



# Mail from Mali

## C Squadron QDG OP NEWCOMBE Newsletter

C Squadron, 1st The Queen's Dragoon Guards, is deployed on Operation NEWCOMBE 2 alongside the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion The Royal Anglian Task Force providing a Long-Range Reconnaissance Group to the United Nations. Working as part of United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), we are contributing to establishing and maintaining peace.



Welcome to the third edition of 'Mail from Mali,' covering our third month deployed on the United Nations Peace Keeping Mission in Mali under the Long Range Recce Group.

The month of July has been exceptionally busy but very rewarding for C Squadron. After a potential COVID 19 scare which caused the Task Force to quarantine for 24 hours, the all clear was given, and the Squadron deployed on a 17 day operation at the beginning of July. The operation was designed to visit difficult to access parts of Mali and reassure the population and, where possible, to spread the word of the United Nations and our Peace Keeping role in Mali. The operation was a tremendous success with the residents of numerous towns and villages being very pleased to see us and receptive to our engagement. A real highlight was the interaction with the children throughout the operating area who were always keen to speak and play games with soldiers and officers of C Squadron. Another highlight was enabling the annual festival of Tabaski, which is Muslim festival based around a willingness to sacrifice. It is known as Eid Al-Adha in other countries. The weather throughout the operation continued to be a challenge, varying from thunderstorms at night, to temperatures in excess of 50 degrees Celsius by day! Thankfully, everyone now has numerous methods of mitigating against the unrelenting heat, including sun shades, umbrellas and water in a sock.

After 17 days on the ground, C Squadron returned back to Camp Bagnold in Gao and were welcomed back with a cold can of coke and a beef burger which was a real treat after weeks on a ration pack diet. C Squadron then conducted maintenance on their vehicles before having a few days to relax and enjoy the facilities of Camp Bagnold.

Towards the end of July, the Squadron took part in Talavera day, a day which marks the anniversary of a famous battle honour for one of the antecedent Regiments of the Royal Anglian Regiment, our headquarters. This celebration included an Olympic style sports competition, with table tennis, volleyball and weightlifting being among the competitions. C Squadron were of course the overall winners. The Olympics was then followed by a BBQ in the welfare area to provide time for everyone to relax and enjoy a bit of time off. In the evening, the Officers and Warrant Officers enjoyed a meal hosting our UN partners.

The Squadron is in excellent shape and looking forward to another month deployed on operations. We enter the wet season in August and therefore the operating environment will change yet again, but the Squadron is ready for the challenge and excited for what the future holds.

To conclude, I will again thank you for all your support whilst we are deployed. Morale significantly improves when a flight arrives carrying all the parcels which our support network have kindly sent; thank you – it is all very much appreciated.

We hope you are all well and enjoying the summer of freedom back in the UK.

Major Bryn Williams

Officer Commanding C Squadron



*National anthems before a friendly game of football.*



*Lt Wills engaging with a Malian Army Commander.*



*Children asking for biscuits and chocolate.*



*The Jackals/Coyotes are superior on this ground.*



*81 mm Illum Mortars being fired at night.*



*The Royal Artillery launching their PUMA aircraft.*



*LCpl Gutteridge chatting to some friendly kids.*



*LCpl Purvis conducting female engagement.*





## Talavera Day – 27/07/2021



*The Task Force celebrated Talavera Day, which is the principle battle honour of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion The Royal Anglian Regiment.*

Talavera was a battle of the Peninsular War. Wellington had advanced into Spain with the intention of bringing to battle a large French army. On 27 July 1809 his forces occupied high ground at Talavera; southwest of Madrid, alongside a large Spanish force. Late in the evening, the French attacked, before the left of the British line was properly in position, and occupied an important hill.

A swift counterattack, in which the 1st Battalion of the 48th (Northamptonshire) Regiment of Foot played a prominent part, drove the French off the hill, and other troops, including the 2nd Battalion of the 48th, came up to help secure the position.

A large-scale French assault the following morning was repulsed, but later in the day when the French attacked the centre of the British line a dangerous gap was opened up. Wellington summoned the 1/48th to plug the gap, which they did with great dash and bravery.

In his subsequent dispatch, Wellington wrote, 'The battle was certainly saved by the advance, position, and steady conduct of the 48th Regiment.' As a result of their conduct on 28th July, the 48th were granted the signal privilege of being the only regiment in the Army permitted to include the word "Talavera" on their buttons and accoutrements.

## The Squadron Social – 30/07/21



*The Sqn social was a fun evening of team challenges. Plenty of pizza & pop. 4<sup>th</sup> Troop were the winners.*



Half way through the 17 day patrol, the Task Force had a maintenance day in a secure UN base. This base is occupied by the forces from Niger deployed here in Mali as part of MINUSMA.

The were very friendly and challenged us to a game of football. It turned out that they took football seriously and turned up in full kit. The teams lined up and sung their national anthems and then played a great game. Sadly we were beaten, but this was a great example of how sports can bring people together from around the world.

The role of a Peacekeeper here in Mali is varied. Here you can see two C Squadron soldiers helping push a broken down truck off the road so it can be fixed. The majority of trucks and lorries out here are very old and run down. It is common to see them broken down by the side of the road. This is an easy way to show the local population that we are friendly forces and want to help in any way we can, however small.



One of the key assets we have available to the Squadron is called PUMA. This is an unmanned aircraft that is used as over-watch to the troops on the ground. This is an impressive and very useful capability. This photo shows the PUMA operator launching the aircraft as night time comes in. This gives us eyes into any area we want to observe at any time of day.



## A word from Corporal Casey – 4<sup>th</sup> Troop

July was a busy month for C squadron as we deployed from Camp Bagnold on a long patrol. This patrol saw us head south about 100km to a small operating base where we conducted maintenance and preparation before subsequently heading out into the desert.

This was the first proper test for us to gather information on the type of ground we will be operating on. More importantly it gave us a better understanding on the current situation in the Gao region of Mali.



During our 17 day deployment we conducted multiple reassurance patrols, casual conversations (cascons) with locals and dismounted patrols into villages to provide peace and security for the people of Mali. Thrown in the middle of all that was plenty of dragging vehicles out of the sand.

Unfortunately as much as we would all love to build more roads, schools and much needed infrastructure for the people of Mali, it brings us much satisfaction knowing that for at least two weeks we are able to provide these people with some reassurance and freedom of movement to continue their daily lives in peace. Seeing this part of the world first hand definitely makes me feel grateful for what I have and appreciate how wonderful my life in the UK is. Hopefully the small part we play out here will contribute to making Mali a peaceful, prosperous and successful country one day.

Now all safe back at Camp Bagnold, the ladies and gentlemen are enjoying some well-deserved rest after a successful mission.

Camp life is fairly easy going. After all post mission maintenance is complete we can all relax and enjoy the air con!

## A word from Trooper Lilly – 3<sup>rd</sup> Troop



Everyone is happy to swap the cold woodblocks of Norfolk for the plains of the Sahel, and the reality of being on operations is bringing out the best in us. The environment can be challenging on ourselves and the vehicles, but we are surprised at how well we've adapted. Being out among the population and playing with the local children is a good reminder for everyone how important our mission is.

Life in camp is spent doing maintenance, playing board games and doing PT. The constant support from our loved ones has been helping to keep morale up. There are regular football and volleyball competitions and we are gearing up for a charity half marathon in a few weeks. We are approaching the halfway point of the tour, and looking forward to our next operation, thanks for the sweets!





## Quote of the month

A quote from *The Men Who Made The SAS* by Gavin Mortimer for you to enjoy.

“Similarly he didn’t want the sort of ‘tough and knuckle-duster men’ that were at that very moment being recruited for the Commandos in Britain. ‘We wanted an intelligent, responsible and self-sufficient type who would treat their precious vehicles and apparatus as their own, realising that their lives might depend on them.’”

Colonel Bagnold (1943)

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