

# **SUPPORT TO STRIKE**

The History of the Royal Air Force Tactical Supply Wing

By

James McMillan Coleman BEM

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## **Acknowledgments**

Gp Capt J.K. Craven Griffiths OBE Ret'd. Gp Capt D.Grant Ret'd. Gp Capt R.Springett Ret'd. Gp Capt D Packman Ret. Gp Capt P Perkins MA. MCMI, Wg Cdr N Atkinson MBE.MEI. Sqn Ldr Perry MBE Ret. Wing WO M Farrell. Ex Wing WO A.Byers (Deceased). Ex Wing WO J. Ronan. Ex Wing WO B. McBey BEM Ret'd. FS I Campbell. Sgt Chris Baker, Sgt Kev Wynn, Mrs G Pritchard. Mr. J. Davies. Mr & Mrs Houlton and the RAF Cosford Photo Section.

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

AAC	ARMY AIR CORPS
ACE	ALLIED COMMAND EUROPE
ACHE	AIRCRAFT HANDLING EQUIPMENT
ACM	AIR CHIEF MARSHALL
ACSSU	AIR COMBAT SERVICE SUPPORT UNIT
AD	AID DE-CAMP
ADFARP	AIR DELIVERED FORWARD AIRCRAFT REFUELLING POINT
ALC	AIR LOGISTICS COMMAND
AMF(L)	ALLIED MOBILE FORCE (LAND)
AO	AREA OF OPERATIONS
AOC	AIR OFFICER COMMANDING
APFC	AIR PORTABLE FUEL CONTAINER
ARAMCO	ARABIAN AMERICAN OIL COMPANY
ASMA	AIR STAFF MANAGEMENT AID
AVM	AIR VICE MARSHALL
AWD	ALL WHEEL DRIVE
BEM	BRITISH EMPIRE MEDAL
BFAP	BRITISH FORCES, ARABIAN PENINSULA
CAP	COMBAT AREA PATROLS
CAS	CHIEF OF THE AIR STAFF
DACOS J4	DEPUTY ASSISTANT CHIEF OF STAFF LOGISTICS
DCINC	DEPUTY COMMANDER IN CHIEF
DCM	DANGEROUS CARGO MANIFEST
DGS	DANGEROUS GOOD SHIPPING

DSEAR	DANGEROUS SUBSTANCES AND EXPLOSIVE ATMOSPHERE REGULATIONS
DSF	DOMESTIC SUPPLY FLIGHT
DSP	DIRECTOR OF SUPPLY POLICY (RAF)
E PLANS	EMERGENCY PLANNING (RAF)
EAG	EUROPEAN AIR GROUP
EBFI	EMERGENCY BULK FUEL INSTALLATION
EFE	EMERGENCY FUEL EQUIPMENT
EFI	EXPEDITIONARY FORCE INSTITUTES
ELW	EXPEDITIONARY LOGISTICS WING
FARP	FORWARD AIRCRAFT REFUELLING POINT
FHU	FUEL HANDLING UNIT
FMA	FORCE MAINTENANCE AREA
FOB	FORWARD OPERATING BASE
FRP	FORWARD REFUEL POINT
FSD	FUEL SUPPLY DEPOT
GCB	GRAND COMMANDER OF THE BATH
GEN TECH	GENERAL TECHNICIAN
GPS	GLOBAL POSITIONING SYSTEM
GSE	GROUND SUPPORT EQUIPMENT
HQ	HEADQUARTERS
HQBFC	HEADQUARTERS BRITISH FORCES CYPRUS
HQMC	HEADQUARTERS MARINE CORPS
IED	IMPROVISED EXPLOSIVE DEVICE
ISAF	INTERNATIONAL SECURITY ASSISTANCE FORCE
JAG	JOINT AIR GROUP
JHC	JOINT HELICOPTER COMMAND
JOFS	JOINT OPERATIONAL FUEL SYSTEM
JWE	JOINT WARFARE ESTABLISHMENT
LLP	LOWER LEVEL PROTOCOL
MBE	MEMBER OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE
MDO	MARINE DIESEL OIL
MEF	US MARINE EXPEDITIONARY FORCE
MOB	MAIN OPERATING BASE
MOD	MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
MRAF	MARSHALL OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCE

MSP	MULTI STRESS PLATFORM
MSR	MAIN SUPPLY ROUTE
MT	MECHANICAL TRANSPORT
MU	MAINTENANCE UNIT
MV	MARINE VESSEL
NAPS	NERVE AGENT PRETREATMENT SETS
NATO	NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANISATION
NBC	NUCLEAR BIOLOGICAL CHEMICAL
NEU	NEUTRAL MERCHANT SHIP
OBE	ORDER OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE
OC	OFFICER COMMANDING
OOA	OUT OF AREA
PMC	PRESIDENT OF THE MESS COMMITTEE
POL	PETROLS OILS & LUBRICANTS
PSD	PETROL SUPPLY DEPOT
QA	QUALITY ASSURANCE
RAFO	ROYAL AIR FORCE OFFICER
RAOC	ROYAL ARMY ORDINANCE CORPS
RE	ROYAL ENGINEERS
RFA	ROYAL FLEET AUXILIARY
RM	ROYAL MARINES
RN	ROYAL NAVY
RSAF	ROYAL SAUDI AIR FORCE
RSM	REGIMENTAL SERGEANT MAJOR
RTR	ROTORS TURNING REFUEL
RUF	REVOLUTIONARY UNITED FRONT
SACEUR (AIR)	SUPREME ALLIED COMMANDER EUROPE (AIR)
SADF	SOUTH AFRICAN DEFENCE FORCE
SAS	SPECIAL AIR SERVICE
SBS	SPECIAL BOAT SERVICE
SEA	SERVICE DES ESSENCES DE ARMEES
SLS	SQUARE LINE STATIC
SNCO	SENIOR NON COMMISSIONED OFFICER
STANTA	STANFORD TRAINING AREA
TART	TACTICAL AIRCRAFT REFUELLING TRAILER
TFC	TANK FABRIC COLLAPSIBLE



THFE	TACTICAL FUELS HANDLING EQUIPMENT
TRA	TACTICAL REFUEL AREA
TTF	TANKER TRUCK FUEL
UKMAMS	UNITED KINGDOM MOBILE AIR MOVEMENTS SQUADRON
UKMF(L)	UNITED KINGDOM MOBILE FORCE (LAND)
UNAVEM	UNITED NATIONS VERIFICATION MISSION
USAF	UNITED STATES AIR FORCE
USMC	UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
USN	UNITED STATES NAVY

### **TSW Commanding Officers 1970 to 2011**

Wg Cdr J.K. Craven Griffiths OBE	1970 to 1973
Wg Cdr J. Shearer	1973 to 1975
Wg Cdr D. Packman F.Inst Pet.,M.Inst.P.S.AMBIM	1975 to 1977
Wg Cdr G.M. Ferguson	1977 to 1979
Wg Cdr S.E. Baker	1979 to 1981
Wg Cdr J.I. Barrow	1981
Wg Cdr M.W. Barham	1981 to 1983
Wg Cdr D. Grant M.Inst.P.	1983 to 1985
Wg Cdr A.P. Matthews MBE	1985 to 1988
Wg Cdr D.C. Bernard MBE	1988 to 1991
Wg Cdr R Springett	1991
Wg Cdr A.C. Spinks	1991 to 1994
Wg Cdr P. Grimson	1994 to 1997

Wg Cdr N.W. Cromarty	1997 to 1999
Wg Cdr G.J. Howard MA.MCIT.Mlog.MI Mgt.	1999 to 2000
Wg Cdr P. Higgins BA.MA.	2000 to 2003
Wg Cdr D.M. Picton MA.BSc.MCIPS	2003 to 2005
Wg Cdr C.W. Watson MBE. MSc.MCIPS.MEI.	2005 to 2007
Wg Cdr N. Atkinson MBE.MEI.	2007 to 2009
Wg Cdr T. Etches MA	2009 to 2011
Wg Cdr S. N. Perkins MA. MCMI	2011 to 2013

## **Introduction**

When the chance to write the book came up, I was delighted, because having been the first team leader on the Wing, and of the original TSW personnel, also having served on the Wing for two, three year periods and been in touch with them in one way or another, especially as I lived in Stafford where the Wing was based.

I had always wanted the history of the Wing to be written. Having seen the Wing develop over the past forty years, I was desperate to see their achievements recorded. Although the Wing is quite small, about 210 members, the impact it has had over the years, has been eminence. It has certainly punched well above its weight. This has been borne out by the part it played in both the Falklands war and the two Gulf wars. It would be easy for me to sit down and fill the pages of this book, with lots of facts and figures. However, that is not how I see the history of the Wing. To me the Wing history is mostly about the people who have seen service on the Wing and over all its years have made it a Unit to be proud of. Having said that, there are plenty of facts and figures to you get your teeth into. Yet I am hoping that the camaraderie and the ingenuity of the lads to solve the problems that confronted us. The love of being part of a unique unit that allowed us to be at our best, all the banter, and the joy of being with a happy band of people. Will come to the front, because that was and I still believe is the secret of the success of the Wing. It is a fact that we all wanted to be part of it.

After the withdrawal from Suez, the British had to rethink the best way it needed to utilise its forces. Out of this in the 1960s came a man with an idea. His name was Wing Commander John K Craven Griffiths. He saw that if you could develop a small force of personnel, who, with first class skills and training and could use their expertise in the field being able to move with the aircraft. That would make the job of moving troops and equipment easier and would allow the aircraft to work closer to the front line, instead of having to return to base for refuelling, they could get it at the front from TSW. Although the idea was authorised; CG had to work hard to convince those above that the Wing would make a difference. They were not so sure; sometimes it is hard to see something under your nose. So being clever people they passed him what they thought was a poisoned chalice, in that they gave him the position of being the first OC TSW. (Well if you are going to make a prune of yourself, you might as well make it a big one)! They thought that it would not take off. However, they were wrong. Because

if ever a man was put in the right job, it was CG.

He started with absolutely nothing. Well from there you can only go up. That's what he did; the secret with CG is that he is different. The very first time I met him and by the way he spoke to me I knew we would hit it off. For a start he spoke to me not as an airman but as a person. He also allowed you, very much in some ways, to use your initiative and expected you to do so. He actively encouraged us to think up ways of improving what we had in the way of equipment and in the way we did things. He wanted us to look outside the bubble. The good thing about that was he was prepared to back his men. It was using our initiative that in some ways brought the first bit of luck. Because at first it used to take a helicopter 20 minutes to shut down its rotors and restart them. It took about 3 days to move a Battalion of troops forward. However, during the first petroleum course at Westmoors with the RAOC. The TSW team noticed a fireman using a four way manifold. Of course it was only for use with water. Having seen this, on the teams return to the Wing they put the idea forward, so that it could be modified to be used with fuel. This was done and they were authorised to use them for the refuelling of aircraft. The only drawback was the power of the pump feeding the manifolds. As our pumps were 150 psi we managed to refuel 16 aircraft at one time, sometimes we would test our luck and manage 20 aircraft. From that very simple idea, I say simple, because although it was obvious in some ways, it had never been tried.

Maybe it is time had come with the creation of TSW. Yet the difference it made was immense. For instead of taking something like 3 days to move a Battalion forward, TSW with the new Splitter Box moved them in 3 to 4 hours. Having read several books on units which over the years have used flexibility and mobility as their weapons, in each case they have been greatly successful. I cite, The Chindits with their Long Range Penetration, the Malayan Scouts and the SAS/SBS, who were masters of the Jungle, Desert and the Sea. I now think it is time that the names of The RAF Servicing Commandos who during WWII move forward with their aircraft and serviced them in the field. Also since 1<sup>st</sup> January 1971 The RAF Tactical Supply Wing who have enabled our aircraft to be put to better use, by being there for them on the front line, should get the recognition that they deserve. The funny thing is that all of these units have had an uphill struggle to be taken seriously. Yet in every case they have proved, without a doubt, their success over the years. These units are unique, because they have succeeded, where many other have failed. The RAFSC and TSW, although small forces, it is the ability to be self-sufficient in the field and at the same time, have the skills to service the

aircraft and to be able to defend their area, that sets them apart. CG seen that, and came up with the idea of TSW. The other important fact that makes all the units I mentioned unique, is the fact, that all the members of each of them, wanted to be on their units. I spoke to a young airman the other day (he was sporting his Para Wings, as part of the TSW Para team) of which he was rightly proud of. He told me that he loved being on the Wing, and just like me 40 years ago when I was on the Wing, said that it was a breath of fresh air from just doing normal Supply work. He said that he was able to show that he had many other abilities and TSW was the vehicle for doing that. I was very pleased and proud to know that what we through CG have built has been and still is a success.

## TACTICAL SUPPLY WING HISTORY 1970-2011

### **CHAPTER 1**

#### **THE FORMATION OF THE WING AND ITS EARLY YEARS**

The history of the Wing, all started when the British Forces were withdrawn from East of Suez. Squadron Leader Mike Liddiard wrote about it in the RAF Supply Magazine in 1973. He wrote that when the Secretary of State for Defence stood in a shaft of sunlight in the House of Commons and stated that he intended to withdraw British Forces from the East of Suez, the world was not altogether startled. When he added that Her Majesty's Government would retain the capability to support her allies, her treaties and commitments anywhere in the world, the British people sighed with relief but military planners closed their eyes and fell into a dead faint. Instead of men and machines committed to the tropics or the Arctic, there was suddenly a total NATO outlook and an open-ended commitment to operations in any strength with any amount of men and machines anywhere in the world.

The Services soon set to making plans for the new concept. In the RAF each Branch was tasked with making its own arrangements. Some produced permanent tactical organizations but most branches nominated detachments from several units to come together on the tactical field in support of operational deployed forces. The period from Jan 1965 to 1969 saw the gestation of the vision of Tactical Supply Wing. It was then nurtured into a fully operational unit by 1st January 1971. The supply branch developed the TSW solution. The mobility in the 1970s Supply Policy Statement is what they came up with. The Policy Statement is without doubt the most important historical document referring to the Tactical Supply Wing. It considers the requirements for TSW, its initial organization, administration, structures and its role in war and peace.

They are:

- The History of TSW, RAF Mobility in the 1970s-Formation of the Tactical Supply Wing.
- The History of TSW Mobility in the -1970s Development of the Tactical Supply Wing 1976.



**Wg Cdr J Craven Griffiths OBE**

The then Wing Commander John Craven Griffiths , who had been at MoD while the concept was being developed, was the first OC TSW He became known to all his Officers, SNCO's, Airmen and Airwomen affectionately as **"CG"**. In the following paragraphs he offers a personal account of the early years of TSW. It provides a fascinating insight into how an operational unit is formed and developed.

## **THE FORMATIVE YEARS- THE C-G VIEW**

‘The Air Force Board’ in the mid-60s embarked upon a new defence strategy which encompassed deploying our aircraft to a number of bases, both overseas and within the UK, consisting of established bases, that is to say those which we considered suitable and capable of supporting deployed aircraft, on un-established or bare bases. These bare bases, which were clearly going to give them problems in the future, could range from literally an airstrip with or without fuel, to a base operated by NATO or friendly foreign powers. These could consist literally of a landing strip with no supporting services whatsoever to a well-run established base generally within the NATO area but one which would operate aircraft which were quite foreign from those in the Air Force inventory.

It must be remembered, at this time the UK had responsibilities, which ranged in the Far East, Singapore, Indonesia, Africa, the Middle East and the Near East, quite apart from the north and southern flanks and the central region of NATO. Against this wide ranging scenario, it was necessary to devise some form of efficient supply support not only aircraft but also men who fly and maintain them in these rather different and difficult locations. At that point in time, all support, such as it was, was run by fly-away packs and supply personnel from the unit from which the aircraft were originally deployed. Within the Ministry of Defence, E Plans (RAF) was the department, which had the responsibility for devising some form of supply support. Squadron Leader Dewi Edwards was the desk officer who had responsibilities for mobility and it fell to him to produce the first thoughts and ideas. Not surprisingly, the initial thoughts ranged around expanding the then fairly successful methods, that is to say the fly-away packs plus supporting personnel from the various units. I arrived in Equipment Plans (RAF) in Feb 1967, just as this whole scenario was being painted within that department. The idea of the Tactical Supply Wing sprang from discussions, fairly heated at times, between myself and Sqn Ldr Edwards, I was not convinced that we should just expand or enlarge on the methods we had in being. I based my views on the experience I had had in the past several years in Aden where I was Ops and Planning Officer for Supply staff there.

I was firmly convinced that what we really needed was a dedicated and highly professional band of supply personnel who could cater in most adverse conditions to provide the necessary supply support whatever it happened to be.



The birth of the TSW took place after 3 litres of Portuguese Rosé in a well-known drinking establishment in Whitehall called Henekeys, where Dewi Edwards and I discussed it for a long time, and between us we decided that we had to think on the “professionally trained body of men” approach. Our discussions remained heated and venomous and we took some several more weeks before we came up with the basic plot. I would say at this stage the basic plot bears not too much resemblance to the finished article, but at least it gave us a good jumping- off point.

We based the Tactical Logistics Wing, as it was called at the time, on a worst-case situation of the support for 2 established bases and 3 non-established bases, not necessarily all in the same area. We worked from basics and we devised the nucleus of what is now the Tactical Supply Wing. The next stage was to present this idea to the more senior officers. Those readers who have not had the experience of working in a Ministry of Defence environment and putting what was then a radical change in thinking and policy through the Wing Commander/ Group Captain/ Air Commodore and Air Vice Marshal level and indeed the Air Force Board, have no idea of the problems which one encounters.

Nevertheless, we agreed that the only way we could achieve this new organisation was to first of all convince the Air Staff; that was the easiest part, and then secondly to produce a staff paper. It was fortunate at the time that we were presented with an opportunity to sound our ideas out on a number of then high-flying Squadron Leaders. In the late 60's and early 70's, there was a one-week course held in London known as the Advanced Logistics Course (ALC), the great-grandfather of what became the much more extensive Senior Supply Course. The ALC lasted just for 5 working days and was normally held in quite salubrious surroundings in London and the lucky Squadron Leader students were talked to at length by very Senior Officers from the different disciplines within the Ministry. E Plans (RAF) were always called upon to present to the ALC the concept of supply support in the 1970's, namely the Tactical Supply Wing backed up by mobility supply flights and selected units. The Mobility Supply Flight being an appendage to the Tactical Supply Wing concept.

The presentation, I have to say, was not particularly well done but it did get over the main ideas. We were rather set back when the then Director of Supply Policy (RAF) stood on his feet and announced to the assembled multitudes that this was the first he had heard of this concept. He had never heard of anything

more ridiculous in his life and in his opinion it was a total non-starter, it was not surprising that his remarks were followed by 20 Squadron Leaders, all ambitious, who agreed entirely with the Director and thought we were a bunch of yo-yos in E Plans (RAF).

One of the advantages of the RAF system is that people retire and get posted, so E Plans (RAF) did the only thing possible, we waited for that particular Director to be posted. We then produced a fairly bulky staff paper and I attempted to get it through my Wing Commander. At this point Dewi Edwards was posted and Sqn. Ldr. Tim Wilkinson arrived, who became an enthusiastic and active devotee of the TSW concept. Between us, we attempted to pilot our staff paper through the then Wing Commander. He having had his fingers burned at the Advanced Logistics Course, sat with the paper in his "IN" tray for 10 months until he was posted. By this time we had our third D of S Pol (RAF), and we were very fortunate that Air Cdre E D (Don) Hills arrived in post.

He read the E Plans (RAF) paper, wrote some very kind remarks on it, and gave us the go ahead to produce a policy statement, and it was really from that point all downhill. We produced the first Supply Policy Mobility Statement; some of it is still valid. Some of it is invalid, not surprisingly, if only because the defence policy of the UK has changed a number of times since the original concept was raised, most recently in 2010.

The project was then handed over to Equipment 36 (RAF) and they were given the task of actually putting the policy into practice, that is to say establishing the OC and the nucleus or the cadre members of the Wing, and establishing the vehicles and obtaining scaling of tentage and clothing and what have you. Myself, in E Plans (RAF), thought I hadn't done a bad job, and brushed that one aside and turned my attention to other things. Little did I realise at the time I would then be called upon to set the Wing up. This came about in a rather sensible and fortuitous manner.

In 1970 I was told that I was going to Singapore for a 3 months exercise called BERSATU PADU, which I believe means in Malaysian "Complete Unity". This exercise was operating the bare base concept and was to prove that 5 nations, that is to say Singapore, Malaysia, the UK, Australia and New Zealand, could successfully reinforce Singapore in the event of an emergency without the benefit

of an established base or depots. I was sent out to run the Rear Maintenance Area, (RMA) which was not the Tactical Supply Wing concept, but certainly was most valuable to me in working among wooden huts, tents, bits of jungle and people from various nations to see one could provide supply support where a future OC TSW, one Sqn Ldr David Packman was on the Movements Staff, I returned to Stafford in September 1970 to set up the Tactical Supply Wing.



## Learning radio procedures at RAF Cosford

**Fg Off Brett Morrell, WO Taff Duncan (deceased), FS Terry McCann, Sgt Keith Rogers, Cpl Jim Coleman, Cpl Dave Langford, Cpl John Richards & Instructor (Roger).**

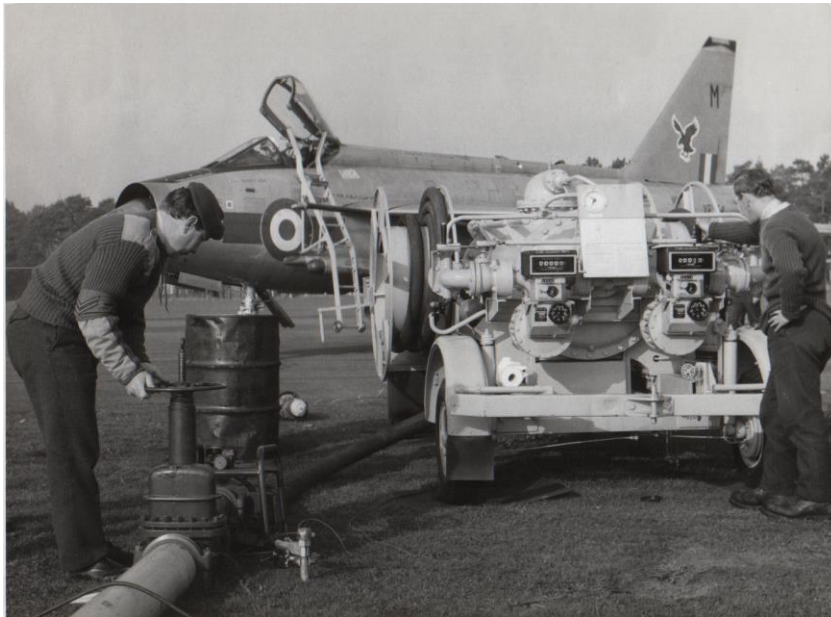
Here I think it is useful to say why we selected Stafford in the original concept. It was purely because there are a large number of supply airmen at Stafford and in the early days, we quickly realised that the hope of establishing 150 or so supply personnel as an identifiable and separate entity was pretty remote.

Even if we had been successful, we realised that successive economy cuts would aim their knives at this rump of suppliers and indeed, even with the small cadre, this occurred a number of times in the early years of the Wing. Thus, Stafford became the home base for the TSW.

Arrival at Stafford was a revelation. The unit had 18 months to prepare for my arrival. After my initial interview with the Station Commander, which took all of 10 minutes, I was then sent packing off to my headquarters, Nicholson Block, which consisted of 2 rooms, there was no desk, no telephone, no support, frankly - not much interest. I was shown the shed for my training activities and my stockholdings; this consisted of a 30,000 sq ft second-class storage shed adjacent to transportation, full of wooden boxes and general old rubbish. I was dismayed but frankly not surprised at the lack of effort, which had been made for this new unit to be formed at Stafford.

Within a matter of hours, I was told that we had been volunteered for an exercise. "We", at that stage, consisted of me, but I was quickly joined by Cpl Coleman and 5 other airmen. We had been pre-briefed to take part in a joint exercise being held in Scotland at RAF Kinloss to help operate the emergency fuel handling equipment (EFE), which was originally designed to take fuel off from Dracones at sea, pump fuel 25 miles through the desert to a non-established base.

These airmen were keen, enthusiastic and totally ignorant of what they were going to have to do. We had no combat clothing, we had no vehicles, in fact, and we had nothing, except what we stood up in, and our keenness and determination to achieve a good result. In hindsight, I should really have withdrawn from this exercise, but that was not my style. I borrowed a telephone, or at least had one installed within a matter of hours, and after 2 days, heavy phoning and shouting at a number of people I managed to get a long wheelbase Land Rover, 2 tents and a motley mixture of uniforms and protective clothing. Thus equipped, Cpl Coleman and his 5 helpers drove to Kinloss together with myself to set up our first exercise. In hindsight, it was a success.



**Cpl Jim Coleman, Sac Fred Redwood refuelling a Lightning aircraft, RAF Kinloss**

We were not sure what we were doing, but we quickly assumed authority and responsibility, even if it was without much professional knowledge. In the mean time I dispatched myself with two organizations which would be my tasking commands in the future in RAF Air Support Command at Upavon, which was responsible for air transport operations and the Army's Strategic Command at Wilton. Sqn Ldr Jim Shearer, another future OC TSW was the 'tame' Supplier within the Army HQ. This was followed, by a visit to RAF Maintenance Command at Andover, within whose jurisdiction I came. The big problem was that TSW was not written into any of the Joint Theatre Plans, and unless an organisation appeared in the Joint Theatre Plan, then it did not translate into an operation order and would not be called upon when war or a warlike situation occurs. Of course, HQMC was very unaccustomed to having an 'operational' unit under its command so TSW was a culture shock.

Fortunately, an old friend, Sqn Ldr Mike Slade, had been posted from MOD Mobility Plans to Strategic Command Central Staff. Their responsibility was preparing Joint Theatre Plans, and between us we rapidly wrote TSW into as many plans as we could lay our hands on, irrespective or not of whether we thought we

were capable of achieving the aim of the operation. I received from Air Support Command and Strategic Command nothing but help, co-operation and encouragement. Alas, this was not the case with Maintenance Command. I was greeted with suspicion by senior staff, told quite firmly that I was to do what I was told, go back to Stafford and write out the training notes and précis, which would then be forwarded to Command staff for approval. I think we can draw a veil over this particular episode by saying that I was not on particularly good terms with the immediate staff at Maintenance Command at the time. The desk officers were quite helpful, but unfortunately, at Gp Capt level I encountered the most difficulty. Today of course Logistics Branch Group Captains are nothing but co-operative.

It was on this shaky basis that I set about forming the Tactical Supply Wing proper. My first officer was posted in, Flying Officer Brett Morrell, rapidly followed by Flight Lieutenant Robin Springett (another future OC TSW -in Gulf War 1). It was on these two officers that the burden fell of making the Wing work. I was really the blind leading the blind. I chased around looking for opportunity, trying to find equipment, for example the scaling of tentage for TSW in those days was 24 tents for the whole Wing, an application for an increase in scale was rejected by MOD; we then demanded, I think, 100 or so tents by bits and pieces, to bring ourselves to a reasonable holding. The MOD supply system being what it is promptly provided 100 tents, albeit under individual part numbers.



**SAC Colin Garner, Cpl Jim Coleman, Cpl Brian Toates (Gen Eng)**



### **Early Equipment Initiatives! (APFC on the left)**

We spent our first few months really deciding how to select personnel, which was our first priority. I decided to set a very high standard in both professional ability and physical fitness. For example, when we were not on operations or exercises, there was a mandatory hour's physical training Monday to Friday, for Officers, SNCO's and Airmen, and a compulsory attendance of 2 days a week for Officers of the non-cadre. Life was very blurred and confusing, On the one hand I would be discussing with Air Support Command when I could provide supply support, including refuelling, for such and such an exercise; on the other hand, I had nobody to do it. There was no training machinery to teach us - indeed there was very little equipment. Such equipment as we needed we found. I discovered a 10,000 gallon flexible fuel tank in a hangar on one operational unit where they had had it for a trial. There was a 150 gpm pump along with that tank which was almost solid with rust. We put our feelers around the RAF, and we found bits of equipment here, there and everywhere. Eventually, of course, E36 having done their stuff, we received some brand new pumps from the manufacturers- we never did get, in my time, the proper scaling of Air Portable Fuel Containers (APFCs). We operated with I believe about 50 or 60 which we scrounged, found on Army units as well as Air Force units; equipment which had been used essentially for trial. Cold weather clothing for operating in the Arctic was like gold dust; I literally stole the cold weather clothing from Air Support Command and refused to give it back

to them. The combat clothing was scarce; no-one in the Air Force could understand why a blue-suited man wanted to look like a soldier. Indeed, I well remember on an inspection of the unit the Personnel Staff from Maintenance Command commented on the irregular wearing of Army- type uniform by airmen, and I was instructed to cease the wearing of this unauthorised clothing, that is to say, “woolly-pullies and green trousers. Needless to say, I ignored the instruction.

Initially TSW comprised a permanent cadre level of 46 with non-cadre personnel from 16 MU RAF Stafford creating another 113 men on permanent standby. Out of the starting 159 men in total, only 9 were not from Trade Group 18 (Supply & Movements) but all were volunteers.

With limited gym equipment and a need for a more robust fitness regime than was required in the days of V Force Support, training for refuelling was non-existent. To achieve this I established liaison with the helicopter squadrons at RAF Odiham and the Harrier Squadron at RAF Wittering and dispatched my men there.

They were checked out by the Station Engineering Officer to be declared as safe and competent to refuel aeroplanes. We designed our own pressure refuelling systems using bits of old systems), 10,000 gallon tanks, anything we could lay our hands on. I literally bullied our way into exercises and operations, we accepted everything. There were occasions in the early days when we had as many as 100 men out on exercise to gain the necessary experience. We refuelled and supported anything - Italian aircraft, transport aircraft; no job was turned down. I was aiming at this time to establish a rapid reputation. I wanted the Wing to be accepted by everybody. In this respect the hard work put in by the Officers, SNCO's and airmen at the time was most gratifying. To many people, it was almost unbelievable that we could take Trade Group 18 Supply airmen from RAF Stafford and within a training period of 6 to 8 weeks, turn them into highly professional tradesmen in the field. I was careful not to neglect their normal professional training, that is to say operating Supply Squadrons. The difficulty was, that unlike to-day, then it was easy to practice refuelling in the field, but not so easy to practice supply support, if only that the exercises were too small to really produce the sort of effort that one needed, for example, for the Falklands or Gulf War 1. Nevertheless, I recognised the importance of maintaining their professional level.



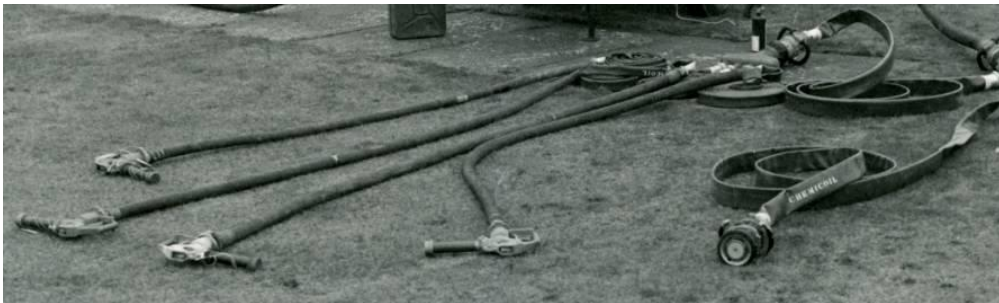
One of the early problems was what to do about the non-cadre airmen. It is a great temptation to run a cadre system and use the non-cadre personnel as a sort of second-class citizen, only bringing them forward when absolutely necessary, and whilst in the first six months this was the only way we could run, I introduced very early on the system of running 6 teams, indeed the team system was invented whilst I was at RAF Stafford, with a team consisting primarily of a Corporal plus 5 airmen. The cadre consisted of 6 teams. At any time 4 of those would be fully operational and 2 would be under training. As the 2 training cadres neared their peak, then 2 teams were disbanded from the cadre and put back into the Depot as a team, though in different locations and 2 more training teams were brought in. This varied of course, sometimes with 2 teams sometimes with 1. It was very hard to put the best men back into the Depot but in my view absolutely essential if one was to achieve high professionalism throughout the whole of the Wing. It was not unusual, when it became a team's turn to go back into the Depot to have to have a deputation in my office pleading their special case. Each one, regrettably, I had to turn down.

I laid great emphasis, in the early days, upon physical fitness and ground combat training, and we were fortunate that we were able to take advantage of the local Army Regiment (The Prince of Wales) who were very helpful and gave us much valuable training and advice and help. Without the Army's assistance in ground combat training we would been in poor shape to take on some of the commitments which we did. You must recall that at the time it was a fairly volatile period and we still had big responsibilities in Africa.

I would like to make reference to specific instances which the Wing was concerned with in its early days. First we declared ourselves operational on 1 January 1971, that is to say, one year and a few months after I arrived. Because of the background work I had done with Mike Slade and with Upavon we were drawn into exercises and operations and, as I have said, we turned down nothing, and although we were declared operational on 1 January 1971 we in fact took part in a number of minor exercises before that. Shortly after we were declared operational, I was instructed to go to Wilton where I was briefed on a most secret venture at the time. This was to be the evacuation of all British citizens from Uganda using Entebbe as the base. This could only be achieve by using staging posts in the Indian Ocean and the Wing was tasked with providing refuelling storage and refuelling supply support in the Seychelles, and I had to put 2 teams

on board an Royal Fleet Auxiliary Tanker. In fact they remained afloat for 3 months. I had to select 2 teams to go into Entebbe with the Parachute Regiment with an expected casualty rate of 50%. I found this not an easy thing to do and of course the operation never took place. Nevertheless it was an extremely good test of the Wing's organization and its training. The fact that I was not permitted to brief anyone else, including the Stn Cdr or the Command staff, on the operation did little to improve the relationships which existed at the time.

The second event I wish to mention is the first major helicopter exercise which took place in Otterburn, North East England (SKY WARRIOR) with helicopters from all 3 services and one or two from the Americans and 50- plus aircraft. It was prior to this that we in the Wing developed, at the prodding and instigation of Cpl Jim Coleman, plus assistance from our people, the now accepted system whereby a number of choppers can be refuelled from one point. Up to that time, the turn round time for refuelling one aeroplane in the field was 20 minutes and indeed it flew back to a safe refuelling point. The introduction of the 'Splitter Box' radically changed things to refuelling of up to 20 Helicopters in 20 minutes.



### **The 'Splitter Box' demonstrating how four open lines can be run off one Soft Line**

It came about when we used some water pipes and a box and some oil cans to test the theory and we purchased the splitter boxes on local purchase from the manufacturer of the 150 gpm pumps, all done in 6 weeks. The modification

committee approved the modification in retrospect. Likewise, we had adapted hot line refuelling, rotors turning refuelling and had been operating this for 18 months or so before it was announced that a trial would take place at RAF Odiham.

The Otterburn Exercise was the first time that we operated in a simulated battle zone. This came about from an operational conference held by GOC 3 Div and AOC 38 Gp which suggested that we could get more utilisation out of the aircraft if we actually flew the fuel to the edge of the battle zone so that the helicopters moving the troops backwards and forwards, and the supplies, could refuel up and down the edge of the battle zone rather than flying back 50 kilometres. This was an outstanding success considering we made it up as we went along and is now reflected in standard procedures with TSW. It is valuable developments like this by which a small, professionally-trained organisation can make its mark.

The early days of TSW were marked by extremely high morale and very high standards of professional performance. If an airman or officer for that matter did not match up to the standards he was returned to normal Depot duties. I can't remember how many airmen we put back into the Depot, but it was a large number and they went back for a number of reasons. Indeed two officers failed to meet the standards at the time. Overall, and without trying to go into all the details, exercises and operations which we carried out in the first 2 years of the TSW existence we developed from empty rooms, no equipment, no expertise, and little knowledge, to a highly proficient, first-class outfit within 12 months. The credit for this goes not to one individual but to all the officers, SNCO's and Airmen of the time, and indeed to the then Wg Cdr Supply and Wg Cdr Support at RAF Stafford, both of whom were senior in age and experience to me and who gave me loads of co-operation and help in setting up this most vital unit of the RAF field force, and Joint Helicopter Command today."



**AVM Don Hills (second right)**  
**with Station Commander –the then Gp**  
**Capt Derek O'Hara hears about the**  
**reality of the Wing CG created. Others**  
**in the picture are Flt Lt Brian Field (first**

By the time C-G had completed his tour of duty and the Wing had become a credible Force its importance to the UK contribution of helicopters and Harrier jets to NATO led to it becoming an important UK logistics element in three key NATO activities:

- Allied Command Europe (ACE) Mobile Force (Land) – AMF (L) - Helicopter Support
- UK Mobile Force (Land) - UKMF (L) - Helicopter Support
- SACEUR Strategic Reserve (Air) - SSR (A) - Harrier Support

Both the AMF (L) and SSR (A) commitments involved the need for deployment to the flanks of NATO (The Arctic circle or Turkey/Greece. In the former case this entailed training for and delivering a service in Arctic conditions. Training of the Wing therefore entailed ensuring that an Arctic capability in terms of men and equipment was sustained at all times. The late Wing Commander Jim Shearer's time in Command (1973 - 1975) took forward and consolidated the sound foundation laid by C-G



**Early THFE being used 'in the field'**

The foundation upon which TSW's success was, and is based, is its constant preparedness during times of peace. This is developed through teamwork, continuous training, and implementation of local initiatives, technological advancements and strong leadership. Since its formation, TSW has been closely involved with ensuring effective support to its range of customers. Not all can be told. Little is heard of some of these initiatives, be it de-fuelling concepts for Engines Running C-130s or Rotors Turning Refuelling trials for the Chinook. Indeed, the introduction of the Chinook in the 80's caused a significant rethink of concepts that have stood the test of time. This led in 1985 to the first (and only) award to a non-flying unit of the "Wilkinson Battle of Britain Memorial Sword" for enhanced operational effectiveness of the Support Helicopter Force. It was presented to the Wing on the 20th October 1986 by Air Chief Marshal Sir David Craig GCB.OBE.ADC.MA.RAF. Chief of Staff (CAS). Although the sword was presented to the TSW CO at the time Wg Cdr A.P.Matthews MBE, The person who wrote the winning paper on the Chinook Concept was the previous TSW CO Wg Cdr Duncan Grant M.Inst.P.S. (Now a retired Group Captain). Also attending the presentation were Gp Capt (later Air Mshl) Sir Timothy) Garden and Gp Capt Packman. The latter was then in MoD Supply Policy and Logs Plans (RAF) with responsibility for writing TSW into any number of NATO and out-of-area operational plans.

## **CHAPTER 2: OPERATIONS AND EXERCISES - 1970s**

### **Operation BANNER - Northern Ireland**

#### **1971 to 2008**

TSW's first operational deployment after its formation was to Northern Ireland (NI) in 1971. At this time NI was entering into one of its darkest and most difficult periods. The use of helicopters was increased to support the troops on the ground, to aid in intelligence gathering in the region, and to aid rapid deployment of Special Forces elements. As such, TSW had to deploy to various locations across NI to help maintain these efforts.

Initially TSW were based at Bessbrook Mill and Castle Dillon. However, in September 1979 a third refuelling point was located at St Angelo to the west of the province. TSW teams gained a justifiably high reputation for their flexibility in support, often undertaking short notice off-base deployments, in an openly hostile theatre, in support of special tasks. For certain periods this resulted in up to five refuelling bases being used. Sadly 1979 also saw the Parachute Regiment suffering significant casualties in a bomb attack at Warren Point. TSW's role was vital to ensure that the helicopters were able to CASEVAC the wounded to Musgrave Hospital in Belfast quickly.



**RAF Puma picking up an underslung load at Bessbrook HLS, Northern Ireland**

The award of an AOC's Commendation to SAC Pete Donkin in the early 80's best exemplifies the operational and flight safety awareness inherent in all TSW's tasks. At Bessbrook, Pete was instrumental in identifying and extinguishing an aircraft fire during a refuelling task, much to the relief of Pete not to mention the Pilot and Passengers! The many duties in NI were maintained, without a break until peace came following the 1998 Good Friday Agreement.

As Detachment Commander in 1979 and during the Warren Point Bombing, I was extremely proud of the way the TSW lads handled themselves at a very difficult time. On a more light-hearted point, the TSW teams were always telling me about the Air Crew coming into our crew room and making themselves a bacon butty and then just leaving the dirty frying pan for the lads to clean up after them! I was always on to the teams telling them that I wanted the kitchen and crew room to be a credit to the Wing, as we were co-located with the Army. I had to do something about it. So on one occasion, as the crewman had not long left the kitchen to go down to his aircraft, I grabbed the frying pan and went after him. I got to the aircraft just in time, as it was just about to take off. So I threw the frying pan into the aircraft and told the crewman to clean it when he got back!

### **Exercise Hellenic Express**

#### **Sept 1971.**

A Detachment of the Wing took part in Exercise Hellenic Express in Southern Greece where they supported helicopters from UK, (RAF and ARMY), USA, Belgium and Greece. Some 180 aircraft were refuelled using 6 APFC's and 1 Lightweight pump, TSW have come a long way since those days.

#### **Exercises in 1972.**

TSW participated in seven major exercises during 1972. The year commenced with an exercise in Norway for NATO training. The Wing did manage to deploy to sunny climates, including RAF Gan in the Maldives for tropical fuel handling trials and the Bahamas (Nov-Dec) in support of Wessex and Puma helicopters.

## **Exercises and Operations in 1973.**

TSW had eight major exercises in this year. A team deployed to RAF Thorney Island for training in refuelling Andover's in preparation for exercise, Hardfall. The Wing was involved in two major Operation; codenames, "KHANA CASCADE" and "LUCAN" respectively. Details are set out below:

### **Op KHANA CASCADE - Nepal**

At the height of the Nepalese drought of 1973, the proud hill tribes of Nepal began to succumb to a desperate situation. The normally regular monsoon rains that they had come to rely upon had not arrived for over 2 years. Their meagre store of seed grain had been eaten for survival and other possessions sold for food. It had also been reported that some heads of family had administered poison to everyone in their family in order to prevent further suffering in a no-hope situation. Following a request for famine relief by the Nepalese Government the British mounted Op KHANA CASCADE in February 1973. The prospect of aiding the Himalayan Country, home to the famous fighting Ghurkhas, generated much interest within the Forces and a rush of offers from across the RAF's mobile units ensued.



**Ground Engineering Nepal 1973**



As this was the first operation of its kind, no contingency plan existed and so a reconnaissance team was dispatched to Kathmandu. The basic plan was for the UK to set up and run the aid effort as our contribution to the United Nations that year. Wheat and rice grain, supplied by the USA, would be delivered to an airfield at Bhairawa by the Nepal/India border. Once there, the food supplies would be divided into 1 Ton airdrop loads and delivered to all of the stricken areas by the RAF until 1800 tons of grain had been delivered. It soon became apparent that the main logistical problem would be fuel. Nepal's airports could only cater for light aircraft with larger aircraft refuelled in New Delhi or Calcutta. To solve this problem TSW were tasked with providing 40,000 gallons of fuel at Bhairawa and further support from a smaller detachment set up to the east of the country at Kharan. The first TSW contingent to reach Nepal was led by Detachment Commander WO Trevor Tipton who described the event as follows:

"It took us over 24 hrs to reach Nepal from RAF Lyneham in the back of a rickety Hercules. Reaching Nepal was a real culture shock. The place didn't seem to have been touched for 500 years before we got there and the level of poverty was heart breaking."



**Khana Cascade Nepal 1973**

Prior to arrival, the British Army Ghurkha depot at Paklihawa Camp had set up basic tentage and ablutions. As soon as we landed the monsoon rains, the absence of which had caused the crises, arrived with a vengeance. The arrival of the rains was a godsend to the Nepalese but played havoc with the initial deployment. The airfield camp was christened "Canvas City" and by day 3, both food and fuel were ready for issue. For the majority of the detachment, climatic conditions were demanding. The heat was oppressive (over 100 degrees F) and the air humid. This was only countered by carrying out most of the work in the evenings. The men worked 12 hours a day, 7 days a week with an R&R break in Kathmandu after 4 weeks. Once working routine was in operation life was rather more bearable and often enjoyable, Due to the dubious safety of the local food, ration packs were the norm. These were supplemented with the infrequent arrival of tinned and frozen food. After sacking the resident Sergeant Chef for lack of imagination (2 weeks of cold salmon and potato salad) a hand-picked Warrant Officer was appointed as detachment chef who quickly produced a bounty of frozen goodies and instantly raised morale. Film shows were held nightly, but after the umpteenth showing of "ZULU", monopoly again became the entertainment of choice.

Militarily the Operation had been a complete success. It had been the largest RAF food-lift since the blockade of Berlin in 1948 and acted as a testing ground for the Wing. The Nepalese government was extremely impressed with the speed and determination of the aid effort and later sent out jewel encrusted Khukris for presentation to a chosen few (including WO Tipton on behalf of the Wing) throughout this period the men of TSW worked unerringly. Not only had they managed to help prevent a humanitarian disaster but also managed to maintain the excellent reputation of the Wing. This was the first major operation that the Wing was involved in and this set the standard for future deployments.

### **Op LUCAN - Pakistan and Bangladesh**

Later that same year, TSW were involved in a now almost forgotten Operation called Op LUCAN. This was another humanitarian aid effort to help the refugees of Pakistan and Bangladesh following major floods in the region. TSW were based at Karachi in Pakistan and carried out the refuelling and blending of the RAF Britannia aircraft involved. In total over 200,000 refugees were flown out of the area and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Sadruddin Aga Khan, described the Operation as "The biggest ever airlift of human beings".

## Exercises in 1974

There were only four major exercises during this year. However these did involve the Wing deploying to Sardinia, Denmark, Germany and Beef Island in the British Virgin Islands. The most important exercise of the year, was `SHARPWING`, when the Wing supported NATO exercise forces. More importantly from a historical perspective was the fact that 1973 was the year that TSW was first involved in a NATO Tactical Evaluation.

## The 1975 Exercise Season

TSW participated in seven major exercises in 1975. The annual journey to Norway for NATO Winter Training-Exercise `HARDFALL`, occurred in February and March. Later in the year the Wing deployed to Masirah Island, Muscat and Turkey. The Turkish deployment, codenamed `DEEP EXPRESS` involved refuelling 32 Wessex helicopters.

During the year, there were also three major demonstrations of the Wing's capability which are worthy of note;

- RAF Wittering.

A demonstration of refuelling techniques for the Swiss Defence Attaché and the Chief of Staff for the French Air Force.

- RAF Lyneham.

A demonstration of refuelling techniques for a visit of Her Majesty the Queen in June 1973. Also at the same location, on 26-29 June 1973, a demonstration for the Italian Air Force Chief.

- RAF Odiham

A demonstration of refuelling techniques was given to Air Marshal W J Stacey, Deputy C in C (Designate) RAF STC on the 11 Dec 1975.

## **British Honduras (Belize) 1975 to 1979**

Belize (formerly British Honduras) is a former British dependency on the Eastern coast of Central America. The Republic of Guatemala, which lies to the south of Belize, had long disputed British sovereignty over the country. Following an agreed independence Settlement between Britain and Belize in June 1975, Guatemala began to increase its military forces on the Belizean border. On 2nd November 1975. The British Government approved the request from the Government of Belize, for military assistance to counter the increased threat of aggression. The public display of support resulted in the deployment of Harriers from RAF Wittering and Puma helicopters from RAF Odiham. Initially the individual units deployed performed their own supply functions through their own Mobile Supply Flights. As a result the logistics chain lacked central control, caused duplication and was overall inefficient. Consequently, on the 9th Nov 1975, a TSW officer (Flt Lt Roger Maunder) was deployed to Belize to co-ordinate deployment, re-supply and re-fuelling issues. It soon became apparent that a more robust supply process was necessary and so a detachment from RAF Stafford was organised and rushed out to support the air operations in Belize. The TSW detachment of 14 personnel majored principally on aircraft refuelling issues by manning the two 10000 gallon Pillow tank sites at Punta Gorda and Rideau and the 2 air portable refuelling points at Salamanca and Holdfast Camps. They also operated 2 land rovers in the re-supply role.



**Camp Salamanca**

After a few weeks, Flt Lt John Furney replaced Flt Lt Maunder for the Christmas and New Year period and he was then replaced on 4 January 1976 by the then Fg Off Pete Whalley, the first 'permanent' officer detachee. Based with his Army supply specialists (2 Majors who operated off tartan blanket covered desks!) the co-ordination function was strengthened substantially and, of significant note, control of all fuel matters at Belize International Airport was wrested from the local Shell office in Belize City. At a stroke, the quality of aviation fuel improved if for no other reason than the elimination of bolts and other ironmongery from the tankers, pumps and filters!



### **Belize 1977**

Supported by FS Mervyn Cork and half of a UK MAMS team on frequent rotation from RAF Lyneham, the daily routine became fairly consistent. Nevertheless, one event affected everyone – the severe earthquake that hit Guatemala one night in February 1976. Having loaded a C130 Hercules the previous afternoon in preparation for departure to the UK next day, orders were issued by London to offload the aircraft and re-load it with humanitarian aid support. That decision seemed somewhat surreal to detachment personnel who recognised that they were only there because of the aggressive stance of the Guatemalan government. In the event, no aid was dispatched, and the aircraft was reloaded and dispatched to the UK 4 days later.

By the end of April 1976, coincident with Fg Off Steve Hayes taking over Det Cdr duties, preparations were made for the return of the Harrier detachment to the UK. TSW personnel, assisted by UK MAMS personnel were instrumental in the back-load of equipment. Subsequently, with only the Puma detachment

remaining, it was decided to amend the multi-detachment organisation and a formal self-accounting S&M Flt under TSW control was established. That arrangement continued successfully from Jun 76 until Jun 78, at which point the theatre was deemed non-tactical, the S&M Flt became a regular unit within the STC and TSW's involvement in Belize ended when a non-TSW officer took command of the organisation.

### **My recollections of TSW by Adam Byers.**

Little did he know when he was first called to be interviewed to be put on the non-cadre strength as a Sgt in 1975, which he was not over excited about at the time. That one day he would end up as being, most likely the first person since WWII to be promoted to Warrant Officer in the field. Whilst he was deployed in the Falklands War.

Anyway here are his recollections of his time on TSW.

I was posted to 16MU RAF Stafford from Germany in November 1975 and put in charge of `B` Shed on 1 Site.

A couple of weeks after my arrival I was sent to TSW for an interview regarding joining TSW non-cadre. The interview did not go well, when I said I was not interested in TSW and not having worked on the Depot before, had still to become completely au fait with Depot procedures. It was finally agreed that I would not be called up for TSW duties for 6 months.

### **Northern Ireland**

At the end of the 6 months period I was notified that I would be going to Northern Ireland, in June 76, as TSW Detachment Commander and that I would be in charge of helicopter refuelling installations at Bessbrook, Castle Dillon and St Angelo.

On getting this news I asked what prior training I would require and was advised I would require a fuels course , an equipment familiarization course and a `counter surveillance` course. Over the next few weeks I chased TSW to find out when I was going on these courses, as time for my deployment was getting ever closer. Eventually, the week before I was due to be deployed, I was called up to

TSW. Shown how to cam a Land Rover (essential for Northern Ireland what?) and saw a 10,000 gallon pillow tank unrolled then re-rolled. I learned later that the guy I was replacing was discharged from the RAF. Apparently he'd put MT Diesel fuel into the Avtur tank (I wonder if he'd done the fuels course).

After being in Northern Ireland for 3 weeks, an Army lorry arrived and unloaded a large box .The driver saying it was from TSW. Nobody had advised me of this item coming, so I rang TSW for some clarification. They told me that the item in the box was a 30,000 gallon pillow tank and that I had to replace the existing 10,000 gallon pillow tank, which would eventually be re-positioned on site. I asked what manpower arrangements had been made for the changeover of tanks, only to be advised that I would have to get some "Grunts" from the Army to help me. Bearing in mind I only had 2 lads per shift to give a 24 Hour refuelling capability. I was not a Happy Chappie! On looking at the task I became convinced that the 30,000 gallon tank would not fit into the 10,000 gallon tank's bund. Subsequent measurement (with a 12 inch desk rule) proved that the tank, with 30,000 gallons in it, would just fit, but once you started to use fuel, the tank would flatten out and fold against the sides of the bund. Neither would the existing drain channel fit the new tank. I rang TSW again and voiced my concern and thought a lot of snags could happen; especially should a major incident occur when we had only fuel in 45 gallon drums. It was then decided to suspend the whole operation till a future date.

I think the above shows I wasn't overly impressed by the organisation in TSW at that time. "Fred Carno" comes to mind.

Just a little post script;

You can't say that this book doesn't show warts and all.

### **Belize- A view by the late Warrant Officer A Byers.**

The RAF barrack lines were a series of hutted buildings. Periodic inspections were carried out by the CO. On the occasion of one inspection before going to work, I went to our hut to ensure the lads had bulled our hut properly. Everything was fine so that was that (I thought) and we all left for work. About two hours later a message came for me to report to the RSM immediately. Wondering what was



wrong, off I went to see him, only to be greeted as I entered his office by “Your lines were \*\*\*\* on inspection this morning Sergeant” I replied that I was sorry to hear that but that I had inspected the TSW hut before going to work and that everything seemed OK at that time. His response was “I’m telling you they were \*\*\*\*” I replied by saying “before we take this conversation any further I want to go and look at TSW’s Billet” and strode out of his office not well pleased. When I got to the hut it was (in my opinion) very smart so I couldn’t understand how the problem had arisen. The RAF Tactical Communications Wing (TCW) detachment was billeted next door so I went in there to see if they had any problems. Their billet was indeed as the RSM described in a real heap! So the RSM had cocked it up himself, and put TSW instead of TCW as being on report (I suppose a reasonable mistake for a wooden top!).

On returning to the RSM’s office and informing him that he’d got the huts cocked up, he didn’t even have the good grace to acknowledge he’d got it wrong. However, the best part was still to come. Instead, he roared at two army guys walking down the road and barged out of the office. Thinking that’s the end of that, I followed him outside to make my way back to the fuel installation. The RSM was by now berating the two soldiers on their standard of dress and the way they were carrying their weapons, while they just stood grinning at him. They turned away from him and sauntered off. (I found out later they were two SAS guys). At this point an RAF Land Rover came passed apparently exceeding the camp speed limit. The RSM roared “Hey You” whereupon the Land Rover screeched to a halt, the driver’s door opened, a head appeared and said “I’m neither a Hey nor a You I’m an Excuse Me, then the door shut and the Land rover roared off. The RSM’s face was a picture; he was so dumbstruck that I don’t think he got the vehicle number.

### **Operation AGUILA – Rhodesia December 1979-February 1980**

Towards the end of the 1970s, Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) was in a state of civil war after Britain had handed self-government back to the Rhodesians. Following the successful negotiations between the ZANA and ZAPU guerrillas and the then Rhodesian government, a five-nation Ceasefire Monitoring Force was established to oversee the peace and restore democracy. Towards the end of 1979, seven Hercules aircraft of No 47 and No 70 Squadrons, together with 6 Pumas of No 33 Squadron, were dispatched to Harare International Airport. On arrival it was

deemed necessary to have their own fuel blending capability and so on 23rd December a TSW detachment arrived to complete these duties. They remained in Rhodesia until early 1980 to oversee the transition of power and the successful restoration of democracy.

## **CHAPTER 3: OPERATIONS, EXERCISES, AND MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES - THE 1980`s**

### **Exercises**

#### **1980**

This was a busy year for the Wing, being involved in 12 major exercises. The year started with the annual winter exercise HARDFALL/ ATLAS EXPRESS in Norway. TSW was involved in a number of other NATO exercises. There were 2 major events of note during this year.

- A TSW evaluation for operational effectiveness (Mineval) from 18-27 May
- The participation in Crusader 80, a major NATO reinforcement exercise.

The Wing also cemented its relationship with the Americans by participating in exercise "NIGHT EAGLE" at Netheravon during November. This involved refuelling Chinook and Huey aircraft of the US Army. The other major exercises were; Tiger Head, Ardent Ground, Roman Senator, Hart Quest, Rotten Rub, Tank Change and Anvil Express.

#### **1981**

During this year TSW participated in 11 major exercises. Major overseas deployments included Hardfall 81/Cold Winter 81 in Norway, Amber Express in Denmark and Ardent Ground in Portugal. Amber Express was by far the largest single commitment TSW met that year, with 92 men deployed over 3 concepts in the field for the best part of a month including travel. Significant exercises within the United Kingdom which called for TSW's support included Hars Quest 81(33 Sqn RAF Pumas), Deft Noon (1 Sqn RAF Harriers), Rough Diamond (RN and RM helicopters) and Brave Warrior (US Army Chinooks). Since Amber Express included a trial deployment of two 18 Sqn RAF aircraft, the Wing accumulated a good deal of experience on open-line refuelling of the Chinook.

## **1982**

Despite Operation Corporate, the Falklands war, the demand for TSW participation in field exercises both at home and abroad during 1982 continued almost unabated. TSW actually participated in 8 major exercises during the year. Major overseas deployments included Hardfall 82/Alloy Express 82 in Norway, Bold Guard in Schleswig-Holstein (a refuelling service for the UKMF (A) Support Helicopter Force, and finally a deployment to Dakar. Significant exercises within the United Kingdom which called for TSW support including Welsh Falcon (Puma a/c of 33 Sqn in Support of 5 Infantry Brigade due for deployment to the Falklands and exercise Green Lanyard (18 and 33 Sqn RAF.)

A tactical fuelling demonstration was given to HRH Princess Anne on the 27<sup>th</sup> April 1982 when she visited RAF Stafford.

### **Operation CORPORATE- Falkland Islands- Apr to July 1982**

On 2nd April 1982, an invasion force from the Military governed country of Argentina landed and took control of Port Stanley, the capital of the Falkland Islands. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher called an emergency meeting of the War Cabinet and a declaration of war was confirmed that same day. TSW were involved from the outset and elements of the Wing deployed with Task Force 317 to the South Atlantic with a majority of the manpower being deployed in stages for duties with the Task Force on board ships at Dakar, on Ascension Island and on East Falkland. TSW's task was two-fold. First, it had to co-ordinate the supply support at Ascension Island and provide aviation fuel to the aircraft bases on the Island, including the famous Vulcan "Black Buck" raid and the massive air-to-air refuelling operation by Victor Tanker aircraft.



### **The Ascension Island Connection**

The re-taking of the Falkland Islands was seen as a RN only do, not least by the Navy, which was facing the savage “John Nott” cuts. Adam Byers and Jim Coleman describe well how TSW were tasked to provide on ship and ashore support, mainly for Harriers, but inevitably also helicopters. However, the link connecting the UK with the South Atlantic was the small British Dependency of Ascension Island, situated 8 degrees south of the Equator, it was in the Southern Ocean, but only just! Wideawake Airfield had been built in WW2 by US Forces; it was owned and operated by the USAF, largely in support of NASA moon shots, but also by USAF, USN and CIA. Day to day operation was by a US contractor with just a few USAF officers in contract compliance roles.

The Navy decamped en-mass to Ascension, as it was the last possible destination en-route to the exclusion zone for ships to collect stores flown from UK. In command of UK forces was a RN Captain, one McQueen. He was a most difficult person, but even he realised that the RN needed help from the other Services. As the RAF presence built up with maritime, transport and tanker aircraft, the RAF was asked to send a “two and a half” (squadron leader in RAF parlance) to handle air stores, to coordinate first level Supply Fly Away Packs (FAPs) and act as the RAF advisor on logistics. The then Sqn Ldr Robin Springett (who commanded the Wing during part of Gulf war 1 some 10 years later and retired as a Gp Capt) in shared an MoD Supply Policy office room with the TSW desk officer (Nigel Coleman, later Gp Capt). RAF Support Command was asked to send a Sqn Ldr and ended up sending a Flying Officer!

Nigel arranged to give the nominee local acting Flt Lt, but McQueen wasn't impressed and the poor guy was turned round very quickly, to be replaced with a TSW non-cadre Sqn Ldr who got off on the wrong foot with the Captain, and only lasted 14 days! Wg Cdr Roger Cox, Robin's Head of Branch, relieved Support Command of the task of providing an officer and told him he was specially selected from a cast of one! Robin had served for 4 years on TSW and had a reasonable joint logistics background, but had just 48 hours to get back to his home in Devon, get kitted and get himself to Brize Norton for the VC10 flight.



### **Ascension Islands**

The Logistics set up on Ascension at Wideawake Airfield had been set up by the RN and had become "Joint" as additional personnel arrived. OC Logs was a RN Commander (Supply & Secretarial). Air Stores had been handled by a small team of RN storemen, led by a RN Supply Fleet Chief (WO), but as RAF Suppliers arrived, they began taking over from the Navy. Robin set out his stall as TSW Detachment Commander, became effectively OC Supply, and whilst the FAPs and staff never came under command, once the Supply Computer was set up and running, demands began to be channelled through TSW. Two large temporary storage tents were erected on the airfield, and even racking, shelving and fork lift trucks

arrived to ease the task of the supply tradesmen, who had taken over everything from the RN except the kitting of survivors from sunken ships.

At this point, the RAF had no responsibility for aviation fuel, which was being handled by a small detachment of Army POL tradesmen under an RAOC Captain. Briefly, RAF fuel was brought ashore from an ocean going "depot" tanker by floating pipeline and into the USAF twin storage tanks at Catherine Point (Georgetown), and trucked to Wideawake Airfield by road tanker; this was all undertaken by US contractors. To meet the daily uptake of fuel, the RE's had constructed a 6 x 135 cu meter pillow tank farm on the airfield, and RAF fuel tankers were arriving to assist with the bridging task. The RE's were also in the early stages of building a 6 inch "FEE" pipeline from Catherine Point to the airfield. This temporary pipeline became operational on 11 May and provided a throughput of about 2 cu metres a minute. With a peak of nearly 1,200 cu metres on maximum effort days, it was a very busy installation. As RAF manpower built up, and POL tradesmen, led by a TSW sergeant, began to arrive, an issue with quality control hastened the handover of the airfield fuel installation from the Army to the RAF (TSW). The pumping of fuel from Catherine Point to the airfield remained in RAOC hands.

Life quickly settled into a very busy routine. Manpower was short, and seven day working was the norm. TSW personnel were accommodated in a tented camp in the clinker at English Bay. Pressure on the airfield site and the all-pervading dust forced Robin to look around for alternative accommodation for the Supply Computer terminal and the supply control function. A site was found in Georgetown on the quay in an historic warehouse building, where the first element of what was to become in due time Supply Squadron RAF Ascension Island was established. Supply tradesmen, like servicemen everywhere, went about their business with minimum fuss, and in addition to doing the job, attempted to improve their comfort level. There was a scare that Argentinean marines might be landed from a submarine, and the RAF Regt cobbled together a "local defence force" which involved weapon firing on the range, and an increase in guard duties. An overflight by an Argentinean Boeing 707 resulted in the arrival of 2 RAF Phantoms to provide air cover and air defence radar was set up very rapidly on Green Mountain; known as Bowler Radar; this extended the supply runs to the top of Green Mountain. One rather odd duty was re-kitting personnel who survived the sinking of their ship in the Task Force. This was very slickly handled

by the RN; a list of survivors was obtained, and the parent service of the survivor was invited to make up a basic issue of kit, which was air freighted to ASI for issue once the survivors had been transported by sea to Ascension. They arrived in whatever kit they had scrounged in Stanley, and were re-kitted so that they at least looked like genuine military as they got off the VC-10 at Brize Norton and faced the press and TV. Now a look at "down south"

## **The Falklands**

Eight members of TSW fought in "Bomb Alley" in San Carlos waters aboard the Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA) Fort Austin and latterly RFA Fort Grange. One Sgt Jim Coleman was awarded a BEM. Officially seven of them except Cpl John Joyce set foot on the Island at Port San Carlos on the 26th June 82. In reality the detachment deployed its refuelling equipment onto "Blue Beach that is to say Ajax Bay" much earlier after Sgt Coleman had flown to meet up with the MV St Edmund with Flt. Lt Don Taylor and Flt. Sgt Adam Byers on board. They had agreed that rapid deployment to the shore was vital as a contingency in case the Fort Austin was hit and the equipment destroyed. Indeed this lesson had been learned on the 25th May when the Wing suffered a severe blow after the "Atlantic Conveyor", carrying much of TSW's equipment, was lost as a result of an Exocet missile attack. Attached to the Atlantic Conveyor at the time of its sinking was Cpl George Boother. He was the only TSW member on board the ship and, following his fortunate rescue, he was sent back to the UK via Ascension Islands.





### **The Atlantic Conveyor**

Cpl Boother later received a Commander Task Force 317 Commendation for his actions during the Atlantic Conveyor sinking for shutting down and making safe on board aircraft refuelling systems. George has sadly since passed away. He was a hell of a fellow; a small man but with the heart of a lion. His words to the returning initial deployment team headed by Jim Coleman are the measure of the man. He said "Well Jim there was nothing else I could do when the Conveyor was hit, because there was no way I was getting on that ship, I can't swim.!" He is much remembered by the Wing members and is sadly missed. The equipment lost on Atlantic Conveyor was replaced by sending a new shipment out on-board the MV Tor Caledonia under the custody of the then Cpl Bob McBey.



### **MV Tor Caledonia**

Despite these early setbacks, TSW were able to establish a Forward Arming and Refuelling Point (FARP) at Port San Carlos supporting both aircraft and ground forces attacking Port Stanley. Sgt Jim Coleman led the team, which was flown back to RAF Brize Norton arriving on the 25th July. They were greeted by the RAF Stafford Acting Stn Cdr, Wg Cdr John Pink and in the absence of OC TSW in the South Atlantic, Sqn Ldr John Brazier. All personnel were then flown by Puma to Stafford, courtesy of 33 Sqn; a measure of the high esteem in which the Wing was held.



### **Port San Carlos**

From an overall strength of 180 some 131 Wing personnel, found themselves in the South Atlantic Theatre for periods ranging from 1 to 4 months. One BEM (Flt/Sgt Jim Coleman Ret'd ), five Commendations by CTF 317 (WO Joe Ronan(The Wing WO at the time and now Ret'd), Cpl George Boothor, Cpl Bob McBey and now holds the BEM, J/T Ian Harrison a Gen/Fitt who was one of Sgt Coleman's team and Cpl Rae Harvey. and of course a large number of South Atlantic Campaign medals are a tangible record of the Wing's contribution to Operation CORPORATE and helped secure a position for the Wing in all future campaigns.

Adam Byers offered this recollection of his tour of duty during the Falklands War. He wrote as follows:-

“When the balloon went up we were tasked to deploy a team immediately and, not knowing exactly what was expected of us, I selected our most experienced SNCO (Sgt Jim Coleman) to lead the team; Jim had a wealth of TSW operating experience and adaptability in the field. They were duly dispatched by air to Ascension Island to board the RFA Fort Austin; the first ship to be deployed. Two days later I was sent to HQ RAF Strike Command to advise what additional equipment would be required for TSW. This was hairy stuff; we didn’t know exactly what our overall task was going to be i.e. refuelling only or refuelling and logistics re-supply. There were also requests coming in for men and equipment to man refuelling facilities being built on other ships that were preparing to sail. I was then informed that our main deployment would be to Falklands East Island and asked what was required in the way of equipment to set up a refuelling installation for 1 Sqn Harriers (It was called the ‘Bog Option’, because of the nature of its location). I hadn’t any idea how we stood equipment wise, there had been so many requests Accordingly, I said I’d have to return to the Wing to undertake further planning and signal our requirements the following day. Within 24 hrs equipment was arriving.

The manning for the main deployment was 1 Officer, 1 SNCO, 2 Cpls, 12 airmen suppliers and 1 engineer. I put myself down as the SNCO and eventually won the argument, (I thought, I have spent all this time planning exercises etc., I want to see how it works for real). When we arrived at Devonport it was raining and we couldn’t get aboard our ship (The MV St. Edward) so I told the lads to take shelter in a nearby toilet block. In the block were stacks of toilet rolls, ( you never know what to expect when deployed) as it happened it was a wise decision because the ship ran out of toilet paper before we disembarked and people had to use Klim-Wipe.

We left Devonport accompanied by the MV Contender Bezant, which was carrying, mainly, Helicopters and munitions. We stopped off at Freetown in Guyana to pick up provisions but everything we wanted appeared to be infested by weevils so we left empty handed; except for a “Sneaky Beaky” Russian trawler which followed us. At this point, the Senior Naval Officer (SNO) asked all units on board if they had any specialist skills that could help the running of the ship. The

helicopter refuelling kit on the two heli-decks were ours so I offered the "Fleet Chief" manpower to operate them, for which he was very grateful. However, a short time later, he called to see me and advised me that he had, on the SNO's orders, to decline our offer (in other words this was a navy ship and the navy would run it) regardless of how short staffed they were! This was hard to take; especially since it was our kit that was being used and we were more proficient at using it.

We enjoyed a two-day stopover at Ascension, to take on some Ghurkhas and an Army missile crew, and to let Contender Bezant do some running repairs before we set off south. About this time I received a signal from records office saying that it was imperative I reply to their previous signal asking for confirmation that I would accept promotion to Warrant Officer and advise when I would be able to take post. The first signal had obviously ended up in the Navy File 13 but, what I found amusing, was the bit about advising when I would be available to take up post, I thought I'll just check my crystal ball and see how long it's going to take us to win the war, instead I took a guess and said October 1982.

Our days were then passed carrying out weapons training and general fitness exercises. Our trip was then uneventful, until we arrived in the Tug Repair and Logistics Area (TRALA) where I was piped up to the Heli-deck to see Jim Coleman waiting for me; he said he'd been trying to contact me for days (again the SNO must have File 13'd our signals). Jim and his team had been transferred from the RFA Fort Austin to the RFA Fort Grange; which was about to sail for South Georgia, and wanted to know what he should do. They'd been shot at and bombed in the Falkland Sound and San Carlos Water (Bomb Alley) and hadn't received any signals I'd sent to him to find out where he and his team were. I told him if there were troops ashore then he should get ashore too and find out where to set up his refuelling installation. Jim got his team and equipment ashore. When the day came and our ship was making its run to East Island the destination was changed to Stanley. Apparently, the enemy had surrendered and we were redirected to Port Stanley.

We got held up in Port William on the way in because it wasn't known if the approach into Stanley was mined or not. Don Taylor and I took the opportunity of a helicopter lift into Stanley to see if we could find a suitable place for setting up our fuel installation on the airfield. We hiked our way to the airfield, passing about

60 Argentinean prisoners all following one British marine to Stanley. At the airfield there were hundreds of prisoners milling around makeshift tents or shelters. Don and I walked the length of the runway and decided on a place to set up; it was just off the runway opposite the ATC building. It was a good flat area to accommodate the pillow tanks and easy access to the sea re-supply. The area also had enough flat ground to accommodate helicopter refuelling and logistics.

When we got back to the MV Saint Edmund that evening we called the rest of the team together and explained the situation. We told them we were going ashore the next day because we wanted to make sure we got onto our site before any other unit got there before us. Cpl Wright and 4 others would stay aboard to get our accommodation stores to us ASAP followed by the refuelling kit. A helicopter dropped us off on the airfield the following morning. We survived on ration packs for a few days.

Before we had left UK we had heard that weather in the Falklands was temperate, knowing that what one guy thinks is temperate another might think Arctic, so I hedged our bets and added arctic clothing and heaters to our kit-list. This was very opportune because the next day we went from mild sunny conditions to complete white outs.

We managed to make contact with Jim Coleman. He and his team were set up at Port San Carlos and had to do their own ship to shore refuelling, so with his knowledge of these things, it's a good job Jim was the team leader. Now that we knew where each other were located, it was easy to get a lift in a helicopter if there was any problems that may need to be discussed at length."

*Note: Adam wrote these words just a few days before he passed away on the 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2008, aged 69.*

## **The 1980s-Post Operation Corporate**

Following the ending of the War in the South Atlantic TSW personnel remained in the Falkland Islands and to a lesser extent Ascension Island, while a small detachment remained in Dakar, Senegal.

However, by the end of 1982 all but the Senegal detachment had been replaced by Supply personnel from elsewhere in the Royal Air Force. The need to

retain equipment in theatre pending the rebuild of Stanley in particular meant that there was a need to restock the TSW Inventory

### **1983 Exercises**

During 1983 TSW participated in 12 major exercises. The major overseas deployments included Hardfall/ Coldwinter 83, the Wing's annual sojourn to Norway, Ardent Ground to Belgium, (Puma), and Adventure Express to Turkish Trace (in support of the AMF (L) FHU) and finally Ample Express to Denmark (IF RAF). On the home front TSW were involved in Osex 7 at RAF Hullavington in support of 10 Harrier aircraft; an International Air Tattoo at RAF Greenham Common, (33 Sqn RAF Puma). The major UK exercise for TSW was Windmill One, a field training exercise involving the deployment of both Cadre and Non- Cadre personnel of TSW. The exercise was designed to practice all areas of TSW operations including elements of SSR (A) and UKMF (A) concepts.

### **Changes**

Wing Commander Mike Barham, having sailed south with the Task Force and been closely involved with the conflict, was faced with the challenge of expending his energies in convincing the "system" that men and materiel were still needed! At that time, there were two TSW's! One, commanded by Wing Commander Bill Girdwood in the Falkland Islands, the other by Mike Barham in the UK reinvigorating the Wing. By the time his successor, Wing Commander Duncan Grant arrived to succeed Mike Barham in August 1983 much of this challenge remained.

In particular, there was a need to increase the cadre manpower by a significant amount to support the introduction of the Chinook-now a UK battle proven helicopter. Furthermore, the impact of Operation Corporate meant that staff had to be rotated and fresh blood brought into the Wing. Of course, as with all his predecessors Duncan Grant found that a hard nose, tough skin and great amounts of energy were required to convince the uneducated of the need for change. Even so, by the time of summer 1984 and a major Exercise in support of the UKMF scenario, permanent manpower increments had not been approved. The poor result was as forecast-fortunately for OC TSW, as he had forecast in writing!!!

Needless to say there was great gnashing of teeth, blame attribution and Air Officer embarrassment. However, by the September of 1984 the 19 extra personnel had been approved so the objective had been achieved. Furthermore, as part of the overall package Squadron Leader Brian Hunt arrived as the first incumbent of the newly established full time HQ Sqn OC. Things were looking up so time for a new challenge!

The “customers” at No 7 Sqn (Chinooks) under the command of the then Wing Commander Joe French, and OC 33 Sqn (Pumas) the then Wing Commander Chris Chambers, recognised with Duncan that the semi static nature of support had to change and for survivability greater mobility was required for the UKMF Air component.

Proof testing of new concepts was carried out on an incremental basis culminating in a major Wing Exercise involving deployments to RAF Quedgely and RAF Little Rissington (then an Army Barracks!) in Gloucestershire and elsewhere in support of tasked helicopters from 7 and 33 Sqns. Needless to say the limiting factor was manpower - not numbers but the need to husband resources and reduce risk by effective shift management. Driver hours had to be flexible! A review of outcomes proved concept viability and the terms Bulk Refuelling Area (BRA), Main Refuelling Area (MRA) and Tactical Refuelling Area (TRA) moved into Wing folklore. The days of refuelling on wheels had arrived. So Squadron Leader “Kit” Ayers, the Sqn Cdr (non cadre) for the UKMF (A) concept was eager and willing to face the 1985 major exercise utilizing the new concept. Of course it was a success because it was a TSW solution!!

In amongst all this high level activity there was a changeover of Wing Warrant Officer. Joe Ronan left on retirement and Dave Abbott arrived on promotion.





**The Wing Says farewell to Joe Ronan (second from right)**

During the latter part of 1985 the new UKMF (A) concept had been so well received that Duncan Grant decided to tell the Air Force about it! This entailed writing up the concept and solution as an entry to the annual Battle of Britain Wilkinson Sword Award for enhancements to Operational Effectiveness. The entry won-the first ground unit to do so. The unique award to a ground unit remains to this day. The award itself was made by ACM Sir David Craig, CAS (now MRAF Lord Craig) in the autumn of 1986. The men behind the story made sure they were smart on the day!



**The UKMF Brains Trust!**

**Sqn Ldr Brian Hunt, Wg Cdr Duncan Grant and Sqn Ldr Kit Ayers on the occasion of the award of the Wilkinson Sword**

But time marched on and the inevitable time of changeover approached over Christmas and New Year for Duncan Grant and Alan Matthews.



**Time to Go**

**Sqn Ldr Brian Hunt offers light refreshment to Duncan Grant on the occasion of his posting in January 1986.**

## **1984 Exercises**

There were 16 major exercises in which TSW participated. The most important exercises were Exercise Black Heart a UKMF concept exercise involving 37 Officers and men. The major overseas deployment included HardFall 84 / Avalanche Express in Norway. Tacammex 2/84 took place in Schleswig-Holstein, Bold Gannet in Denmark and Operation Lionheart in Germany. Exercise Bold Gannet involved exercising the UKMF (A), SSR (A) and In Theatre Support concepts. The UKMF (A) component involved the Chinook Force and an emerging mobile fuel support concept. The major exercises in the UK included exercises Ardent Ground; which involved refuelling Puma (33 Sqn RAF). Gazelle (AAC) and UH1D (German) helicopters, Gannet Anticipation, Osex 9 and Pedal Bin III. A full UKMF (A) concept had been exercised.

In May 1984, TSW were also tasked with exercise PROCONSOL in, Normandy. The teams supported refuelling for 4 Chinook and 5 Puma aircraft to support the 40th Anniversary Celebrations for D Day.

## **1985**

The year started as normal with Exercise Hardfall which lasted from Jan to Mar. Exercise Windmill Three was the 1985 TSW training exercise, involving the complete UKMF(A). The exercise took place in April, throughout the Cotswold area, with support from Puma, Chinook and Jaguar aircraft. Next was Exercise Fast Buzzard which was also in April. TSW deployed to STANTA in Norfolk. This was a 5 Airborne Bde Out of Area Logistics Exercise. Hercules was defueled, and there were refuelling points for Puma, Chinook, Scout, Gazelle, Harrier and Augusta 109 aircraft.

Next came Exercise Ardent Ground during May; and AMF (L) NATO Exercise A in Portugal. There were three more Exercises in May. Exercise Purple Venture 84-s a Tri-Service Command Post Exercise, Exercise Border Baron came next to refuel Puma, Chinook and Gazelles at Catterick Training Area in support of 15 Infantry Bde. Exercise Final Fling was a day and night refuelling exercise in support of the School of Infantry.

June saw Exercise SUMMER CASTLE- a NATO SH Force Evaluation. This involved the complete TSW UKMF (A) Detachment. The exercise took place on Stanford and Salisbury Plain training areas in support of Puma, Chinook and Gazelle helicopters. The exercise was a success and proved the viability of the new TSW UKMF (A).

In July the pace of Exercise did not slacken. Exercise MAYFLY 85/OSEX11, the MAXIVAL for 1 (F) Sqn and its support elements, in the SSR (A) role involving 12 Harriers was but one.

September attracted three more major exercises. They included Exercise ARCHWAY EXPRESS which marked the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the formation of NATO's AMF (L). The detachment under the command of the then Fg Off Tim Newstead was based at Corlu in Turkey.

From October through to November a range of exercises took place, including harrier support in Denmark.

## **1986**

This was a quiet year for major exercises. There was just Exercise Hardfall from Jan to Mar and then in July TSW were deployed on Exercise Druids Delight supporting 1 Infantry Bde on Salisbury Plain Training Area. Also there was Exercise Mayfly 86 with 1 (F) Sqn held at RAF Hullavington with 12 Harrier aircraft.

Next came Exercise Bold Guard (UKMF) held at Schleswig-Holstein area in Germany during Sept aircraft involved were Chinook, Puma and Gazelles. Exercise Bold Guard (SSR (A). Took place also during Sept in Vandel in Denmark to support 12 Harriers of 1(F) Sqn.

## **1987-1989**

The following three years saw a continuing heavy exercise and training commitment, principally in support of the Chinook and Puma Force. However the Harriers were not forgotten, with deployments to Denmark, while an evolving "Out of Area" concept developed from the Falklands war lessons began to creep up the priority tasking list.

**Operation Monja.**

During December 1988 and January 1989, a TSW detachment deployed to Lockerbie to undertake the refuelling of Support Helicopters following the Lockerbie Pan Am Air Disaster.

## **CHAPTER 4: OPERATIONS 90's**

### **THE DECADE OF OPERATIONS AND CHANGE**

#### **GULF WAR – OP GRANBY (US OP DESERT STORM)**

##### **IRAQ 1990-1991**



**Largest fuel farm – OP Granby**

The 1990s were to be perhaps the most tumultuous in the history of TSW. The end of the Cold War brought with it not the expected great peace dividend but a resurgence of hostility on the European mainland, in Africa, the Middle East and further east into Afghanistan. The RAF responded by shaking off its philosophy of having to fight from the hardened shelters of the home base to one of an expeditionary Air Force where any capability could be deployed and swiftly engage into operations. The change in Government in 1997 followed by a Strategic Defence Review initiated wholesale changes in the command and control of the

UK Battlefield Helicopter Forces – and with it TSW. Through all of this, the Wing continued to provide outstanding support to our forces deployed in Northern Ireland and to the SH Force in particular while gaining the respect of the aircrew of all 3 Services. In this Chapter, these changes are discussed together with details of the continuous support provided to operations at home and abroad including participation in the first major conflict since the Falklands War a decade earlier. However, when Wg Cdr David Bernard MBE took over as OC TSW in 1988 the world was looking like a pretty peaceful place!

### **As Luck Would Have It – Exercise Windmill East**

The aim of Exercise Windmill East, a warm-weather battle camp in Cyprus in 1990, was to simulate a hot weather, rapid, out of area (OOA) deployment, and supporting helicopters in the field under hostile enemy conditions. The exercise was conceived, planned and recce'd by OC TSW during 1989. In addition to the exercise aim, Annual Proficiency Weapon Tests and amphibious landings were to be undertaken. This training exercise began on 23 July 1990 when the TSW Training Flight (comprising some 14 men) formed the advance Party and DS, and deployed by air to Cyprus under the leadership of Flt Lt Steve Moull. Following a period of readiness, kitting and briefing, the main party of some 159 personnel deployed at minimum notice in 3 Hercules chinks, to Kingsfield airstrip, Cyprus. Around 30 minutes after TSW landed, the invasion of Kuwait by Iraqi forces was announced; a receiving ground crewman exclaimed, "Jesus Christ, you guys are quick"!

Following the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq on 2 August 1990, NODUF briefings were given throughout the exercise program. On the evening of the 7 August the Wing was brought to 12 hours readiness to deploy and the first detachments ordered to Dhahran and Thumrait. Windmill East ENDEX was declared prematurely on 8 August. Cpl Gary Morris explains: "We got called in for a briefing by our OC and he said Kuwait had been invaded. My first reaction was, so what? What's it got to do with us? We were on exercise having a good time. Later they asked for volunteers so I put my name down but, mind you, when I talked to the Boss later he told me my name was already on the list of the first 12 to go out anyway, so it was just as well I'd volunteered." Operational briefings included survival, recognition, intelligence and how to deal with Arabs began immediately.





Saudi Arabia) during early October 1990 in support of Puma aircraft and later, what became a much larger helicopter force, known as the UK Support Helicopter Force, Middle East (UKSHFME). Meanwhile, the remaining TSW detachments were stood-down so releasing personnel to redeploy to support the UKSHFME detachment that proved to be the largest and most varied in the Wing's history.

## **THE CYPRUS REINFORCEMENT TASK**

From 9 August until late November, TSW personnel provided reinforcement to the supply and fuels sections at RAF Akrotiri. Such support was much needed as, during August and September, the highest number of aircraft movements ever was recorded at Akrotiri. The fuel off-take exceeded the normal rate by more than 6 times and members of TSW provided manpower to operate BFIs and assist with Ocean Terminal operations. To improve survivability against the threat of Iraqi MRBMs and to sustain the high level of fuel off-take caused by increased AT and tanker operations, additional fuel storage capacity was required. This was provided by an 810m<sup>3</sup> Emergency Bulk Fuel Installation (EBFI) that was constructed by the TSW detachment under the supervision of 516 Specialist Team (RE).

In addition to tasking in support of RAF Akrotiri it was inevitable that early TSW operations were effectively controlled from this forward location. NBC, weapon and fitness training was continued for about 60 members of the Wing held ready to deploy forward. A 24 hour ops room was set up within the Tech Supply Sqn from where wider situation monitoring and communication could be conducted as well as the coordination of logistic support for the deployed detachments. Cyprus-sourced local purchases included electrical items and a large quantity of air-coolers that were airlifted to Dhahran. Most of the MT and specialist GSE used during Exercise Windmill East was redeployed to Saudi Arabia, together with items of personnel and NBC equipment. During August and September OC TSW, Wg Cdr Dave Bernard, made visits to Dhahran, Riyadh(HQ BFAP - later renamed BFME), Seeb and Tabuk before returning to JHQ (High Wycombe) on 3 occasions to brief the DCinC, AO Eng and Supply and his staff.

During the first few months of the operation, TSW maintained close liaison with staff at HQ British Force Cyprus (HQBFC) undertaking a study, on behalf of JHQ, of 2nd line support for UK air and ground force equipment. The Cyprus detachment provided this cover and reinforcement for RAF Akrotiri until the last week of November when this task was transferred to non-FSD qualified suppliers to release

TSW personnel for specialist support tasks in NI and in support of the UK SHFME. It is worth mentioning that the support given to TSW by staff at HQBFC, and throughout Cyprus, was outstanding throughout the 4 month stay on the island. Provision of MT, personal equipment, accommodation, comms and training facilities was always provided willingly from their own very limited resources.

## **Life Goes On**

### **TSW Base Party Support (UK).**

Back at RAF Stafford the unsung heroes had to maintain that home support that is so necessary to any successful operation. The TSW Ops Room was manned on a 24 hours basis from 9 August 1990. TSW ops staff coordinated the supply of all equipment, manpower and MT resources for all the TSW detachments during Operation GRANBY. The only communications available was DCN signal although even using PRIORITY precedence a message often took several days to reach its destination. An alternative was the civilian telephone network and this was, out of necessity, used extensively throughout the operation. The limited staff remaining at RAF Stafford included only one officer (Fg Off Nick Atkinson, later Wg Cdr Atkinson who returned in 2007 to become OC TSW) and a dozen men who were required to work extended hours for many weeks without any break. Maintenance of RTR operations at the Stafford HLS plus support for pre-NI training and NI operations continued, together with FSD training and hosting many VIP visitors to the Wing. Moreover, the entire stock of the Field Support Section (tents and domestic equipment for thousands of men) had to be prepared for movement by air and sea to 5 locations over a 3 month period. The Base Party was also responsible for coordinating US and UK sourced local purchases such as compressors for tyre inflation, body armour, camp cots and rapid assembly shelters. Of equal importance was support for the families of those deployed. Frequent newsletters were published and regular meetings held with next of kin. Where possible, domestic problems were solved, including repair of washing machines and servicing of cars. The support provided by TSW Base Ops to all the detachments was continuous, unfailing and outstanding.

### **Northern Ireland Operations (Op Banner)**

Support for the 4 detachments in NI continued unabated throughout Operation

GRANBY. The shortage of available manpower entailed an extension of the normal 6 week roulement to 3 months, which continued until April 1991. The detachments at Bessbrook, Dungannon, St Angelo and Omagh were manned by one SNCO Detachment Commander and 13 men. The re-fuelling task was vital to NI SH operations, which intensified during late 1990 and early 1991 with a requirement to frequently RTR 4 aircraft simultaneously. One quarter of all SH hours flown worldwide by RAF and AAC Squadrons was undertaken within the NI province. Throughout Operation GRANBY, the NI task was given equal precedence in terms of manpower and resources.



**Bessbrook Mill HLS**



**Golf 40**

### **Support To The Forward Operating Bases**

Sqn Ldr Don Belmore, Officer-in Charge of the first detachment and second-in-command of the Wing describes the task: "We didn't know until after we had landed that we had flown to Saudi Arabia, to the huge airbase at Dhahran, which had become the centre of a quite phenomenal Allied effort to deter an invasion of the country by Iraq. Soon after, a second detachment was dispatched to Thumrait in the Dhofar Valley, Oman. At both locations, TSW was instrumental in putting together the infrastructure needed to support a force. More experienced members of the service will be only too familiar with the logistical nightmares of such a task; not only the need to ship-in huge quantities of bombs, missiles and fuel, but tending also to the human needs - food, water (lots of it, we were under orders to drink a litre every half hour), accommodation and transport (we must have hired every available car in the province). As more and more aircraft were committed to the operation, we found ourselves starting fresh detachments at other bases, each time handing over a going concern to men drafted in."



### **Dhahran – The First Deployment.**

The deployment of 20 men to Dhahran, led by the TSW Exec Off (Sqn Ldr Don Belmore) was one of the first UK forces to set foot in Saudi Arabia following the invasion of Kuwait. Their first task was to organise the entire logistics and administration service for the detachment requiring them to organise transport, accommodation and food. Taxis and hotels soon gave way to a fleet of hire cars and a move to safer accommodation (eventually for over 700 men) shared with British Aerospace (BAe) at the Rezayat Apartments at Al Khobar, some 4 miles from Dhahran Airbase. Airhead clearance began as soon as ACHE could be scrounged and cargo-handling space made available from reluctant RSAF commanders. The immediate task was to generate Tornado F3 aircraft to fly Combat Air Patrols (CAPs). Sqn line accommodation, ops rooms, admin, MT, Eng /Logs, Medical and Ground Defence offices in the form of Portakabins were erected within days of arrival on waste ground. Telephone, SATCOM, power, lighting and air conditioning were installed and the entire detachment made self-contained within 3 weeks of arrival. "Local" purchase extended as far as Cyprus

and the UK and included contracts for vehicle hire and maintenance lease (over 160 vehicles), scavenging, purchase of stationery, photo-copiers, office furniture and anything else required to support a small RAF Station. More permanent support accommodation was eventually provided by the RSAF and a Supply Flt, located along the flight-line, became operational within 8 weeks of deployments.

The RSAF personnel were not renowned for their help and cooperation, at least initially, in support of the Allied Forces. An air and ground fuel were also in demand by RSAF and US forces and, as the PSD was vulnerable to air attack, an EBFI was erected within 8 weeks to provide a minimum war reserve. The TSW Det Cdr took the initiative to rationalize common logistics assets while the procurement of all goods and services fell to the TSW detachment that, for the first weeks, had to manage a huge impress and several large contracts without any admin support. The working hours were long; there were no days off; the outside day temperature exceeded 60° C, made bearable because of acclimatization in Cyprus. The TSW Exec Off handed over to the TSW OC Supply and Eng Flt (Flt Lt Nigel Stevens) on 15 September 1990 before proceeding to Tabuk in NW Saudi Arabia. Command of the detachment then passed to a non-TSW officer during early November; Flt Lt Stevens was redeployed north to join the UKSHFME detachment. Meanwhile, the remaining TSW personnel were relieved by PMC draftees and recovered to the UK by mid-December before being redeployed to the UKSHFME detachment at Jubail 4 weeks later.

### **Thumrait – And The Jaguar MSF.**

The tasking of TSW to support the Jaguar Force deployment to RAFO Thumrait revealed a degree of confusion in the Wing's role and its requirement to support units that were, in their own right, wholly mobile. This was undoubtedly not the Wing's fault, rather one created by changing circumstance and the disconnect between Strike Command that required the Wing's services and Support/Logistics Command that retained Full Command, but it reveals a tension that existed between TSW and such Units. It was clear that the Wing's role in providing general supply support had been dwindling as the Harrier and SH refuelling task increased. The Jaguar Force was fundamentally geared up for mobile operations as its Cold War role required it to deploy from Coltishall to fight from Norway and Denmark. Nevertheless, the second deployment from Cyprus comprised of 15 men under the command of the TSW Training Officer, Flt Lt Steve Moull.

This detachment, like the first, was deployed under instructions from JHQ. The task was to provide logistics support for a Squadron of Jaguar aircraft from RAF Coltishall, operating from the Royal Air Force Oman (RAFO) air base of Thumrait, located inland and to the NW of the ex-RAF base of Salalah. This detachment, unlike that at Dhahran, was required initially to operate in desert field conditions using FSS equipment. However, the inability to drive tent-pegs into the rocky surface soon led to more permanent, if basic, accommodation was being provided on this windy camp and only a few tents were actually used. However, the assistance provided by the TSW lads in the heat of the Omani desert was much appreciated, if not essential. Their skills were better used in assisting the RAFO with refuelling operations during the build-up of the Jaguar detachment which, coinciding with a large US influx, severely tested the station's own resources.

Why it was felt necessary to commit the scarce specialised resource of TSW to a well-found base to support a Force that had organic logistic capability was puzzling at best. Flt Lt Moull did a good job in helping the early deployment but Flt Lt Chris Boyce (who was awarded the MBE for his work supporting the Jaguars on GRANBY) and his small team from the Coltishall S&M Sqn were more than able to support the detachment both at Thumrait and as it redeployed to undertake the combat phase of the operation from Muharraq in Bahrain. Rumours that almost the entire S&M Sqn from Coltishall had been detached to Thumrait illustrate how these tensions can quickly lead to folk-lore; a future OC TSW, Neil Cromarty, was the OC S&M at Coltishall at the time and confirms most of his team remained in deepest Norfolk! After Sqn Ldr Cromarty's input and OC TSW's second visit to JHQ, Air Cdre S&M agreed to withdraw the TSW detachment from Thumrait and redeploy them to Bahrain in support of Tornado GR1 aircraft. This changeover occurred via Cyprus during mid-September. Finally, it is worth mentioning that the OC Supply Sqn at RAFO Thumrait, Chris Ramasingh, himself an ex-RAF Sqn Ldr supplier, provided excellent support.

### **Muharraq.**

The tasks of the Muharraq detachment were similar to those at Dhahran but made more difficult by the local authorities which appeared reluctant to concede real estate, including an area vital to the erection of an EBFI. However, the task was

achieved and TSW personnel were soon integrated into the Supply Sqn which comprised tradesmen from RAFG. Flt Lt Moull, fresh from Thumrait, eventually handed over command of the TSW element to Plt Off Eddie McLean, who had only joined the Wing 2 days prior to deploying on Exercise WINDMILL EAST. The tasks given to TSW by the Detachment Supply Officer (DSO), appointed from RAFG, were not of specialist FSD nature and as the teams were split up, morale of the close-knit TSW lads occasionally suffered. Recognizing the need for TSW's expertise the TSW detachment was withdrawn during late November, PMC draftees replacing them, and after leave in the UK re-deployed in January 1991 to either NI or the UKSHFME.

### **Seeb.**

There were several TSW deployments to Seeb. TG5 (Gen Tech GSE) personnel were deployed to accompany specialist fuel GSE in support of Nimrod and VC10K detachments. The TSW non-cadre officer (Fg Off Stuart Ogden) deployed to Seeb during October and recovered to UK in December. His task was to provide adequate fuel supplies and tankage from HN resources in order to maintain the large off-take of fuel used by the Nimrod and VC10K aircraft.

### **Tabuk.**

Sqn Ldr Don Belmore and Sgt Mick Johnson were deployed to Tabuk in NE Saudi Arabia during mid-September 1990. Their task was to support a detachment of Tornado GR1 and GR1A aircraft and was similar to the task already carried out at Dhahran. However, restriction was placed by the RSAF Base Cdr on the number of personnel who could deploy to Tabuk and logistic support was provided by just these 2 men until November. The problems of procurement were compounded by the fact that all materials had to be transported over a huge distance, often covering 1,000 road miles. Aviation fuel had to be tanked by road from the SAMAREC refinery at the West Coast port of Yanbu, some 650 miles away! An EBFI was constructed and a Hot Pit (refuelling and rearming) facility made ready for the rapid turn-around of Tornado aircraft. The town of Tabuk is small and therefore offers very limited HN resources; generators, Portakabins, water tanks and hired transport had to be procured from distant locations. The entire operational and domestic accommodation for 650 personnel was planned and organised from scratch by the 2-man TSW detachment. The working and living conditions were



poor, communications almost non-existent and the working hours long. Only after the logistics arrangements had been planned and put in place was a full-sized supply detachment deployed using supply tradesmen drafted by PMC during mid-November. Sqn Ldr Belmore and Sgt Johnson returned to the UK in November. Sgt Johnson was redeployed to support the UKSHFME during late December. However, Tabuk had proven to be the smallest but one of the busiest TSW detachments deployed during the Gulf War.

### **The Main Effort - The UKSFFME Detachment, Al Jubail**

Throughout the autumn months of 1990, the build-up of Allied Forces in Saudi Arabia continued and as the plans crystallised so did the Wing's role. The support provided to the FOBs was handed over and TSW's specialist skills were brought to bear with a degree of general supply work but a real concentration of effort on fuel for the SH and Allied helicopter forces.

### **The Deployment.**

In early Oct OC TSW deployed to Al Jubail, located some 100 km south of Kuwait on the Gulf coast where, a week later, he was joined by the main SH Force (SHF) recce team from RAF Odiham and RAF Gutersloh. Returning to RAFG and UK without having obtained a MOB for the soon to deploy Puma Force, completion of this task fell to OC TSW who remained at Al Jubail. The first 45 TSW personnel arrived 3 weeks later on 23 October. The SHF Main Party arrived by USAF C130 Hercules during early November with 15 Puma aircraft. Meanwhile, plans to expand the Brigade to Divisional status and the SHF into multi-force UKSHFME by deploying AAC Lynx and Gazelles, RN Sea Kings and RAF Chinooks helicopters were announced. The TSW detachment was reinforced during December and January in order to support the additional aircraft and provide worst case logistics support for the "NW hook option". By early Jan 1991, the TSW detachment comprised some 251 officers and men and included additional drivers and FSD-qualified suppliers drafted in by PMC.

### **Acclimatisation.**

Although Exercise Windmill East had provided a degree of acclimatisation for some the climate still shocked others! In August, with the temperatures up around the

150 degrees mark and humidity of 95% or higher, it was, Sqn Ldr Belmore recalled, "not unlike standing in front of a blast furnace whilst someone threw hot water under your armpits. Some days the humidity was so high you could get your hands wet simply by waving through the air. At least the hired transport had air conditioning, although this often meant that you had condensation on the outside, and had to have the windscreen wipers on to clear it."

### **Organisation.**

The SHF was assigned to 7 Armoured Bde (The Desert Rats) which had just arrived in theatre. All personnel within the Brigade Force were detailed to wear the Desert Rat badge and it is believed that this was the first occasion (certainly for many years) that RAF units were authorised to wear a Divisional Flash. The deployed ground forces were logistically supported by a Force Maintenance Area (FMA) HQ, alongside which the SHF HQ would operate. 7 Armd Bde and its FMA formed part of one US Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF).

### **The Task.**

The main task was to provide logistics support for nearly 100 UK helicopters, UKMAMS, TSW and Aeromed detachments. Some logistics support was provided to the 7 Bde and 4 Bde Brigade Air Liaison Officers (BALOs) and to the HQ FMA.

### **Domestic Accommodation.**

The first task was to provide domestic accommodation for up to 2,300 personnel from a site that initially accommodated only 125 people. No tentage was available and the HQ FMA were unable to offer tented accommodation in the secure area of Al Jubail's commercial port. The problem was solved by leasing a local Motel and 3 labour camps. The balance of accommodation was made up of prefabricated buildings transported north from Muscat and by modifying existing buildings. Mess hall accommodation was increased by a further 3 kitchens and dining rooms; electric power, sewage and fresh water capacity was also increased. The SHF had deployed with no admin support and, initially, all accommodation arrangements impress facilities, briefings and room allocation were undertaken by the TSW detachment. A six-day war reserve of bottled water and boxed rations was built up during the first weeks and located in blast/ splinter shelters built from ISO

containers. Also, a PA system was bought locally and served all accommodation areas to serve as ground defence and air raid/SCUD warning. The accommodation at Al Jubail was very basic, cramped and of a far lower standard than that enjoyed by the other RAF detachments.

### **Operational Accommodation.**

The first MOB site for the Puma Det was located at Ras Al Ghar, some 25 km south of Al Jubail. This site was initially shared with two squadrons of USMC CH53 aircraft. Operational accommodation comprising seven air-conditioned Portakabins was in place by the end of October in time for the arrival of the first Pumas. Self-contained power and lighting, air conditioning, heating and electrical equipment was provided for each of the MOB sites. Fresh water tanks to provide hot showers and flush WCs were also hired and installed at each site. Additional sites were built at King Abdul Aziz Naval Academy, for the RN Sea King Det and for the Airhead Det at Al Jubail airfield, 30 km to the NW, to accommodate the UKMAMS, TSW and Aeromed units.

### **Contract Hire Transport.**

To conserve Service MT running to avoid a servicing penalty during hostilities and replace some vehicles lost to storm damage on the sea-deployment it was necessary to hire many vehicles. A large fleet of over 100 vehicles comprising cars, axis, buses, water and fuel tankers was obtained locally.

### **Airhead Clearance.**

Al Jubail Airport provided the main airhead to 7 Bde, then 1 Armd Div, and the UKSHFME. TSW provided teams to work alongside the UKMAMS Det to complete the airhead clearance and forward delivery tasks. This task became vital as the airlift increased to over 10 daily flights and the very limited real estate, let alone need of receiving units, necessitated rapid clearance of inbound freight.

### **Local Procurement.**

A local procurement section was established alongside the Army equivalent in the local Shipping Agent's offices near the Commercial Docks at Al Jubail. Much of the

equipment could be provided through Service sources. However, the airlift capacity was already stretched with movement of personnel and munitions. Moreover, HQ 1 Div decreed that, understandably, 62 Ord Coy was unable to make any issues of equipment to the SH dets. Consequently, the local purchase team initially lead by Flt Lt Tim Walls (TSW Ops Off) then WO George White (Wing Eng Off) were kept busy. Purchases of equipment varied from scores of ISO containers, for use as storage or shelters, to office equipment, basic furniture, vehicle sand ladders and tyres, desert boots, cam-nets, sandbags and satellite navigational equipment. The LPO budget limit was initially set at 500,000 Saudi Riyals (SR), about £70,000 for each item. For the record, although with the benefit of considerable hindsight after the event, there was much concern expressed after GRANBY about the level of local purchases and (again with hindsight) the necessity for much of it. However, the situation on the ground was anything but stable, the TSW personnel did not know when attacks would start and the Army quartermasters were, unsurprisingly, not particularly forthcoming with assistance. In the heat of the moment, it was entirely understandable that it was felt necessary to make swift purchases but, in the cold light of day in UK after the event, matters may have looked different. Suffice it to say that local RAF commanders supported the TSW decisions but local purchase regulations were tightened after the Operation. Some might say “closing the stable door after the horse had bolted” but local purchase was never the same again!

### **Maintenance of FAPs.**

Each helicopter Det (Puma, Sea King etc.) had deployed with full FAP scales of equipment. Supply progression was provided by the HQ SHFME supply cell supported by a TSW officer (A/Flt Lt Nick Atkinson and later OC TSW). Fill rates were generally high and no major supply replenishment problems were experienced despite the remoteness of each SH detachment from the airhead.

### **Training.**

Cross training of TSW and USMC/USAF refuelling teams began immediately on arrival in theatre at Ras Al Ghar and Al Jubail airhead. TSW personnel became proficient in refuelling all types of fixed and rotary wing aircraft. NBC, fitness, First Aid and weapons training became a daily routine with NCOs from the TSW Training Flt taking the lessons. OC TSW and a retired British Army Major (P Lenthall, who

had lived in Saudi Arabia for some 14 years) designed a 2-day desert familiarization, navigation, survival and driving course that all TSW personnel underwent. During the training, Cpl Steve Bicknell broke his back and right foot and became the first RAF CASEVAC to the UK, where he made a full recovery. The course later became mandatory for all forward ground support personnel and a modified version was provided for aircrew. While Army units were buying sun compasses, TSW purchased around 60 Magellan Satellite Ground Positioning Systems (GPS) that could be vehicle mounted or hand-held. In addition, each TSW vehicle was fitted with an electronic compass for off-road navigation and carried a full range of survival equipment. The GPS and electronic compasses were essential for navigation in the desert where reference points were non-existent and maps inaccurate. Training and briefings continued though until the outbreak of hostilities. It was the opinion of many senior British Army commanders that TSW was one of the best trained and equipped units within 1 Armoured Div.

### **Communications.**

Access to secure military communications was problematic particularly in the early days. Civil telephones and the few mobiles that existed at the time were used extensively for in-theatre calls and to the UK, Cyprus and Germany. The only classified DCN terminal was in the HQ FMA until, in December, TCW installed ASMA in the HQ UKSHFME by which time 21 Sigs Regt were also operating an excellent secure Ptarmigan in-theatre service.

### **Special Forces.**

A TSW detachment of eight men was deployed in support of Special Forces operations during GRANBY. No further amplification on this task is needed.

### **Fuel.**

As preparations continued, TSW found itself moving further into the desert and concentrating on its core task, that of helicopter refuelling. The scale of the helicopter deployment meant that the entire remaining UK stock of 10K and 30K gallon TFCs, pumps, lines and filters was dispatched to support the TSW UKSHFME detachment. In addition, ten 10,000 gallon Belgian tanks and equipment were made available and the USMC traded two 20,000 gallon tanks for a Christmas cake

during late December! In addition to 19 Tanker Trucks Fuel (TTF) deployed from the UK, a further twenty 30,000 litre road tankers were hired locally. In addition, four 20,000 litre All Wheel Drive (AWD) off-road tankers procured from the UK were built to TSW specifications and delivered in less than 2 months; perhaps showing how Defence procurement should really work! RTR sites were established at Ras Al Ghar, Old Port, Al Jubail, 33 Fld Hosp, NW of Al Jubail and Abu Hadriyah by mid-December. By mid-January, a further 2 refuelling sites had been established along the Main Supply Route (MSR) towards Hafar Al Batin. TSW was responsible for the provision of all aviation fuel for UK helicopters supporting 1 Div. During the Operation, TSW personnel refuelled not only the largest helicopter force assembled by the UK, but also on an ad-hoc basis, the helicopters of the coalition partners. The fuel had to be transferred by road from the ARAMCO refinery at Ad Dammam, north of Dhahran, up to 20 hours driving time to the forward areas. A rear TSW ops centre (commanded by Flt Lt Dave Nattrass, the ex-TSW Ops Off) controlled the supply from the refinery to Abu Hadriyah. The forward fuel supply was controlled by the TSW element from within the HQ SHFME (commanded by Flt Lt C Anderson, ex-TSW OC Trg), which deployed during January 1991. By mid-January there were 6 refuelling sites established along a 600 km supply route, providing a 5- day war reserve of fuel at a Maximum Daily Off-take (MDO) rate of 671,000 litres. Furthermore, the RTR facilities of the forward detachments were frequently used by helicopters of other Allied and Arab Forces. After a month of preparatory bombing, the Allies ground offensive began in the early hours 25th February 1991. TSW followed the tanks through the breach in the Iraqi defences at 1400 hrs with convoys of fuel for Support Helicopters. Four days later, they had travelled in a huge left hook manoeuvre through Iraq and into North of Kuwait City. Logistically the inhospitable desert proved quite a challenge, with the Wing's positions hundreds of kilometres apart. Some of the goods arriving by road had come the equivalent distance of driving from London to Kiev. However, within 4 days, elements of TSW were in Northern Kuwait and were one of the first British units to enter Kuwait City.

### **TSW At War – From The Horse's Mouth**

In these next few paragraphs some stories and the words of some who were there are used to convey the mood, thoughts and feelings of all involved.

The first major operational refuel point before crossing the border was

based at Abu Hadre, which became known as "Anthrax Valley". Fresh from his counter surveillance course, Sgt McBey overseen the camouflaging of the new site, which included painting all the vehicles and covering them in sand whilst still wet. After the third or fourth aircraft failed to spot the site, for refuelling, they decided to put out markers giving away the position of the site from the air.



**Sgt McBey keeping up military standards of hygiene – OP Granby 1990**

After returning from a HQ briefing, Cpl Morris found that all of his kit had been chucked in the back of his wagon. H-hour had been brought forward by 12 hours and so his team were swept up in the surge forward. His team were the first RAF ground team to enter Iraq: "We drove 112kms into Kuwait in 30 hours. We just kept going and going". As the task force swung its left hook manoeuvre, TSW stayed within 1 or 2 km of the frontline and found themselves watching the war unfold. "I was sitting in my wagon at three in the morning reading a book and there's this entire artillery barrage going on. The battle was going on about 3kms in front of me. I said to the lad I was with, 'Hey Paul, what do you think is going on up there? It's funny. We've just made a cup of tea, we're having a fag and 3 km up there people are getting blown apart'. He said, 'that's war Gary, isn't it', and just

carried on reading." Cpl Morris realised what was going on in front of him but didn't see the consequences. SAC Brian Aitken on the other hand came briefly into contact with some of the casualties from the front line as he refuelled the helicopters that were bringing them into the field dressing stations: "They'd bring their casualties in, patch them up, and pump them full of morphine or whatever because a lot of people were screaming in pain. My whole view of the war changed from there on. I started hating the Iraqis. When it's actually happening to your own people, then the adrenalin starts flowing".



**Puma refuel in NBC suits during OP Granby**

Op GRANBY was a crash course in "Purple Ops", or working with other nations, and one of the main problems was language...English and American that is! At one point Cpl Buckingham remembers setting up a FARP alongside his US counterparts at Phantom. With a big push through Iraq expected soon, the US Army FARP Commander came over to see if TSW could help them. Cpl Buckingham explains: "The Americans asked us if we could help refuel a 'few' aircraft. Of course we can 'no problem' said Cpl Buckingham. But the next thing we knew the 101st Airborne Division started pushing through a continuous wave of attack and support helicopters. Over the next 24 hours we helped to refuel over 300 aircraft." This



was in support of "Operation COBRA" TSW working closely with the 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured Div, became the first RAF unit to wear the Jerboah symbol of the Desert Rats the 7<sup>th</sup> Armoured Brigade.

By the time TSW left the region in May 1991, having been given the job of closing down the RAF detachment at Al Jubail, they had been involved in for the some 10 months with activities across 7 countries in addition to the UK: Cyprus, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Iraq and Kuwait. Some 170 personnel had been drafted in to reinforce the Wing's normal strength of 200. In charge of the detachment in the Gulf was Wg Cdr now Gp Capt Robin Springett, one of the first Officers on the Wing in 1971. There had been no fatalities and only one injury, Cpl Bicknell, who injured his back during desert driving training. The Commanding Officer during the crisis, Wg Cdr Dave Barnard, had preached his doctrine throughout; survivability, flexibility and mobility. The system was proved to work. Well that was how some of the people who were there saw it.

## **POST GRANBY OPERATIONS**

### **OP BANNER – Northern Ireland**

Operations in Northern Ireland, as mentioned earlier, continued throughout the whole decade. In general, Wing personnel undertook 6 week detachments at forward re-fuelling points across the Province.

### **OPERATION HAVEN –Turkey/Iraq April To July 1991**

Op HAVEN was an international aid effort to help Kurds who, persecuted by Iraqi Forces, had fled into the mountains on the Iraq/Turkey border. A party of 20 personnel under Det Cdr Flt Lt Tim Stevens, left RAF Stafford on 18 April 91. Staging via Diyarbakir, they were deployed to Silopi to operate with the Royal Marines and the Joint Support Helicopter Force.

### **OPERATION MINURSO–Morocco 1993**

Flt Lt Dan Parry (TSW Ops O) was detached to Morocco in support of the ceasefire monitoring force on Operation Minurso so becoming one of the first Supply

Officers to be nominated for UN duties.

**OPERATION OCULUS/RESOLUTE/GRAPPLE/LODESTAR/PALATINE - the former Republic Yugoslavia -1993 to 2006**



**Sipovo refuel site with a visiting 845 RNAS Medevac Seaking**

As J M Roberts explains in his History of the World<sup>1</sup>, at the end of 1990 the conditions of what had once seemed the almost monolithic east European bloc changed irrevocably – and the impact was felt on TSW.

In 1991, a jolt was given to optimism over the prospect of peaceful change when two of the constituent republics of Yugoslavia announced their decision to separate from the federal state. Their action was influenced by deep-rooted national animosities which had for years been increasingly evident in the Serb-dominated republics. In August 1991, sporadic fighting began between Serbs and

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<sup>1</sup> History of the World by J M Roberts, published by BCA 1993.

Croats. By the end of the year, Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Slovenia had all declared themselves independent of the Yugoslav federal republic, and had joined Croatia in doing so.

TSW was initially tasked to provide a J4 officer to the UK National HQ in Split (Croatia) but that soon grew to a much larger commitment, including setting up 2 forward refuelling sites, one in the very inhospitable climate on the border of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina in a mountain valley at Lipa (where the RCT and TSW shared responsibilities for ground and aviation fuels respectively) and Kiseljak, a short distance from Sarajevo. The war in the Balkans (together with the enduring Northern Ireland commitment) thus became TSW's main effort from 1992, providing the UN and NATO helicopter forces with aviation fuel in locations as diverse as Split through to the most hostile parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina. At its height of activity, TSW ran 7 refuelling sites and the fuel supplies to them but this was eventually reduced to one helicopter refuelling site at Banja Luka. TSW's final detachment closed in 2006, ending a 13-year sustained deployment.

#### **OP CHANTRESS – ANGOLA 1995**

On 13 April 1995 an advance party of 55 British troops left RAF Brize Norton for Angola as part of the United Nations Angola Verification Mission (UNAVEM III). The British name for this Peacekeeping Operation was Op CHANTRESS and the advance party was to make preparations to aid the deployment of up to 625 personnel, who were fully deployed by early May. TSW's task was to set up the logistics infrastructure for the UN before handing over control to UN civilian contractors. This was completed within a couple of weeks in an extremely hostile environment, proving again the Wing's adaptability and determination.

#### **OP DETERMINANT – ZAIRE 1997**

Following a recce by a former OC TSW (the then Gp Capt Andy Spinks, DACOS J4 at the UK's Permanent Joint HQ), TSW sent a detachment to the Democratic Republic of Congo in May 1997 to support a number of RAF Air Transport aircraft but, more crucially, 4 Pumas of 33 Sqn. Zaire had enjoyed a relatively stable period for over 30 years, but the people increasingly viewed the government as corrupt. A large

Rebel force had slowly emerged from eastern Zaire in an attempt to replace the President with a new democracy. A coup had been forecast and Operation DETERMINANT was formulated to evacuate all UK and Commonwealth nationals should the situation require. Once in-theatre, the UK Force found itself in competition with a larger US force for commercial access to fuel supplies – size matters! However, resourceful as ever, Flt Lt Chris Turner, leading the TSW detachment, arranged for any spare fuel on-board transiting RAF Hercules to be de-fuelled and transported by APFC across the airfield to his EBF. Soon, whilst others worried about fuel supply, the TSW Detachment confidently advised the Cdr British Forces that the SH Det had sufficient supplies to enact the operations should it be called. After nearly a month of the situation worsening and with the rebel force approaching Kinshasa, violence was finally avoided by the departure of the President. The transition of power was peaceful and the detachment returned home in Jne 1997.

#### **OP AGRICOLA – KOSOVO 1999**

In March 1999, 11 TSW personnel under the command of a SNCO deployed to Macedonia to provide refuelling support to a small UK Puma detachment based at Petrovec. On arrival in Macedonia, personnel were tactically deployed and lived around their vehicles. However, with the deployment of 5 Airborne Brigade and more UK SH, a larger team led by Sqn Ldr Clive Watson, (latterly to become OC TSW) deployed to Macedonia at the beginning of June 1999. By 7 June 1999 a second refuelling site consisting of 2 x 10,000 gallon TFCs had been set up at Petrovec whilst more equipment and personnel arrived by air over the following 2 days. With the arrival of a large number of Puma and Chinook at Skopje airfield, the build of a 4 point MRA, consisting of 2 x 30,000 gallon TFCs, was completed alongside the FOB and remained in place for a year. A FRP was also flown from Petrovec to a location known as Piper Camp (the jumping-off point for the heliborne assault into Kosovo on 12 June 1999) just south of the Macedonia/Kosovo border. Whilst the Forward Refuelling Point (FRP) was only expected to be in operation for 24 hours it nevertheless had to be refuelled from a 22.5m<sup>3</sup> TTF. Fuels equipment was brought up from Prelip and concurrently the Petrovec site was emptied and the equipment loaded onto vehicles ready for the next move. On 13 June, TSW personnel and equipment deployed into Kosovo and, by the morning of 14 June, had a 2 point TRA at Lipjan, living and working alongside 1 RGR.

The Ghurkhas provided life support to the TSW Det - including cooking. Curry was clearly to become a staple diet and while most thoroughly enjoyed this content of the meals raised some eyebrows. Visiting the Det, the recently departed OC, now Gp Capt Cromarty asked that famous senior officer question: "Is the food good?" The animated response from the assembled lads made it quite clear to him that generally it was but that the "whole chicken goes in" – beaks and sphincters alike! This location was reinforced on 15 June 1999 with additional resources including those from Piper Camp. All non-deployed TFHE was held on vehicles ready for further site moves but in mid-July, the TRA wheeled stock was replaced by fuel held in TFCs and the dismantling of the MRA facility at Skopje commenced. Equipment and vehicles were prepared for return for the UK and, on 22 July, 15 personnel departed theatre. By the beginning of August 1999 all but 5 personnel to man the TRA at Lipijan had returned to UK. The peak level of activity occurred between 12 and 13 June 1999 when a total of 216M3 of fuel was issued to aircraft from Piper Camp FRP and from the Skopje MRA. Between 7 June and 23 July 1999, TSW issued a total of 1474m<sup>3</sup> of fuel to RAF, AAC, US, Canadian, French, Italian, German, Belgium and UN helicopters.

## **THE WINDS OF CHANGE**

Throughout this decade of unprecedented commitment to operations across the globe significant doctrinal and subsequent command and control changes were being rolled out across the Armed Forces. It is also worth remembering, that during the Wing's first 20 plus years it was manned largely by volunteers – manned being the operative word. During the 90s airwomen and later officers were posted onto the Wings strength and, despite a few doubting Thomas', proved, not surprisingly, the equal (or even better....) of their male counter-parts. So, in addition to just doing the job, the Wing had to cope with many changes.

### **Cadre and Non-Cadre Personnel.**

At the beginning of the decade, TSW still operated its traditional split of cadre and non-cadre elements; the latter being provided by the uniformed staff of 16MU Stafford. But both TSW and its parent Station were under Full Command of Support and then Logistics Command. However, as the Depot functions were

seeded to newly conceived Agencies and budgets for manpower were delegated to Unit level the ability to maintain such cross-unit flexibility diminished. Wg Cdr Paul Grimson, OC TSW in the mid-90s, tried desperately to secure additional staff to replace the non-cadre element. Largely successful, he managed to get the cadre establishment of the Wing up to the 200 mark but as budgets transferred between Command HQs and Agencies full funding to replace the non-cadre potential was not forthcoming.

### **Command and Control.**

Throughout the decade, occasional probes by the Army to take over helicopter refuelling duties and even by RAF Aldergrove in the case of Northern Ireland who proposed running the refuelling sites dispersed throughout the Province, had to be robustly defended. This was often achieved with the direct support of the RAF SH Force who clearly treasured the support they received from the Wing. With the break-up of 16MU Stafford and its transfer to a Defence Agency it was clear that the uniformed elements of the station needed to be protected for the Royal Air Force. To do this the then Station Commander, Gp Capt (later Air Cdre) Pete Whalley and the OC TSW, Wg Cdr (later Gp Capt) Neil Cromarty agreed that both 2MT Sqn and 5001 Sqn should transfer from the 16MU establishment into TSW. While 5001 Sqn continued in its role of providing temporary aircraft shelters and hangars it was at this time that 2 MT Flt was re-born as a Sqn and, under Sqn Ldr Nigel Stevens, began its rapid growth from a peacetime transport flt back into a full, military transport Sqn. Towards the end of the decade the Strategic Defence Review recommended that the Battlefield Helicopters of the 3 Armed Forces be brought under the Command of HQ Land through a new Joint Helicopter Command. Wg Cdr (now Air Cdre) Graham Howard, on taking command of the Wing in Jan 99, was immediately tasked to a study team to recommend the future of the Wing within the emerging Command structures. Under fierce pressure from the Army in particular, TSW's autonomy was preserved and the Wing, now fundamentally focused on helicopter refuelling operations, was rightly transferred to the Joint Helicopter Command. However, while the helicopter refuelling role had become indispensable to the UK military, there was still some unease about the tactical supply role and, of course, what to do with 2MT Sqn and 5001 Sqn. At this time 2 former OCs TSW (by then Gp Capts Andy Spinks and Neil Cromarty) were staff officers at HQ STC. TSW had been nominated, along with TCW, the Mobile Met Unit and UKMAMS, as one of the very few 'Air Combat Service

Support Units (ACSSU) in an increasingly expeditionary Royal Air Force. The 2 group captains, during an afternoon 'wet towel' session at High Wycombe, devised their idea to split TSW between its commitment to the new Joint Helicopter Command and support to RAF deployable fixed wing forces. They even christened the deployed fixed wing organization Expeditionary Logistics Wing. In due course, this arrangement was endorsed and ELW soon took under its wing a small refuelling capability, 2 MT Sqn, 5001 Sqn and, later, the Mobile Catering Support Unit. However, more of this in the Noughties.

### **TSW Goes Airborne.**

Another change in the early 90s was to qualify some TSW personnel as parachutists to support an air-dropped FRP (of 2 APFCs with pump, filter and pipework) for the RAF Chinook Force. Initially, TSW was authorised by the Parachute Brigade to have 18 qualified parachutists, sharing the role with the RCT. Leading from the front, both OC TSW (Wg Cdr Andy Spinks) and the Wing WO (WO Paul Hignett) passed the parachute course and became part of this small specialist element. This grew to become another highly-important and specialist role for TSW to keep it at the sharp end of logistics and maintain the Wing's strong links with the SHF and Special Forces.

### **Full Cycle – Battle Camp.**

Having deployed, operated, re-grouped and deployed repeatedly in support of an unprecedented number and scale of operations TSW settled, in the latter part of the decade, into a slightly more stable operational environment. By 1997 TSW Operations Sqn personnel were doing a 4 month detachment to Bosnia and 2 x 6 week Northern Ireland detachments – year in, year out. Inevitably, the focus had been on operations but shortly after assuming command, Wg Cdr Neil Cromarty became concerned that the Wing had lost many of the core skills essential to sustaining a flexible, deployable capability able to support a large-scale operation; indeed, over the years TSW's plans and abilities had become dislocated from the SH Force Concept of Operations.

His fears were confirmed when, on asking the officers and training staff if they were confident that the Wing could effectively deploy to support a large scale operation, Flight Sergeant Bob McBey, pipe in mouth, gently shock his head from

side-to-side. Another battle Camp (hopefully without an attached war) was required and Ex Top Banana was born. This exercise on STANTA and its associated training proved highly successful. Top Banana 2 was required and needed to exercise the Wing at full capacity in support of the now aligned Con Ops. To achieve this links were forged with the French "Service Des Essences Des Armees" (SEA).

Working closely together an exercise was planned that would involve operating with the SEA, French Army and Air Force, a RAF SH detachment and 2 MT Sqn (to move bulk fuel out of and back into MRAs) to simulate exactly what the SHF Con Ops required in terms of simultaneous refuelling points and rolling EBF sites of considerable size. Sadly, with Gulf War II looming real operations once again diverted all effort and Graham Howard, now in the chair, had to prepare for another war. So to the new Millennium.





**TSW Battlecamp Garelochhead 2006**

## **CHAPTER 5: OPERATIONS – 2000’S**

In the late 1990s after many years under RAF Logistics Command, operational command of TSW was transferred to HQ Strike Command. However, this arrangement was short-lived as in 1999 the RAF Support Helicopter Force (SHF) was transferred to the new Joint Helicopter Command (JHC). The JHC sits within HQ Land Forces and commands all battlefield helicopters from the Army Air Corps, Navy and of course the RAF. The JHC allows the Department to draw on equipment and personnel from the three Services to provide joint task force commanders with tailored packages of battlefield helicopters to meet operational demands. For example, the SHF and Tactical Supply Wing (TSW) have been brought closer to their principal customer, 16 Air Assault Brigade.

RAF personnel within the JHC remain under the Full Command of the RAF exercised by Commander-in-Chief Air Command. Accompanying the SHF on operations, TSW provides aviation fuel both at deployed operating bases and more austere tactical refuelling locations. MOD Stafford remains today as it has done for many years home to the 210 RAF personnel in TSW.

## **OP BARWOOD**

**Mozambique - February 2000**



**OP BARWOOD - Bob Pearson, Andy Waters, Matt Leader, Dai Miller and John Elliot**

Operation BARWOOD was a short notice humanitarian aid operation initiated in February 2000 in response to a request from the President of Mozambique for humanitarian assistance from the international community following severe flooding. The UK government agreed to the immediate deployment of 4 RAF Puma helicopters and supporting assets to Mozambique to assist in the international flood rescue operation in the south of the country.

The deployment was preceded by a Reconnaissance Team that deployed to Mozambique on February 29<sup>th</sup> and included TSW representation. The aircraft were

transported to the region on 2nd March 2000 by a chartered Antonov 124 transport aircraft with personnel and equipment deploying by RAF Tri-Star. The Puma's were prepared for operations within 24 hrs of arrival and joined South African Defence Forces (SADF) already operating in the country.



### **33 Sqn Puma refuel in Mozambique**

The Limpopo Valley tasking areas were approximately 80 miles from the Main Operating Base at Maputo that had been established by the SADF. However, as SADF aircraft had to close down to refuel, this resulted in delays to tasking. After only 48 hours in theatre, the TSW team had transformed the site into efficient refuelling points where all nations took on hot refuels making the operation more efficient and thus more aid was delivered.

By mid-March the Department of International Development had confirmed that the receding waters around Maputo and the resulting improvement in access had reduced the necessity to retain helicopters in the region and the decision was taken to end Op BARWOOD although RFA Fort George and its embarked Sea King helicopters remained in support of operations in the central region. It has proved difficult to provide details of the number of

helicopters refuelled by TSW; however, what is known is that the Puma's flew over 350 hrs, distributed 425 tonnes of supplies and airlifted 563 people to safety.

## **OP PALLISER**

### **Sierra Leone - May 2000**

The United Kingdom's armed forces practise the manoeuvrist approach to warfare, which entails momentum, shock, surprise, and tempo to shatter an adversary's cohesion and will to fight. SH are integral to this approach because they possess range, speed, and offer a variety of deployment options, from austere forward airbases to maritime platforms. Their tactical mobility has been especially useful when a rapid response to events is required over a large operational area. So, for example, during Operation PALLISER in Sierra Leone early 2000, SH supported by TSW enabled British forces to support the joint task force commander.

Towards the end of the 90s, Sierra Leone's gold and diamond mines fell under the control of violent group calling themselves the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). The force was made up of child fighters who were given drugs and weapons and were led by a self-styled General called Foday Sanokoh. At the start of 2000 their attacks were getting more vicious and widespread and, with the aim of over throwing the government, they started to advance on the capital Freetown. The UN entered Sierra Leone to try and restore order but, in the first week of May 2000, soldiers of the RUF took captive around 300 UN personnel in an attempt to prevent a further increase of forces in the region.

OP PALLISER was initially a non-combatant evacuation operation (NEO) that quickly developed into an intervention/ peace support operation. Although small in scale, the significant challenge posed by the operation meant that considerable resources were needed to achieve a satisfactory outcome. UK 1 Para (1st Battalion, The Parachute Regiment), having been warned only on 6<sup>th</sup> May, successfully secured Lungi airfield in Sierra Leone over 7–8 May and began the NEO. Later that same day, the TSW detachment arrived at Lungi International Airport to commence rotors turning refuelling of Chinook, Sea King Mk4 and Lynx aircraft. TSW's support enabled the aircraft to achieve high sortie rates in support of UK Forces.



By 12<sup>th</sup> May the NEO had largely been accomplished and was being scaled down, the nature and scale of the operation developed to meet an increasing threat posed by the rebel forces of the Revolutionary United Front. On 17<sup>th</sup> May, the rebel leader Sanokoh was captured and transported to a secure location by a British Chinook. That same day, rebel RUF fighters launched an attack on 2 Para and a contingent of Nigerian UN troops who were guarding the airport. The attack was successfully repelled. Between 23–26 May 42 Commando Brigade conducted a relief-in-place with 1 Para, and, with the situation significantly more stable, the operation was scaled down.

#### **OP VERITAS/ORACLE/DAMIEN/FINGAL/and JACANA**

**Afghanistan- November 2001-2002**



**SAC Carrigan and SAC Maxwell practicing using Dunlop tanks during OP DAMIEN**

A large number of British troops had been in the Middle East on exercise SAIF SAREEA II, in Oman. When, on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001, the World Trade Centre was destroyed the US response was to strike against the then Taliban government of Afghanistan who hosted and supported the terrorist Al Qaeda who were responsible for the attacks. Operation VERITAS was the codename used for British military operations that followed. The British contribution was an important part of the overall force deployed on Op VERITAS and TSW were sent in to support this, and the other subsequent Ops, from the start.

In November 2001, TSW elements were deployed to Oman as part of Operation ORACLE. Tasked with rotors turning refuelling of multi-national aircraft, TSW support enabled high readiness sorties to be undertaken by both UK and US Special Forces. Within Afghanistan the lack of any in country source of fuel required all fuel to be imported, initially, almost entirely by air. This constrained both the volume of fuel available and the operations able to be conducted. As the War progressed, the first operational Air Delivered Forward Aircraft Refuelling Point (ADFARP) was set up by TSW beyond the forward line of our troops. The 12-man team was led by Sgt Holmes and again the team was used to support UK and US Special Forces Operations under the codename Op DAMIEN. Other Operations incorporated into Op VERITAS included Op FINGAL and Op JACANA. During Ops JACANA (in Afghanistan) and TELIC, TSW supported the Commando Helicopter Force's Sea Kings.



### **OP JACANA CH47 Refuel**

## **GULF WAR II - OP TELIC**

### **Iraq - February 2003 to Jul 2009**

Twelve years after we first entered into Iraq on Operation GRANBY, and after a series of more defiant gestures by Iraq's leadership, a 2nd Gulf War was finally initiated, without UN support. On the 6th of February 2003 the Secretary of State for Defence, Geoff Hoon, announced that Britain was to join the U.S as part of a coalition force with the aim of finally bringing to an end the regime of Saddam Hussein. The Operation was called Op TELIC and the resulting RAF air component numbered 100 fixed wing aircraft and 27 support helicopters with 7000 personnel from the RAF. 87 TSW personnel augmented by 8 personnel from 606 RAF Auxiliary Squadron plus assorted vehicles and TFHE were deployed to Ali-Al Salem (AAS) Air Force Base to provide rotors turning refuelling in support of coalition helicopters involved in Iraq. A further 20-23 personnel were allocated to Task Force 7 and 14 providing support to Special Forces.





The force multiplier effect and flexibility of TSW support to battlefield helicopters again demonstrated in 2003 during Op TELIC, which has been the JHC's largest operation to date. Although a JHC (Iraq) was established at Safwan near the Iraq-Kuwait border during operations to support 1 (UK) Armoured Division, a number of Royal Air Force Chinook HC2/2as were initially deployed aboard Royal Navy ships to operate within the Commando Helicopter Force. An advance party of 4 personnel was initially deployed to carry out area reconnaissance, take over accommodation and to act as a liaison point on the main forces arrival. Prior to deploying, all TSW personnel worked extended dayshifts preparing over 80 vehicles for transportation to the Gulf by sea. Every vehicle was loaded, unloaded and reloaded until it complied with Road, Sea and Dangerous Goods Regulations. All vehicles were then driven down in convoy to Marchwood Port for embarkation. The UK role in the US led plan evolved constantly as UK force levels built up and their ability to play a greater part in the US plan progressively increased. From the 20th February 2003 through to 18th March 2003 the detachment spent its time planning and preparing to meet its proposed commitment of one Main Refuelling Area (MRA) and 2 Tactical Refuelling Areas (TRA's). During this time all the vehicles were collected from the docks, driven to the vehicle sprayers and sprayed

desert camouflage. They were then prepped ready for crossing over the border and loaded with extra food, water and cam netting. On the 19th of March 2003 the MRA and elements of the second TRA moved in convoy with 51 Squadron RAF Regiment (Force Protection) to Abdaly Farms, to act as the form up point prior to going across the border. Finally, after 3 nights spent in shell scrapes, they crossed the border to occupy the objective of Safwan airfield. At Safwan the MRA established 8 refuelling points giving over 420m³ capacity and four AFDV's offering rotors turning refuelling capabilities to 2 resident medevac Pumas and other coalition helicopters.

TSW personnel based at Ali Al Salaam also undertook a number of secondary and support roles, notably dispatching a team of 14 personnel to assist 3 Commando Brigade during their preparation and deployment to the Al Faw peninsula. During the early stages of Op TELIC, SHF again demonstrated their importance to the conduct of manoeuvre warfare by supporting the UK's first dual Commando Group aviation assault, by 40 and 42 Commando Royal Marines, which secured the strategically important Al Faw peninsula.

Whilst at Safwan, 8 members of the TRA were dispatched to Shaibah airbase to support 7 Lynx and at the beginning of April 2003 a further 9 personnel were sent to Al Amarah in support of elements of 16 Air Assault Brigade and helicopters of the Army Air Corps. The aircraft had a vast area to cover and without TSW support, the mission could not have been accomplished. In the immediate aftermath of hostilities during what was known as Phase 4 operations, helicopters proved to be the most efficient means of covering the vast operational area allocated to British forces, and also in distributing humanitarian aid to isolated villages. Once again, TSW provided the rotors-turning refuelling capability that gave the SHF and coalition helicopters the range and endurance to achieve their mission.



**Refuel spot at Basra Air Base Jun/Jul 2007**

The Middle of April 2003 saw 30 personnel of the MRA re-deploy to Basra International Airport where they operated 4 refuelling points initially from Low Mobility Tankers then latterly utilizing 136m Tanks. During the summer of 2007 Basra Airbase was declared as the highest bombed airfield in history. TSW took a hit when a Russian made rocket impacted 10 metres away from the portacabin where TSW personnel were taking cover. The explosion however fraged the site, wrote off two Land Rovers, impacted two tankers and cut hoses to shreds. It took TSW personnel just 15 minutes to declare themselves operational again, this impressed the OC Helicopter Det massively with the turn round speed. The RAF's major presence in Iraq has finished with the withdrawal from Basrah airport in Jul 2009 and the end of the British mission in the country. A small number of personnel and equipment remained in and around Iraq, including Bagdad, to provide support to the remaining British forces.

## **OP HERRICK**

### **Afghanistan 2005**

The Royal Air Force's involvement in Afghanistan dates back to October 2001 when RAF aircraft provided reconnaissance and air-to-air refuelling capabilities in support of US strike aircraft on Operation Enduring Freedom. In December 2001 the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), which aimed to assist the Afghan Transitional Authority in creating and maintaining a safe and secure environment in Kabul and its surrounding area, was created; it now comprises 47 nations. In 2003 NATO assumed command of ISAF; Stage One and Two of ISAF expansion saw ISAF move into the North and West of Afghanistan. Stage Three of ISAF expansion, which came into effect on 31 July 2006 saw ISAF move into Southern Afghanistan. It is here that the RAF is providing major support in order to aid ISAF in its mission of facilitating reconstruction and the extension of government authority. This support comes in a number of different forms and comprises about 850 RAF personnel: tactical reconnaissance and close air support is provided by Tornado GR4 Force; in-theatre airlift is provided by the RAF C130s and supplemented by Comms Fleet aircraft, including the HS125 and BAe 146; air refuelling support for Coalition aircraft is provided by the TriStar, while the Nimrod plays a large part in delivering ISTAR support. RAF Chinook Helicopters form part of the Joint Helicopter Force in Afghanistan and are the backbone for the provision of tactical mobility for Land forces.



### **CH47 dropping in an underslung APFC load into a FOB site**

Key to success in Afghanistan is the support provided by TSW. The JHF is heavily tasked and is used primarily for medevac and transporting troops and freight around the battlefield. In Afghanistan where roads are poor and the terrain difficult, helicopters provide ground forces a far greater degree of agility and freedom of movement, while affording them protection from the threat of improvised explosive devices. To facilitate these challenging aviation operations, TSW provides a substantial rotors turning capability at Camp Bastion and has had a number of permanent FOB detachments in Helmand Province. In addition, the Wing has taken part in numerous Combat Logistic Patrols to resupply its FOB detachments and has regularly provided mobile tactical refuelling points outside the wire. The flexible and scalable capabilities provided by TSW are a significant force multiplier, in support of combat operations, and are essential to the success of aviation operations.

## **OP HERRICK**

### **Afghanistan 2006 -**

TSW deployed a team of 16 personnel to Afghanistan in April 06 as part of the build-up of Camp BASTION facility, supporting the Joint Helicopter Command Afghanistan (JHF (A) assets in theatre. Personnel are transported to theatre by normal RAF AT from Brize Norton, arriving at Kabul, prior to onward move to BASTION (although a stop at Kandahah, 90 miles East of BASTION is possible). Flights from the UK to Afghanistan take around 8 hours. The team operates from the flight line at BASTION, providing 24hr refuelling cover to UK Support



**Cpl Turner working hard in extreme heat and dust conditions Afghanistan 2009**



## **TSW OP HERRICK 2006 – 2011**

Since TSW were tasked to deploy to Afghanistan in April 2006 things have grown exponentially. From delivering fuel from an austere four point HLS to today's 13 point, intercepted, multi-site semi-permanent HLS. The site improvements have seen the fuel site move from what is now the hospital HLS at Nightingale, to the current set up on the Joint Air Group (JAG) flight line, utilising 8 x 136 m3 fuel tanks, storing over 1 million litres of Aviation fuel. Throughout the years of transition we have seen manpower constraints both increase and decrease to meet operation flow and the introduction of the new Joint Fuels Operation System (JOFS).

Upon arrival at Bastion, the camp consisted of a small detachment of various cap badges from across the tri-service, working from the periphery of the temporary runway that then served the camp. This was a small camp of a few hundred personnel spread over what was about 1Km square. Since then this expeditionary force has become several thousand strong encamped over 3 Camp Bastions taking in more than 10 Km of real estate. Once you add in both the tens of thousands of US Marines at Camp Leatherneck and the thousands of civilian contractors from across the majority of the globe, required to keep the Main Operating Base functioning, you now have a MOB that is bigger in size than most UK towns. It also now boasts 2 fully functioning runways combined with a 24-7 Air Traffic Control tower.



As the camp has grown so has the fleet of aircraft serviced by TSW, from Chinooks, Merlin's, Sea Kings and Apache aircraft, TSW also cover coalition helicopters from MH 53's, Pedro Blackhawk ac and have been known to cover the Hips flown by the Afghan Army under US supervision. Before the arrival of the civilian contractor Supreme we were also required to cover the few fixed wing aircraft that were the lifeline to this far flung base. To cover these extra tasks the manpower has fluctuated throughout, from the initial estimates of 16 personnel consisting of 1 Officer, 1 Flight Sgt, 4 JNCO's and 10 other ranks the team was increased to 25 with the officer being rearward based at JHF (A) Air Ops at Kahadaha and the FS acting as Det Cdr at Bastion. Since the move of all JHF (A) personnel to Bastion the team was reduced to 22. This number still stands to date with TSW remitted to cover the 13 RTR points at Bastion, support the RTR points at FOB Price and have 2 x FARP teams on standby to cover any outside the wire operations.

The tempo of operations and the fluidity of the situation at Bastion have constantly changed over the years, throughout which TSW has had to remain flexible to adapt to the situation as is dictated by events out with our control. Since 2006 to the present day we have continued to undertake 72000 RTR's a year every year or 6000 a month, whilst delivering more than 22 million litres of fuel into various helicopter types from across all 3 Services and coalition partners. All of this has been, until recently, achieved using the exact same Tactical Fuels Handling Equipment used in all TSW operations since the Falklands War. With the introduction of Dangerous Substances and Explosive Atmosphere Regulations (DSEAR) the TFHE has had to be modernised to meet legislation and has seen the new JOFS equipment be deployed into theatre for the first time. Will it last as long as the old faithful tried and tested fuels delivery system, well only time will tell?



**CH47 getting refuelled at Bastion**



With the increase in both Military and civilian personnel came a more robust and modern welfare system. From Coffee shops to Wi-Fi enabled rooms the camp has come a long way from the days of digging in or living out of 12 man tents and having the monotony of eating the same ration pack each day. Bastion now boasts 2 Super Kitchens to feed and water its many inhabitants and has 2 NAAFI / EFFT complexes which serve most needs from sticky's (sweets and snacks) and magazines to toiletries and Sky Sports big screen entertainment

## **Kenya**

TSW deployed and still do deploy to support British Forces training in Kenya from an area near the equator- It provides many challenges from experiencing the dangers faced by wild animals like Elephants and Lions, Snakes and Scorpions to the rains that flood fuel bunds in an instant. The Wing supports all aircraft either on base or up country where temperatures can reach the extreme. The Wing are helped and advised by the Masai Mara people, who guard the site and keep the Hyenas at bay. TSW have also given their time and effort to a local propriety school, who were in need of assistance. One instance was when the education authorities would not let the school raise the Kenyan flag because the school flag pole was not straight, but 'leaning' and in disrepair. It took TSW a day to dig out the flag pole, rub it down, gloss it up and reset it to a nice 'straight' position. Money was raised, windows replaced downtown in Nanuki and toilets were fixed. Detached personnel also took with them pencils, paper, colouring books and toys for the children.



## **Back into Europe - Spain**

2009-2010 European Air Group EAG saw an opportunity to produce refuelling capabilities which would be multi-national ran. The French, Italians, Netherlands and TSW joined forces and worked together to achieve this goal. It involved Wing personnel gaining knowledge and getting hands on with other nations refuelling equipment. It came as no surprise that the equipment currently used by TSW was pretty good and stood out as not only safer, but less likely to leak! It was after conversation with an Italian Officer that we discovered that TSW was the very template that they are trying to model themselves on – this must be very rewarding to CG that his legacy has brought nations of fuellies together under his idea.



## **Chapter 6: The History of Tactical Supply Wing Parachute Cadre**

Although TSW teams had worked with Special Forces in an Exercise environment from 1984 the TSW Parachute Cadre was not formed until 1992 following the First Gulf War. In order to support long-range deployments, the aerial insertion of rotary aviation fuel was required and the Air Despatched Forward Aircraft Refuelling Point (ADFARP) was born.



### **TSW Para Cadre personnel stripping down the Medium Stress Platform**

Over the course of the following year the Joint Air Transport establishment at RAF Brize Norton built, tested and then trialled the Medium Stress Platform (MSP) used for dropping Land Rovers, Artillery, Ammunition and the like. This system allowed TSW to air drop fuel and equipment into an operational environment for the first time. The TSW MSP consists of 2 Air Portable Fuel Containers, a 50 GPM pump, filter and ancillaries. This system provides just less than 4000 litres of jet fuel (Avtur) and has proved extremely successful.

It is still in use today. Technical details are shown below:

- Weight 14000 lbs ( peacetime)
- 18000 lbs ( operational)
- Comprising:
  - 2 x Air Portable Fuel Containers
  - 1 x 150 GPM Filter
  - 1 x 50 GPM Pump
  - 1 x Pressure Line/ Open Line

Ancillaries (spares, QA kit, earth spike, water, rations, ammo, tool kit)



**MSP being delivered by C130, despatched by 47Air Despatch from RAF Lyneham**

TSW was then established for 15 parachute-qualified personnel of all ranks and trades. In 1992 the first TSW Airmen completed the Military Parachute Training Course under the canopies of PX4 parachutes, alongside the then OC TSW, Wg Cdr Spinks at the Military Parachute Training at RAF Brize Norton. TSW personnel are not selected for parachute training prior to joining the Wing. Instead they apply on a purely voluntary basis. More recently, TSW has begun to

consider special levels of fitness, experience and Personal Qualities before personnel embark on parachute training.



### **Static Line Square parachute training**

In 1995 TSW converted to the new Low Level Parachute (LLP) alongside the Parachute Regiment, the Royal Marines and Special Forces. This parachute was modern and a lighter weight than its predecessor and to this day it has never failed to deploy. In 1998, OC TSW created the Air Adjutant role to place a greater

significance on the TSW parachuting capability; this allowed more formal Para exercises to take place. These exercises have included covert patrolling, day and night navigation, obstacle crossing, covert RECCE, sketch maps and model building, improvised shelters, harbour drills and actions on compromise as well as evasive navigation in a hostile environment.



### **TSW Para Cadre training**

In 2002, TSW Parachute Cadre selection weekends were initiated, they involved existing Para Cadre Members acting as Directing Staff or assisting in patrols covering approximately 30 km through the night as well as supporting background activities to suit all skill levels. These weekends were designed as a window of opportunity to display determination, leadership and commitment to the Para Cadre. Once selected, those nominated for the Parachute course: held at RAF Brize Norton. On passing out each person was read the 'Warning on Qualifying as a Trained Parachutist'. As a Military Parachutist on TSW Para Cadre, members are expected to serve as ordered. This is still the training system that exists today.



**Sgt Miller, Cpl Watson and SAC Gasser – on-board a C130**

In 2004 the TSW Para Cadre sought support from Special Forces to help sustain the numbers of recruits transiting through parachute training. In 2005, after a military review of all parachute training and entitlement, TSW was allocated 18 LLP personnel and 18 Static Line Square (SLS) placements as part of a DSF developed bespoke parachute course. The SLS enhanced TSW's capability by parachuting in higher winds and greater control. The first SLS TSW personnel successfully qualified in December 2006.

TSW Parachute Cadre are frequently called upon to support exercises all over the world and have often jumped with both equipment and manpower to successfully complete the task. The Cadre has most recently supported Operation Herrick in Afghanistan. Since 1992, TSW has employed 67 qualified military parachutists and continues this proud tradition today.





**Sgt Dai Millar leading a patrol**



## **CHAPTER 7: THE FUTURE?**

Since its formation in 1971, TSW have been involved in every major conflict and deployed to every theatre of Operations in which the U.K Government has committed it to.

The Wing has undertaken an immense range of Exercise commitments and undertaken civic duties and charity work. Its presence in its home town of Stafford is greatly valued. Indeed in 2009 The Borough awarded the Wing its Freedom to march with “bayonets fixed and colours flying”

Following the then Labour Government’s Defence Review the Joint Helicopter Command formed at Wilton on 1st October 1999. It comprises of Battlefield Helicopters. The RN Commando Helicopter Force; all operational Army Air Corps aircraft; and the RAF Support Helicopter Force of Chinook, Merlin and Pumas. In acknowledging TSW’s role in supporting helicopters from the 3 Services, the Wing was fully integrated into the JHC albeit still as a dedicated RAF Unit providing a dedicated fuel support and logistics organization.

Wg Cdr (Retired) N F Atkinson OC TSW Apr 07 – Apr 09 gives his personal reflections on TSW’s future.



“TSW has evolved since the conception of the Wing in 1970 into a highly professional, specialist, some would say unique, organization delivering to Defence what no other unit in the British Military is configured to do. There are a variety of reasons for this, from the `love of the job` bringing personnel back to serve on TSW time and time again and thus maintaining a high level of experience, an ability to cross-train personnel from currently 10 different trades to deliver the TSW Operator, and remaining despite various initiatives a Single Service unit delivering capability to all 3 Services. The Wing had developed an esprit de corps which is second to none.

But what does the future hold? Whatever happens there will always be the need to have a unit that delivers the `TSW` capability to the Joint Helicopter Command (JHC) as long as helicopters form part of the UK Defence capability. Also, will TSW remain solely fuel support and Rotors Turning Refuel (RTR) specialist, or as the name implies should TSW expand to take on a wider supply (or logistic) function for the JHC?”

In 2010 the Coalition Government announced the outcome of the Strategic Defence and Security Review. This confirmed the importance of the helicopter in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Battlefield. So, from the birth of the Wing when the RAF enjoyed strength of 120000 to 2011 in the Wing’s 41<sup>st</sup> Year when the Service is forecast to shrink to some 35000, the Wing has stood the test of time. Long may it do so.

In 2011 as the first female CO of the Wing Wg Cdr (now Gp Capt) S N Perkins MA MCMI (Better known as ‘Polly’) took over command of the Wing from Wg Cdr Tim Etches MA, who was CO from 2009-2011.



**Wg Cdr now Gp Cpt Polly Perkins MA MCMI takes over command from Wg Cdr Tim Etches MA (RAF Rtd)**

Just for the record there have been WRAF members on the Wing over the past 40 odd years. FO Brown was I believe the first WRAF Officer and SAC (W) Shirley McBey, the wife of ex Wing WO Bob McBey.

I asked the new CO to say how the future of the Wing will progress, she replied with the following:

For many Defence Organisations, the implications of the Strategic Defence and Security Review 2010 will see significant changes in resources, the way we train and the way we deploy. For TSW, the revised Defence Strategic Direction will result in the opportunity for TSW to reconfigure to deliver its core capability of Rotors Turning Refuelling with Very High Readiness Teams prepared to support JHC and SF activity across the globe. The quality of our people will remain the key

with highly motivated, well trained and experienced personnel able to deploy, led at JNCO-level, helping to ensure we remain taught, value for money and largely staffed by volunteers.



**Wg Cdr now Gp Cpt Polly N Perkins MA MCMI**

Closer cooperation, but not necessarily integration, with the Army Air Corps will ensure Defence assets are deployed and supported increasingly efficiently. Common standards, equipment and training with our NATO allies will remain an essential foundation of our coalition operations with TSW likely to remain the benchmark for other Nations to meet.

Whilst it will be essential for TSW to adjust and innovate to meet the challenges of the future, there is no doubt that the capabilities that we support will remain key to the UK's National Security Strategy. In supporting these not only are we prepared to go where they go, but we are prepared and ready to be there first.

The foundation upon which TSW's success was, and has been based is its constant preparedness during times of peace. This is developed teamwork, continuous training, and implementation of local initiatives, technological advancements and strong leadership. Since its formation, TSW have been closely involved with ensuring effective support to its range of customers. Not all can be told, little is heard of some of these initiatives.

However, I believe that the words of Air Chief Marshall Sir Jock Stirrup KCB AFD ADC's CAS report to HM Queen Elizabeth II in 2005 tells how far, the Wing have come from its first conception. This is what it said:

### ***Unsung and unheralded***

*'One of the many crucial but often unsung units of the Royal Air Force whose work underpins all of our flying operations is the Tactical Supply Wing, based at Stafford.*

*The Wing delivers fuel support to battlefield helicopters deployed at the front line and, if required, behind enemy lines. It performs a dangerous but essential role, and its people often the first in and the last out of remote areas.*

*Tactical Supply Wing has served on all recent operations and through its work has significantly increased the reach of our helicopters.*

*Its 200-plus strong volunteers come from diverse backgrounds and bring a great variety of experience to the unit.*

*Their contribution is normally unheralded; but they are brave and skilful people without whom our helicopters – and hence our ground forces – could not do their job.'*

What a wonderful tribute to the Wing.

It is therefore essential that TSW carry those standards into the future, having watched the wing grow over the past 40 years, I have no doubt whatsoever that our customers will still be depending on the men and woman of the Tactical Supply Wing well into the future.

## **CHAPTER 8: OTHER AREAS OF INTEREST**

### **The Arctic**

Each year the Wing's teams committed to NATO's AMF (L) were mandated to undertake operational training in the Arctic-usually Norway. Personnel attending these exercises remember having to survive in -30 degrees C on "two of the world's smallest fish and a scrawny but very active chicken" to share between 15 of them. The Royal Marines supervising the training then unceremoniously chucked the TSW trainees into a freezing cold water hole before being allowed a tot of rum to warm up with!



**SAC Owen- Ice breaking drills in Norway**



## **International Relations**

In 2000 TSW personnel, led by then Cpl Jon Steels, were sent to London on special request of the then President of the United States of an America, Bill Clinton. The task was to refuel his Marine 1 and 2 VIP Helicopters in front of a crowd measured in the hundreds in the middle of Hyde Park. This provided great publicity to the Wing and gave the President the chance to stand next to some of the most powerful men in the world.



**Airforce one getting refuelled at Hyde Park**

In 2002, three members of TSW, Sgt Neil Hyde, Cpl Paul Gannon and Cpl Dai Miller, were sent to Australia for three weeks to work alongside the Australian armed forces using similar tactical re-fuelling techniques. The three were stopped several times trying to "jump the wire" and go native but Cpl Dai Millers dodge Welsh/Ozzy accent just kept giving them away.

## **National Support**

The year 2001 saw the outbreak of foot and mouth disease across the country. TSW were called up as part of Op PENINSULAR to help prevent the spread



of infection. This was a gruelling task that was carried out professionally by all involved.

When the blight of Foot and Mouth struck the UK, all mainland military establishments were called upon to help the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food (MAFF) to control the spread.

TSW's involvement in this seen Cpl Wynn and SAC Wilson called out to cover the North East AO of England. Assigned to what was known as the 'Dirty Teams' both were sent to Willington a small mining community village. Acting as initial point of confirmation for farms to be cleansed, the small team would work in isolation calling in vets and authorised animal extermination teams to undertake the cull. This was a time consuming and often delicate operation calling on a good deal of tact and diplomacy to placate the landowner when informed of the planned destruction of their herd.

The small teams were only actively used over a 2 week period to ensure the trauma of dealing in so much death and destruction of animals did not adversely affect those individuals.

Upon return to Stafford a 2<sup>nd</sup> Foot and Mouth Team were dispatched to the Settle and Gisburn to undertake further MAFF duties. Deployed for a further 2 weeks where Cpl Wynn and SAC Hemming were to the fore in curtailing any further spread of Foot and Mouth

On the 27th June 2002, the Wing supported Her Majesty's Golden Jubilee visit to the Army Forces Portsmouth. TSW set up a refuelling site at RAF Thorney Island to refuel the 33 Helicopters due to take part in the fly past during the visit. Flt Sgt Paul Stanford, who led the detachment, said:

"I have never seen so many helicopters in one place at one time. It was probably the only occasion when all types and roles were represented. Apaches, Search and Rescue variants, RN ASW Merlin's, RM Gazelles, Chinook, Puma, Lynx, HM Coastguard variants and we even performed rotors turning refuel on a VIP Squirrel".

TSW also had a stand in the exhibition hall which wrapped up the day nicely when they were visited by Her Majesty the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh.

On 12<sup>th</sup> November 2002 the Fire Brigades Union started the first national fire-fighters strike in over 25 years. RAF Stafford acted as the area hub for the ensuing Op FRESCO with Wing staff providing fire-fighting cover for the duration of the strikes. This lasted until June 2003 meaning that the Wing was split between continuing their normal detachments and deploying on Op TELIC.

### **Two Stories from Retired Warrant Officers!**

One of the Wing's WO's from 1982 to 1985 was Joe Ronan. Joe's Jack Russell "Hutch" a seven year old Jack Russell which was adopted as the Wing mascot. Hutch became so popular that he accompanied the Wing on its training sessions. His basic job was keeping an eye on the admin tent but he liked to join in the exercise as well. He kept the trainees on their toes and was known to nip the odd heel while running with them Hutch proudly wore a camouflage jacket and a little tin hat made for him by one of the Wing's instructors. Hutch did have one little draw back; he chased anything! On one occasion out on exercise, a thunder flash was thrown, Hutch, thinking it was a stick, dutifully shot off to retrieve it. Fortunately, he was persuaded to part company with the thunder flash before it went off, and survived to wag his tail!



**Wing WO Joe Ronan and Hutch**



### **Hutch checks out living conditions at Swynnerton with WO Joe Ronan**

Joe mentioned a few names that bring back memories to me like Alan Sadler, Ian Mayes, Terry Bott, Jack Skyse, Eddie Greene, Chris Barnes, Ron Hindle, Ian Bancroft, Keith Fraint, Graham Noakes, Mal Short, Wiley(David)Lyndon, Dick Bore, Ranjit(Sid)Singh. However the one which stood out for him was an airman called Connie Harris, who always seemed to be full of life and continually smiling, although he was a bit of a Jonah, as everything he attempted seemed to go wrong. None-the-less he always came back for more.

On one occasion, he took Hutch for a walk and stood to watch Rugby match which was just about to start. Just as the Referee placed the ball on the centre spot a gust of wind blew the ball away. Well anything which was moving was fair game to Hutch and he took off dragging Connie with him all over the pitch hotly pursued by 30 angry Rugby players. No one would try to get the ball off Hutch. No one would take a chance of getting the ball back so Joe had to threaten Hutch with his old Shillelagh until Hutch gave it up, and the game got under way.

Connie was worried for weeks afterwards because even though he still wanted to take Hutch for walks. Joe only allowed him to do so provided he didn't stop to watch any more Rugby matches.

WO Bob McBey tells another story. It is called "The Barrel" Bob tells how he and some other Wing members such as SAC Charlie Hillman, SAC Trev (Barrel) Rodgers were on Exercise in Denmark supporting 1 (F) Sqn. He says. They were not far from a town called Veile, so decided to go down and have a few pints in the town.



**The Danish bar where the 'Barrel' lived before the Wing re-located it.**

The brave warriors went into a bar and immediately were nearly deafened by the noise. The barman was asked to turn the sound down, but to their amazement he

turned round and said that it was a Disco for those with impaired hearing and speech. On the way out they spotted this large polished wooden barrel. So, thinking it would look good in the Wing's crew room as a trophy they helped it on its way. However it had a long way to travel, to get it back to the exercise area. Also no taxis could be seen to get the barrel into. We had almost given up the idea. However an American Cadillac taxi turned up and it was no problem to get the barrel into it. The next problem was getting the Danish Military Police to put it on one of their vehicles to take it to the TSW lines. They would not play ball at first, so the lads decided to lie down and go to sleep. So they changed their minds and transported them and the barrel back to the accommodation. To cut a long story short, the barrel made it back to the TSW crew room at Stafford. It has been used in the Station church on Harvest Thanks Giving church services.

**Flt/Sgt Ian Campbell (Better known as Granny) Tale of Exercise at Garelochhead.**



**TSW – we have a problem! - Railway line meets TTF**

A small exercise consisting of a convoy of three vehicles. Land Rover, 4 Ton Bedford and a TTF supported by four personnel, myself Cpl Campbell, Sac's Paul Martin, Bez Wilson and Ian Fisher.

We travelled from Stafford to Garelochhead with the mandatory overnight watering hole stop at Carlisle. On the Carlisle to Garelochhead leg of the journey the TTF's speedometer went U/S. No drama's there but on arrival and whilst the TTF was parked up as the fuel source (connected to the pump and filter) at the top of the hill, I reported the fault and the REME were called out to fix it. Unknown to me the REME arrived, failed to fix the fault, due to the TTF being an unfamiliar vehicle, and then they left. Investigations revealed afterwards that whilst working in the cab of the vehicle one of the fitters most likely knocked the override switch for the vehicles airbrakes, which automatically came on when the fuel compartment were in use. Prior to this a Gazelle had arrived and took a refuel from the refuel point which was situated on the HLS halfway down the hill where the TTF was situated. As the vehicle was parked up and the fuel had time to settle before the override switch was engaged it did not move until a Wessex landed on the point for Rotors Turning Refuel. The aircraft was fitted with a Night Sun which made the front refuelling point slightly more difficult to reach. I managed the pump whilst the lads manned the two refuel points. With the tanker to my right and the pump to my left with the hose connected the two behind me, all of a sudden, my legs were taken from underneath me and I was flat on my back. Not knowing what was going on I looked to my right and the tanker tyre rubbed past my nose (leaving a black mark). I then sat up only to watch the TTF trundling down the hill, heading straight for the Wessex, towing the pump, filter and hose(the latter of which was the reason for me being flat on my back) down the hill.





### **First attempt at an unmanned refuelling vehicle did not quite work**

It seemed like I was watching a cartoon in slow motion as the loadmaster disconnected himself from the aircraft comms, and ran away with the rear refueller, the Wessex lifted to avoid the oncoming traffic with the front refueller still on the point sat on the Night Sun. When the aircraft reached about 10-15 ft the front refueller, who was the driver of the TTF, decided it was time to leave and jumped off the Night Sun. whilst brushing himself down, not realizing what was going on, the TTF narrowly missed him on the way down to its eventual resting place, the railway line. At the time we took the piss out of the techies and aircrew who all ran away from the runaway TTF and all the TSW personnel were chasing after it, glad we didn't catch it as I don't know what we would have done if we did, but they were probably doing the sensible thing. With the TTF now stationary, on the railway with a train 9 minutes up the line, we went into auto pilot calling the Fire Service and deploying an airman about 200 metres up the line either side of the tanker.



The Fire Service gave us a pat on the back for our prompt actions whilst, unknown to us at the time, the umbrellas were out back at Stafford ready to hang us out to dry. Counting my blessings as so much could have gone against us during this event. We were so lucky on many accounts.

### **Commendations for Bravery**

There have been 3 national awards for Bravery on the Wing. Two relate to operations in Northern Island (Mark Bennett and Andy Holsgrove) with the third (Chris Hopkins) associated with Operations in the Balkans. All concerned daring rescue attempts in an aviation environment.

### **Community Support and Recognition**

Wing personnel are conscious of the need to help those in society less fortunate than themselves. Locally, the Donna Louise Trust benefits. One annual mechanism for raising money is the now well established annual sponsored “Bergathon”. This is a team event involving teams from all three Services and the TSW Association veterans (a recent addition). It commits participants to run (or at least move quickly) in light fighting order over a 10km course at a Military Training Area close to Stafford. In 2010 the Veterans team raised most sponsorship money.



**The 2009 TSW Association Bergathon Veterans Team**



**Coxy and Dunc's setting off on another leg of the Bergathon**



**TSW Bergathon Veterans team 29 Sep 2011**

### TSW Open Day's

The families of the Wing personnel are not forgotten. Each year a Families Day is held to entertain families. The highlight is invariably the placing in the Stocks of certain key staff (certainly the CO) when anybody (for a fee) can have a go! The charity coffers invariably swell!







**Chernobyl Children**



**October 2008 TSW received a visit from children from the Chernobyl disaster**



### Ceremonial

The Wing is proud to represent the RAF in the local community through public events such as Battle of Britain Day and Armistice Sunday. In September 2010 the Wing joined with the Borough of Stafford to celebrate two significant events in the short history of the RAF: the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Battle of Britain and the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the formation of Tactical Supply Wing.



**Freedom of Stafford Parade 2010**



**HRH Duke of Edingburgh chats to Sgt 'Bart' Lawtey during a visit to Stafford**



### **The Unit Crest and Motto**

The original design for a TSW badge came from Flt Lt Roger Maunder in early 1976 when he suggested that it should be the RAF eagle clutching an APFC!

The TSW Unit Crest bears the Wing's motto "Support to Strike" and had been used informally for many years before it was authorised in March 1992 by HM Queen Elizabeth II. As TSW's original role was that of supporting Strike Command, the motto "Support to Strike" was chosen as it summed up the function and aim of the Wing perfectly. The Crest shows a Peregrine Falcon in flight over a bridge of three arches. The Peregrine Falcon symbolises strength agility and the ability to strike whilst the three arches refer to the three commands that were in place at the time of TSW's formation. The plans were swiftly dropped though when WO Martin (Eng) pointed out the obvious dangers of mixing electricity with fuels and the obvious lack of judgment demonstrated. After a review with TSW in 2003, the crest and motto were deemed to remain appropriate to this day, even under the Joint Helicopter Command and so remains the same



## **CHAPTER 9: THE SERVICING COMMANDOS**



First of all let me say that it has only been in the last 10 years, that the RAF Servicing Commandos have been known to TSW. I myself have only become aware of them in the past five years. I only wish that we had known about them when we first started to form the Wing. Their invaluable experiences would have certainly have been of use to us. However I understand why we had not heard of them. It is because like Stan White writes in The RAF Servicing Commandos. That they received scant recognition from those, who write about the Second World Wars RAF History. That is exactly what has happened to the Tactical Supply Wing. The Wing has made vital contributions to keeping our front line aircraft flying all around the world and especially in the Falklands and the Gulf wars. Yet after reading nearly every book on the Falklands War, not one mention have I seen. The Tactical Supply Wing revolutionised the flexibility of troop's movements from early 1970 until the present day. So isn't it time that both the histories of the RAF Servicing Commandos and Tactical Supply Wing be told. Both units are unique. Because they were and with TSW still are strange fish. For a start they are airmen in Army Uniforms. They both were formed to do a specialist job, that only they could do. That was to be able to be flexible enough to move with the aircraft and yet having the skills to live and work in all types of terrain, climates and conditions in the field, yet still to be able to be self-sufficient, but also to kept the aircraft flying at any cost. They also had to be combat trained in order to secure and defend their area.

The RAF Servicing Commandos and the Tactical Supply Wing have come together and formed an Association. It is hoped by doing this that the contribution which the RAF Servicing Commandos gave in WWII will not be forgotten. Yet will



still live on through their younger comrades in arms of the Tactical Supply Wing. Having read Spectacles, testicles, fags and matches. The untold story of the RAF Servicing Commandos in World War 2 by Tom Atkinson. Many of the things they got up to, remind me of TSW in the early days. Their contribution in WWII cannot and must not be forgotten. It was too hard paid for by all those who laid down their lives for their country. Also some of the problems they encountered were very similar to those of TSW. Having also read David Rooney's "MAD MIKE" about the formation of the Chindits and the struggles of General Orde Wingate and Brigadier Michael Calvert, also David Stirling and the SAS to get the establishment to appreciate the importance of having and using units that are flexible and mobile at or in front of the front line is again similar to that of the Servicing Commandos and TSW. For example the way that Group Captain John Craven Griffiths idea of the Tactical Supply Wing was scoffed at by the D of S Pol (RAF) and by the 20 Sqn Ldr's (All ambitious). Also the fact that after proving to all the Doubting Thomas's the value of the Wing over close to 40 years he was awarded an OBE. This was more than well deserved. However isn't it time the value of GC's idea and the fact that over the years it has continually contributed greatly to the ability of the RAF to be more flexible, mobile and to be able to coup better as a force than ever before, is that not worthy of a Knighthood. It is a pity that over all these years the Top Brass still can't see a real leader in front of their faces. Yet they are quite ready to promote yes men. Who if they keep their nose clean? Get promotion. Yet people like Wingate, Calvert, Stirling and Craven Griffiths get scant recognition for standing up and being different. These are the men of courage and the leaders of men. That we all should venerate, they are a class above the sheep that would call themselves leaders, like the D of S Pol (RAF) and the 20 Sqn Ldr's (All ambitious).

I sat down with my 15 year old Grandson Drew and watched the video of the dedication of the Royal Air Force Servicing Commandoes Standard. I wanted him to see the pride and the comradeship of these people in their unit. They had come from far and wide for this service. It shows their commitment after all these years to the RAF SC. It also showed the metal that these people were made of. The comradeship was very evident by the joy in their faces and the amount of good banter that was being shown, when they were re-united with their mates. I hope my Grandson will one day reflect on this video when he is older and recall these jolly old men. Who had in their youth put themselves on the line, that others coming after them, could live in peace. I said to him that if it had not been for people like the RAF SC, and many others, he would most likely be speaking

German under the Nazis. We owe a great debt to all who fought in the Second World War that can never be repaid.



**Field Marshall Montgomery with 3208 SC, Belgium 1944**

Except by keeping the memories for those who fought and died for us, alive. Having fought in the Battle for the Falklands. I can understand a little more the sacrifice of those who fought in WWII. Unfortunately for the majority of people today those sacrifices which were made in WWII by service men and women don't seem to hold any value today. Service to Queen and country are more like a dirty word. However there are many young men and women still carrying the flag high in the service of their country among them are those of the RAF Tactical Supply Wing they will keep the flag flying and the aircraft, because that is what they do best.

We also must not forget all those who went before us and fought in the terrible First World War.

The Poet Siegfried Sassoon wrote this poem:-

*Dim, gradual thinning of the shapeless form*  
*Shudders to drizzling daybreak that reveals*  
*Disconsolate men who stamp their sodden boots*  
*And turn dulled, sunken faces to the sky*  
*Haggard and hopeless, they who have beaten down*  
*The stale despair of night, must now renew*  
*Their desolation in the truce of dawn*  
*Murdering the lived hours that grope for peace*

I have written what the poem says to me:-

This poem conjures up for me a picture of a battlefield during the First World War. Soldiers are beginning to stir and as they try to shrug off the cold dampness of a murky night, they try to get the circulation moving in their limbs, especially their feet, for their feet have taken the brunt being continuously submerged into the mud and sludge of a rain soaked trench.

These soldiers have done this many times before and have become oblivious to the conditions around them. Their faces are drawn and lack pallor, they move around aimlessly and beleaguered as if a forgotten legion. There is a chill in the

dark mist which hangs as if suspended in shadows which take different shapes as the light of dawn approaches, shadows which hide the reaper of death who creeps amongst them like a scavenger not wanting to be seen.

They have survived yet another night, but this is only a mirage, for with the coming of the dawn, comes the preparation for yet another battle. It makes them feel, if there is a capability left to feel, that the night has betrayed them, that the reaper of death has played a terrible trick on them, using them only like clay things, just waiting to steal their lives from them. The night has hung still and silent as if time had stopped to take a breath, inhaling as if it were to prepare itself for what inevitably is going to happen. Each hour has seemed like an eternity, begging for a release from its imprisonment, searching for a way to break through the stagnation which it has locked itself into, out into a new yet welcomed mundane time.

Through this entire atmosphere, the writer has sat all night penning his poem; one would think that he would be exhausted. It somehow seems incredible that anybody still has the temperament and mental strength to want to do such a thing. However, for the writer, it is an incipient need within him, which invokes such an outburst. It becomes a way to beat the reaper for if he does glean this mortal body, it will be of no avail to him because the words which are so carefully chosen, will live on as a testament to the truth, as an inspiration to those who one day, will follow and who will also one day meet the dark shadowy figure in the mist. These are words which cry out to be heard as a message which asks for this futility not to be repeated, that the sacrifice which each soldier makes is not wasted. How can it be contemplated that it could happen again for surely this is the war to end all wars.

At this moment in time, the writer has captured the mood, the picture of what he sees around him. Yet with his words which he uses like a skilled painter, he invokes you to conjure up a picture. He opens your mind so that you can interpret the message with which he pleads for a time of peace to come again.

He tells us that these men are aware of their plight yet carry on regardless of the consequences. They are caught in a vicious tangle from which there is no escape other, that is, than death. Yet still these men soldier on, they are like sheep to the slaughter, awaiting their turn, each man finding his own way to get over this

nauseous time. Some play cards, some write (that last letter) and some like the writer of this poem; put their feelings and thoughts into more expressive forms.

It can, be seen even by the way the poet writes and punctuates the poem that each word has been particularly sot out to emphasise and express what he wishes to say and to give the poem better impact. In some ways this poem reminds me of another message from the soldiers of another battle fought many hundreds of years ago in Greece by soldiers from Sparta. They too were ready to give their lives unselfishly and left this message “Go tell them thou the passer bye, that here obedient to their laws we lie”.

### Units

UNIT	COMMAND	FORMED	TRAINING	OPERATIONS
3201* 3202 3203	Fighter	March 1942	UK	North Africa, Sicily, Italy *Sth France
3225 3226	Army Cooperation	August 1942	UK	Sicily, Italy
3204	Fighter	February 1943	UK	North Africa
3206	Army Cooperation	April 1943	UK	Europe
3205 3207 3209 3210	Fighter	April 1943	UK	Normandy, India, Burma, Indo-China, Malaya, Thailand, Java
3208	Fighter	April 1943	UK	Europe
3230 3231 3232	Middle East	April 1943	Palestine	Sicily, Italy

After I came back from the Falklands War, I wrote my own little poem:-

*Step out brave soldier with your uniform and gun,  
Chest filled with pride and head held high,  
For today you yet may be called upon to die,  
But do not sigh nor women cry,  
For this is where the bravest lie,  
Among the battlefields of freedom.*

I would also like to present a poem by Mrs Gwyneth Pritchard whose husband was a member of 3206 SCU. It reads as follows:-

#### THE FALLEN

*Silent troops lined row on row,  
No trumpet call, no nearby foe.  
Battles faded into dreams,  
Blood run cold like icy streams,  
Memories faded like the years,  
Only stories, bravery blurs.  
Souls risen, matters not the low,  
Rank means nothing where we go,  
We'll just wait here, we are the blessed.  
There is no war where we must rest.*

What a beautiful tribute to the fallen and obviously written from the heart.



**3210 SC in France**



**3206 SC**



**3260 SC**

Gwyneth also sent me the list of the Military Awards to the Servicing Commandos and the Roll of Honour. Gwyneth also contacted to Mr Jeff Davies, who was the author of The Royal Air Force Servicing Commandos and obtained his permission to allow these lists to be published in this book. My sincere thanks to them both for their kindness. The lists are shown on the next few pages.



## **MILITARY AWARDS**

### **LIST OF AWARDS TO SERVICING COMMANDOS**

#### **PERSONNEL IN UNIT ORDER**

##### **Unit**

<b>Number</b>	<b>Rank</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Award</b>
<b>3201 SCU</b>			
810118	A/F/Sgt	Bannon	
551351	Cpl	Frazer H	BEM
962736	L/A/C	Strange W R	BEM
1428680	Cpl	Dann E	MID
623099	Cpl	Cooper VA	MID
1580175	A/C2	Fear CA	MID
1012119	L/A/C	Garlick A C	MID
977875	Cpl	Holton J	MID
1267277	Sgt	Tee E M	MID
1178541	L/A/C	Williams D I	MID

**3201 SCU & 3202 SCU** Units Devotion to Duty in command DRO's by AOC Eastern Air Command.

	Flt/lt	Wheadon B E	MBE
566248	W/O	Draycott W E	MBE
	F/O	Hatton M F	MID
1136053	L/A/C	Valance R W	MID

**3203 SCU**

520716	F/Sgt	Flanders L J	MID
930768	L/A/C	Emms E J	MID

**3204 SCU**               None on records.

**3205 SCU**               Unit Commendation – ACSEA

**3026 SCU**               None on records.

**3207 SCU**

803379	Sgt	Brown F	MM
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1433683	Cpl	Coxhall	MM
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47948	Flt/Lt	Smith C F	MID
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<b>3208 SCU</b>	None on records.		
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<b>3209 SCU</b>	None on records.		
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<b>3210 SCU</b>	Unit Commendation – AOC 85 Grp		
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1404004	L/A/C	Warren	MID
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**Commendation for Bravery**

<b>3225 SCU</b>	None on record.		
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<b>3230 SCU</b>	None on record.		
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**3231 SCU**                      None on record.

**3232 SCU**                      None on record.

**FOR THOSE WHO DIED – ROLL OF HONOR**

**3201 SCU**                      612453, SGT BENJAMIN PICKERING  
  
RAF 17 November 1942, Age 22  
  
DELY IBRAHIM WAR CEMETERY, ALGERIA  
  
3H10

**3201 SCU**                      1240138, AC1 GEORGE CLARKE  
  
RAF (VR) 22 November 1942, Age 31  
  
MEDJEZ-EL-BAB WAR CEMETERY, TUNISIA  
  
6C1

**3201 SCU**                      1035703, LAC STANLEY ARTHUR GALLAGHER  
  
RAF (vr) 22 November 1942, Age 22

MEDJEZ-EL-BAB WAR CEMETERY, TUNISIA

GC2

**3201 SCU**

618375, SGT LEONARD VICTOR SNAPE

RAF 18 January 1945, Age 23

BARI WAR CEMETERY, ITALY

15D14

**3205 SCU**

1312615, LAC OWEN WILLIAM SWALLOW

RAF (VR) 30 January 1945, Age 31

TAUKKYAN WAR CEMETERY, RANGOON, BURMA

5C8

**3206 SCU**

1384610 LAC LEONARD CHARLES LANSDOWNE

RAF (VR) 12 September 1944, Age 32

MARISSEL FRENCH NATIONAL CEMETERY, FRANCE

Grave 324

**3207 SCU**

16778283, LAC JACK HENSON CROFTS

RAF (VR) 7 June 1944, Age 20

RUNNYMEDE MEMORIAL, EGHAM, SURRY

Panel 241 (LOST AT SEA – NORMANDY LANDINGS)

**3209 SCU**

1460523, AC1 EDWARD JOHN SKEGGS

RAF (VR) 8 June 1944, Age 23

RUNNYMEDE MEMORIAL, EGHAM, SURRY

Panel 243 (LOST AT SEA – NORMANDY LANDINGS)

**3209 SCU**

648591, CPL CHARLES MERVYN WALKER

RAF 10 October 1945, Age 23

MADRAS WAR CEMETERY, INDIA

9E3 (WHILE REJOINING UNIT IN BURMA – SIAM  
AREA)

**3225 SCU**

612613, SGT JOHN EDWIN SAVAGE

RAF 22 October 1943, Age 26

KHAYAT BEACH WAR CEMETERY, ISRAEL

DB6

**3226 SCU**

1107082, CPL HUGH McCULLOCH MONTGOMERIE

RAF (VR) 11 August 1943, Age 26

CATANIA WAR CEMETERY, SICILY

IF 46

**3231 SCU**

1305857, LAC ERNEST NUTTALL

RAF (VR) 30 June 1943, Age 22

PEMBOKE MILITARY CEMETERY, MALTA

1117

**3232 SCU**

649555, CPL HAROLD MOORE

RAF 11 May 1943, Age 27

THE ALAMEIN MEMORIAL, EGYPT (Column 272)

(LOST AT SEA – GIVATE OLGA BEACH, ISRAEL)

**3232 SCU**

1024016, LAC HORACE HUGHES

RAF (VR) 11 May 1943, Age 23

KHAYAT BEACH WAR CEMETERY, ISRAEL

CB16 (LOST AT SEA – GIVATE OLGA BEACH, ISRAEL)

**3232 SCU**

1233431, AC1 JOHN WILLIAM CANNON

RAF (VR) 21 June 1943, Age 22

MALTA (CAPUCCHINI) NAVEL CEMETERY, MALTA

Prot Sec (Men's) Plot F Coll. Grave 36

**3232 SCU**

1172764, LAC REGINALD JAMES ALGRED GOODMAN

RAF (VR) 21 June 1943, Age 24

MALTA (CAPUCCHINI) NAVEL CEMETERY, MALTA

Prot Sec (Men's) Plot F Coll. Grave 36

The names of those who died are recorded at the RAF Memorial at Runnymede



**The First recipient of the RAF Servicing Commandos and The Tactical Supply Wing Association Presidents Award.**



**SAC 'Dutch' Holland being presented with the 'Airman of the Year' Trophy at JCB HQ**

**The Citation**

Senior Aircraftsman (SAC) Neil "Dutch" Holland joined the Royal Air Force in January 2003 aged 16. After initial airman training and a 3 year tour at RAF Kinloss, he arrived at Tactical Supply Wing (TSW), in January 2006.

On completion of initial TSW training followed by some minor exercises, SAC Holland deployed as part of the on-going TSW detachment in Afghanistan in January 2007. Whilst operating forward in the desert on an aviation support task, he was involved in an incident where his team leader was injured during the rapid

offload from a Hercules transport aircraft. His team leader had to be evacuated, but SAC Holland was able to remain and assumed command of the team, setting up the refuel site and ensured the task continued with maximum output and full efficiency. In doing so SAC Holland exhibited tremendous leadership and acceptance of responsibility when confronted with an extremely challenging situation.

Following this tour, SAC Holland deployed on a number of exercises supporting forces in the UK and Oman. Whilst in Oman, SAC Holland was selected to take charge of a shift as a result of his previous solid performances, despite being a relatively junior SAC. He did so with the now familiar confidence, determination and sound leadership. In all his ventures on TSW, he has received many praiseworthy comments from his Detachment Commanders, confirming his proactive attitude, extensive trade knowledge and understanding of TSW procedures. This coupled with his ability to promote good morale, his acceptance of, and enthusiasm for, extra responsibilities, and his exceptional organisational capabilities stand him apart from his peers.

Throughout all his activities there have been a number of recurring themes which focus on justified confidence, strong leadership, dedication and a proactive willingness to assist. He has become an instrumental and popular team player, and respected throughout TSW. At MOD Stafford, SAC Holland represents TSW at rugby and behind the scenes assists the team captain by organising the TSW Amenities Fund, which provides welfare support to TSW personnel deployed on overseas operations.

Thus, whether on operations, exercises, or at MOD Stafford, SAC Holland has consistently displayed an exemplary, proactive, determined and wholly professional performance in all his duties, and as a result has gained an enormous amount of respect on TSW. Indeed, he meets all parts of the RAF acronym RISE; Respect for others, Integrity, Service before self and Excellence. Because of his exemplary performance, SAC Holland had been selected to be the first recipient of the RAF Servicing Commandos and Tactical Supply Wing Association President's Award.

## **CHAPTER 10: REFLECTIONS OF GP/ Capt D PACKMAN**

### **OC TSW 1975-1977**

#### **DAVID PACKMAN - PERSONAL BACKGROUND**

It may help to put my memories of life with TSW into perspective if I provide some information about my personal background before being given the best wing commander job in the Supply Branch.

In 1969 I was serving as a Sqn Ldr in the Far East at HQFEAF, RAF Changi. I was working 'out of branch' in the Joint Warfare Branch. My job was to plan and take part in joint exercises with the Army. In those days there was a full Army division in the Far East theatre, it comprised 3 Cmdo Bde, 28 Commonwealth Inf Bde and 99 Ghurkha Bde. Almost by accident I learnt about the changes that were taking place in the way in which the RAF was to support NATO. It all sounded quite exciting from the Supply point of view but my two GD-branch bosses, who lacked any real foresight, poo-poo'd the concept and told me to get back into my cage. A few months earlier, it had been announced that all British troops would be withdrawn from east of Suez but that, to demonstrate the UK's ability to reinforce the Far East should this be necessary, there was to be a major 5-nation exercise in Malaysia in June and July 1970. This was called Exercise 'Bersatu Padu (Malay for 'massive unity'). Originally the exercise was going to be called just 'Bersatu' but in the nick of time someone realised that Bersatu referred to a totally different type of unity! The nations taking part were: UK, Singapore, Malaysia, Australia and New Zealand

I then found myself doing the logistic planning for the reception in-theatre of reinforcing troops. The on-the-spot planning team comprised solely of me and two other Sqn Ldr's, one for SH and the other for OS. As planning gained pace it was decided that there would be an RMA set up on the edge of RAF Changi airfield to act as a reception point for incoming forces. The airlift from the UK was going to be the largest such operation since the Berlin Airlift. Then we learnt that John

CG was to command the RMA and that I was to be his Movs 'expert'. So far so good but, just as matters were hotting up, I was sent on sick leave; CG most definitely did not approve of this development, Suffice it to say that the exercise went well and I was posted back to UK rather earlier than I had expected, to fill a new planning post at HQ ASC (RAF Upavon). In addition to having an office at RAF Upavon I also had one at HQ UKLF (Wilton) where Sqn Ldr Jim Shearer was also based. At the same time, John CG returned home to command the newly formed TSW. During the next year or so I had a lot to do with TSW, partly as a visiting lecturer, talking about survival in the field, and partly as a visitor to various NATO and national exercises in which the TSW was taking part. In addition, I was also involved in quite a number of Joint Service recces to the Northern and Southern Flanks of NATO where the UKMF and the AMF(L) and (A), complete with TSW, were likely to have to operate.

A tour as PSO to DGS (RAF) intervened, as did one at RAF Thorney Island (again I had dealings with TSW), and then came 7 months at Staff College where both Denis Collins and I asked for the post of OC TSW. Finally, in August 1975 I took over command of the Wing from Jim Shearer. Denis had drawn the short straw and became OC Support Wing 16 MU. Despite his disappointment he was a great friend to the Wing even though, under the non-cadre arrangement, I was routinely calling for help from his airmen and NCOs. Sadly, the first of two OCs Supply Wing on the depot was less supportive.

## **A COLLECTION OF RANDOM THOUGHTS**

Everything that has gone before has been related to specific events but it is now time to put together some random but very important thoughts.

First of all, I was more fortunate than I can say to be given command of the best Wing in the RAF. The fact that it was the best Wing was due solely to the hard work of all ranks, cadre and non-cadre, who worked for me. With one possible exception (no names, no pack drill but he was pretty senior in the pecking order) everyone put heart and soul into what they were doing. There was enormous

scope for people to get into trouble but, if they did, they got out of it without my involvement. Indeed, I only held two formal orderly rooms in two years and these were as a result of complaints by over-officious Mod-Plods. While I did my best not to mess people about, the sometimes short-notice deployments on operations and exercises were tackled with remarkable good humour. The only serious complaint I received was from the father of a young airman (he was aged over 18) who did not think that his son should have to carry a gun and go to war (i.e.: to Belize). I think we calmed down the gentleman.

Naturally, with quite a number of husbands working away from base, there were wives who needed support. WO Curtis, the Wing WO, was very good and my wife together with one or two other wives did their best to provide moral support. It has to be admitted that on the odd occasion, a knock at the door of an MQ supposedly occupied solely by a lady was answered by a male 'lodger'. There was a Station Wives Club but unfortunately many of its members did not seem able to relate to the fact that other wives were, temporarily, without husbands. The solution was to form a Wing Wives Club and its monthly meetings were pretty well attended. Certainly, I picked up a lot of worthwhile information through this useful grape vine. Not for the first time, a number of people on the station took a dim view of what they saw as being a breakaway formation. My approach was 'tough, just be glad that your husband is at the end of your apron strings'.

While I have already mentioned some of my officers by name I need to say something about the others.

My first OC Trg Flt was Flt LT George Edgington. A cross country runner of considerable ability, a little lacking in self-confidence, but could pull the stops out when he had to. He did a good job in setting up the operation in Belize and was then posted to Germany. His successor was Fg Off Steve Hayes who proved to be natural trainer. Not only did he update all the Wing's various courses but he also enlisted the help of the Stn Regt Officer, Flt Lt Kevin Lay, who worked wonders with field craft, camouflage and other Rock Ape-type activities. What is more, Steve totally reorganised the ground floor of the Wing headquarters building to provide much improved classrooms and demonstration rooms.

Flt Lt John Furney has already been mentioned. When he left the Wing his successor was Flt Lt Tony Broderick who came to us from Movs duties at RAF Aldergrove. Tony too was excellent and always had a positive outlook on life. His main claim to fame, apart from being with TSW for only a short time before being promoted and posted, was to introduce a much-needed degree of organization into the Wing Ops Room. His charts were not only a joy to look at but were also useful!!

On the Supply and Transport side, Flt Lt Stuart Holland's took over from Roger Maunder and certainly earned his keep both on base and when deployed. It was thanks to Stuart and to a supernumerary Sqn Ldr (Derek Thompson) that the move into extra accommodation on No 7 Site went so well.

The non-cadre officers were also a good bunch. Bill Gordon and Richard Johnson have already been mentioned, others included Flt Lt's Tony Doveston, Roger Fry, Peter Whalley and David Howlett.

Perhaps it should be explained at this stage that, from the beginning, TSW had occupied just one shed on No 7 Site. This was totally inadequate in terms of space and was lacking in any sort of heating. Because of this, a lot of Wing equipment was stored 25 miles away at RAF Shawbury. Fortunately, a new Unit Supply Sqn building was built in 1976 and we were able to move into the old Supply Sqn shed which was next to ours. Not only did this give us more space on site but the additional building was blessed with internal office accommodation which we turned into a proper MT Detail Office and working space for the engineering tradesmen. There was some rudimentary heating in the 'offices' which was a marked improvement over people having to work in ambient temperatures. As was to be expected, the extra space was not ideal and MPBW were more than a little reluctant to spend money on meeting our needs. That said, after we had a few 'accidents' with RTFLs some changes were funded.

At about the same time, common sense prevailed and the Wing was provided with a proper concrete hard standing and bund wall for the pillow tank adjacent to the helipad. This was just as well because the amount of refuelling we were called on to carry out at RAF Stafford was growing month on month.

While I may seem over-critical of a number of personalities at RAF Stafford, I still believe it was more than a shame that the resident C of E Padre took no interest whatsoever in TSW. He also strenuously resisted the suggestion that he should make visit to our various deployments. I only wish that I had had the courage to get in touch with the HQMC chief chaplain. I was not alone in having thoughts about his inadequacies and at Christmas 1976 there was a general move towards doing some carol-singing at local old people's homes and the like. We set everything up but the Stn Cdr got wind of what was afoot and told us to involve the Padre. So far as I can recall we told him what we were going to do and then got on and did it. The reverend gentleman did not join us!!

It was some time in 1976 that the Packman family acquired a dog - a Jack Russell terrier which answered to 'Rubbish'. From time to time I took him into the office where he generally curled up quietly. However, at one stage he made a practice of disgracing himself in the corridor outside my office. This was out of character and I eventually found out that the lads in the Ops Room had been feeding him with laxative chocolate! At our farewell party in September 1977 'Rubbish' was presented with his own 'salver' - an RAF issue tin tray with a large slab of Dairy Milk chocolate attached to it. The inscription read: 'For Rubbish from trade group 18'.

A final thought. The Wing Christmas Party in December 1976 was as good as only such parties could be. In the middle of proceedings Cpl Lindsay Gordon, who was one of the Wing's more successful practical jokers, appeared handcuffed to a bucket (don't ask me why). He used the bucket to make a collection for one of the local children's homes. So far so good but the next morning he was still attached to the bucket. Not only were the handcuffs genuine ones but the keys had been lost. The only solution was to visit Stafford Police Station and ask the Boys in Blue to release Cpl Gordon. They did so with good humour but we had not bargained on a reporter from the local paper being present (he had gone along to find out who had been arrested overnight around the town. He saw our incident as providing proof that airmen were being mistreated and did his best to make capital and national headlines out of what he saw. Very fortunately, the collection for the children's home saved the day. Even so, the Stn Cdr and I spent quite a lot of time on the phone trying to calm things down.

## **EXERCISE 'INSIDE RIGHT' - AUTUMN 1975**

I had only been in command of TSW for a few weeks when we were given a challenge that was too good to refuse - even if it did fall outside our remit. The HQMC Rock Ape and Provo staff wanted to test the security of several stations, in what was called Exercise 'Inside Right', and asked if TSW would provide 3 intruder teams each of 6 all ranks. We were to try to infiltrate RAF Oakhanger, RAF Quedgely and RAF Kemble. I led the Oakhanger team, Sqn Ldr Richard Johnson and co went to Quedgely and Sqn Ldr Bill Gordon went to Kemble. Both Richard and Bill were non-cadre staff. In retrospect, I am pleased to say that we all managed to wreak a fair amount of havoc but, at the time, it was disconcerting to realise just how easy it was to disrupt normal life. For example, at one point at Oakhanger the first that the station knew about our presence was when we were rather too noisy propping up a ladder against the security fence of one of the sites (despite having dragged the ladder across an open field which was being patrolled by snowdrops in Land Rovers). We also kidnapped the Station Commander who had the misfortune to be 'living out' in a hiring and 'blew up' a bus carrying about 30 shift personnel who were coming on duty. Richard's and Bill's teams also did well but Richard prudently decided against kidnapping OC RAF Quedgely (Gp Capt Colin James, a good friend of mine) as he found out in the nick of time that the AOC in C (Air Mshl Sir Reginald Harland was visiting on the day in question!

All in all the exercise was good fun and the successful kidnapping cost me a barrel of beer. While the HQMC Supply staffs were not too amused at what they regarded as a mis-use of manpower, the HQSTC staffs under Gp Capt Harry Dufton (our real bosses) seemed fairly relaxed about things.

## **COMMAND AND CONTROL OF TSW**

The question of the command and control of TSW was one that plagued almost the whole of my time in command. Basically, the Wing was part of RAF Stafford (though not of 16 MU) and I was answerable through the Stn Cdr to the Group Captain Command Supply Officer at HQMC at RAF Andover. This notwithstanding, it was HQSTC and its subordinate HQ38 Gp that tasked the Wing. It doesn't say much for the senior officers at the command headquarters that they never



seemed to speak other than to snipe at each other and sometimes at me. Naturally, to my way of thinking, HQSTC usually won any arguments that took place (possibly because I had a good working relationship with its Supply staff at my own level).

For much of the time, as mentioned elsewhere, I negotiated with various Army and RAF formations as to what our tasking should be, obtained the agreement of the other Wg Cdrs at Stafford regarding no- cadre personnel, and then visited HQSTC each month to confirm that they were reasonably content. Only at that stage was HQMC formally told what was going on. In retrospect this may seem a little unfair but it has to be made clear that HQMC was, in operational terms, something of a sleepy hollow. Many of the staff officers just could not understand that they had a truly operational unit under their control. It was not until about 1980 that Maintenance Command units (by then it was known as RAF Support Command) was subjected to TACEVALS. Every so often, the Supply Policy branches at MOD (Air) became involved in resolving squabbles and, other than occasionally telling me not to be greedy in my requests for non-cadre personnel, were helpful.

Eventually, towards the end of 1976 MOD decided that, as was the case with the operational flying squadrons, TSW should have its own statement of unit policy. This set out in unambiguous terms what the command and control arrangements were to be for both operations and exercises, also the Wing's personnel and vehicle establishments, and all sorts of other matters including where it fitted into the AMF and UKMF orbat. Most importantly, it stated categorically that TSW was 'an independent unit'. This was great news and, on the day the policy was published, one of the Wing wags - Cpl Lindsay Gordon I suspect - put up a flag outside the TSW HQ with the letters 'DP' on it. Gp Capt Bryan Plaskett who was then the Stn Cdr took it in good heart and let us continue to fly the flag for a few days. Not all Stn Cdr's would have been so understanding!

## **THE ON-GOING TASK IN NORTHERN IRELAND - 1975-77**

When I arrived on the Wing I had only the vaguest of ideas about the task in Northern Ireland so made haste to visit that province. My first impression was that it seemed very strange to be carrying a gun in what was essentially part of my home country.

I was made welcome at HQNI and, while being briefed in the Ops Room, met an Army Major who I had last seen 20 years earlier when we had been at school together.

In autumn 1975 TSW had three detachments in Northern Ireland: St Angelo near Enniskillen, Castle Dillon near Armagh and Bessbrook Mill right in the south not far from the infamous Newry and Crossmaglen townships. The role in each case was to refuel RAF and Army SH with rotors still turning, thereby limiting their vulnerability while on the ground. It was not long before we withdrew from St Angelo but the workload at the other two sites grew constantly. Life was relatively peaceful at Castle Dillon but Bessbrook was a different matter and the threat from IEDs and IRA/PIRA attacks was ever present. Both cadre and non-cadre personnel were deployed for periods of 6 weeks at a time and, inevitably, most people undertook several roulements. SH could arrive at any time, day or night and quite often unheralded. This meant that the refuelling teams spent all their waking hours on the edge of the LS rather than in the supposed comfort of the domestic accommodation. In the case of Bessbrook this was in a former linen mill which was, in the main, occupied by an Army bn. The Army units served for three months at a time and it was quite interesting to see how different bns organised themselves. Generally they were fairly tolerant of the Light Blue presence and acknowledged that the teams were doing an important job.



### **Bessbrook Mill**

One or two of the more adventurous TSW members wanted to go on patrol with the Army in what was termed 'Bandit Country'. While their enthusiasm was very commendable, the requests had to be firmly turned down. Life was sufficiently risky without adding unnecessarily to the dangers.

Because so much time had to be spent in a hut on the edge of the LS a request was made for a TV set to be provided from Nuffield Trust funds. At 16MU the purse strings were held by an elderly and unhelpful OC SSS. He did everything he could not to pay up so I presented him with a return air ticket so that he could go and judge the need for himself. Lo and behold the money was instantly forthcoming and a suitable 'thank you' letter was sent to the Nuffield Trust.

My introduction to Castle Dillon was to disembark from a low hovering Wessex and to find myself up to my knees in mud - and this on a hill top; it could only happen in Northern Ireland. The local Army presence consisted of a troop of Sappers and they did not take too much persuading to exercise their professional skills and to construct a proper hard standing. By a strange coincidence in 1993, when I had retired from the RAF and was working for The Royal British Legion, I met the Sapper corporal who did the work. He was then a committee member of

the Newham Branch of the Legion. I did not succeed in persuading anyone from HQMC to visit the TSW detachments but I am glad to say that Gp Capt Reg Brittain (OC 16 MU) did make the trip as did AVM 'Jimmy' Gill who was DGS (RAF) in 1977. I had known Jimmy previously and was delighted when he initiated the idea of visiting what was effectively the front line. In addition, AVM Peter Williamson (AOC 38 Gp) was always very complimentary about the service his people received.

As an aside, one of the benefits of the Northern Ireland roulement was that everyone quickly became fully au fait with rotors turning refuelling. More to the point, there were no accidents. This was very helpful when it came to arguing with a variety of RAF engineers who seemed to think that aircraft refuelling should only be carried out by engineering tradesmen. There was a particularly important read-across to Harrier refuelling where the engineers almost died in a ditch before agreeing that, given something like two days' training, there was no reason why suppliers should not do the job.

It may also have been as a result of Northern Ireland activities that we made quite a leap forward with the handling of APFCs. For some time it had been standard practice to tow the APFCs behind Land Rovers using a Y-shaped yoke. Despite this, whenever they had to be airlifted by SH they were underslung using attachment points on the end plates. This meant that, when they were put down, they had to be turned on to their sides - not always an easy process. Thanks to some very helpful work on the part of engineers from CSDE and from JATE it proved possible to pick up the APFCs using the towing yoke, thereby reducing the ground handling workload.

It was during one of my regular visits to the far side of St George's Channel that I first met Flt Lt Tony Broderick, one of the Movs officers at Aldergrove who was shortly to join TSW as OC Ops Flt.

## **OPERATIONS IN BELIZE 1975-77**

Autumn 1975 was remarkably busy! I had just been sent to the JWE at Old Sarum for a fortnight's NATO joint warfare course when Guatemala started making aggressive noises towards British Honduras, as Belize was then known. A chance telephone conversation with TSW HQ meant that, three days into the course and unknown to HQSTC who had put me on the course, I was driving rather quickly back to base to supervise the Wing's deployment arrangements. A few days later, and not for the first time, I found myself explaining my actions to the CSO (Gp Capt Harry Dufton) who thought that I should have asked him first!!

The RAF's commitment to Belize consisted of a flight of Harriers and some SH (Pumas, I think). There was a fuel installation of sorts at what became known as Airport Camp but there was also a need for APFC-type refuelling at two other locations - Punta Gorda in the very south of the country near the border with Guatemala and at San Ignacio close to the western border. While political machinations blew hot and cold, the task remained with us for the whole of my time in command. I do not recall exactly how many Wing personnel we deployed at any one time but there was always at least one officer present and one of the jobs was to drive fuel tankers from Airport Camp to Punta Gorda via a very basic road. It was a miracle that there were no major accidents. Unfortunately, there was an accident with a Landover in which one of the TSW officers suffered a broken arm.

While the LS at Punta Gorda was not large, the local rock formations were both hard and sharp. This meant that APFCs were regularly punctured when being towed around the local area and few in the Supply Provisioning Branch could understand why replacements were forever being sought. Eventually, it was decided that the APFC casing should be strengthened.

I was fortunate to make one visit to Belize and it was very pleasing to be told by the local RAF commander and individual aircrew members just how much they appreciated the service they were being given. This was so much so that one of the TSW engineering trade J/Ts was awarded a BEM solely on the recommendation of the aircrew.

## **PROBLEMS WITH THE NON-CADRE CONCEPT**

In the mid-1970s, shortages of manpower were almost as prevalent as they are in 2008/9. Thus, for reasons of economy, it had been decided that the Wing would be staffed by full-time or cadre personnel (about 1/3 of the total) and by non-cadre part-timers (2/3 of the total) who were trained and who could then be called out from their normal duties in the Supply or Support Wings of 16 MU for a given number of days each year and subject to a maximum number at any given time. The ranks affected ranged from Sqn Ldr to SAC. Understandably, this arrangement was not greatly welcomed by the senior managers of those wings, even though, by and large, the non-cadre personnel seemed to welcome the relief from routine depot duties. As an aside, I don't think that there was a single Monday morning when I didn't arrive in the office to be confronted by depot personnel who wanted to volunteer for TSW.

If the Wing's workload had been restricted to the occasional exercise there would have been fewer problems but, during my time in command, we were kept very busy on operations in Northern Ireland and in Belize as well as an increasing number of NATO and national exercises. The effect was that non cadre personnel were routinely tasked at and beyond the upper limit of what 16MU and HQMC considered acceptable.

Inevitably this had unwanted effects of the performance of the depot. Indeed, I found out a few years ago, when researching for a presentation that I was to give to the RAF Historical Society, that one month in 1976 I took 1000 man-days of effort from non-cadre personnel. This resulted in some fairly tart exchanges between HQMC and HQSTC, with me in the middle collecting flak from both sides. Other than a few ritual protestations, HQMC was not able seriously to challenge the need for TSW support of operations and eventually it accepted that, if the RAF was not to be seen by the Army as failing to engage fully in exercises, those commitments also had to be honoured.

While each month I had to go to Andover and High Wycombe to explain myself away, the real negotiations took place between me and OCs Supply and Support Wg's. There were strong arguments put forward from all sides but more often than not acceptable compromises were reached. For me, life became easier when there was a change of incumbent in the OC Supply Wg post at 16MU. The

arguments were no less intense but there was at least a little more humour. On one occasion, when I had been more than usually successful in getting the manpower I needed, OC Supply Wg looked at OC Support Wg and said, referring to me: 'You hold him, I'll kick him'. The reply was quick and to the point: 'Why should you have the good job?'

I am pleased to report that OC Support Wg regularly visited exercises and sites in Northern Ireland when his staff were deployed. I never recall him claiming that we had over-egged the pudding.

## **TACEVALS**

We knew that eventually TSW would be called upon to deploy with No 1 Sqn (Harriers) on a TACEVALS in mid-1976. The general likely timing of the exercise was known but not the details so at least we were able to carry out some preparatory work and to earmark personnel for deployment. The TSW team was to be headed by Flt Lt Roger Maunder who was OC Supply and Engineering Flt.

The call to deploy duly arrived and the TSW contingent headed off to RAF Wittering to join the squadron prior to flying to a location in Denmark. The main problem was that Roger, who was an international standard fencer, was due to take part in the Inter Service Fencing Championships. He accepted the clash with good grace and went on his way. Unfortunately, the President of the RAF Fencing Association was AOC in C HQMC, Air Mshl Sir Reginald Harland, who, coincidentally, was carrying out his formal Taconic's inspection of RAF Stafford. It took some fairly fast-talking to persuade him that Roger really did have to go on the TACEVALS and that no other officers were available. By a stroke of luck, the TACEVAL did not last too long and Roger was able to take part in some of the skill-at-arms competitions.

Overall, we did not acquit ourselves as well as we would have hoped - poor camouflage let us down. HQSTC was reasonably relaxed but HQMC staffs had difficulty in acknowledging the concept that a 'satisfactory' rating was quite acceptable to NATO and that 'exceptional' was only awarded very rarely. I was

probably less tactful than I might have been in pointing this out to the armchair warriors at Andover and was given a kick in the pants for my pains.

In mid-1977 we again deployed on TACEVAL, this time with the SH force and again to Denmark. Murphy's Law applied and the deployment was actually taking place at the time of that year's formal AOC in C's inspection. This time the inspecting officer was AVM John Bowring - like Harland he was an engineer. He cheerfully accepted the disruption of his schedule and took a close and constructive interest in what TSW was doing. Some 3 months later I had been posted to work for him at HQ RAF Support Command. He very kindly said that he knew how highly regarded the Wing was by the many units it supported.

## **NATO EXERCISE IN TURKEY -AUTUMN 1975**

Each autumn, NATO used to hold a multi-nation exercise in one of the Southern Flank countries. The overall nick-name for the series of exercises was '..... Express'. In 1975 this took place in Turkish Anatolia. TSW was included in the orbat to gain experience of refuelling SH in the field; Flt Lt Roger Maunder was in command of the Wing detachment. If I recall aright, the team had deployed at pretty well the same time that I arrived on the scene so I did not know any of the characters very well. Even so, I gathered (correctly) that Roger was quite an outgoing sort of chap but, when he returned to base, he seemed rather subdued. I eventually found out the reason.

During one convey in Turkey there had been a road traffic accident which was nothing to do with the TSW contingent. Roger investigated and found out that the Turkish military police had questioned those involved in the pile up and, without any more ado, had shot the driver they considered was responsible. This lesson was taken on board and careful driving was very much the order of the day for future Southern Flank deployments



## **'PEBBLE MILL AT ONE' AND A TRAINING VIDEO**



**A visit to the BBC Pebble Mill Studio 1976**

My first OC Ops Flt was Flt Lt John Furney of whom it was (very kindly) said: 'Point him in the right direction and he will keep going for ever'. John was very good at his job and was also a source of bright ideas. One of these was to ask the BBC if the Wing could appear on 'Pebble Mill at One' - a very popular lunchtime TV programme, broadcast live from the BBC Pebble Mill studios in Edgbaston, Birmingham. The BBC was pro-Service in those days and readily agreed that we could give a refuelling demonstration on their 'back lawn'. Access was a bit marginal for Pumas and Wessex but the flying squadrons took up the challenge and the game was on.

We turned up on the day in spring 1976, set out our equipment and made contact with the aircraft (we also made time to put TSW stickers on every bit of BBC kit we could find!). My role was to act as commentator and to answer questions from David Seymour who was one of the regular Pebble Mill team. This

was rather nerve-wracking because I did not know what (daft) questions I might be asked. The HQSTC PR man was present and all he said was 'I have told the BBC what questions NOT to ask - just get on with it'. I did!

The actual programme went very well but for a couple of things. Half way through the live broadcast a little old lady from the depths of Edgbaston who was not used to low flying aircraft telephoned the BBC to ask if the next war had started!! The other snag was that the 'back lawn' was used routinely as the setting for BBC gardening programmes. Unfortunately, the down-wash from the helicopters blew the garden shed into a local brook. Peter Smith, who was the anchor man for the garden programme, complained on air about this for months afterwards. Not for the first time HQMC asked why I thought it was worthwhile using resources on such a venture.

A few months later we were tasked - not my doing this time - with helping out on a BBC 'Tomorrow's World' programme. Some clever soul had decided that pillow tanks made ideal containers for effluent from mobile lavatories in the third world (not as silly as it might sound as they permitted otherwise toxic substances to be degraded by means of anaerobic action). Filming was carried out at RAF Wittering but, surprisingly, HQMC said nothing on this occasion.

### **THE 1976 ROYAL TOURNAMENT AT EARLS COURT**

One of the so-called 'perks' of being a student at Staff College was a free trip to the 1975 Royal Tournament. While it was not the RAF's turn to provide the main interest for the public (who still flocked to see one of the best military displays in the world), none of us were very impressed with the Light Blue contributions and told DPR (RAF) just what we thought!

Move forward a few months, I was no longer a student but was commanding my own Wing, and DPR (RAF) telephoned to say that, as some of us had been rude about his staff's efforts in 1975 what would we suggest the RAF should do in 1976? We thought about this for a couple of days and suggested that the centre-piece should be the operational turn-round of a Harrier operating from

a hide. This was agreed and it was decided that there should be a replica hide in the main entrance of Earls Court as well as the set piece in the arena.

In the replica hide TSW set up shop against some quite convincing 'scenery' with carefully camouflaged shelters, fuel pumps and filters, quite a lot of pipework and other impedimenta. This proved to be the attraction we had hoped would be the case and we spent a lot of time answering many very sensible questions.

The arena show started with a real Harrier entering through the large doors at one end. There was a lot of aircraft-type noise but, in reality, the aircraft was pulled in thanks to a carefully-hidden winch. It was then 'refuelled' from APFCs because there was no space for a pillow tank. So that the APFC could be seen to collapse as it was emptied we sucked the air out using a vacuum cleaner!! As this was being done, the aircraft was also rearmed and staged a vertical take-off by again being winched up into the rafters of Earls Court (again accompanied by a lot of noise and dust. The whole performance went down remarkable well with the thousands of people who came to see the show.

The TSW team for all this took part in the pre-Tournament parade in London from Wellington Barracks, via Buckingham Palace and the Mall to Horseguards Parade. As part of parade we towed an APFC behind a Landover. Naturally, the national press got things wrong and no lesser a newspaper than the Guardian claimed that it was one of Barnes Wallis's bouncing bombs!! They did not correct themselves when told of the error. During the setting up and rehearsal week before the public show the Wing contingent was paid a visit by Air Mshl Sir John Aiken, Air Member for Personnel, who, despite having a reputation for being somewhat short-tempered, was quite fascinated by what he saw and was most supportive.

To the best of my recollection, the Wing team consisted of about 10 all ranks. When the show was over I was told by the organisers that they were most impressed by the wholehearted way in which then team entered into the spirit of the occasion. SAC Teague (I hope that is the correct spelling) even ran an out of hours disco for all those taking part. He was awarded a richly deserved AOC in C's commendation for his efforts. That said, display was, by all accounts, physically very demanding.

## **HM THE QUEEN'S SILVER JUBILEE REVIEW**

The year 1977 saw the Queen's Silver Jubilee. Included in the many celebrations was a Royal Review of the RAF which was to take place at RAF Finningley. As luck would have it, John CG was a member of the planning team and he did not need very much persuading that TSW should feature in proceedings.

The centre-piece of the Royal Review was the presentation of a new Queen's Colour. This and the related parade passed off extremely well. There was then a formal lunch for the lucky few, I was included in the guest list, followed by a Royal tour of any number of static displays both in hangars and in the open air. TSW's involvement was not unlike the previous year's Royal Tournament but this time we had enough space to set up a full-scale Harrier refuelling hide in a small copse on the side of the airfield, complete with a whole range of TSW-type equipment and the refuelling team not only camouflaged themselves but also carrying personal weapons. Both the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh walked through the hide as did most of the other VIPs (the Secretary of State for Defence, Fred Mulley, disgraced himself by sleeping through the flying display even though he was sitting by the Queen!!). Sadly, OC RAF Stafford did not make the effort to call in to see what his staff were doing - a very unfortunate omission. Yet again the Wing received a very nice congratulatory note from AOC 38 Gp.

Only a fortnight or so before the Royal Review there had been an RAF Stafford Open Day. Inevitably, Wing personnel of all ranks were very much involved with this, not least in arranging a pretty good flying display which included the Red Arrows together with various air/ground borne activities involving SH. Fortunately, the weather was kind to us and the Staffordshire Police estimated that some 50,000 people attended.

## **VIP VISITS TO TSW AT STAFFORD AND IN THE FIELD**

I had not been in command very long before deciding that TSW as a whole, rather than me as its OC, deserved more publicity than it was then getting. My reasoning was that, in the mid-1970s, the Supply trades were not in the forefront of the

RAF's publicity efforts. This was despite the fact that TSW was a unique unit in the whole of NATO, never mind only in the British forces.

I was fortunate in that it was only 18 months since I had been PSO to DGS (RAF) so I was on quite good terms with most of the very senior officers in the Supply Branch. Without too much ado in late 1975 I invited AVM Harry Southgate (the then DGS (RAF), Air Cdre Ron Gladding (D of S Pol (RAF)) and the Stn Cdr RAF Stafford to visit an exercise on Salisbury Plain. It is fair to say that the air officers know very little about what supporting SH operating away from base really involved, so the visit proved to be very useful - even if AOC 38 Gp, who dropped in to refuel his Puma, was more than a little surprised to find another AVM on 'his' patch.

A few months later, the tri-Service Defence Supply Committee visited RAF Stafford. It was headed by ACM Sir Alasdair Steedman (AMSO) who had been Commandant while I was at Staff College. We laid on a full display of all the Wing's equipment (we may even have refuelled a helicopter) which seemed to impress the generals and admirals. A few days later we received a fulsome 'thank you' letter from Sir Alasdair.

Another visit that comes to mind was from the military staff of the Indian High Commission in London. They had been talking with Imperial Metal Industries, who manufactured the APFCs, and wanted to see how everything worked in practice.

In early 1977, just as he was about to retire, Gp Capt Harry Dufton from HQSTC visited the NATO winter exercise ('Arctic Express') at Tromsø and Bardufoss in Norway. Yet again, it was good for TSW members to receive interested visitors in their own right rather than to be regarded as 'add-ons' for the other professions within the RAF. One of my memories of Harry's visit was looking up at the Northern Lights as we walked through Tromsø. They were wonderful but, in looking at them, Harry lost his footing and slid down Tromsø High Street on his backside. How very undignified! It was during this exercise that he was able to see and hear for himself just how often the British Army and other NATO SH units used the TSW service.

While members of the local press corps could hardly be regarded as being VIPs, they usually reported our doings quite accurately. The Wolverhampton 'Express and Star' took a special interest so we arranged for one of their reporters to join us on an exercise at the Thetford PTA. This proved to be totally worthwhile and RAF Stafford as a whole gained some valuable publicity.

## **CHAPTER 11: SURVIVAL IN NORWAY**



### **EX CLOCKWORK Norway**

From January to March 1972. I was on exercise with the Tactical Supply Wing and RAF Mobile Refuelling Unit. We had deployed to Norway on an exercise codenamed Hardfall. Whilst on this exercise, it was decided that I would be the first Guinea-pig to go on an Arctic Survival Course. This was run by the Royal Marine Commandos up in the mountains at a place called Hotel Fossli, Fawlt Towers would better describe it. The reason for going on this course was because the job with TSW required us to work in the field, in any climate including the Arctic. We would be in tents and would be deployed to outlying regions by helicopters and left to set up our refuelling equipment, it was therefore important that we learn to survive in the Arctic. Having completed a marathon the same year at the age of 30 years and having always considered myself to be fit and healthy, I was not too worried about going on the course. I had travelled the world living in

all types of climates and having to go through hard and gruelling times. Mentally I considered myself very good as I was a big believer in self-discipline and was always testing myself on hard runs or in competitions against younger airmen. It was both my mental and physical stamina, which were dented when I felt the weight of the Bergen and haversack, which I had to carry. Having been in the desert and the jungle, both places where you do not need a lot of clothing and therefore never having to carry much in haversacks, it was a bit of a shock to find that my Bergen as they are called because of the frame which accompanies the haversack, was somewhere around 50 to 60 lbs in weight. If this is not enough, I was to get myself and the Bergen on skis. Something that I had only ever done as a joke. The afternoon before I was to fly up to the Army School of Arctic Warfare high in the mountains of Norway, I was given a lesson on skiing; the lesson was given by one of the Norwegian Officers who were used by the Army for training the British personnel in Norway. He was very good and I was to be thankful for those lessons while on the course. It must also be said that without those lessons I would not have gotten onto the course. However, all my skiing was done without my Bergen on my back. The next morning I managed to get myself and my Bergen, plus my skis and snowshoes to the helicopter having said farewell to all my mates with a few drinks the night before.

This was at 0800 hours on a very misty morning. The mist was not going to go away it seemed, so instead of a half hour trip by helicopter to Fossli Hotel .It was an all day trip up the Fjords by boat and up the mountains by truck to the Hotel, which was completely crammed full of British soldiers. Having arrived I looked forward to a nice bath or shower and a hot meal, However, I forgot one very important thing! I was not with the Royal Air Force but with the British Army, and what is more, with the Royal Marine Commandos, I can assure you that there is a difference. One does not worry about what he eats and the other does not care if he eats. That evening the first thing our course, which had just arrived, had to do was learn about avalanches and how to build snow holes, then we would be shown our accommodation. I was to consider myself lucky in being able to use a bit of a back room cupboard. My bed would be the top of a chest of drawers the drawer turn upside down. Heating was no problem as I was carrying all my Arctic clothing in my Bergen. Food was to be a hotchpotch of stew made from compositions, which were issued to the troops. All in all, not a very good omen for the start of the course.





### **Norwegian sunset**

Next morning, first day, outside at 0600 hours, they said to make use of the light. There we were trying to stand on an icy road where we were to get into our skis, oh yes! With our Bergen's! Miracles of Miracles! I managed to do it and thought "This is not as hard as it first seemed ". Ten minutes later, as I got further up the road, we were told to get into the field on our left. I might just add at this point, on each side of the road was a five to six foot wall of snow and ice, which I might also add, were quite vertical. Considering myself to be a little more logical than the others (being RAF you know) I asked where the gate or entrance was, To which came the reply "just start climbing old fellow" As I am only 5` 6" in height, this was easier said than done. Not only was I the smallest person on the course, I was also the eldest at 30 years of age and all the others on the course were 20 year old soldiers. I was however, determined to show the Army and myself that both the Royal Air Force and an older RAF representative were not going to be beaten. Some of the other lads had been on the course before and for different reasons, had been put back on it. I watched them digging into the snow and ice with the side of their skis; I started to do the same and eventually managed to get over and into the field. This was to be the real start of a six-day period of intense effort and determination of learning about myself and about others, and of physical and mental pain. During the first day we were to go into the hills and learn a little more skiing. We were on what was called NATO planks and they are used to travel

across the snow on the march. These skis are unlike downhill skis, they do not detach from your feet if you fall, which does not help to give you a great deal of confidence. After we completed what for me was the equivalent of the Olympic Champion Ski course, we returned to the Hotel that night a little bit older and wiser. After one young soldier had gone head over heels and two others had fallen and broken their skis. It was lucky it was only their skis. The second day was to see us up into the hills yet again. This time we were not playing at skiing but climbing hill after hill by the method which is called "herringboning". This is walking like Charlie Chaplin only with 60 to 80 lbs on your back, much harder work! There was to be no rest on reaching the top of the last hill. Night was starting to close in and we had to get a tent sheet hole dug and the tent erected. This was to sleep eight of us. We set about digging the hole which was to be approximately 10'x10' wide x 3' deep. At one end of the square a set of steps were made to get up to the top, and a deeper hole placed in the corner. This was made because it allowed the cold air to go into the deeper hole. You see, hot air rises and cold air sinks, this allowed us to sleep that little bit warmer. On top of the whole thing we attached eight large diamonds of canvas buttoned together, called tent sheets. These were hoisted in the middle with a piece of string. This they attached to a branch of a small tree nearby. We slept that night in the whole with a few Arctic candles and a little cooker to keep us warm.



### **Not far to go now?**

We also had to take turns in staying awake because if the candles went out, then it meant danger and we could all die of cold or lack of oxygen. Our next task was to ski to another part of the mountain and build a snow hole. This meant digging into the lee of a snowdrift. You start digging a little two foot square hole at the base of the drift and after reaching about three or four feet into it, start to make a larger cave inside. We did this after some nine kilometres and getting there at 0900 hours that morning. It was at 2100 hours that night that before we got down to making a meal and getting ourselves ready for sleep. We had just gotten into our sleeping bags when the instructors came in and took them away. This was to test our mental attitude and sense of humour. They gave them back to us an hour later. I might say at this point I was too tired to care one way or the other.

We were to go through many other tasks but the last one was to ski into the tree line and erect a bivouac from trees. It was the fifth day and we were all extremely tired. Just cutting the trees which were about four inches thick with a machete, which is a thick bladed knife and is about eighteen inches long, was difficult enough, but climbing up and down in the deep snow which came up to you waist, was a killer and when one of the lads lost the knife, which took us an hour to find, we had a sense of humour failure.

The last night we were to lie out in what was all but an open shelter or lean-to. I could actually see the stars with the ice forming and building up around the neck of my sleeping bag and the temperature reading was -25 degrees C, all in all not a funny time. The next day we just had to clear the camp site and ski down to a waiting truck which took us back to the real world again. For me it had been a hard gruelling time, but one I would not have missed. It taught me a lot about myself and others, but most of all, it showed me that there was nothing to fear in the snow waste. It was to be of great importance to my men and myself during a war which was to take place in such conditions later on.

## **CHAPTER 12: REFLECTIONS OF THE FALKLANDS WAR**



**Stanley Airfield**

In chapter one it was mentioned that one of the wars that TSW had been evolved in was the Falklands war. A team under the command of the then Sgt Jim Coleman, was sent to set up a refuelling insulation as soon as possible on the Islands. After surviving the battle which they spent defending the RFA Fort Austin while in San Carlos Water or Bomb Alley as it was called with small arms fire. Set up a refuelling insulation at the Tin Strip Airfield at Port San Carlos, from where they refuelled both Harriers and Helicopters. On 1st April 1982, (Sgt Jim Coleman and a team of eight, Cpl John Joyce, J/T Ian Harrison, SAC Tony Curtis, SAC Alan Doidge, SAC Dave Dale, SAC Steve Martin and SAC Robert (Waggy) Wagstaff. TSW personnel from RAF Stafford were sent to catch an aircraft from RAF Lyneham to Gibraltar and from there to Ascension Island. There they met up with "D" Sqn SAS and joined them on board the RFA Fort Austin which had sailed on the 29th March 1982 from Gibraltar to Ascension Island to provide support for Endurance. The SAS and SBS which would later be pick-up on the way down after they had parachuted into the sea from a C130 Hercules aircraft to join up with the SAS on board the RFA Fort Austin. They would be part of Operation Paraquet Task Group 319-9 on their way to retake South Georgia. Now read on as Jim Coleman reflects on the war.

The very first question that I was asked, as I jumped down from the Puma helicopter, which had flown my men, and I from RAF Brize Norton to RAF Stafford, returning from the Falklands, was "Would you do it again?" The question was put to me by a very young Air Training Corp Cadet. At the time I did not really know what to say to him for in my heart I felt that after experiencing six days in San Carlos Water nick-name "Bomb Alley" by the our forces and "Death Valley" by the Argies, where my men and I had been attacked and bombed, That war was futile yet my head told me that if it was to happen again I would most likely go again. I was however, praying to God that it would never happen again. All our families and friends were there to welcome us back.

As we were the first ones who had gone to the Falklands, we were the first to be allowed to return home as we had actually been involved in the battle. I did not really get a chance to answer the young lad's question as other people crowded around to congratulate us. Yet the question was to raise its head yet again for we were to go to war with Iraq. By this time however, I was out of the RAF in which I had served boy and man for twenty five years but felt that as I had only been out of the service for five years, that I might be called upon to do my duty once again.

I can now understand the feelings of all the men who wanted to go to the Falklands to do their duty but who, through no fault of their own, could not go. Because inside you there is a gnawing itch which won't allow you to settle to anything and nearly drives you crazy, yet on the other hand, you are crazy for wanting to go in the first place, especially if you have managed to come through a war before. There is no glory in war. There are brave men and women and brave deeds done. However, war in itself is as I have said, is totally futile. If you are going to fight there is only one thing worth fighting for and that is freedom, as I believe Sir Arthur Conan Doyle once said. I was not to be called because the war in effect only lasted one hundred hours and the casualties were unbelievably light. Something like 35 killed or missing. Whereas in the Falklands, we had 259 dead and around a thousand wounded, still relatively light considering that we were fighting a war eight thousand miles away and with a good deal of it at sea. Still I

could feel and understand all those feelings which the men and women of our forces were going through as they began to build up to the war and as they eventually went into battle. I could also see it was as if looking through a window or looking at a landscape painting which you are familiar with and know the place painted in the picture.

Again the media were playing a big role in this war as they did in the Falklands, only this time they had learnt from the Falklands War and had managed to perfect their nausea. I had not been happy with the media's conduct during the Falklands war as I felt that they were aiding the Argies and therefore causing us more problems. However, in the war with Iraq they really surpassed themselves. They were without doubt the best propaganda outlet that Iraq had. Sitting watching and listening to the television I had to wonder to myself at times which side these people were on and to my way of thinking, if your country is at war, you do not broadcast information which will help the enemy no matter how balanced you may consider your report.

If it is going to hurt our troops, then you don't report it. Then publish and be damned if the brigade got their way. Yet, the freedom to do so is fought for and won by the very men and women of our forces who pay the price for the media's betrayal. The real war is never really reported because the real war is fought inside each person. For me it was worrying if I would have the courage to do my duty. I felt so alone, so utterly alone. I could feel the fear inside me and yet I knew that I could do no other than my duty. To think of doing anything else was impossible yet I did not want to die. I had too many things in my life left to do and I wanted to see my family again. The fight to survive was becoming stronger within me as the battle raged on.

As I stood on the deck of the ship we were defending with mere small arms fire on the 25th May 1982 at 4.30pm, I said to myself "You have half an hour to live". That was the day that HMS Sheffield and the Atlantic Conveyor were hit. A corporal from our unit George Boother was on the Atlantic Conveyor. He received The Task Force Commanders Commendation along with four others from the Wing for their various exploits. It was also the day that we won the battle for "Bomb Alley" because the Argies were never to come back to attack us in San Carlos Water again. We were all trained in mobile refuelling techniques and also were trained to work in any climate in the world and especially in Arctic conditions. We

had done several exercises in Norway up in the Arctic Circle so we were well used to living in very cold conditions. We were also trained to be self-sufficient and to work as a team or on our own. It did not matter what your rank was, if you found yourself in a difficult situation, you were expected to deal with it, even take command if need be.

We prepared our equipment which were large rubber fuel tanks, pumping and filtering equipment to set up a fuel installation somewhere on the Falklands and to support the aircraft fixed wing or helicopter which required fuel. We didn't even get a chance to let our families know that we were going to the Falklands. So on the 1st April 1982 my men Cpl John Joyce J/T Alan Harrison, SAC Tony Curtis, SAC Alan Doidge, SAC David Waggstaff and SAC Steve Martin all moved out to catch an aircraft from RAF Lyneham in Wiltshire to Gibraltar and from there to Ascension Island. There we met up with the SAS and after some plain speaking to the Navy Officer running the show at Ascension, managed to get on board the RFA Fort Austin.



**Royal Fleet Auxiliary Fort Austin**



As we left the island which looks like something on the moon with only one green grassed hill and the rest of the island covered in dust, I could see where my team had been utilising their time, because as we had flown in from Gibraltar I could see a word written on the hillside made with white stones that had now changed and were reading "TSW" which stood for Tactical Supply Wing. I had to smile at that even if my men thought that I did not smile. I had felt proud and pleased the night before we left when in a bar up on the Green Hill, one of my men told me that even though they considered me to be a bit of a tartar, they were glad that it was I who had been sent as the Detachment Commander. At this stage it was all a bit light hearted, we believed that all would be resolved politically so in some ways we thought of it as a bit of a "jolly". That thought was to come to a sudden end on the 4th May 1982 when the HMS Sheffield was hit by an Exocet missile only four miles away from our ship and whose survivors we took on board. We had sailed on 2nd April 1982 before the main Task Force was to get underway. During this period we checked our equipment, sunbathed, enjoyed seeing the flying fish and many seabirds which I had never seen before.

Then one day we stopped and waited for an aircraft. It was to be a C130 Hercules which was bringing the SBS to join up with us. As we watched the SBS parachuting down into the sea, we had a baby whale swim back and forth under our ship, and then we watched as the men of the SBS played with the baby whale. After getting the SBS lads on board we sailed again, this time we had a mission to RAS that is to say replenish at Sea with the Endurance which was an Icebreaker which had been in the Antarctic at the time of the invasion by the Argentineans and which had important information for us. We made contact and put some of the SAS and SBS lads onto the Endurance and then made our way back up to meet up with the Task Force at Ascension Island. We had by this time been in the 200 mile exclusion zone for two weeks. When we reached Ascension we managed to get a couple of days to ourselves and had a swim off the beach where the turtles come to lay their eggs. It was just a rest period while the rest of the Task Force prepared to sail. We were also able to meet up with some of our mates who, by this time, had been sent to Ascension Island to set up their own Refuelling Installation Farm which was needed for the vast amount of aircraft now racing to Ascension Island with equipment and men.

At last the time came for us to sail .I looked with awe as more and more ships appeared on the horizon and around us. I had never seen so many ships at one time. Our ship was kept very busy all the way down to the Falklands. We must have replenished every ship in the Task Force including the aircraft carriers. At one stage the crew replenished for 13 hours non-stop. I believe it was on the 13<sup>th</sup> May 1982 and it was the HMS Antrim, you have to take your hats off to the crews of both ships for a job well done. There were some humorous moments while we transferred the equipment and supplies from ship to ship. For instance, I recall the time that our ship was sending the postbags across to the HMS Glasgow only to let a couple of the bags drop into the sea. It can only be imagined, what was going through the minds of the lads on the Glasgow, as letters were the best morale booster there was for troops. However, it was only a hoax and they did not really lose their precious cargo. In reply they were sending us some beer across and again some barrels were not destined to make it safely to us. This time it was our moral that took a beating. Again luckily it was only a joke being played on us. It was interesting to note that even though all the ships were some distance away, there was a definite indefinable bond between them and their crews.

This was to show itself in the comradeship of the crew of the HMS Arrow and others who went to rescue of HMS Sheffield as its crew fought to save their ship, the Arrow went alongside to help and do what it could do to save the ship and men of the Sheffield. We were only four miles away and were stunned by the news that the HMS Sheffield had been hit. We had been playing "cat and mouse" a few days before with the Belgrano and were relieved to hear that it had been sunk by HMS Conqueror. I must point out at this stage that all the talk in the world from Mr Tam Dayell will not convince me as I stood on our deck waiting for its Exocets to strike at us, that we did not do the right thing, by sinking her. It certainly kept the Argi Navy in port after that and surely saved many of our forces lives in doing so. We took some of the Sheffield crew on board and tended to their needs as when you pluck a survivor from the sea he comes to you with nothing. We shared what we had with them even spare underpants and soap, I took on the role of entertainments manager in the CPO's Mess where I had become the resident barman. This was because I had time on my hands and the crew who ran the bar where busy.

I would ask the lads what music they fancied and then I would go around the men on the Fort Austin asking for cassettes and then play the Sheffield's request. The big favourite with the men of the Sheffield at the time was without doubt, Abba. One of the main things we had to do was to sit and listen to their stories and to get them to talk about what had happened as much as possible. This would help them get the horror of that day out of their systems as much as they could. As I sat there and listened to their stories, some horrific and some very humorous, I became aware of the pride all of them had in their ship and in their Captain. Even in this time of loss, these men stood tall and as one. They for me were the very best team of men I was to come across in the war. There were many other brave men and women I would meet, however, as a unit of men, the crew of the HMS Sheffield stood the highest of all. As they left our ship on the way back to the UK. I asked one of them if he would send my wife a bunch of flowers and gave him some money to do so. Sure enough, when I received a letter eventually from my wife, she told me that she had received the flowers and a telephone call from the lad. She was very pleased that he had rung because that was the first time she knew where we were.

The lads of the Sheffield helped me a lot in many ways. The air attacks were beginning to become more regular as we got closer to the Falkland Islands. Every time there was a flicker on the radar screen, the alert went. The sound would send a chill down inside you. It certainly sent fear into me. We lay on the floor of the CPO's Mess and consoled each other, it helped to take some of that fear away to see how these men who had been through so much, responded so bravely to the alert. They also brought with them some ideas on how we could protect ourselves and that is when we started wearing anti-flash gear and learnt how to use our all-in-one suits. The next eventful time for us was when we had to look after and guard some Argentine prisoners. I remember a funny moment one day. It was while we were letting an Officer have a walk on deck. He looked across to the aircraft carrier on the starboard side of the ship and said "We have sunk your other aircraft carrier". As it happened we were replenishing both aircraft carriers at the same time so it was with great pleasure that I invited him to have a look from the portside of the ship. His mouth dropped and his eyes nearly popped out as he saw the other aircraft carrier sailing beside us. After a few days the prisoners were sent away from our ship and the next time I would see any

prisoners would be in Ajax Bay on the Falklands.

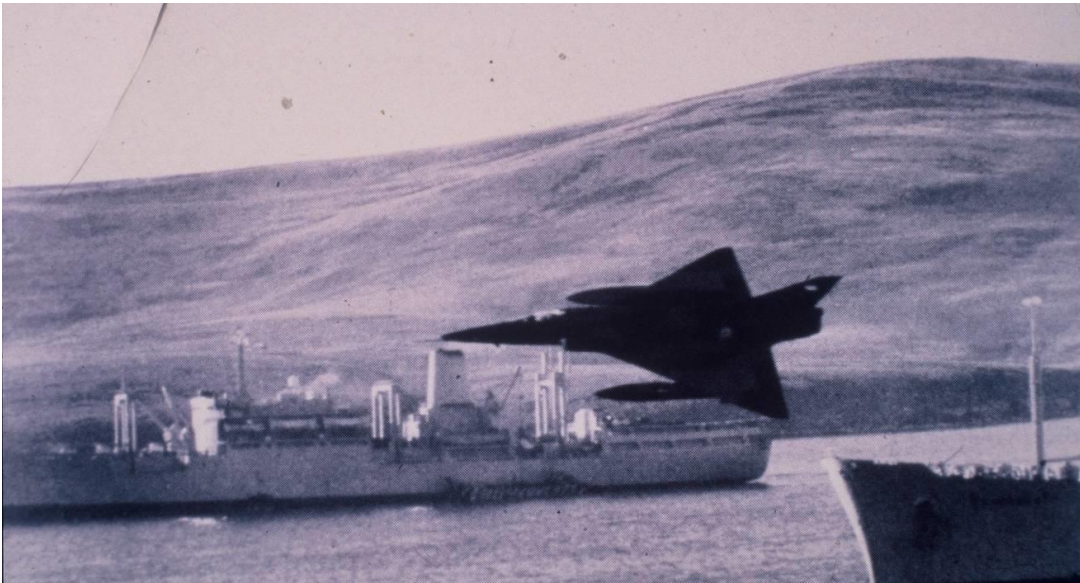
We had been at sea some weeks now and were beginning to get used to the routine of red alerts. One minute you would be laying in your bed always fully clothed with your gun close by you, the next you would hear that terrible sound striking fear into your heart as you ran down the corridor loading your weapons as you went. I had a particular place where I would stand .It was on the quarter deck at the aft of the ship on the starboard side. I don't know why but that was the place where I was going to live or die. That is the way your mind works, you think I am safe here and you say to yourself, this is a lucky ship. Even the position that the ship is anchored becomes important to your survival. We had one or two close shaves with our ship. Once or twice we had nearly run into other ships in the night. I believe we are talking about a matter of feet. A torpedo had been seen to pass alongside our starboard side. Also an Argi Hercules aircraft seen to be rolling bombs off the back of the aircraft at us, thankfully missing us. It was dispatched by one the CAP aircraft, a Harrier from one of the aircraft carriers that was giving us air cover. There was always something or someone coming and going on our ship especially as we had both the SAS and the SBS on board the ship. However, mission by mission they would set off to do what only they do best, some of whom would never return and some who did with the odd Argi flag. We would sit and listen with awe at some of the things these men got up to. It's no wonder they have the name "Special" for without a doubt, you had to be special to do what these men did.

Days went and came until at last we were told that we were going in to San Carlos Water. As it happened, we were to be stuck out in the sound, that's the stretch of water between the East and West islands. We had anchored about two hundred yards from the shore of the East Island just at the mouth of San Carlos Water just off Chanco Point, which was full of ships of one kind or another including the big white whale, the Canberra. It was sitting right in the middle of the other ships. The only other ship that we could see was the HMS Antrim which was positioned across the sound from us on the West island side. Suddenly we were attacked by an Aeromacci Argentinean aircraft, but its bomb missed us. Also on the 21<sup>st</sup> May at about 12.35 hrs we were attacked by a Dagger, we put up a volley of small arms fire but did not bring it down. However it was destroyed by a Sea Wolf missile from HMS Broadsword. An hour later we were again attacked by Daggers we hit one but did not manage to bring it down .It was in the early hours

that we slipped into position under cover of darkness. The Marines set up a bridgehead at Ajax Bay in San Carlos Water and other units were helicoptered into Port San Carlos and various other places. When daylight came we all held our breath as we waited for the Argentines to attack, because to all intent and purposes, we were just sitting ducks in the water and in such a small area. The first I knew of an attack was when I saw and heard the patter patter of 20mm cannon fire run across the water alongside our ship, then I saw rocket explode on the hill that was behind us. By that time we had opened up with one machine gun. To our surprise we actually hit the Bucarra which was attacking us and got smoke coming out of it. I heard later that a missile finished the job as it flew further into San Carlos Water. At the same time two Dagger Mirage came screaming over the hill from the opposite direction. They were coming along San Carlos Water out towards the sound and the West Island. They flew very low, so low that you could see the rivets on the mainplains. However, they must not have seen us until it was too late. We managed to get some rounds off at them but to no effect. We watched in horror as they attacked the HMS Antrim, I saw two bombs go into the Antrim. The Argi aircraft were so low I thought they would fly into the ship's mast, and then they would suddenly pull up and away. We then settled into being attacked four times a day. One of the nights we were attacked with high level bombing from a Canberra Bomber aircraft which the Argies had. The bombs landed on Ajax Bay Hospital and a few people were killed. A small graveyard was set up a few hundred yards along from the Hospital. It was there I would stand after the Battle for San Carlos and pay my respects to those brave people killed at the hospital and to another brave soldier Colonel H Jones of the Para's. As I stood looking at the graves it suddenly dawned on me once again, that this was no game we were playing. I looked down and saw that the soil was just earth dug over as if you were digging your garden for the first time. I had expected it to be tidy somehow with stones or something to mark out each grave. There were makeshift crosses with the names on them but it was the bare loose earth that seemed to bring the cold reality home to me. One night we were alerted to the fact that there might be a mine on our hull. We watched the lights of the frogmen check and clear our ship. This all happened about 0600 hrs so we did not get much sleep that night.

The worst day for us was 24<sup>th</sup> May. That day we watched as usual as each of the aircraft attacked hugging the hills for cover and to end up in a small puff of smoke. However, this day a Dagger flew very low close to us. The plane was flying

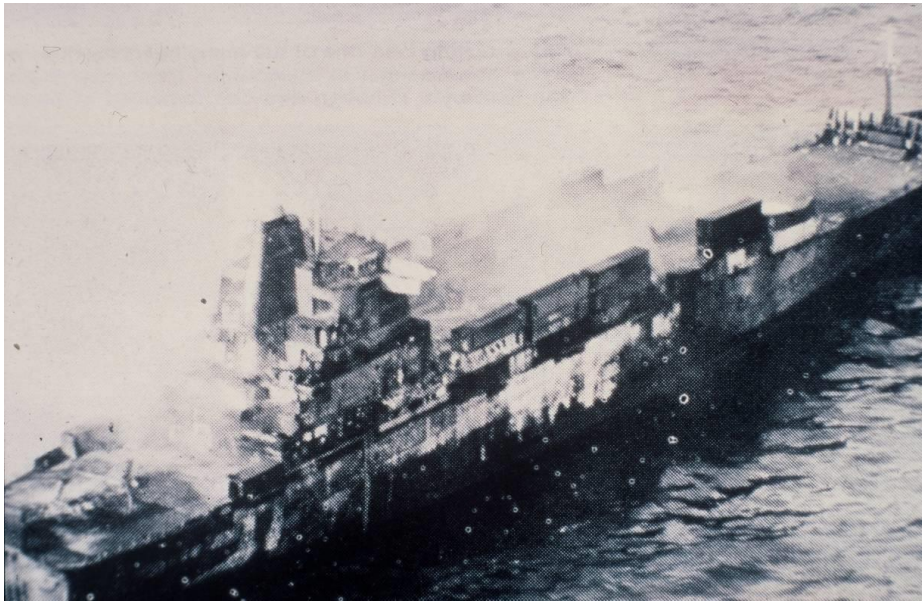
lower than where I stood on the quarter deck. It was about fifty yards away. I could even see the pilot. I let go with thirty rounds and emptied my magazine into the aircraft and as he left to attack one of the other ships, I think it was the fearless, a missile took him out. As I turned to change my magazine, I spotted another Dagger coming straight up the rear of our ship.



### **Dagger low-level attack**

My men and I closed together without a word and started firing at him. We wanted to get as much lead in the air as we were hoping that the aircraft would suck it into its engine and bring him down. As we fired at it, the aircraft turned and cut the corner as it were, of our ship, it dropped its bomb and the bomb landed between our ship and another one of the replenishment ships and exploded, lifting us off our feet. On another occasion I was reading a book in my bunk when I suddenly heard firing coming from our ship and then the red alert sounded off. We ran out onto the deck to see a missile take out an aircraft which had managed to get into the sound and start an attack. Our ship was to be his prey. However my Cpl John Joyce spotted him and started firing on him and alerted the other ships. That aircraft was the one from which the pilot bailed out and broke his leg and was

taken aboard the HMS Fearless to be given medical attention. On another night we watched as the HMS Antelope came and anchored a hundred yards away from us. We could see that it had been hit. We all thought that because the bombs which had hit the Antrim had been defused, that these bombs would not cause any problems. We had to go out to replenish a ship away from the island and to take on fuel. We had to get out while it was still dark. It was around 2100 hrs. As we were sailing past Fanning's Head when we heard and seen the flash of an explosion and we were told that the HMS Antelope was badly damaged. We came back early the next morning to get into San Carlos Water before daylight. It was 1100hrs in the morning and the light was starting to show. We could see the Antelope burning. At about midday it broke up and sank right in the middle of San Carlos Water. Each day another ship would get hit, and one or two of the landing craft like the Sir Galahad. We started to wonder when it would be our turn to get it. However, the Rapier missiles were doing a good job. We watched as one chased a Dagger Mirage that thought it was getting away, it seemed to follow it for ages then it went right up its back end and up it went in a cloud of smoke. There was a sense of relief as the men from all the ships in San Carlos Water sent up a great cheer all at once. The next bad day was when we took survivors on board the HMS Coventry. Again we went through the same procedures that we had with the lads of the HMS Sheffield. Again one of the Coventry lads sent my wife a bunch of flowers when he went back home to U.K.



### **The Atlantic Conveyor**

The Atlantic Conveyor got hit that day as well. We were especially upset about that news because one of our mates was on it. A little Corporal called George Boother. He was to make us very proud back at our Unit because he won himself a commendation for his efforts that day. Later on when we got home and met up again he made me laugh when he told me

"There was no way I was getting off that ship, because I can't swim". The same day, which was the 25<sup>th</sup> May, the Argentina Independence Day, we thought that we would get all they had to give us. A Skyhawk attacked and was destroyed by a rapier missile; the pilot bailed out and was unharmed. We were to be the lucky ones, however; we had won the battle for San Carlos Water.

We moved out of San Carlos Water and went out to sea. We heard we were on our way to Georgia but we ended up at Fitzroy where we saw the burned out hull of the LSL St Tristan and the LSL Sir Galahad. We then caught up with our sister ship, the Fort Grange on to which we were transferred. This we were not too happy about. We had gotten used to our own crew and had made a lot of good friends. I did not think that the Fort Grange was up to the standard of the Fort Austin, the attitude to us and to the war was, in service terms N.F.I. (No



f.....interest). They were a bit like us on the way down to the Falklands, they thought it was a bit of a game. After having a serious talk with the Royal Navy Commander on board with the Helicopters Squadron about what we had just been through, he decided that it was better not to take our weapons off us. In fact we advised the Commander to try and get hold of a couple of machine guns. After leaving San Carlos we thought that we were never destined to see it again, we were hoping not to anyway, but it was not to be, for once again in we went only this time we had only alerts to contend with. While I was on this ship I heard our second wave of Tactical Supply Wing personnel were on the St Edmund which was only 70 nautical miles away, so I hitched a lift out to them. As we approached it looked just like a cork in the sink. How we managed to get onto her deck I will never know. Anyway at last I met up with my comrades in arms. Flt Lt Don Taylor and the then Flt/Sgt Adam Byers. I had exactly two minutes to discuss what we were intending to do and let them know what had happened to us. Having got the information I needed, off I went back into the battle zone. My instructions were to set up a fuel installation at Port San Carlos tinned airstrip; I was to take charge of the airstrip, a tug and two assault craft. Also I had the command of several men from the Army & Navy as well as the men of the Royal Air Force that I had with me. At last we were able to go ashore and to get our kit set up. We had slipped it ashore on Ajax Bay earlier on in the war. The thinking behind that was that if we went back out to sea or if we were hit, then the equipment would be available for the use of the second wave of TSW. The equipment that we had weighed 1500 lbs and were very cumbersome. However, we managed to get it transferred from Ajax Bay to Port San Carlos Airstrip by helicopter. We then set to and set up our refuelling points and our tents. It was snowing half the time and when the snow thawed, you were up to your knees in mud. Still we eventually got things ship-shape. I must say that my men were great. They knew what to do and just got on with it.

I am very proud of them! One of them the J/T Gen Fitt. Alan Harrison was awarded a CTF 317 Commendation. The first helicopters started arriving and then the Harriers would drop in on us to refuel. It was on that first day that I was to take charge of the tug which was being used to take the giant rubber sausage to be refilled with fuel from the tanker in San Carlos Water. This thing held 81,000 gallons of fuel. We used to walk along it in the sea and pretend we were Vikings on the long boats. However, with the tug and the refuelling Dracone (as it is called), came the problems of working out the time to get it ashore, because I didn't know

anything about tides. After all, I was in the RAF not the Navy; still I soon found out that there is a high tide, a high, high tide, a low tide, and a low, low tide, each about half-an-hour apart. We found that we could only get the Dracone up onto the shore, if we used high, high tides. The timing was essential, because if we did not catch that tide we would not be able to drive the Dracone up onto the beach far enough for us to connect the fuel hoses together which allowed us to pump the fuel up the hill onto the airstrip, where we had three 30,000 gallon pillow tanks.



**Dracone hauling at Port Stanley**

These were also made of rubber and which we had connected up to 450 gpm pumps. We would then pump through several hoses to the various aircraft. Living conditions were a bit primitive at first and so was the rationing. We lived several days on nothing but chick Supreme from our Rat Packs. I have since then never been able to look a plate of Chicken Supreme in the face. After four days of trying to make meals for seven, because Cpl John Joyce had not come ashore with us.

Therefore we were now just seven. On a couple of Rat Pack Hexamine block stoves between the two 12x12 tents, with the wind whistling a gale, we progressed to a petrol stove which we had borrowed from our comrades down in Port Stanley Airport. As the days went on I would travel back and forth from one airstrip to another. One day on the way back in a Chinook helicopter, I got talking to one of the ranch managers from Port San Carlos, who said he had a double burner but it only had Argi connections on it. Well my eyes lit up for I had seen in Port Stanley all the gas cylinders I could handle. I commandeered several bottles of gas; the large one I gave to the ranch manager, which he said would be of some use to him. I had also managed to pick up several large tins of tomatoes, some of these I shared with my mates at Port Stanley in exchange for some potatoes and bacon. I would also go aboard the ships and get fresh food for my men and myself In exchange for bringing back to the ship first day covers and stamps, also little knickknacks as souvenirs which the men on the ship could not get because they were not allowed to go ashore. One day we ate kippers and strawberries. A terrible combination you may think, yet to us, it was a feast after Chicken Supreme.

It is amazing that in such time as war, there is still time to laugh and to try and get on with the normal things of life. One such occasion springs to mind for me. It was when my then Flt/Sgt Adam Byers was promoted to Warrant Officer whilst down in the Falklands during the war. This in itself was quite unique because I doubt if it had happened since the last major war. Adam was greatly respected by all the officers, SNCO's and airmen alike. So we were all determined to make this occasion very special.



**'Cheers' Adam Byers Dining in Night**

**Flt Lt Pete Berry, Flt Lt Don Taylor, WO Adam Byers, Wg Cdr Barham**

A plot was hatched to ensure that he was got out of the way while arrangements were made to hold a "Dinning In Night" just as we would at home in the Sgt's Mess. Somehow wine, brandy and Port plus cigars were acquired and all attending were to wear a bow tie (the bow ties were made from 4 x 2 pieces of material which is used for cleaning our weapons). Blue hand towel paper adorned the tables and a very special meal was provided by the catering staff. We assembled in the Tactical Supply Wing's tent and it was something special to see Adam's face when he walked in. This was a most unique evening for most dinning in nights each and every airman, SNCO and Officer stood up and spoke about this man. I have never in my twenty-five years of service known any person to be given such unsolicited praise and respect by so many people. This was the measure of the man. After this we got completely stoned and enjoyed the entertainment that only servicemen can conjure up while in difficult conditions. Adam has to this day a photograph of himself wearing an Argi tin hat looking like General Patton and with my false teeth sitting on the top of his hat. Even now we still sit and laugh at the things we all got up to. Just the other day I met Shirley McBey in town. Shirley had

been the WRAF secretary to the OC TSW and was married to Bob McBey currently TSW's Ex Wing WO. It was when I ask Shirley where Bob was, that it triggered my memory of Bob down in the Falklands. He had come down with the Task Force with Adam Byers. I had first met Bob as a young Senior Aircraftsman in Gan in the early seventies and had told him about TSW which I had been posted to from Gan. He was in turn posted to RAF Stafford and was taken into TSW. Bob McBey was for me the original Highlander. I will always remember the time we were wrestling in front of the Fuel Installation Office at RAF Gan in the Maldives in the 1970's. The Flt/Sgt came out to separate us because he thought that we were having a serious fight. There was another time when he had slept outside the door of my room, just in case I might be attacked by two people I had charged with setting off the fire alarm. To me he was always full of character and spirit. He should never have been in the RAF; he was a born soldier from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. The SAS would have been the best place for him. He for me was one of the best leaders of men and (still is) I have come across. He always leads from the front and never gives in. Even under the most difficult conditions. It was with immense pleasure as I was on a flight to Hong Kong that I read he had been awarded the British Empire Medal for his efforts during the Iraq war. He had also been awarded a CTF 317 Commendation for his work during the Falklands. He has also received the Meritorious Service Medal. There are many stories I could tell about Bob but they are not for this publication. I will say this, that if I was ever in a spot of bother, the one man I would want standing beside me would be that big Scotsman Bob McBey.





**“Go away” or words to that effect.**



Bob McBey joined the RAF in May 1960 as an apprentice Supplier. In 35 years he has served at RAF Kinloss, Singapore, GAN (Maldives Islands), RAF Saxa Vord, TSW, Coningsby, TSW, RAF North Luffenham, TSW, RAF Kinloss, RAF Cottesmore and finally returned to the fold of TSW in April 2002. Having spent over 20 years on TSW he has seen Operational Service in the Falklands, Belize, Northern Ireland, Iraq 90/91, Bosnia, Kosovo, Op Telic and Afghanistan.

After the Argies had thrown all they had at us and had decided to call it a day, I managed to arrange with the ship which we got our aircraft fuel from, to let us come aboard in two's to have a shower and a day's rest and recreation. The ship at the time was called the Ancho Charger. One day it was the turn of SAC Tony Curtis and me to go on board; we set out from Port San Carlos in one of our two little seven-foot assault craft, which we had. It was a beautiful day and the water was as flat and calm as a mill pond. That was until we reached the sound between the islands. Then the waves started to get larger and larger. We were being thrown around like a cork. Tony was a member of the Mountain Rescue Team back at base, so I was with a very sensible lad and he was as cool as a cucumber. We managed to get around the sound which in essence was the open sea into San Carlos Water, but the waves were still very large and I shouted to Tony to keep the boat pointing into the waves, because if we were to turn sideways we would get thrown into the sea and we would be dead in twenty minutes because of the temperature of the water. Things at this stage were not going well. However we had a lot worse to come. As we got into San Carlos Water we could see the ship. Then the snow started to fall and turned into a complete whiteout. When it cleared the ship had moved and our engine decided to call it a day. We then had to start to row; there was a little sandy beach, which we tried to get to. After an hour and a half hours of rowing we ended up on the rocks and our boat sank. By this time the crew on the Ancho Charger had decided that all the frantic waving that we had been doing was not to say hello, but was a cry for help and not to see us end up on the rocks, sent out a rescue launch to pick us up. We were very lucky, because a Royal Marine died the same day in similar circumstances.

So that in a nut shell was our war. We were relieved by other members of TSW and flown home. When we arrived at Brize Norton we were told that a helicopter had been put on to take us back to RAF Stafford. I was glad of that as



we had been travelling for twenty odd hours so the thought of having to spend another three or four hours on a bus did not impress me much. When we landed all our families and friends were there shouting and cheering. TSW had put on a bit of a do for us and the press was there to take our story. For a few days we were pulled along with the euphoria of it all. Eventually all our lads returned save and well. Awards were received by several members of TSW and I believe that something like twenty-one awards overall were given to RAF Stafford. Considering the size and short time TSW had been in existence the percentage of awards to TSW was outstandingly high. However when I think of the effort and determination, skill and commitment of the lads of TSW it was very fitting and showed that TSW had proved their worth in the field, and that they had come of age in the annals of RAF history.



### **TSW First Portaloo**

The End