PEN&SWORD CLUB

October 2016

***Scratchings…from The Pen** is the Journal of the Pen & Sword Club. Contributions are drawn from across the military and civilian media operations community. The views and words expressed are those of the authors who are offered the opportunity of the club's public platform. Editorial Enquiries: Colonel Mike Peters, Executive Vice President.*

Ministers, Military, Policy, Politics and Speaking Out

This issue of Scratchings has a wonderful series of contributions that serve to demonstrate just how tricky the relationship between the media and the military has always been. It is obvious that whatever policies or structures emerge in the future that will remain the case. There is all too often a fundamental difference of objective and that is inescapable, writes Club President Hugh Colver.

However, Howard Wheeldon in particular has raised a different issue which has enormous relevance when we are trying to weave a path through the complexities of different objectives and imperatives. I refer to the ever-present difficulty of the senior military "speaking out" and the clash with Ministers that results if they are seen to go "off message".

I grappled with this issue on a regular basis during my time running corporate communications in the MoD and I have over the years observed others struggling with it with varying degrees of success and failure.

Howard writes about the “gagging” of senior officers and suggests it is regrettable that they are not allowed “to say what they think”. There is part of me that wants to say “of course” and “what do you expect?” but it is important to understand the pressures on all sides as well as the facts about the rules and accepted practices that govern or at least heavily influence what people can say, how they can say it and the extent to which they are given licence to do so.

In this piece, I will examine the issues around this conundrum and dilemma. I will put on one side the public briefing by military officers in the context of operations. That is a separate issue. I will start by painting two extreme pictures – one at each end of the spectrum.

So, in Picture 1, why do senior officers feel the need to speak out?

If you are the leader of an organisation you set the tone for that entity, you need to be seen to be leading, you need to be seen to speak for your own people, you need to be in charge of how it works, what it does and what it says. If, as is too often the case in the Royal Navy, the Army and the Royal Air Force, you perceive that you are under resourced, your personnel are not getting all the pay, allowances, terms and conditions or equipment they deserve or that they need to do the job then you have to be seen to be the person to make that case and make it publicly. It is part of your leadership role. It helps to ensure that your lead is followed, that you are respected and that your people are proud to be part of the organisation you lead.

So, for all these reasons when something is amiss and you have a grievance against those who provide the money and the policy, you need to be out there on the front foot aggressively pushing for what is required. If that means attacking Ministers and policy, then so be it. If you can get a debate going and public opinion behind you – and the media will help you with that because they will love the controversy and the confrontation because that is meat and drink to them – then you will get the politicians to sit up and take notice, the media and the public will back you and you can shame the government into providing more money, more equipment, better conditions and you can take some money from one of the other services you are quite prepared to rubbish in the process anyway.

In Picture 2 why do Ministers wish to prevent senior officers from speaking out?

You are the leader of the organisation. As Secretary of State or one of the departmental Ministers you are in a leadership role. You are in charge of formulating and putting into practice the Government's defence policy and you are responsible, in the context of wider government imperatives and decisions, for managing the defence budget and seeing to it that the structure and organisation is fit for purpose. You are also responsible for the message and for all public utterances about defence policy and activity. You speak in Cabinet for defence, you answer for defence in the House of Commons, you are subjected to the scrutiny of Parliament through its Select Committee structure and you are the voice of defence policy in the media.

You have a right to expect that the organisation will take your lead, do the things that you ask it to do and, where public utterances come out of the mouths of people other than you, that everything they say is in line with your policy and is on message. You should all be working towards the same aims. If there are constraints on policy or budgets dictated by wider government imperatives then you have to live with that, carry your senior advisers and internal leaders with you and put on a brave face to the world. You cannot tolerate somebody within your own organisation briefing against you and speaking publicly in rebellion at your policies and leadership. If you allow that to happen then you will be seen to

be a weak leader and your authority will be undermined and your organisation will not function properly.
Pretty soon you will lose your job and someone will come in who will not make those mistakes.

If we take those two extreme pictures, we will see immediately that reconciling them is a hard task and even when both Ministers and senior officers are in agreement that the boat should not be rocked publicly too much it remains a hard task. In order to weave a path through that - and perhaps find a middle way - we first have to examine some facts which influence these relationships and public outcomes.

The Armed Forces are an instrument of Government.

The electorate chooses a Government of a particular persuasion – party politics is entirely irrelevant in the context I am addressing – or, as in the recent past, political parties form a coalition Government. There is a tendency for people to say things like “The politicians are dictating X”. The party-political inference in that is a digression from the point at hand. Once a Government is formed and Ministers appointed we have a Government and we have Government policy and decision making. All employees of Government are employed to do its bidding. Policy is developed through a process that combines the wishes of Ministers – influenced in varying measure by their party-political affiliation – with the pragmatic practicality of what will work and what will not work.

Civil servants and, in the case of defence, the military, will give advice on how everything should be run, financed and structured. They are there to give Ministers a spectrum of advice and when faced with a Ministerial aspiration to lay out the pros and cons of a particular measure or activity.

It is important that Ministers are made aware of what is and what is not possible, what will or will not work and the upsides and downsides of pursuing a particular route. That is, incidentally, one of the reasons why many of us have always been opposed to total openness in Government – if the full spectrum of “advice” on options was to be made public it would be grossly distorted by the media (“Ministers consider cancelling Trident” would emerge as a headline if, when looking for budget cuts, that was in a list of options).

The brutal truth is that the Service chiefs and their senior officers are employees of Government, and Ministers are right to expect that when they go public they do so in line with policy. That is how it is in corporate life. Directors of a company are expected to sing from the song sheet. That protects the company's share price, ensures a consistency of message and positions the company in the City and the wider world, and with its customers, in a way that has been agreed around the boardroom table. If anyone steps out of line they resign or are sacked.

Ministers are seriously irritated when senior officers go public about a lack of resources, a lack of the proper equipment, poor pay and conditions for their sailors, soldiers and airmen or – worse than all this – promote a piece of policy which runs counter to Government policy.

There is no easy straightforward answer in attempting to reconcile these positions but in my experience, there is ample opportunity for serious internal challenge. There are endless internal debates about the merits or otherwise of particular pieces of policy, about things that Ministers want to do and especially about the use of resources and the setting of budgets.

So how should matters proceed?

My advice to Ministers is that they should understand the importance of carrying the senior military with them in policy terms, they should recognise that senior officers have a leadership role in their organisations and they do have a public face. The public and the media expect to see and hear from the military and they do have a legitimate voice. However, they should not be exploited for the advocacy of policy. That is not their job. Nor should they speak against policy. That is simply against the rules and bad for everyone. When difficult decisions about resources have to be made then there is a process for internal debate and discussion and there is the scope for individual service arguments to be made very strongly internally. When decisions are made, they may not always be easy or palatable but they are decisions and they need to be explained internally and externally and the message needs to be consistent.

I have observed Ministers who understand the pressures very well and are quite prepared to say publicly "This isn't what the Services wanted in an ideal world. If we could afford it, we would like to do this but the budgetary constraints simply do not allow." We had some of that post the 2008 economic crisis when defence expenditure was held back significantly and there were cross Whitehall battles over resources (Ministers can find the senior military very useful then!) Everyone was uncomfortable but they knew it had to be done. The pain had to be taken and it had to be shared. There were plenty of people on the side-lines – including some retired military – who were very vocal about the lack of resources and capability, and the cuts and the effect on our place in the world and on morale. Those are the difficult times and it is not helpful when rebellious ministers or recalcitrant senior military go public with their concerns. But that is life. Some get sacked or side-lined. That is life too.

It is important to stress, in maintaining a sensible balance, that in the broad sweep of this Ministers should not seek to impose petty rules about clearing every speech or preventing people from speaking off the cuff. The system depends on everyone acting sensibly and with understanding and respect. Of course, some people will stray off message from time to time but in my experience Ministers are broad shouldered enough to understand that.

The senior military have to understand where they stand in all of this. Have the debate internally, make robust representation of your case internally. Then either accept the decisions and stay on message or resign.

We all know of course that in the middle of all this – from both Ministers and senior military – there can be the off the record, unattributable, background briefings, sometimes using a third party (usually retired) to get messages across. The services all have a team of advocates out there that help to make their case. That is a healthy part of the scene. Everybody knows it goes on, it enables options to be put out there and be discussed, allows for particular views to get aired and it sometimes makes Ministers justifiably uncomfortable. It can also help them in their own internal Government battles or it can help them to get a sense of how a particular policy will play in public.

As with so many things the best outcomes are when all the parties involved are sensible and reasonable, see the other point of view and have the ability to build relationships and trust and exercise their ability to influence with care and understanding. It may seem invidious to mention names but Charles Guthrie and David Richards both come to mind as holders of the top CDS job in the MoD who managed with great skill to weave a path through all this with aplomb. They earned the respect of Ministers, public, media and service personnel. And they were never backward in coming forward. The irony is they were both consummate politicians (with a small p)!

So, there should be no sense in which service chiefs are "gagged". Relationships should never reach the point where that becomes in any way relevant. Service chiefs and senior officers can of course say what they think but not if it runs counter to Government policy – however difficult that may be. That is our tradition in this country and long may it remain. The military are an instrument of Government.

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Hugh Colver, CBE, is a specialist in issues and crisis management, operational public affairs, media relations and contingency planning. He served in the UK Ministry of Defence from 1975 and went to 10 Downing Street in 1981 and advised Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher during the Falklands Conflict. In 1984 he became Deputy Director of Information at Scotland Yard and an adviser to Sir Kenneth Newman, and in 1985 returned to the MoD as Deputy Chief of Public Relations.

Hugh became Chief of Public Relations at the Ministry of Defence in 1987. As well as being the department's chief spokesman and Press Secretary to successive Secretaries of State, he was involved in National and NATO contingency planning for war and conflict, particularly in the context of public presentation and media issues.

He put these plans into effect for the Gulf War of 1991 and was appointed a Commander of the Order of the British Empire in the Gulf War Honours List of 1992. Hugh has extensive operational experience including Cod War (1976), Belize (1978), Bermuda (1979), Falklands (1982), siege of the Libyan People's Bureau in London (1984) and the Gulf War (1991).

In 1992, he became Director of Public Affairs for British Aerospace Defence responsible for communications and relations with Government, Parliament and media. In 1995, he became Director of Communications for the Conservative Party and acted as Press Secretary to Prime Minister John Major when he was on Party business.

After the British Aerospace/Marconi Electronic Systems merger in 2000 Hugh became Group Communications Director for BAE SYSTEMS responsible for corporate communications and a member of the Group Executive. In this role, he was responsible for developing the image and brand of the newly merged entity, initiating a number of positioning campaigns as the company presented a new face to the world. In this role, he was the company's principal interface with the news media at the corporate level, managed the communications function across the company and was responsible for issues management.

Hugh continues to offer public affairs advice and has a wide range of business interests. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts and the Royal Aeronautical Society and an Honorary Freeman of the Company of Public Relations Practitioners.

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Media Operations of the past are increasingly only a memory

Says National Chairman, John Boyes

Firstly I must record my thanks to Colonel Mike Peters for editing this issue of 'Scratchings'. It is no easy matter to obtain, cajole, edit, proof read etc. and the wide variety of topics covered is tribute enough to the breadth of experience of the contributors. Time moves on quicker than perhaps many of us would like and the transformation of Public Information, Media Ops and the often-unfathomable complexities, truths and untruths, instant reportage of the social media age have all happened within the working life of many of us.

Some time ago when the NATO Touring Exhibition was a regular event on the calendar, I remember discussing with a US admiral the future worth of the sea-borne deterrent. The Royal Navy had just stopped targeting information being loaded into its Polaris A-3TKs and on the face of it the role of SSBNs was potentially no more. However, the admiral was indeed prescient. 'Fifty years from now' he said, 'they will be targeted against Russia and China'. I leave you to consider if he was correct in his prediction.

Who could have predicted the turmoil in Libya and Syria to name but two? President Obama, on whom much hope was placed seems in denial. Was nothing learned from Bosnia? The slaughter of the innocents continues whilst the general public is mesmerised by a callipygian narcissist who has her £3m diamond ring stolen in a Paris. Meanwhile the head of the Metropolitan Police finds himself unable to summon up the courage to apologise for spurious allegations made against a retired Field Marshal and our troops are under investigation for war crimes with a dispassionate MoD refusing to give legal assistance.

But the MoD now seems a shadow of its former self, increasingly a tool used by our political masters to further their own careers. The media operations successes of the past are increasingly only a memory.

I have a particular interest in the earlier years of the Cold War, particularly its nuclear aspects and it is concerning that many of today's students – particularly those who aspire to be the historians and writers of tomorrow – have very little appreciation of what it was like to live under the daily threat of annihilation. The significance of a William Morris – well known for his left leaning tendencies – fabric used in the Ward Room of HMS *Courageous* seemingly of far greater significance than the SSN's role and capability as an instrument of war. I joke not.

The late Reg Turnill of the BBC was a friend and a journalist for whom I had a great respect and I remember him telling me that waking up in the morning was like entering a battlefield

as so many of his friends and contemporaries were dying off. This was the man, who by dedicated old fashioned journalistic skills, first got wind of the Apollo 13 disaster when most of the rest of the press corps had repaired to the bar. Were it not for the film, loosely inspired by the actual events, then I fear that the knife edge survival of the three astronauts would be known of by a much smaller audience. But without the competition of the Cold War there would have been no Apollo programme. There are fewer and fewer of the World War Two veterans still around. Working for the Bomber Command Association, I see the membership reduce month by month.

Cold War warriors too feature ever more regularly in the obituary columns. In due course, it will be to The National Archives that historians will turn. As a regular visitor, whilst I admire the staff's willingness to help, the official catalogue seems not to be designed to be helpful. There are undoubtedly many, many records that will remain unfound by a 'keyword' search. There are thousands of mis-spelt entries but the search engine doesn't cater for errors. And what about a file that has no title? Having said that there are also items (gems?) in there that possibly shouldn't be there at all.

Go into any reputable bookshop and go to the military section. Whilst there are very many shelves covering the two World Wars – how much more can really be said about say, the Spitfire, great though that aircraft was - the post-war shelves take up very little space. Novels inspired by SF activities in the Gulf Wars, a few Falklands memoirs but little of substance about the Cold War which after all covered a generation and a half.

The sad thing is perhaps that dangerous though this period was with an ever-present threat of nuclear annihilation, our lives were in many ways safer than in today's terrorist ridden world dominated by intolerance.

At school, we had a ritual of looking nightly for 'Reds under the beds': silly perhaps, but the significance is totally lost on today's youngsters. The institutions that we used to respect are riven by greed and self-serving. Of such is progress? We must not let it boil down to why the MoD chose William Morris fabric – almost certainly because it was the cheapest?

On a lighter note, since starting our 'Light Lunches with a speaker' we have been entertained by contributions from a wide variety of guest speakers, all of them enlightening. Politics, defence analysis, journalism, naval history and the role and experiences of a combat photographer, all have been covered in the last year. Whilst, of course these benefit those close to London, if you happen to be in the capital during the second week of the month and can manage to make one of these lunches, you will be most welcome, will be well fed and will undoubtedly leave with something to ponder. Check Doreen's emails for the details.

National Chairman, Major John Boyes TD, right, joined the TA Pool of Public Information Officers in 1987. Trained as a chartered accountant after wise counsel had advised against a career in the RAF suggesting something more solid, he spent his working life in the motor industry. As a TAPIO, predominantly active in Scotland under the charismatic HQ Scotland PIO Major Jim Herkes, the TA satisfied a continuing desire to serve in some aspect of the armed forces. And it did so for the next 17 years.

Memorable activities were Ex Tartan Driver with 4RTR, the Pool's major deployment to Normandy for the 50th D-Day commemorations and serving in the Joint HQ on Ex Saif Sareea II. Not to omit driving a Ferret along the UN Green Line in Cyprus which resulted in the purchase of an ex-BAOR Mk 1/1!

After retiring with the intention of writing about the RAF's early foray into the world of guided missiles, he was asked to handle the finances of the £7.5m Bomber Command Memorial. Set in London's Green Park, it was dedicated by the Queen in 2012. Having seen his two books on the Thor IRBM published, he is now writing his third: 'Cancelled - Blue Streak and Skybolt'.

He is also the treasurer of the RAF Historical Society and a regular contributor at the semi-annual British Nuclear History conferences.

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2016: A year of sad, proud, grim memories: uncertainty for the UK's Armed Forces: and an opportunity to get media operations on track.

Poignant memories have been evoked in 2016. One hundred years ago, the nation was subject to shock after shock following on from nearly two years of horrific trench warfare and losses at sea. 1916 was to bring more heartache and pain for the nation. In May, the Royal Navy emerged from the Battle of Jutland, a clash at sea of unprecedented proportions and its reputation foundering because the other side was better at media operations. The Silent Service did itself no favours by letting German propagandists have a free run at the world's press before it reacted.

A few days later the Western Front erupted in the Battle of the Somme and the Army suffered horrendous casualties and the headlines were yet again grim, writes Colonel Mike Peters, Executive Vice President of the Pen & Sword.

In May, I attended the Jutland Memorial Service in Portsmouth with club colleague Squadron Leader Malcolm Davidge to lay wreaths on behalf of our grand uncles who did not survive the sinking of HMS Invincible. Days before, with my extended family, I remembered the sacrifice of a 19-year-old young man, already a Temporary Captain after a short time on the Western Front, who won the Victoria Cross and died rescuing his soldiers from a shell crater.

His body was never found though his name and deeds are preserved in a new stone plaque at the War Memorial in Dulwich where he attended college.

Many club members will have similar memories and there will be more events to come as the anniversaries and commemorations continue over the next two years. For the club, each of these is an opportunity to affirm our beliefs that media operations are an essential military skill in the 21st century if the UK's armed forces are to maintain the support of the British people. What is more this being an ideal role for a specialist Reserve Unit recruiting and deploying professional communicators.

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Mike Peters, TD was Operations Officer at 116 Provost Company, RMP (V) before joining 5th Battalion, Light Infantry (V) as HQ and Support Company Commander. He was the first Commanding Officer of Media Operations Group and took its strength from a baker's dozen to over 80 media professionals in uniform. As a MoD Information Officer, he served at HQ BAOR, in Northern Ireland, West Midland and North West Districts before running the Army Press Desk in Main Building. He was with the Multi National Group & Observers in Sinai during 1981, accompanied the Governor on his return to the Falklands in 1982, and was the media specialist for Operation Hyperion in Beirut in 1983. He returned to the defence industry in 1985 and managed communications teams for Lucas Group, European Helicopter Industries, Westland Helicopters, and British Aerospace. An award winning daily newspaper journalist, he currently specialises in Crisis Communications for AkzoNobel, the international paints and coatings giant and Intelligence & Security company, MD Associates. He is a Freeman of the Company of Professional Public Relations Practitioners and Executive Vice President of the Pen & Sword Club.

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2016 also hosts the 25th anniversary of the First Gulf War 1 when the Pool of TA Public Information Officers and our sister organisations, became deeply involved through mobilisation on Operation Granby and the resulting Desert Storm. There is no doubt in my mind that the media ops successes of this conflict were inspired by the lessons learned in the Falklands and in Whitehall in1982 when once again the MoD, for a short time, forgot the principles of dealing with media and there was anger on both sides of the media and military divide.

We need to look back to the years following the World War 2 when the Services' public affairs operational capability gradually diminished in reputation and importance and then rapidly revived with Operation Banner and the Northern Ireland Troubles when there was a desperate need to send the right messages to an anxious community. The books were dusted off and read again and the value of sharp end public affairs was reinstated. Indeed, the unit press officer courses run at UKLF by stalwarts SIO Nigel Gillies and Major Onslow Dent, assisted by experienced reservist and civilian communicators, were a classic example. Selected officers learned the skills of dealing with the media and the public from those who did so on a daily basis before facing the challenges on the streets of Belfast and Londonderry and the hedgerows of Armagh,

The TAPIO Pool was formed at this time under the leadership of the legendary Colonel Alan Protheroe who epitomised the professional communicator in uniform. Alan spent his two years of National Service with the Welsh Regiment, joined the Territorial Army on his release and was a natural choice, as a working BBC reporter and editor, to show the Army how to work with the UK and world media.

As Assistant Director General (News) of the BBC Alan was the right man at the right time and became

the confidant of many senior officers. The TAPIOs were not mobilised during the Falklands conflict – though many served by filling gaps at home where civilian and military press officers were on active duty - so it was satisfying in late 1990 when the unit was tasked to supply officers for Operation Granby. That they performed well is a matter of record.

We all remember the media treatment of the 7th Armoured Brigade Commander who admitted the possibilities of casualties. This incident resulted in Colonel David McDine, then the Senior TAPIOs being despatched to the Gulf where his experiences in Ulster as a Government Information Officer were put to good use. I am sure that the RAF also recall how 7644 (PR) Flight RAFVR was early on the ground and their journalists in reservist uniform, including former Honorary Air Commodore Alex Dickson, were immediately engaged with the press and broadcasters - and taking the strain of dealing with the media.

This year also sees an anniversary of the Suez Crisis where Britain did not cover itself in glory and the public relations policy was disastrous. As yet we have not seen any media attention to this operation but there is still time!

Another uncertainty of 2016 is the future of our Armed Forces. No matter that as a nation we are said to be meeting our financial commitment to NATO there is a widely-held view – and many will agree with that public relations tenet that perception is reality – that the Royal Navy, the Army and the Royal Air Force have had less manpower than ever before, are overstretched, struggling to recruit Regulars and Reservists, and looking for Government direction and purpose. In recent days, it has been suggested the two per cent of GDP committed to defence is not enough and that three per cent should be the norm.

We all admire the capability and commitment of our friends and colleagues in uniform but they need more of everything in an uncertain world where other countries are expanding their military capabilities and the threat to not only Britain's security but that of our friends and neighbours is rising. We are living in uncertain times and it, therefore, good to hear on the grapevine that the Chief of the General Staff, General Sir Nick Carter, has a vision for the future and it includes ensuring that the British public is kept fully informed.

That our Armed Forces are respected for their commitment and sacrifices is not unexpected but with no hot conflicts to justify the expenditure of national treasure in financially strained times the Services and the MoD must consider their approach public messages and provide the communicators with the capacity and strengths to do their job. To convince the tax payers of the need for bigger and better forces is a full-time operation and must use all the means available.

Social media is one of the tools in the box but engagement with the public by all other means, including dealing with the sometimes difficult, defence media, is vital. From the simple home town story, upwards the plan must go forward. All means must be exploited and all the experience available to the Ministry should be tapped. Scratchings is pleased to publish the thoughts of respected broadcaster, journalist, defence analyst and one-time navy reservist Commander Christopher Lee RNR**.**

He says: General Carter "has come along at the right time. What he has created needs a bigger audience. Sadly, one of the Army's weaknesses is the comfortable public relations system……. "

In the next year, the club hopes to see and participate in a change programme because many are concerned for the future of the UK's military media operations. The club is aware that relationships between military and media appear to be strained. Speakers at our events often bring up the subject and it is obvious that the time is right for an open debate on the direction and employment of military media operations.

No matter that social appears to be a controllable release of information in peace time there must be consideration of how social media will be degraded or manipulated by the enemy

during and before hostilities….and, that while, most useful it is not accessed by a sizeable part of the older, influential population.

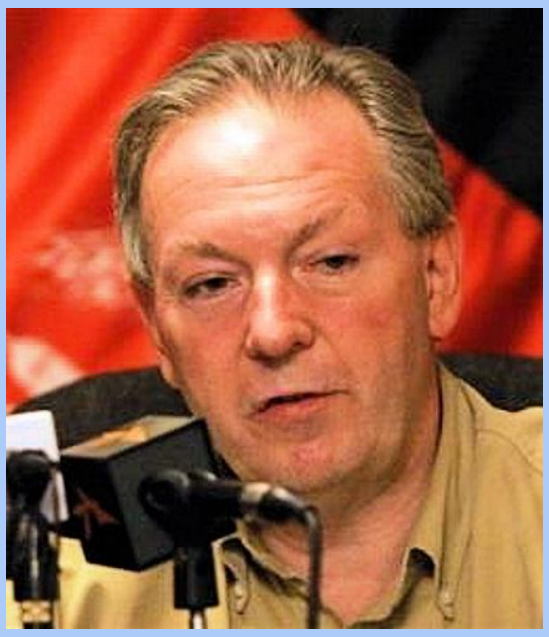
There is still a cast iron case for the military and media to have a constant dialogue. No one can expect the relationship to be perfect. Each side has a different aim. Military secrecy and Media demands for information can, nevertheless, be managed. What is vital is that the Services are seen to be as open as possible and to be sufficiently robust and confident to withstand examination and criticism in the world's media.

The media can be expected to seek and find areas where there is doubt or concern and they will do their utmost to get the biggest story during conflict. It is the job of media operations professionals – and we are fortunate in also having three Reservist units still in existence though apparently with a lesser role than before – that could provide the skills that they were initially tasked to provide.

Scratchings has recently asked serving officers to explain current media operations, policies and practises. These have not been forthcoming under current Ministry of Defence rules and guidelines. We hope the information flow will improve in the near future.

In this edition Scratchings publishes some of the worries and concerns that exist and tells tales of how our particular military skill grew and was fostered on operations and exercises in the last few decades. This edition also carries some reminders of the need for the military to fully understand the media and its aims and cultures. In 2012 the club published a 30 plus page edition of the experiences and failures of the Falklands Conflict. Much of what was written is just as relevant today. Some of the stories are carried below as a reminder of what happens when the media/military relationship is broken.

Mark Laity, pictured right, now Chief Strategic Communications at SHAPE was the BBC Defence Correspondent throughout the 1991 Gulf War. He reveals here how he and his colleagues reported that epic "mother of all battles."



Mark is a Vice President of the Pen & Sword Club and knows both sides of the media and military relationship. His views are invaluable. His reporting in those months before and during the operation reflect not only his abilities as a journalist but his understanding of maintaining a close relationship with military media operations at all levels.

Although my civilian employers would not release me for the Gulf I played my part…I had late night and early morning conversations with Mark and others, as they called asking for that trusted background information and the insights that ensure accurate, and may I say so, sympathetic reporting.

There is enough expertise, and good will around still, including among retired media operators - both civilian and military- that the Ministry of Defence can call upon to help resuscitate a vital strong relationship with the Press.

Let's reverse the cycle and bring media ops back to the forefront. I, for one, am still ready and willing to help.

General Nick Carter leads army into better battle

By Christopher Lee, RD, RNR (Retd)

The British army without Afghanistan is vulnerable. Taxpayers ask what's it for if it isn't chasing Taliban. They tend to add: especially as you didn't get Afghanistan right especially the public image of that decade is charity events for soldiers with one leg. It may be unfair, but public opinion doesn't do fair.

More is the pity when something close to brilliant is going on in the army and it is being led by one of the best army bosses for some time. To borrow Michael Caine's script, Not Many People Know That. The head of the Army, the Chief of the General Staff has been for the past two years General Sir Nicholas Carter, right.

He is a man who understands just how conservative is the Army. How it does not like change. When things don't move on then the young and good brains do not join the Army. The Army could by this standard even become irrelevant.

So, when General Carter became CGS the importance for the army was that in his past job he was already thinking where does the army go from here and how can I get them to come with me.

For a man who had commanded in Kandahar thinking was not a problem. In that command, he introduced the concept of The Big Idea. No Big Idea then you might just as well write test papers on why people still support West Ham United.

General Carter has given the army the Big Idea. Come January 2017 the public will hear about new Army Doctrine. They learn about his ideas of Integrated Action, where junior and senior officers will ask everyone what will happen if they try something else. Will it have a knock-on?

The General has already got his new command in one building in Andover and got people used to basic top down management. If you want an armoured vehicle, then you have to buy it yourself. You need it? Work out how to pay for it.

A general staff office of 700 colonels and above work everything out overcoming battles with tribal difference as cap badges matter but do not get in the way. This is an army that is relearning value-based leadership and with even the new command sergeant majors advising up to board level.

At a private evening meeting among army punditry, General Carter reminded everyone that unless you grasp change, change will grasp you by the throat.

This soldier has done more for the Army than any single CGS in decades. Given the tray has been around with promotions, it is unlikely he will become Chief of the Defence Staff. But for the moment, the Army cannot afford to let him go until the job is done.

If the general public could understand what has happened, they would be amazed (not hyperbole). The UK's too-small army is more innovative than ever, can teach the world to handle the new asymmetric warfare that is the modern security business. General Carter came along at the right time. What he has created needs a bigger audience.

Sadly, one of the army's weaknesses is the comfortable public relations system. The General who leads by example proves that peace has its heroes. Someone should think of a way of teaching us how he has made it work.

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Christopher Lee, RD, was the first Quaternary Fellow in Contemporary History at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, where he looked at British Defence and Foreign Policy decision processes since WWII

At the same time, he became the editor of Winston S Churchill's A History of the English-Speaking Peoples and edited the first abridged edition.

Christopher, who has written more than 20 books including his award-winning Nelson & Napoleon, is also the triple award winning historian and writer of BBC Radio 4's 265-part history of Britain, This Sceptred Isle. He was the BBC's Defence & Foreign Affairs Correspondent and pulled together the coverage of the 1982 Falklands War.

After the Falklands, Christopher (by then a Commander RNR) was tasked by the Commander-in-Chief Fleet, Admiral Sir William Staveley, to design and set up a specialist Public Affairs Branch for the Royal Navy.

In the 1991 Iraq War, he was the analyst tasked by BBC Radio with balancing presentation with the facts that were known and making sure nothing that was broadcast live would have helped the enemy or its sympathizers. He is the defence analyst for the Limehouse Group and a member of RUSI.

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Saddam Hussain – my part in his non-downfall

By Mark Laity (BBC Defence Correspondent 1989-2000)

Looking back through the lens of 9:11, ISIS, Ukraine then the Gulf War of 1991 seems to recede even further into history. In hindsight, it seems a simpler, easier time – although of course, as is the way of things, that's not how it looked at the time. In 1990 I was still a relatively new BBC Defence Correspondent at a time when the very existence and purpose of Defence Correspondents seemed under question. The Cold War was over; the end of history was upon us and the knowledge associated with Defence Correspondents was regarded by some as arcane.

Some colleagues even joked I'd be the last Defence Correspondent. Foreign and diplomatic correspondents used to rather mock knowing too much about all this 'anoraky' stuff – 'silly gun calibre stuff' as one put it. Producers could barely conceal their irritation when I would point out that all battleships were warships but not all warships were battleships, or that all tanks were armoured vehicles but not the reverse. So, what, their expressions said. Then Saddam invaded Kuwait and suddenly I was relevant and in demand. Even then it all felt a bit World War Two. Whole corps and carrier battle groups on the move – hundreds of thousands of troops facing up to actually fight. As they would say today, OMG.

Now as I recall, much of the event has a strange staccato feel – highly coloured episodes standing out from a relentless grind of work and stress.

It was a pre-internet, pre-email pre-digital war. The computer age had begun but was far from entrenched – we mostly did stuff the old way. No web-surfing – you did your research by knowing people and having their phone numbers and reading books, magazines and newspapers.

Looking back, based in Saudi Arabia as I was, I wonder how we managed! But manage we did. It certainly made us more dependent on the daily briefings as in between there was only so much you could do. But it also made us (at least those with integrity) more careful, more thoughtful and more reliant on showing initiative – the internet is a short-cut crutch for more journalists than care to admit it. A strong base of knowledge was also far more critical – if you didn't know your stuff back then it was far harder to cover up your ignorance with a quick Google search.

Before I went out to Saudi then my first big call as a Defence Correspondent was the date of my wedding. After the invasion one of the early big issues was over interpreting US

government briefings of varying authority talking in Delphic terms about when they would invade Kuwait – with the predicted date being bang on when I was meant to get married.

As the go/no-go date to pay for the wedding and reception neared I therefore took myself off to a quiet room with all the info I could amass. I looked at the rate of reinforcement, size of forces – and decided there was no way the US would be ready, so let the wedding proceed!

Much later I had it confirmed by Pentagon sources that the briefings had indeed been deliberate to deter Saddam from attacking Saudi Arabia – I guess a delayed wedding for me should have been seen as acceptable collateral damage.

The outcome of the war makes it easy to forget how risky, and with good reason, it seemed at the time – one of the British brigade commanders nearly lost his job when he acknowledged we could lose hundreds of soldiers. The Iraqis had a huge army, lots of combat experience and vast amounts of at least half-decent kit.

Even at the peak the coalition/Iraqi force ratios were way below what was regarded as necessary for successful offensive operations. We were banking on the impact of a lot of untried tactics and equipment when the last major war the US had fought was Vietnam. Almost everything we now take for granted about western military superiority didn't exist then – those perceptions followed not preceded the Gulf War.

So, when I finally got deployed to Dhahran in Saudi Arabia in December 1990 it seemed like a big deal. The BBC offices were in the Dhahran Airport Hotel, nestled right against what had become one of the major coalition airbases, which was within easy reach of Iraqi airpower – and Chemical Weapons.

It's a sign of just how serious we took everything that, in case the airport was hit by missiles or airstrikes, BBC Radio had a back-up hotel/office further away from the airport. My bedroom at the airport hotel doubled up as the main radio studio and, aside from me, the rest of the BBC Radio team was instructed to overnight at the back-up.

I think it was the CW threat that most affected attitudes. One BBC camera crew member scheduled for forward deployment decided to go home. When we went forward we all carried gas masks on belts and did the drills when asked.

I can remember also the whole international media crowded into the hotel reception listening to James Baker reporting on his last-ditch talks with the Iraqi talks, and when he announced they'd failed the whole room groaned. The mood and response was interesting – remember this was the biggest story of our time but there was no excited chatter about career-enhancing stories.

We were going to war, a big one, and an uncertain one – we all took Saddam with a big pinch of salt but 'the mother of all battles' didn't seem quite as dumb then.

Out in Saudi it soon became just a slog. Initially it was punctuated by us rushing to the improvised bomb & CW shelters (the hotel kitchens with sealed doors and vents) whenever the air raid sirens went off. CW prayed on minds – I remember one poor fellow going a bit catatonic and having to be dressed in his noddy suit. On the other hand, some people donned their gear and played Trivial Pursuits.

Earlier, the radio reporter who was scheduled to embed with 7th Armoured had been brought home to spend Christmas with his family – he bluntly told us it might be his last, and we didn't think he was being over-dramatic. We weren't quite in Blackadder-style 'permission for bottom lip to tremble sir' territory but British stiff upper lips were in evidence on farewells.

Of course, it didn't turn out like that, but the first nights were dramatic enough. With the team in the back-up, when the balloon went up on that first night I was therefore the only one in the office. Knowing little more than that the coalition airstrikes were underway (remember no internet) I was thrust live onto air by the producer in London telling me, "Just talk."

Never in my life was I more glad of the accumulated knowledge of a lifetime's aviation 'anoraking' as I improvised furiously and gave the poor BBC listeners the Mark Laity view of Coalition and Iraqi airpower and strategy. I still don't know what I said or how long I spoke but I filled the space.

The problem then was in keeping the line-up. In those early days (I can't recall how long but days rather than hours) the entire BBC Radio coverage out of Dhahran was based on one outgoing phone line. When I finished that first stumbling effort the BBC traffic manager promptly cut me off. I then couldn't get another line as all the hotel operators had done a runner and the entire international media was competing to use the single figure number of external lines that could be dialled from the hotel without operator help.

In the end, I was saved by the first air raid warning. Outside my room I could hear the thundering of feet as people ran for the air raid shelters. I took a deep breath, waited for silence, and dialled again – and got a line. That outgoing phone line we kept up until things calmed down and got sorted out – incidentally on my personal Amex card.

To complete my joy, the arriving BBC Radio team got to the hotel just as the air raid alarm went off and were forced by the military to go down into the shelter. I don't know how long I was alone in that damn office, but it was a long night.

For the BBC, the Gulf War was the start of continuous rolling news. If it made CNN's reputation, then it also passed on a dose of fame to those of us propping up BBC Radio's rolling news station that took over long wave for the duration of the conflict. Never in the field of conflict reporting had so few said so much for so long.

In fairness, and joking aside, it was actually surprisingly good, and also surprisingly popular. The Gulf War genuinely engaged the British public on a broad front. They felt this was their conflict fought by their forces. A friend told me of walking down a high street and hearing the sound of BBC rolling news coming out of almost every shop as he walked past. Was this the last war that this happened.

Pretty soon though people became blasé and started ignoring the alerts, even after the first real Scuds arrived. Routine is a wonderful thing.

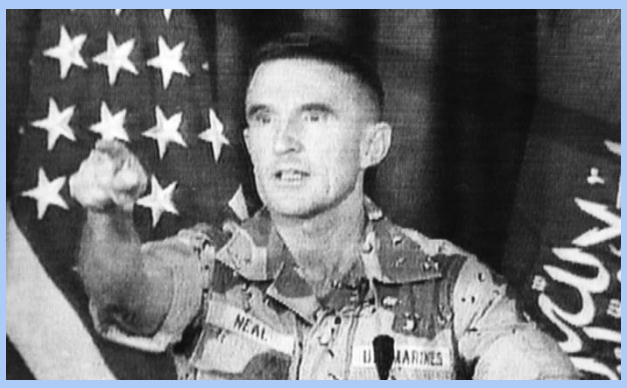
At one stage, we even put on our noddy suits for a different purpose, as pretend British uniforms. That happened after Saddam opened the fuel cocks and started pouring oil into the Gulf. A few of us piled into our sand-coloured Toyotas and headed up to the border to report on the pollution along the coast.

It was a closed military zone but wearing our camouflaged noddy suits and olive green helmets we bowled through various Saudi checkpoints, sometimes with Justin Webb (now a Today presenter) leaning out the window yelling, “British Special Forces, make way please.” At least he said, please.

We were heading for the Iraqi/Kuwaiti border town of Khafji, and in those pre-GPS days once we passed through an inconsequential village we knew we were close – until having roared though and still heading north we suddenly wondered…. was that actually Khafji? Slamming on of brakes, even more rapid return to the village where a few Kuwaiti soldiers emerged to confirm it was Khafji. Whoops.

Having nearly invaded Iraq we then started filming the truly horrible pollution Saddam had unleashed and filing some reports via satphone. Half an hour later the Saudi military – alerted by sigint – appeared and briefly arrested us, before sending us on our way. So, ended the jolly japes of ‘Five go to Khafji’. Seemed like a good idea at the time and at least it got us out of the office.

Not long after I moved from Dhahran to Riyadh. After a fairly chaotic start the coalition briefing machine in Riyadh had finally achieved some coherence and it was now clear that if you wanted to provide an in-theatre overview that was the only place to be. As noted, the initial coalition briefings had been a mess, working their way through several amateur and often amateurish briefers before finally settling on Brigadier General Rich Neal, right.



The occasional briefs by the operational commander, Norman Schwarzkopf, attracted huge attention, but it was Brigadier Richard Neal, a US Marine, who largely anchored the daily briefs. His normal job was Assistant Director of Operations, which meant he did the overnight shift in the ops centre. He then went to bed, getting up around noon, catching up on that morning’s events before briefing the world’s media mid-afternoon.

He wasn’t a natural, but his job certainly made him authoritative, and he grew on the job. Like the later 1999 Kosovo conflict, the overwhelmingly air centric nature of the conflict – with much of the action at night – created an unusual dynamic where a daily briefing was the media centre of effort. Today the nature of the information age means that simply couldn’t happen – the Gulf War and the later Kosovo conflict were one-offs.

It meant hotel-bound journos like me, despite being hundreds of miles from the action, anchored much of the news, with the only real competition being the small number of media

in Baghdad. Meanwhile the embedded media attached to the ground forces largely kicked their heels waiting (and waiting, and waiting) for the land offensive to start.

It was a strange little world, initially with unseemly squabbles among journos fighting over the limited number of seats in the briefing room – German towels on deck chairs had nothing on us.

All except for CNN. Being CNN the US Public Affairs people had given them their own dedicated seat so they could wire in all the stuff they needed to stand up immediately the presser was over and give a live summary report to camera. As BBC radio, I needed something similar but had no such privileges.

However, CNN's Achilles heel was that their generalist reporters struggled to work out the key highlights for their instant summaries. For me, as a Defence Correspondent, that was easy – getting the seat was the hard bit. We did a deal, I whispered a running commentary on what Rich Neal was saying; they made sure I had the seat next to them and guarded it against all-comers. Being next to CNN meant I was also in Rich Neal's eye line when he was taking questions, so I became one of the few regular non-American questioners. Victory in the media war!

As the above suggests, for much of my time in Saudi the actual reporting of this most dramatic and long-running of stories was routine slog. Big news, but often nothing new, which encouraged fevered speculation, chasing after little things that didn't really matter. What did excite of course was the use of gun camera.

It's so routine now but to see those first images of precision guided weapons hitting their targets was stunning – sometimes greeted by whoops of amazement from journalists. If CNN and 24-hour news was one of the features of the Gulf War, then PGM video footage was another. As we moved closer to the inevitable ground offensive then speculation on when it would start became intense.

A potential ethical dilemma came when the British briefer, Group Captain Niall Irving, in his daily report said British Tornados had attacked Iraqi airfields with JP233 runway-cratering weapons. JP233s had been used in the early days of the war, but the low-level flying needed to drop them led to painful losses from Iraqi AA, so the Tornados had switched to medium-level bombing.

I found Niall after the briefing and said I now knew the ground offensive was about to start. He paled and asked why. I said that JP233s only put runways out of action for about a day, so if you had started using them again then the land attack had to follow quickly.

Niall said he had wondered whether to mention using JP233s and asked what I was going to say. I replied I wasn't going to mention the implications. I suppose many journalists could/would have seen it as there 'duty' to say something – some (but not all) have told me so. However, my thoughts then and now were that everyone knew it was coming sometime soon and I didn't think the BBC audience would thank me for giving extra detail to warn the Iraqis our forces were on the way.

As the JP233s had signalled, it did kick off shortly afterwards and media attention switched from Riyadh to my long-suffering colleagues with the British Army in the desert – for all of 100 hours. Even now it is hard to register our surprise at the way the Iraqis folded.

A bizarre consequence was the way the media so rapidly turned from seeing the Iraqi Army as a powerful combat force and coalition adversary to being a bunch of poor conscripts who were some kind of victims. Not so long before the reporting had been all about the casualties the coalition could suffer.

The tenor of the reporting of coalition airpower's destruction of the retreating Iraqis at Mitla Ridge – the so-called highway of death – certainly surprised me. It was portrayed as somehow unfair, some criticised it as some kind of semi-criminal massacre. As far as I was concerned it was war – just because they're retreating doesn't mean they can't reconstitute to fight again.

The actual nature of so much of the reporting was a signal of something new in the media – that killing enemy combat forces could be overdone. 25 years later in Afghanistan ISAF nations were telling people like me, then a NATO spokesman, not to talk about killing the Taleban. I think it started here.

A year after the war I did a documentary series on the war and I have no doubt the media portrayal of Mitla Ridge as some kind of unfair massacre accelerated the US decision to end the fight earlier than they should have. It left much of Saddam's key forces – notably the ones that kept him in power – such as the Republican Guard largely intact. I certainly would not argue President Bush should have headed for Baghdad – that was a good call – but the abrupt ending of the fight certainly helped Saddam survive. Were the seeds of the 2003 conflict sown because the 100 hours of ground combat wasn't 150 or 200 hours?

But that was not on my mind then. I just got home earlier than I expected. Later that summer I was at the Royal Tournament watching Britain's armed forces celebrating their victory with style but not triumphalism. What I remember was the crowd's reaction, the clear emotional link, and the pride in our success. Of course, attendees at the tournament were 'friendly forces' but their reaction was just a more intense version of what I saw almost everywhere. It

wasn't just supporting 'our boys' but, as with the Falklands, it was support for the cause they fought for.

The world has changed and now very often 'our boys' are supported in a different sense, seen as victims in doubtful causes. The Gulf War now looks not to be the start of a new world but the end of an old one. Not so much the beginning of the modern era but the last echo of the old.

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Mark Laity, a Vice President of the Pen & Sword Club, has been involved with defence, the media, and latterly Strategic Communications for three decades, both as a journalist and in a variety of posts as a spokesman and senior manager for NATO. His experience covers all levels, from political and strategic, to the frontlines of major conflicts and peacekeeping missions.

Since 2007, Mark has been the Chief Strategic Communications (StratCom) at SHAPE (Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers in Europe). He is the first holder of the post, created in response to the growing importance of information campaigns in military operations. His office has led in the creation of StratCom policy and now oversees its implementation and further development in NATO operations.

This followed nine months in Afghanistan in 2006-7 as NATO Spokesman in Kabul and Media Adviser to the ISAF Commander. His tour covered NATO/ISAF's expansion to cover all of Afghanistan and as its role evolved from peacekeeping to counter-insurgency. For his service in Afghanistan he was awarded NATO's Meritorious Service Medal. In 2008 he completed a second six-month tour as NATO Spokesman in Kabul, and in 2010 a further shorter tour as StratCom Adviser to NATO's Senior Civilian Representative.

Prior to this he was the first civilian Chief of Public Information at SHAPE, after working as Special Adviser on Strategic Communications to General James Jones, the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR).

From 2000, Mark Laity was for four years the Special Adviser to the Secretary General of NATO, Lord Robertson of Port Ellen, and also NATO's Deputy Spokesman. He had a wide variety of policy and media roles, including a year as NATO spokesman, and special responsibility for liaison with the military, and oversight of information campaigns on NATO operations.

In 2001 he was sent to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia as personal adviser to the Macedonian President at a time when that country was on the verge of civil war. When a NATO military force was later deployed, he became the Media Adviser to the operation's commander and civilian spokesman for NATO's successful Operation Essential Harvest.

Mark joined NATO after 22 years in journalism, mostly in BBC radio and television. This included, from 1989, 11 years as the BBC's Defence Correspondent. He reported from the frontlines of most major conflicts of the nineties, but particularly the break-up of Yugoslavia. In 1999 his reporting on the NATO air campaign against the

Milosevic regime made him a familiar face worldwide on BBC Television. He had a similar role during the Gulf war in 1990-91, when, reporting for BBC Radio, he was based in Saudi Arabia.

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The military needs to engage with the media…. says news team expert, Major Chris Cobb-Smith

Scratchings tracked down Major Chris Cobb-Smith, a former member of the British Army's Media Operations Group, in a war zone to get his expert views on military and media relations around the world. Chris, who served in the Royal Artillery including 29 Commando Regiment RA, for 19 years, is best known as one the elite who guard the backs of TV and news crews in hot spots of the world. Currently he is working as News Safety Advisor to the American Broadcasting Company's ABC News.

Chris was a founding member of Chiron Resources which provides security and logistic support to the media in hostile environs, and has also served as a weapons inspector with the United Nations Security Commission (UNSCOM) in Iraq and with the Organisation for Security & Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in Kosovo. His experiences also include Libya, The Philippines, Crimea, Somalia, Yemen, Gaza and Kurdistan. In his six years as news safety adviser to the BBC he won an international media award in 2011.

WRITING IN HASTE, Chris says his knowledge of the media began in the stifling August heat of 1976 on a corner of some waste ground in Londonderry's Bogside when a gaggle of news teams recorded his soldiers' exertions as they ran through a hail of bottles and bricks. "I viewed this first interface with the media much as I did over the next 19 years of regular service, an intrusion and to be avoided. But this attitude has changed with time, experience and as a result of a privileged, unique and varied insight into the media-military relationship.

"Through the years in Iraq with the United Nations, during both official and commercial roles in Kosovo, to Russia's incursion into the Crimea in 2014 and from lurking behind the camera with numerous news crews I've witnessed armies, factions and gangs, massaging, managing and manipulating the international media.

“I’ve seen third world militias beguiling it cleverly for their own ends and first world coalitions arrogantly alienate themselves from this portal to audiences of millions.

“My years in Iraq with the weapons inspectors were constantly under the spotlight of the press - exposure that became uncomfortable as the lies and fabrication of ‘evidence’ regarding the Weapons of Mass Destruction - gained pace.

“Disillusioned I cross-decked to the OSCE’s monitoring mission in Kosovo. On one bright, crisp morning I was first on the scene of the massacre of dozens of non-combatants in the village of Racak. Appreciating that there would soon be an attempt remove the evidence I ushered the gathering international media to that awful gully on the hill above the village. It wasn’t long before the mortar rounds were landing and both observers and press were driven out by another military assault; but not before the appalling scene had been documented. That media exposure that day was instrumental in changing perceptions and galvanizing the international community.

“My first commercial role also led me back to Kosovo. Subsequent to the NATO bombing of Serbian military positions which we watched from the Albanian side of the border before crossing with a news crew behind a squadron of German tanks which were brushing aside token barricades and streaming past the straggled, drunken remnants of hated ‘MUP’ police.

“As the former regime fled, the Kosovo Liberation Army slowly emerged from the hills to take over as the new authority. In Prizren I soon caught up with the regional commander who had been my former point of contact with the rebels throughout many weeks of arranging local cease fires and negotiating body and prisoner exchanges. This eloquent, staff trained former officer whilst in the Yugoslav army had been groomed for diplomatic and command positions.

“As one of the few responsible personalities and a potential future leader I was happy to facilitate exposure to the international media. Sadly, his murder soon after gave way to far less qualified and less credible individuals.

It took a cohesive crew to stick together and persistent liaison with whoever looked to be in charge to keep up with the action and avoid being abandoned on the battlefield at the conclusion of operations. The new administration however fully appreciated the benefits of flaunting bodies, prisoners and captured weaponry to promote their successes.

“It was in early 2006 that an MoD team addressed the Frontline Club on the forthcoming deployment to Afghanistan, an event well attended and which included many well-travelled journalists with considerable experience of the region. As the presentation progressed it was clear it was being met with increasing incredulity and comments on the potential folly. One veteran special forces serviceman who had operated on the north-west frontier was particularly vocal in his condemnation of the plans.

“The rather patronising attitude was reinforced when none of the visitors thought it necessary to join the audience in the bar afterwards; as a founder member of the Club and known for my Service heritage I was embarrassed. Regardless of the subsequent widespread criticism of the campaign the result of the overwhelming reaction that evening had me speculate as to who Whitehall heeded as ‘experts’ on the region.

“Despite my reservations I deployed as a Reservist on Herrick 8 to HQ ISAF Media Operations, a fascinating insight into the complexities of managing the message made challenging by the multinational nature of the coalition.

“Soon after the tour I returned to Afghanistan with a national news network and shamelessly abused my contacts. On a privileged facility to a parade and having been conveniently deserted by our media escort we had unlimited access. We took full advantage and effectively door stepped ambassadors, generals and soldiers.

“Regrettably a senior officer and former colleague who sauntered across for a social gossip homed into an interview with three junior ranks we had persuaded to reflect on their experiences. Despite their lucid but benign reflections the intruder over cautiously constantly interrupted, inhibiting their genuine and insightful comments.

“For all the grandiose statements, careful pronouncements and formal ‘lines to take’ eloquently rolled out, it was those regional accents that would have illustrated the reality of operations in Afghanistan and best appealed to the national audience at home.

“Of course regimes will go to some lengths to stifle the media’s dissemination of what they view as bad news- as I found to my cost in 2011 as our media team languished in a militia jail cell in Tripoli. What my superior back in the UK later referred to as a ‘stimulating experience’ resulted from our attempts to access the first Libyan town to fall to the rebels.

“Rather unexpectedly in the Crimea the ‘alleged’ Russian forces, corralling the Ukrainian troops in their bases were unfailingly polite and professional, in fact often providing a reassuring presence in the proximity of the drunken, separatist militias.

“The ‘West’ has no monopoly on disciplined forces; too often in Iraq, even in the glare of the TV media, I have witnessed less disciplined behaviour by coalition troops as well as irresponsible use of firepower.

“Following a satisfying Regular career, I joined the Reserves in expectation that I could positively contribute and perhaps provide a credible link with the news industry, The Media Operations Group seemed an obvious fit. Regrettably, it just proved a constant source of frustration; despite exposure to networks, journalists, this unique and privileged access was never utilised or exploited, a disappointment and a wasted opportunity.

An under-used resource

The MOG is an under used resource which was never exploited: a wealth of media and communications talent and experience that was seldom plundered. The unit was often side lined and even deliberately excluded - such as on one notable pre-Herrick media day when the MOG could have fielded experienced media professionals holding the respect of personal contacts amongst the visiting press.

The media is constantly changing and with increasing momentum, the military needs to maintain engagement to keep up with both attitudes, technology as well as acknowledge and respect for those journalists with unique experience, knowledge and access.

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Can trust between media & military ever be restored?

International defence and aerospace analyst Howard Wheeldon, below, poses this important question for readers of Scratchings because in recent months the debate on how the United Kingdom military deals with the media has been intense. Social media may be fine but is the "old media" being ignored?

In my work, as both defence analyst and commentator and in the wider support role that I provide I regularly speak to members of the press and often invited to do radio and TV interviews. It goes with the territory and for the most part I enjoy doing all this. Sadly, though something appears to be wrong with the relationship between sections of press and media and that of the UK Ministry of Defence. Indeed, I am increasingly aware that the relationship is now far from what it should be.

One dislikes generalisations, of course, and there are a great many journalists that senior members of the military and those in government greatly respect.

A perfect example of this was Caroline Wyatt, the BBC's former defence correspondent who was very well liked and respected by most of those with whom she engaged and particularly for the manner in which she portrayed events in a fair, correct and unbiased way. Caroline respected the military and she understood what they did and how they needed to operate.

The trouble is that she was already something of an increased rarity amongst journalists in recent years and few others on the circuit today appear to command an equal level of respect from those inside the MOD.

Although there are some that might beg to differ I would suggest that the level of mistrust between the MoD and press and media has never been greater. Understandably in this competitive age media hates to be merely spun a line. What it wants and requires is detail that it can attempt to analyse itself in the name of adding value.

Yes, the MoD does send out embargoed statements to press and media and for the most part keeps they keep their part of the bargain until the appropriate release time. But the MoD

also seems to take the view that apart from the small handful of media journalists from the likes of say the BBC, Sky News, ITN and maybe the Telegraph and Times that few others matters.

The MoD does sometimes appear to be in almost denial about the wider press but then, communications was never a particular speciality. The press on the other hand still has a very important job to do and is often the only link that the public has with the military.

Caroline Wyatt, right, former BBC defence correspondent.

Not surprisingly and often fairly the military see journalists as often being out to cause trouble and to make their job even harder. There is more than a degree of truth in this and we all know who the culprits are.

For many journalists, it is always the MoD that is at the heart of the problem not only for failing to properly engage and being sometimes in denial of issues but also, as already mentioned, because of bias toward whom they believe will pay most attention. You could say that it is a case of the MoD going for quantity rather than quality. This is more than probably true and remember, I am not biased on this subject either way.

Take the example of the MoD arranging for key ministers to speak to press and media and, leaving full press conferences apart, it will most often be the likes of the BBC, ITV, Sky News together with the Times and Telegraph that get the 'lions' share of the one to one interviews.

The specialist defence press has a very hard time of it these days and they get very little if any help or recognition from the MoD. There have been many attempts made by their representative organisation, the IDMA, to sort whatever the problem is that the MoD communications department has with them but as far as I am aware all to no avail.

An example of what I mean here is that just over five years ago specialist defence journalists were denied access inside RAF Cottesmore when the final 16 ship flypast of Harrier jump

jets was taking place in December 2010. Those that bothered to go had to make do with a Wing Commander or Group Captain talking to them through the fence of the base.

That is not to suggest for a moment that the press doesn't have plenty of egg on its face some of which it really ought to be ashamed.

Misquoting often occurs as does ignoring Chatham House rules. The accusations against the press are many and varied and most likely the majority are true. I suppose the sad fact is that even if those that do the real donkeywork in defence journalism are favourably disposed to defence their editors are certainly not interested in nice things to be said about the MoD and the Government. All they want is stuff that through the military connection they can use for political ends.

There is another underlying problem about military communications though and it is one that is all too rarely aired. Apart from very senior officers and even then, all but rarely these days, the military do not as a rule speak to the press directly except when out in theatre. Service personnel are bound by Queen's Regulations of course which means they must seek permission before speaking to the press.

Even so, until 2007 when even tougher regulations and guidelines were introduced by the so-called MoD Directorate of Communication Planning and that effectively barred service personnel speaking about any part of their service life publicly they had at least been free to blog and take part in online debates.

A great many service personnel had used this method to speak out on the state of kit, housing and other issues so it is not surprising that the door was finally closed.

Since then we have seen an almost continual process of MoD gagging and that these days appears to go right to the top including the service chiefs themselves.

To our shame this appears to include censorship of all speeches that they and other senior offices might intend to deliver. Words almost fail me that we have reached a phase when our service chiefs are not allowed to say what they think

The MoD as an instrument of government has the perfect right to silence all parts of the military of course and if the Secretary of State for Defence decrees, as several past incumbents have, that members of the armed forces including senior serving officers and military chiefs will not be allowed to talk to members of the press, give interviews on camera and that all the speeches must be vetted first then so be it. But sometimes policy dictates such as these can and do backfire.

The rather embarrassing sight of a very senior military officer 'reading' his speech line by line at DSEI 2015 presumably as a form of protest to demonstrate that he might not have wanted to say what he was reading continues to pray on my mind.

The break-down of trust between press, media, government and the military in respect of defence is as regrettable as it is also now serious. Both sides are at fault and quite frankly I doubt that anything is likely to change. The real issue though is that all sides need to realise that they need each other particularly when UK military personnel are deployed in the field and in theatre. At such times, it is common practice for experienced journalists to be embedded with our military personnel.

Quite rightly the MoD requires that those who embed with our armed forces can meet all the various fitness and training requirements for their own safety and the safety of others. I have done this myself in the past as I have also done hostile environment, kidnap and hostage training.

Most usually the relationship between the military and the press and media when they are out in theatre is really good but it can be true that sometimes having press and TV cameras

around puts limitations and can even endanger what the military is hoping to achieve. The biggest danger though is misinterpretation by the journalist and sending home the wrong message.

Another problem and it is one that I have noticed an increasing tendency toward in recent times can be that embedded journalist are far more likely to be interested in the military aspects of the situation as opposed to the political or, as was very much the case in Afghanistan although not in Syria, humanitarian issues.

Like all issues and problems, the best way to sort them out is for all the various parties to sit down together and attempt to sort them out. To do this requires first that trust is re-established and that each of the parties in discussion is open, honest and transparent.

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Howard Wheeldon, a Fellow of the Royal Aeronautical Society and member of the Pen & Sword Club is internationally known for Commentary, his much-read internet publication. An independent analyst, commentator and defence advisor engaged primarily in strategic influence support related to all aspects of military and defence in the UK Howard also works in support of the domestic and international commercial aerospace industry and aviation related issues.

He provides support to UK defence exports through UKTIDSO and is well known as a supporter of UK military and defence particularly in the form of air power and maritime capability advocacy.

A former Director of Policy, Public Affairs and Media at aerospace, defence and security trade association ADS; former Senior European Strategist at inter-bank broker BGC Partners and European Equity Strategist at Prudential Bache Europe

Howard spent 28 years as stockbroker/equity analyst specialising in defence, aerospace, aviation, automotive, engineering and capital goods, global macro-economic and geo-political issues.

He is well travelled on professional business particularly in North America, Continental Europe, the Far East and Middle East and is a regular keynote speaker covering aspects of o military, defence and macro-economic and is a guest broadcaster and talking-head commentator on defence and aerospace primarily for BBC and Sky News. Howard is Freeman of the Honourable Company of Air Pilots and a member of the Air Power Association and the Aviation Focus Group

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Have we shot ourselves in the boot?

Is there something drastically wrong in media operations? That is the question asked by the former Commanding Officer of 7644 Flight, RAFVR Alex Dickson, OBE QVRM AE* MPhil FRAeS, who retired as a Group Captain RAF Reserve. He also served as advisor to DPR (RAF) in the MoD and RAF Detachment Commanders in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia during Gulf War 1.

He was appointed an Honorary Air Commodore by the Queen, the first and only active service reservist to be honoured in this way. Professionally, he has been a reporter, feature writer and columnist on a daily paper, a television anchor-man and writer and presenter of documentaries, and managing director of a very successful commercial radio station.

Taking the opportunity of the 25th anniversary of the First Gulf War in which he served in the Middle East he writes:

It seems like only yesterday. .no it doesn't. It was 25 years ago, and if I may be forgiven, I wonder what's been learned……or forgotten.

The whisper is that Regular officers, with no experience of public relations, aka media ops, other than the sign on their office doors, are increasingly leap frogging the professionals serving in the Reserves when it comes to seeking advice. And they are deciding who should go out when there's a need for good coverage.

Holding hands with television crews visiting hot spots is not enough. At least it wasn't in days of yore. Recognising a good story in situ, or just as important, identifying a potential PR disaster and cutting it off, is what it is about. Or was.

No disrespect to the ladies and gentlemen, but while a PR tour might look good on a CV, it doesn't necessarily work oracles when it comes to spreading the word about what the military is up to, while spending the taxpayers' money.

Then again, perhaps they have no choice today. Collectively, Regulars and Reservists, have we shot ourselves in the boot?

Am I ill-informed, or is there a perceived obsession with social media to the detriment of the prints? And has the MoD still not learned that a good journalist, or public relations man/woman cannot easily clock up six months away from the demanding civvy street job? Is anyone at work on a solution? Is an answer wanted?

Of course, the truth may be that these days, the PR units in uniform don't have enough people with the right kind of background to inspire confidence when the send-'em-out decisions are being deliberated. Forgive me, but when DPR (RAF) was allocating slots during the Gulf War, everyone in the long-gone 7644 Flight of the RAFVR had spent years working for national newspapers, radio or television.

Is the system as selective, that is as demanding, today? Forgiveness again please – there is no substitute for this kind of background, which is why senior officers of all three services were prepared to listen to suggestions, take advice and respect who was giving it.

Well, who wouldn't listen to someone like Colonel Alan Protheroe, Assistant Director General of the BBC, in at the beginning when the TA unit of Public Information Officers (TAPIO) was being dreamed up?

I wonder if this level of respect still exists. If not, shouldn't effort go into re-establishing it? Perhaps it's too late and the reality is the damage has been done, that there is no deep pool of media experience in uniform as opposed to well-meaning enthusiasm, and Iraq and Afghanistan have sucked dry employers' willingness to lose those professionals again and again.

I hope not. Perhaps the MoD's views are changing. Which way, might be the key question, one needing an urgent answer.

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Journalists also have pressures - and editors

Stuart Reed, one of the Ministry of Defence's most travelled press officers struck up an excellent rapport with journalists while he was serving in Bosnia. Here Kim Willsher, right, then writing for the Mail on Sunday, tells her story of how editorial pressures can challenge reporters on the ground in a war zone. Too her credit, Kim – now the Paris Correspondent for The Guardian and The Observer - stuck to her guns and said no to a story that could have been detrimental to the Army.

In a letter to Stuart she wrote: The Bosnia story went something like this: Lynn Hilton, the Mail on Sunday photographer, and I were very happy to have negotiated an "exclusive" with the British army in central Bosnia, thanks, I believe, to your good self.

The deal was that we would spend a week with Colonel Bob Stewart's Warrior patrols, doing a fly-on-the-wall report on 'Our Boys' in action. Lynn and I were delighted with this; working on a Sunday newspaper, it was always difficult to find something that was different to what the daily papers were doing and we really believed it would be interesting and show what British troops were trying to do in Bosnia (obviously, this was of interest, as the Warrior s series later showed). We understood Col Bob wasn't that enamoured of having two women in one of his Warriors, but I believe you (and/or Lee Smart) persuaded him otherwise.

So, we spent a week with the Warrior patrol. We went to Amici and saw the massacre, that reduced Col Bob and many others to tears, we went into other areas where the British forces were trying to negotiate, peace-keep, rebuild relations between the different communities in the conflict. We were shot at and in one very hairy moment, Lynn and I were given some hasty instructions on how to work the door of a Warrior because two guys had gone up a hill, while Col Bob was arguing with their leader and ordering him out of the way, and were aiming RPGs at the soft-skin vehicle in front.

"We will have to get out and scoop up what's left and put the injured in this vehicle, and you need to operate the door," we were told. Thankfully, the patrol beat a hasty retreat.

We went out on a late-night recce with an officer called Rupert who had arranged to meet a local Bosniac (Muslim) commander to try to negotiate a ceasefire, and we met Croatian commanders.

We saw how the British Army was helping civilians caught up in the conflict, and was a reassuring presence to the local populations who appreciated them being there. (This was before locals became desperate and more cynical over the total impotence of the United Nations and realised that "UN safe havens" were anything but...)

In short, this week was fascinating on a professional and personal level. The soldiers in the Warrior we were in were fantastic in the way they operated, in the way they treated us, and in the way, they really seemed to care about what they were doing and the concern they showed local people, and restraint in dealing with some pretty nasty characters.

In a country where every man, and his second cousin had a camouflage uniform and weapons, it was good to observe the workings of a professional army. Other journalists who quickly found out what we doing, were envious at the access we had. We had so, so much good material about the British army at work in a war zone.

I wrote my story, going in on a young soldier in the unit who had never been to war before - he had served in Northern Ireland - and was about to have his birthday the day after we were pinned down under fire in a village and he wondered if he was going to die. (It turned out he'd been tasked with keeping an eye on us, but he was more of a war rookie than either Lynn or I!)

Then Lynn and I stayed up most of the night in the Vitez Army press office trying to wire the pictures back to London.

The following morning, a Saturday, I couldn't get through to the office in London, so the BBC kindly offered to let me use Martin Bell's satellite phone, in the field next to the office, around about the time the "postman" (remember him) would let off a few rounds, drawing a bit of incoming.

I'm in the field and I get through to the office, when I'm told the editor wants to speak to me. Jonathan Holborow comes to the phone. The conversation went thus

- ***JH: Listen Kim, I want you to write a piece about how this conflict isn't worth a single British life.***
- ***KW: Sorry, I can't do that. Have you seen the pictures and words we sent about what the British troops are doing here?" I went on to explain that the British forces were doing a great job in very difficult circumstances, and that although they were frustrated at having their hands tied behind their backs by the politicians and stupid rules of engagement, they believed in what they are doing and so did I. "Sorry Jonathan, I can't write a piece saying this war is not worth the life of a single British soldier. It's not what I believe, and more importantly, it's not what the soldiers, from all ranks, officers to the ordinary young squaddies here that I've just spent a week - with believe."***
- ***JH: You mean you are refusing to write this piece?***
- ***KW: Well...up...er... I suppose, yes I am (hedging a bit because I could see the end of my career!) ...refusing to write it.***
- ***JH: Right. Well, can I write it?***
- ***KW: You're the editor, Jonathan, you can write whatever you want.***
- ***JH: Yes, but can I write this piece and put your name (by-line) on it?***
- ***KW: No, you can't, absolutely not! As I've explained I do not agree that this conflict is not worth a single British life and I don't want my name on an article saying that...."***
- ***At this point the line went dead... I realised that the editor has hung up on me, despite me being in the middle of a war zone, with no satellite phone or way of communicating. I was later told by colleagues in the office that the editor had slammed the phone down and announced: "f….g hell. Willsher's gone native***

I have to admit, at that point, I cried. I was deeply disappointed for myself, for Lynn and most importantly, for the guys who had looked after us in difficult circumstances for a week. I don't think a single word or photograph of our week with the Warrior patrol ever made the paper, which was heart breaking for us and for the lads we had spent the week with. We bought them a couple of crates of beer as some small recompense and we all got drunk together.

I was recalled to London and put on picture caption duty for several months. I didn't get a pay rise that year, and was told that my work had not been up to standard, despite many weeks in the Balkans risking my life for the newspaper. However, sometime later I received a letter, brought back by a journalist on another newspaper. It said words to the effect that "We the undersigned would like to thank you for standing up to your editor and not writing the story you were asked to write..." It was signed by at least 20 colleagues and army personnel, including the Colour Sergeant and some of the lads.

I knew I had done the right thing in refusing to write the story, but this letter made me feel nine feet tall. I remember very clearly that time and I remember how upsetting and frustrating it was for all concerned. Of course, the war went on and the incident with the editor was nothing in the greater scheme of those tragic years.

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Stuart Reed, left, joined MoD as head of Naval Publications, mainly producing recruiting material. This gave him the opportunity to go to sea and experience the jobs he wrote about. In three week stints he served as a Gunner in HMS Juno, as an Engineering Mechanic in HMS Arrow and trained with the Royal Marines.

He later became the Ministry's Picture Editor and, subsequently, the Press Officer in charge of the Navy Desk in Main Building. He continued to run the desk in1982 during the frenetic period of the Falkland's Hostilities. A stint in the MoD Facilities Unit enabled him to train with P Company and Advance Para, Wales, with the Parachute Regiment. He contributed articles to Soldier Magazine as he went.

After a short secondment to the Prime Minister Mrs Thatcher's Press Office he moved to Portsmouth as the Staff PRO to Flag Officer Portsmouth. Promotion to Principal Information to Commander-in-Chief Naval Home Command followed in 1987.Stuart served in Northern Ireland, the Gulf (Desert Shield and Desert Storm) and Bosnia, plus assignments in Cambodia, Belize, Australia, the Black Sea and Arctic Russia gave him an exciting and fulfilling career.

He was awarded the Commander-in-Chief Fleet's Commendation for his services in the Gulf.

In 1994 Stuart became the Chief Press Officer of the Prison Service. "Thirteen months without remission", as he puts it. This was a dreadful period for the Service with record numbers of escapes and blunders as well as acrimony between Prison Officers, Prison Governors and the Headquarters which was trying to implement Harvard Business School style working practices.

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A COD WAR MEMORY

Club President Hugh Colver recalls the 1976 Cod War between the United Kingdom and Iceland when he experienced a different "war at sea."

My sister was sorting through my parents' old papers the other day and came across a letter to them written by me on 22 February 1976 and penned on board the Royal Navy frigate HMS Scylla. At that time Scylla was operating off Iceland - sometimes beyond the Arctic Circle – as the command ship of the small naval task force fighting the third Cod War.

I was attempting to ensure that the British side of the story received due attention and that the media on board some of our warships fighting this strange little "war" were encouraged to help us with that - or at the very least get it "right" and keep the reporting "balanced". As so often in those days my adventure to the north Atlantic had started at very short notice and in a somewhat shambolic manner. I was at that time working on the Royal Navy desk in the Ministry of Defence Press Office and I was next on the list to be posted – as a volunteer of course – to act as Task Force PRO.

Another round of talks had started and our ships had withdrawn beyond what the Icelanders regarded as the exclusion zone pending the outcome. Inevitably those talks broke down yet again because this was a long standing and bitter dispute going back a very long time. This was the third of the more recent Cod Wars, the first being in the sixties, the second in 1972 to 1973.

Our fishing fleet had been fishing the productive deep waters around Iceland for many years. The Icelanders believed they had a right to a 200-mile zone around their islands for their exclusive fishing. To obtain this they were prepared to attack our fishing vessels and warships, threaten to leave NATO and even – at just the time of my adventure – break off diplomatic relations with the UK. This was serious stuff.

The day the talks broke down I was going about my normal business of trying to promote the Royal Navy and get the MoD message across. The Director of Public Relations for the Navy at the time summoned me to his office and said: "You're on. Go to the ice and as soon as you can". We called it "the ice" with good reason.

HMS Scylla and the Icelandic patrol boat Odin at close quarters in rough seas during the 1976 Cod War skirmishes.

It was at that time of year very cold and sailors were employed with plastic hammers to keep the superstructure free of ice so that our warships did not become top heavy (trawlers have been known to turn turtle because of the weight of ice that can accumulate in these waters).

The warships that had gone outside the "exclusion zone" immediately redeployed following the breakdown of talks and once again set about the task of protecting our fishing fleet. They had to withstand the regular interference with the fishing, attempts to cut nets and the ramming's of the Icelandic gunboats (there were 55 rammings in the third Cod War alone). With our frigates already on station I had no obvious means of getting to the ice.

Ever resourceful, the powers that be soon decided to deploy the ocean-going tug RMAS Roysterer. She was to sail from Plymouth and act as a radar platform for the task force – it had not escaped anyone's attention that she might also be called upon to tow a stricken ram victim frigate back to Blighty…....

I caught the train to Plymouth and arrived a few hours before her departure, hoping to meet up with an ITN crew I had arranged to accompany us. This was headed by Robert

Southgate. Bob, destined to play a key role in the formation and running of TVS later, was then an ITN reporter. Bob and his two-man crew duly arrived, but we soon hit a problem.

Roysterer was fully manned and crew accommodation was not in abundance and not comfortable. Together we looked through the vessel and at the options. They were not good. Four extra bunks simply did not exist (in my two months at sea in the Cod War I was destined never to sleep in a bunk. On the floor of the wardroom, next to the ship's gyro, in the odd half available space, but never in a bunk).

Bob's crew rebelled. There was no way they were going on board unless they had a proper bed. I even persuaded the Roysterer officers to release the small sick bay with its swinging bed. To no avail. There were frantic phone calls to see if another crew could be persuaded, and Bob tried very hard to persuade me to delay departure. Of course, I could not do that. We sailed without them – my PR coup in shatters. I did get to sleep in the swinging bed though …....

On our way to the ice we encountered Force 9 in the Irish Sea and the roll indicator went from stop to stop for many hours. We even diverted to rescue a listing coaler before the lifeboat intervened, but somehow we arrived on station. I was winched off Roysterer by HMS Juno's Wasp helicopter – a somewhat hairy experience from the bow of a tug in a rough sea.

From then on it was a roller coaster ride as I flew from ship to ship, witnessed numerous clashes and collisions, not to say rammings, and attempted to counter the media onslaught from the Icelanders who were happy to take journalists on day trips out of Reykjavik – whereas we could only deal with the media who took passage with us – or not – and rely on my constant reports back to Main Building.

A passage from the letter to my parents sums it up: “I am writing this on a Sunday afternoon during a temporary lull in activity. We have the gunboat Odinn stopped nearby and we are simply circling around her, keeping an eye on a group of trawlers some four miles distant. We have had a fairly hairy time of it, only avoiding collision several times by the skin of our teeth. These chaps are quite aggressive, the trawler men are a very rough and ready and rather angry crowd, and the Navy has to calmly keep the peace as much as possible.”

Sad to say, we lost the Cod War a few weeks later. The Icelanders got their 200-mile exclusion zone, with only a small number of UK vessels allowed initially. This decimated the UK deep sea fishing fleet with the loss of many jobs.

However, the Royal Navy as ever did a great job under odd and difficult circumstances and I learned a great deal - which was to stand me in good stead for many more operational PR deployment.

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Mobilising the media…..

Soon after he arrived in MoD Main Building in 1982 to take up the high flying appointment of Director of Public Relations, Brigadier David Ramsbotham realised that his job and the Army's lot would be easier if journalists had a greater understanding and knowledge of the way the military worked, writes Mike Peters – then leading the Army's Press Desk in Main Building and, concurrently, the Training Major of the Territorial Army Pool of Information Officers, a strategic reserve of professional communicators in uniform

National Service had finished years earlier and opinions among the media were not all based on the experience of uniformed service or the rigours of training for war. That realisation turned into a plan to take not only the known defence editors and correspondents of the national press to the coal face of British Army of the Rhine but grew to encompass regional and defence press and the broadcasters.

Before the plan could take effect, the Falklands War erupted and for reasons much argued over in the years that followed there was distrust on both sides of the military and media divide. The Ministry of Defence was also caught in a dilemma at the outbreak of hostilities…there was no Chief of Public Relations – a Civil Service two-star appointment. The consequences have been mulled over in the last three decades.

For the first few months of the conflict with Argentina not having a professional public relations leader and crisis co-ordinator to advise the Sixth Floor and the Ministry's political leaders brought worsening relations.

Nevertheless, the BAOR "media mobilisation" plan was slowly gathering momentum and there was action with three senior broadcasters being appointed to umpire the whole exercise which had the blessing of BAOR's Commander in Chief and the Corps Commander

Taking advantage of Exercise Eternal Triangle in the autumn manoeuvre season in Germany the

media – critics and supporters – were offered the opportunity to take to the field and see the massive and complex world of armoured warfare and the workings of the Press Information centre.

Did the plan succeed: were the journalists impressed? As ever there were varied reactions to wearing uniform with the honorary rank of Captain given to official war correspondents.

Even the camping and hiking enthusiasts among the media did not relish the prospects of reporting this “war “exercise from a pup tent (probably of World War 2 heritage) and learning to survive in the morass of combat and lie on the cold ground in the Army’s “green maggot” sleeping bags.

Moans and groans aside, plus episodes where journalists vanished overnight to the comforts of the local” gasthouses” or the delights of the” schnell imbiss “mobile stalls the overall result for the media of a taste of life in the field, the problems of filing copy or the demands on military press officers and escorts to get them to and from the action safely seemed positive.

What many did not know at the time was that BAOR public relations teams were hard at working planning for an Allied Press Information Centre to cope with media demands should the Warsaw Pact ever cross the Inner German Border. This organisation was designed to cope with hundreds of journalists from around the world. Its size was impressive and its vehicles and equipment scaled to cope with the rapid movement required by modern warfare.

One certainty was that DPR (Army) and the BAOR public affairs team – both Regular and Reservists – became well known and the relationship between military and media had a sound basis for future operations. To serve in British Army of the Rhine and 1st British Corps at that time was to face the might of the Warsaw Pact. Exercises were held once the German harvest was gathered in and the plains, farm land, mountains and forests of Lower Saxony were alive with the rumble of tracked vehicles and the screech of jets. It was a different experience to that of the journalists who reported from Afghanistan.

David Ramsbotham, today, is better known as General Lord Ramsbotham – the Pen & Sword Club’s Patron. He sits on the cross benches in the House of Lords and maintains his watch on the defence of the realm and the interests of our servicemen and women and takes a special interest on matters relating to his former role as Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Prisons.

A journalist's light hearted view…and a commando raid on a German pub

By David McDine.

In a huge barn at Holzminden in Lower Saxony a large party of journalists, dressed in British Army combat kit but looking more like banana republic guerrillas, listened attentively as the likely build-up to Armageddon was explained to them. It was October 1983 and the barn had been taken over to accommodate the Exercise Eternal Triangle Press Information Centre – just as it would have been if the Cold War had turned hot.

And when Major (now Colonel) Mike Peters, the Training Major and future Commanding Officer of the TA pool of Information Officers, began his briefing on what was in store for the media men over the coming days, it was clear that what we were witnessing was something entirely new in post-war media handling.

After all the criticism of the way Falklands War information was handled, the Army was experimenting with the first uniformed 'war correspondents' since the Suez campaign. And, importantly, it was 'embedding' them.

Taking part were television crews and representatives of 50 national and major provincial groups, and, although I was a Territorial Army officer at the time, I was also a journalist and had been instructed by my editor (newspapers not being democracies) to volunteer to take part in this experiment.

From my time in Ministry of Defence public relations I knew something of the background. For years NATO military information representatives, had struggled without much success to plan for media handling in the event of Warsaw Pact hostilities. It appeared simply too difficult and the possibility of large numbers of media wandering at will hazarding operational security and causing all kinds of other problems remained a nettle no-one seemed to know how to grasp.

So, it was appropriate that at the Holzminden barn briefing we also heard from Lieutenant General Sir Martin Farndale, GOC 1st British Corps (and later a full general and GOC BAOR), who, when Director of Army Public Relations, had worked on plans for dealing with the media on operations, but unfortunately this had been overlooked when the Falklands campaign caught everyone by surprise.

It was also highly relevant that the Eternal Triangle media party was led by the then Brigadier David Ramsbotham (now General Lord Ramsbotham) who as Director of Public Relations (Army) had had the foresight and determination to get this unprecedented media embedding experiment up and running.

In doing so he changed military and media attitudes to coverage of operations, paving the way for far better cooperation in later conflicts.

I kept a (light-hearted) Eternal Triangle diary and quote from it below:

DAY ONE: We reported to the MOD and were ushered to the King Henry VIII wine cellar in the bowels of the building for accreditation.

This consisted of filling in various forms which ominously required blood groups and next of kin details. The Sunday Mirror man put 'Famous Grouse' for blood group and no-one seemed to worry.

The Army's PR director told us: 'We must assume your editors have sent you across to Germany in a very confused situation once hostilities have broken out.' Sounded like our office on Monday mornings.

A convivial evening in town with long-lost newspaper friends.

Day Two: Woke with dull pain behind the eyes and general queasiness. To Pirbright where we were ushered into the Guards Depot gym.

Our kit was laid out on tables and we shed civilian clothes and donned uniforms. Those who sent in optimistic measurements found they could not get into their trousers.

A giant from the Southern Evening (now Daily) Echo had to have an enormous extra wedge of material sewn into his to make them fit. The watching guardsmen winced.

Briefings**.** An RAF officer told us about protecting the integrity of our airfields. Someone whispered: 'Does he mean guarding them?'

Naval officer warned that, if we ever go to war in an HM ship, we should remember to call the captain sir and wear a tie in the wardroom.

He demonstrated a 'once only' survival suit and warned us it has a nasty habit of pushing your head down and your feet up when you hit the water.

Welsh Guards officer told us of the horrors of chemical warfare and said symptoms include dull pain behind the eyes and general queasiness. Long-lost newspaper friends of last night nodded. We knew the feeling.

We tried on nuclear, biological and chemical warfare suits. It is known as 'Noddy kit' but I felt more like a wally.

When someone shouts 'gas, gas, gas' you have nine seconds to put on your mask if it's the real thing. I took 12 seconds and the sergeant told me: 'You're dead.'

Later, in a nearby field, 50 men and one woman in noddy suits could be heard hammering in the pegs for their one-man tents in the gathering gloom. Those who forgot to buy torches were in real trouble and one opted out.

A fitful few hours doze in our sleeping bags was disturbed by a party of national men who made a commando raid on a local pub and came back shouting 'gas, gas, gas.'

DAY THREE: A bugler woke those who managed to doze off with reveille at 5 am. To RAF Oldham and a five-hour wait for our aircraft because of fog.

Once in Germany, bad weather ruled out a visit to inner German border and we ended up at the exercise press centre in a huge barn at Holzminden. Many briefings later three of us arrived with the 3rd Battalion of the Queen's Regiment in the middle of a wood.

In complete darkness, we fumbled our way into our sleeping bags under the trees. A mouse ran over my face and when I shone my torch to make sure it was not a rat, someone hissed: 'Put that effing light out.'

A charming major came and whispered: ‘I’ve got to move you chaps. There’s a squadron of tanks coming through here shortly and they might run over you.’

We moved, dozed, and then the tanks woke us again anyway. A patrolling sentry tripped over us to wake us yet again and then at 3 am the whole unit had to move out.

Our team got stuck in the wood behind an armoured personnel carrier that had shed a track and we had to chop down several trees to escape.

There followed a long day seeing little bits of the ‘war’ from the back of a carrier and a Land Rover with no idea of the overall picture.

DAY FOUR: After a similarly restless night we returned to the press centre for the de-brief. Most agreed it would be impossible to do more than colour pieces if you stuck with one small unit for the real thing.

The most sensible thing would be to base yourself on the press centre and visit different parts of the 2,000-square mile battlefield daily. It struck most of us that the real problem with censorship would come during any period of tension that could lead to World War III.

At that stage, with thousands of international journalists on the loose, with access to civilian communications unrestricted, reporting of warlike preparations could itself hasten war.

If nothing else, the experiment with ‘war correspondents’ during Eternal Triangle should help ensure that more sensible arrangements are made for limited wars like the Falklands.

Almost a decade later I came to realise the full significance of the embedding arrangements tried during Eternal Triangle. As commander of the British media section at Dhahran during the Gulf War, my role included helping set up the media teams embedded with our units and associated pooling arrangements.

From the highest level, there was a determination that I believe traced back directly to the success of Eternal Triangle to achieve a workable compromise, allowing the media the fullest possible access in return for not hazarding our operational security. Sharing the hardships and dangers with our soldiers achieved that.

Most of the media excesses and operational security problems were caused by the inevitable mavericks operating outside the pooling and embedding system.

There have of course been further conflicts since the Gulf War that I have not witnessed at first hand and about which I am not qualified to comment. Also, technology and social media have moved on so far and so fast since then that I would not presume to pontificate about the problems of operational coverage today.

But at the very least I believe we can thank the Eternal Triangle experiment for changing the entrenched attitudes of both military and media to war coverage and paving the way for more sensible working arrangements on operations.

David McDine, OBE is an experienced journalist and former Ministry of Defence information specialist. He is pictured here on Eternal Triangle interviewing a Queensman working in Exercise Damage Control

David's MOD appointments included Deputy Director of first Naval and later, Army Public Relations; Assistant Chief of Public Relations and Associate Secretary of the 'D' Notice Committee and Head of the Army Information Service in Northern Ireland.

Unusually David has served in all three Armed Forces: as a National Servicemen in Royal Air Force signals intelligence in Cyprus during the EOKA campaign; as a volunteer, Royal Naval Reserve officer during the Confrontation in Malaysian Borneo.

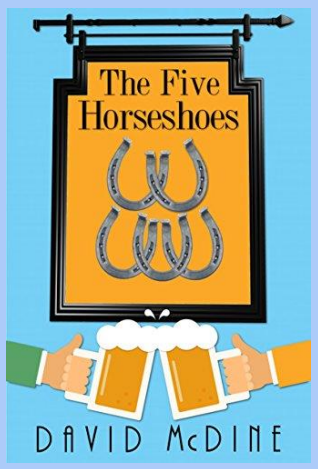
As the Senior TA, Public Information Officer, he deployed to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait during the First Gulf War. A former director of Defence Public Affairs Consultants, David is a Deputy Lieutenant of Kent, author of Unconquered – The Story of Kent and Its Lieutenancy, and now of humorous and Nelson-era naval fiction.

Four books published and still writing

David McDine has been busy in retirement. He has recently had ***Unconquered*** – *The Story of Kent and its Lieutenancy* – published, and his latest humorous novella ***The Five Horseshoes*** and its full-length sequel ***The Animal Man*** are both out as e-books.

Unconquered is the first in-depth story of a county lieutenancy from Tudor times to the present day. Since pre-Armada days the office has played – and continues to play – an important but hitherto largely unrecognised role in the lives of our counties.

Where once the lieutenancies raised, and commanded the trained bands and militia they now encourage armies of community volunteers and provide a focus for county identity, unity and pride. David's fully-illustrated 276-page book is available in hardback via Amazon.



The other two books could not be more different. They are light-hearted stories that recall some of the antics of reporters and photographers back in the early 1960s, when he was himself a young journalist and then a government information officer.

The Five Horseshoes and ***The Animal Man*** are available as Kindle books from Amazon, or can be downloaded via a free app for reading on any device, including a PC. Two more books in the series are planned.

David's fourth book is now available on Amazon as a Kindle publication by Endeavour Press and is a more serious piece of fiction, ***The Normandy Privateer***, the first of a series set in Normandy and his home county of Kent during the Napoleonic Wars. The characters, he says, are entirely fictional, although based to some degree on types he has come across in all three services over the years.

'Weapons, uniforms and conditions of service may have changed dramatically since the Napoleonic era, but the cheerful, courageous, indomitable spirit and sense of humour of the British serviceman lives on.

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FIRST GULF WAR – some personal thoughts

The first Gulf War and the successful Pubic Information performance, is so well, documented that it seems pointless trying to repeat how the operation was organised and run, writes former Daily Mail Midlands Correspondent Lieutenant Colonel Aubrey Chalmers, pictured right.

Aubrey deployed as a TA Public Information Officer and with his knowledge of journalism and familiarity with his UK press colleagues was useful many to have on the staff He writes:

The British public relations organisation eventually numbered 90 to deal with the insatiable demands of some 250 British media people plus plenty of foreign representatives. In many respects both the military action and the professional media ops back-up was a textbook operation. So instead of dusty statistics I believe my most interesting way to sum up the organisation effort is to recall some entertaining vignettes which have survived the fog, or in this case the dust, of war.

General Sir Peter de la Billiere the senior British Army officer was fairly shy retiring individual who hated appearing on TV or meeting journalists. In fact, I think he only made one TV appearance at the time the British attack went in and I wrote the script for him.

The General, who was balding insisted he would wear his beret and, because he was rather deaf, didn't want to answer any questions. Defence correspondents

were given a daily attributable briefing. But the international highlight was the nightly world-wide televised briefings given by two senior officers, one from the Army and one from the RAF.
I tended to work with Colonel Barry Stevens and Colin Mason with Squadron Leader Niall Irving. This stage piece took place in the ballroom of the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Riyadh and I helped to write the script and then rehearse those giving the presentation. The British briefings were timed to hit the evening news bulletins back in the UK. Timing was sometimes tight because everything had to be cleared by MoD in London.

Fortunately, as a poacher-turned-gamekeeper I knew which questions were likely to arise and, to avoid the briefer being caught unaware, it was easy to prepare a response during rehearsals in what we called the 'murder session'. As a result, the briefings went fairly smoothly, though there was always the problem of demands to quantify the number of allied casualties.

There was a genuine difficulty in getting information rapidly because of the command structure: battalion to regiment and regiment to division and division to HQ BFME. It often remained an awkward grey area and we were able to anticipate the questions.

- **Briefing officer: 'Fortunately our casualties have been light. . ..'**
- **Questioner: 'What do you mean by "light"?'**
- **Briefing officer: 'Exactly that. Light'**
- **Second journalist: 'Are you talking in teens or single figures?'**
- **Briefing Officer: 'I'm not going into exact numbers because the situation is constantly changing . . .'**
- **Third journalist: 'Can we take it that casualties are in single figures?'**
- **Briefing Officer: 'No you can't. I've told you that our casualties are fortunately light and when I have precise numbers I'll give them to you. I don't want to give you figures which may not be accurate or up to date.'**

But the unexpected gave us a shock. The blow came on February 26, 1991, when two American A10 ground attack aircraft bombed our Warriors during Desert Storm, the thrust towards Kuwait.

Nine soldiers from the 3rd Bn. The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers were killed and 11 others injured. At first nobody at British HQ believed it because vehicles carried distinctive orange markings so they could be identified from the air.

We thought the vehicles must have hit mines, but the unpalatable facts emerged gradually. It was frustrating that we had to sit on the sad news until all the next of kin had been informed.

I attended some of the American command briefings. Superficially they appeared fairly casual and relaxed meetings compared with the General's formal briefings at British HQ. Nevertheless, the Americans were deeply concerned if anything went wrong and were especially sensitive to media criticism and public opinion. Their own track record wasn't particularly impressive since 24 per cent of the 148 US fatalities were caused by their own 'friendly fire'.

During the course of the war British losses totalled 47, but nine were due to the tragic blue-on-blue and one or two from other causes.

The bridges over the Euphrates were important targets in an effort to confuse Iraqi troop movements and British Tornados went on regular missions. Bombing the centre of a bridge was more effective because it was difficult to affect a repair and precision munitions were used.

On February 13, 1991 a rogue bomb went into the centre of Falluja and killed at least 130 people in a market square and a hotel. Unhappily in years to follow strategically-placed Falluja was to experience many more misfortunes. Not unnaturally much capital was made of the British 'atrocity' in bombing innocent civilians and no amount of explanation on TV from our RAF briefer that it was a freak bomb, because the fins failed to open, would satisfy anyone. There was only one way to combat the adverse propaganda: we had to show the evidence, the video shot of the rogue bomb.

MoD in London demurred and preparations for the evening briefing went ahead. Nevertheless, the video of the rogue bomb was held in reserve. With just minutes to spare MoD finally gave approval and the clip was shown during the briefing in response to a question. The evidence was irrefutable and it was clear that when the fins failed to open the bomb went off target. With this commendable PR exercise, the allegations of a deliberate atrocity were nipped in the bud.

There are, naturally, several macabre moments in a war zone. For example, we came across the remains of an air strike on an Iraqi armoured column and, in shallow sandy graves, I buried mutilated bodies which had also received the attention of stray dogs.

One had to be extremely careful because the place was littered with cluster bombs. Helen Barrett, the RAF corporal who was part of the team, photographed the mutilated bodies as well as me at work and I think she suffered something close to a breakdown at the sight. Damage to Kuwait City looked serious but it was superficial. Nevertheless, it made life uncomfortable. Some of us were holed up in a partly burned out hotel. Fortunately, we had bottled water but many others survived by draining water from the swimming pool.

The power station had been disabled until British sappers went in and effected a temporary connection; the Americans later won the contract for major repairs.

It was a place where gunfire constantly disturbed the night as rival groups settled old scores and it was necessary to sleep with your 9mm Browning to hand. The hotel had been so badly wrecked, with every door splintered, that I doubt if anybody paid for rooms. I heard that two journalists, one from the *Daily Mail*, were occupying a room on the third floor which was reasonably intact. I couldn't resist the temptation and burst in on my *Daily Mail* colleague, who was sharing a room with the *Daily Express,* just as they were attempting to cook over a gas cylinder. When they discovered they weren't to be arrested by a menacing soldier there was a joyful reunion and great mirth.

Accredited journalists caused little trouble except for the suspicion that one veteran reporter

from ITN, who was on the point of retiring, was suspected of pretending to film 'behind enemy lines.' Well. One bit of desert looks much like another doesn't it? He was 'advised' that accreditation could be withdrawn. Nevertheless, we all remained the best of friends and had dinner in a Japanese restaurant, one of the few which remained open in Riyadh. Most business men had fled at the threat of Saddam's Scud missiles.

In fact, the Scuds proved to be something like toothless tigers although one hit an American barracks near Dhahran caused 27 fatalities. To achieve the range and reach the centre of Saudi Arabia the warheads were comparatively small.

At first one had to put on cumbersome NBC equipment when the air raid warning sounded but EOD teams quickly declared them safe. It didn't take long for the prospect of an incoming missile to trigger a rush by spectators to the rooftops. Initially, because of unknown elements, one was like a pin cushion with so many inoculations, including protection against Anthrax and even Bubonic Plague!

At one stage more than one TV channel tried to interview our briefing officers 'blind', i.e. by having a 'star' celebrity interviewer in a studio in London firing difficult questions at the hapless interviewee placed before a camera on a rooftop in Riyadh. Because these intensive interviews became somewhat rude, with pressing questions on policy matters which were the prerogative of Government, we insisted, to the chagrin of TV questioners, that any interviews must be done eye-to-eye in theatre. The all-powerful TV staff had to interview their own correspondents instead!

The news that hostilities had ceased brought a stampede for the port at Al Jubayl. Equipment was literally dropped in the desert and huge numbers of vehicles were abandoned at the port. Nigel Gillies and myself were anxious about the sudden demise of the photographic unit and realised it was vital to secure photographs, especially missing items which might find some commercial value at a later stage. We raced to the dockside at Al Jubayl to be confronted by hundreds and hundreds of vehicles, ranging from Bedford four-ton box bodies and Land Rovers to damaged Warriors. It was impossible to distinguish the Public Information photographic unit and much valuable archive material was probably lost.

Ironically, I am still in evidence as a Gulf War soldier. My complete uniform, helmet, webbing, desert combats and boots, were used to dress a dummy in the Royal Warwickshire/ Royal Regiment of Fusiliers Museum in Warwick. There is one major difference. I've been reduced to a corporal!

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Chris donates a lifetime's collection to Lancashire's Museum

A unique photo-archive, which chronicled 10 years in the life of the Territorial Army in the North West of England, is being made available by the Lancashire Infantry Museum. Back in the late 1970's and early 80's Major Chris Vere was the Territorial Army's Public Information Officer (TAPIO) at Army Headquarters North West District.

He criss-crossed the region – and often further afield, including abroad – photographing the activities of what was then one of the largest TA concentrations in the country. There were units from all the combat and supporting arms and corps, and every weekend hundreds, sometimes thousands of reservists were out on military training.

The result is a unique photo archive of several thousand images. It is very possibly the only such record of TA activity in a given area over a specific period ever created.

Many of the images were published in local newspapers and in the region's own TA newspaper "North West Territorial," but most have never been seen since the day they were taken.

Chris is now a volunteer at the Lancashire Infantry Museum. For 30 years the collection has remained hidden in his photo files, but now a Museum programme to catalogue and digitise its own photo archive gives the opportunity to make it available to the wide audience which it deserves.

"These pictures deserve to be seen," says Chris. "They show the Reserves at their best. It was a fascinating time, when the TA was at its busiest. I had one of the best jobs there was, able to roam about the country and observe every aspect of Reserve service, from the Medics and Engineers right through to all the combat arms. Now I hope that people can get as much pleasure out of viewing them as I did of taking them."

It will take some time to digitally copy all the images from their original film format. As the process progresses, they will be made available to buy in a series of discs which will eventually cover all aspects of TA life in the region, at a cost of £12 per DVD including post and packing. All proceeds go to the preservation and maintenance of the Lancashire Infantry Museum

The first disc in the series covers the Infantry during the years 1978 to 1987 and features the battalions which now form 4th (Volunteer) Battalion, Duke of Lancaster's Regiment:4th Battalion, Kings Own Royal Border Regiment: 5/8th Battalion, Kings Regiment:4th Battalion, Queen's Lancashire Regiment.

The discs can only be purchased on-line via the Museum's website at http://www.lancashireinfantrymuseum.org.uk/territorial-army-north-west-photo-collection/ Call Roger Goodwin :07766 096335: rig@pendragonmedia.co.uk Chris Vere: 01704 87002: chris@chrisvere.co.uk

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