Bosnia and Iraq when the UK armed forces were deployed to defend sovereign territory from foreign aggressors.

Now it seems they are deployed largely in defence of US foreign policy than British sovereignty. In 1982, the Falklands conflict won the full support of the military top brass, the local population, the press and the vast majority of the general public. We all understood why those forces were going, what they were trying to achieve and when they had achieved it. In some senses it was a simple conflict.

It is hard to imagine Admiral Sir John Fieldhouse asking Mrs Thatcher to confirm for him that the effort to retain the Falkland Islands was legal, as defined by international law. The wily Admiral did not need to and no doubt would rather have been keel hauled than bring it up. The real price of these less simple and dirty conflicts in Libya, Afghanistan and Iraq has not yet been paid. The deaths and physical casualties are horrific enough but the mental casualties cannot be fully counted for many years yet.

Many of these casualties will turn to local caseworkers of charities like SSAFA Forces Help. Their volunteers give up their time and are unpaid. They claim only direct expenses for mileage, postage and telephone calls to clients. Even so, at local branch levels the money often looks like running out and caseworkers have to give up more of their days not to help clients but to rattle tins outside Tesco. They will never moan. They are not that sort. It's not an exercise that makes them feel very highly valued though, I can tell you.

No doubt the 30th anniversary of the Falklands will be an excuse for the media to re-visit past glories and a few controversies. The heroes of that conflict deserve all the attention lavished upon them but I wonder how much airtime will be given to those veterans in prison. Or those condemned to a troubled life on medication with only charities to help out?

A former naval hero now in prison for rape and GBH or a commando leader who committed suicide in back-alley leaving his family bereft doesn't fit the popular story angle. Or will anyone contrast the moral case for the Falkland's with the current crop of questionable military excursions into Libya, Iraq and Afghanistan?

Popular myths are by their nature more attractive than reality but please remember the work of SSAFA Forces Help on this important anniversary. Thirty years after the Falklands war ended they are still picking up the pieces.

From sea-going duties to running a PR Agency Sue makes the most of her writing skills

Thirty years ago, Sue Bradbury was a fresh-out-of-the-box WRNS officer spending long hours at sea. Now, she is a seasoned public relations' professional who has been running her own PR agency for the last 11 years. As a newly trained Fleet Analyst Officer working for Flag Officer Sea Training, Sue was as unprepared as anyone else for the dramatic events that unfolded in those early months of 1982.

"I can remember being in a pub with friends and everyone was talking about the Argentinian invasion of the Falklands," says Sue. "There was a shared sense of general outrage but also cynicism. For



all their sabre-rattling, the British Government wasn't likely to do anything. Not on that occasion, however. Just days later, our fleet was preparing for war and, as part of the FOST weapons' team, my job at Portland took on a whole new dimension."

Sue was in the Royal Navy for seven years – moving on from her sea-riding role with FOST to the Public Relations post RNAS Culdrose.

"My degree was in French and Drama so PR was always a more natural career path than the far more mathematically based fleet analysis work that I'd chosen to do on leaving Dartmouth, he remembers. I'd wanted to try something radically different and testing the effectiveness of weapons' systems certainly fitted the bill. I thoroughly enjoyed the work but, when an opportunity arose to look after media relations and general public communication at the biggest helicopter base in Europe, I jumped at the chance."

After having two children, Sue returned to the PR job at Culdrose in 1994 as a Government and Communications Officer before taking up an appointment as Head of PR at the University of Plymouth in 1997. Based in Cornwall, Sue has been running Sue Bradbury PR Limited since 2001.

"We have a broad range of clients – from South Crofty Mine to the Royal Cornwall Museum – so every day is different. I love the freedom of running my own business but have to admit that I still miss the guaranteed holiday time that you get when working in-house. I don't think I've managed more than 10 consecutive days away since starting the agency and my Blackberry is always somewhere close!"

Having worked as a freelance journalist for national newspapers and magazines for seven years from 1987 to 1994, Sue nevertheless finds time to write travel features. "My holidays might not be long but I try and make the most of them by writing them up for the Western Morning News and the Daily and Sunday Express. It certainly helps when trying to get an upgrade!"

Influence, Polished Diplomacy and Networks

Rob sets the pace at RAF Valley

Flt Lt Rob Pitt, a relatively new RAF Regiment Reservist, pictured right, comes to the Pen & Sword with a Regular ancestry. He is the latest in a line of family soldiers spanning over 200 years of service and taking in the Sherwood Foresters, Kings Shropshire Light Infantry, and the Royal Marines.

Selected to lead RAF Valley Media Operations as the Media & Communications Officer (MCO) in September last year he joined the unit after "being honoured to serve an incredibly taxing, successful and valuable period with 2nd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment in 2011 as their uplift Rear Ops Coy 2IC and my own experience on Op HERRICK as a RAF Regiment Battle Captain in 2010.

Says Rob: "Since 2007 I haven't had a year outside of Operations in some way. My wife would be thrilled with this long-awaited home role - if we didn't live in Cambridge. I'd like to say serving at Valley is an ideal change of pace. The truth is that the challenge is equal to anything that precedes it.



"RAF Valley is a complex base, which trains all fast-jet and search and rescue aircrew and saves lives through operational SAR.

“ Every fast jet pilot that has operated in Iraq, Libya and Afghanistan will have met the challenge of training at RAF Valley – as have many JHC colleagues, USAF exchange and other foreign aircrew. We have formed part of the tightly woven fabric of Anglesey community life since 1942 and are a comparatively small military community which is supplemented by a large number of technical contractors.

Beginnings: I began by putting expertise in campaign planning to good use. Carrying out a bespoke media estimate for the unit, in consultation with OC Support Wing - we created Media & Communications Flight underpinned by an operational design schematic and STRATCOM distilled from hours of research, staff work and discussion, that shows the way forward for

Station

influence/PR. By doing this we set the conditions for

‘Decisive

Condition 1’ -

Station PR Unity.

“If I could distil

our principle

challenge to a

single word, it

would be

‘understand’. The

mobilisation of

media coverage

for the unit is the

easy part. At the

fundamental

level, we have an

influence

challenge to

ensure our communities comprehend RAF Valley’s scope and contribution to them and to UK Defence. Owing to the close-weave of the Anglesey Community and its rural nature, targeted outreach is crucial.

“Our prime vehicle for this has been my team’s support and delivery of the Armed Forces Community Covenant in Anglesey which will be signed in May.

“Aside from civic ceremonial, scoping what we can do to ‘Make the Covenant Count’ and mapping the support to the Regular, Reserve, Cadets and Veterans Community on Anglesey is both mammoth, enlightening, demanding of collaborative effort through organisational navigation and hugely rewarding. The buzz in our operations planning room is quite simply electric when we enter open discussion and realise the possibilities we can influence.

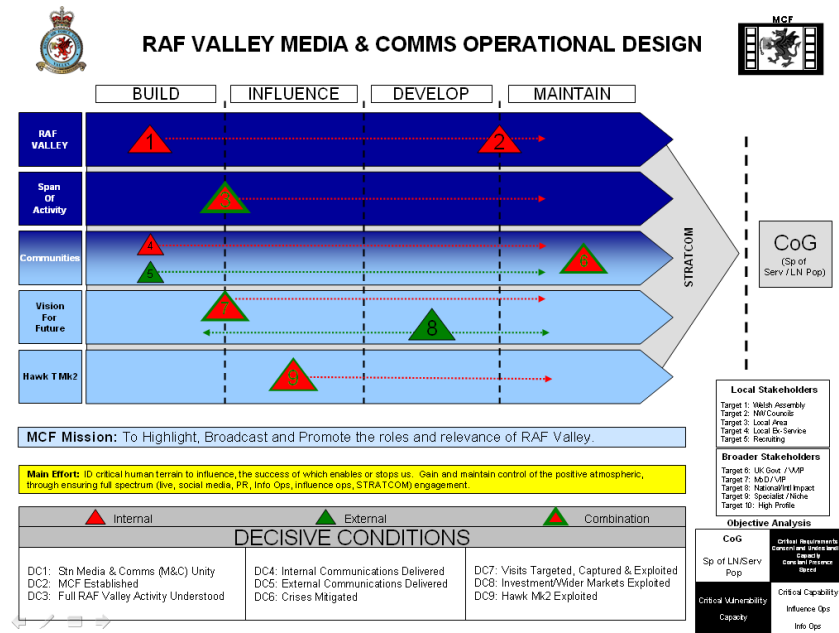
“To do this my small team require constantly evolving political awareness, networking skill and polished diplomacy. Since September, the Flight has become the unit ‘weapon of choice’



to explore on and off base influence opportunity; frequently being called upon to act as trusted emissaries, guides, advisors and diplomats.

“Just some of the projects we lead on are the Armed Forces Community Covenant in Anglesey; partnering Anglesey Council’s PR teams during Island events such as the Olympic Torch Relay; leading over 70 on-base visits per year for a spread of targeted stakeholders (National Trust, Make a Wish Foundation, Royal British Legion, Welsh Livery Guild, AF Parliamentary Scheme, NW Police, Local Farmers, varied young people, etc.) providing innovative, detailed decision support that has

re-shaped the landscape of the Station charitable focus; spearheading new drives into creation of the open access and internal Station Heritage Centres and creation of a mobile



unit outreach team that will systematically give 'PR hits' to a sequence of intelligence-driven target groups on and off Anglesey.

"Crucial to our increasingly muscular PR profile has been the steady growth of our ability to enable mass communication through social media such as Twitter, Face Book, blogs, LinkedIn and YouTube – all of which are linked to our official webpage (www.raf.mod.uk/rafvalley - currently being re-developed).

" Our Twitter following has risen since inception in September 2011 from zero to over 1300, with multiple Valley-specific FB pages at 1000+ and a well viewed blog. Some smirk at the surface novelty of this, until it is realised that if used optimally, a global, niche, local and



national audience of potentially limitless numbers can be reached at zero cost and minimal effort.

"The 'so what' of this fact, coupled with comms, PR, charitable and delivery speed implications, immediately eclipse any facile pretensions toward social media. Moreover, it empowers our people and

our communities to take ownership of Unit PR (within reason), ensuring a genuine and interesting product combined with grass roots interaction.

As a team of four the Flight provides RAF Valley with effects disproportionate to our modest size.

"We offer the CO and executive team manoeuvrable capability in decision support, photography, PR, influence, project management, charity support, bespoke press-secretarial, STRATCOM, online, campaign planning, research, high-pressure trouble-shooting, community support and training. Capacity is the crucial factor and to ensure we can both maintain this level of service and inject pace, we have innovated through creation of a programme of Summer University Air Squadron MCF Work Experience and formal link to 7644 Sqdn RAuxAF.

"These arrangements have led to reciprocal benefit in the best tradition of the Service and will Upscale our outputs, particularly in terms of Unit Internet optimisation, Station History/Heritage publication, Community Covenant support and videography.



"My team are a tiny powerhouse of exciting ideas, constantly developing linkages, and focussed creativity. I believe that as Military Media Operators we offer massive scope to our

unit for the delivery of more than just the simple press release, but an increasingly vast spectrum of diplomatic, communications, community influence and networking capability that ensures that the unit PR centre of gravity (the support of our communities) is consistently and effectively unlocked.

“If any Pen & Sword Club members want to visit us and strap into our North Wales PR rollercoaster I welcome you, at any time, to see us. Likewise we’d love to hear from you to discuss collaborations, ideas and best working practice. “

New Members

The following new members have been confirmed:

Royal Navy

Lt Stuart Heaver, currently owner of Stuart Heaver Media, Hong Kong and Kent, and Press Officer to Canterbury Division of SSAFA.

Army:

Colonel David Norris, currently Assistant Head of Strategy Management, MoD and formerly Head of Media and Communications, MoD.

RAF:

Group Captain Sheila Haughton, currently at Capel Manor College, and formerly Head of News and Internal Communications, RAF.

Member of Parliament:

Angie Bray, currently MP for Ealing Central & Acton and formerly with British Forces Broadcasting In Gibraltar.

Scratchings is always on the look out for stories about club members. Please contribute your ideas or words to The Editor: michaelpcoms@btinternet.com