



# 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.



**C Squadron Leader, Major Bryn Williams delivering confirmatory orders to his officers**

C Squadron entered October following a very successful operation on Operation MAKARA 2B and were in fine spirits. Whilst we were not in a position to comment on the successful actions in the last newsletter, the Squadrons activities have now been published in mainstream media and therefore it is now possible to discuss them. During an insertion into an area called Sorori Forest, the Squadron identified an area which was used by insurgents; instantly the skill and experience of the officers and soldiers kicked in and they managed to detain one of these insurgents. Following a search of the surrounding area, the Squadron found rocket propelled grenades, weapons and other items of military kit. The professionalism of all the members of the Squadron was exceptional and we entered the rest of the Operation in the knowledge that we had protected civilians and contributed to the security of Mali. At the end of the operation, during the route reconnaissance phase mentioned in the last newsletter, the Squadron identified another pair of insurgents trying to escape on a motorbike. Again the actions of the soldiers were incredible and they managed to interdict the insurgents and detain them. These insurgents were also in possession of weapons and other nefarious items. This detention was yet another example of the Squadron making tangible differences to the population of Mali. We all returned pleased with our successes and entered October.

At the start of October we continued with the usual personnel and vehicle rehabilitation, including a stand down weekend and a period of considerable vehicle maintenance. We also had numerous briefs to prepare us for the final operation of the tour called Operation MAKARA 3. During the stand down weekend we were fortunate to celebrate the Gurkha festival of Vijaya Dashain, which involved the Gurkha personnel of the Task Force kindly cooking a Gurkha curry for everyone; it was a great evening with delicious food. On Wednesday 6th October, I was honoured to be able to conduct promotions on behalf of the QDG Commanding Officer during a Squadron sporting competition. Trooper Edward Spencer was promoted to Lance Corporal and Lance Corporals Harvey Whiteing, Sam Rugen, Jack Rees and Ieuan Jones were promoted to Corporal. Corporal Daniel Pugh was also promoted to Sergeant. They were able to celebrate these promotions with a few non-alcoholic beers during the Task Force Bingo night which was the culmination of the rehabilitation following the previous operation.

As October progressed we turned our attention again to Operation MAKARA 3 and started the preparation for this three week operation. It was scheduled to be the longest patrol we would conduct and due to the long distances involved, it would also be the hardest and most complex. The Squadron spent time preparing themselves and the vehicles, cramming as much kit and equipment as well as many supplies on the vehicles as they could. This included a vast amount of noodles, fizzy pops and snacks! The officers hosted the new Commander NEWCOMBE, Colonel Dan Duff, who had just arrived into Mali. Colonel Duff had commanded the QDG between 2015 – 2017 and he welcomed the opportunity to see the officers and soldiers of the QDG again, despite being in very different circumstances.

On the 17th October, following a day off to enjoy a pre-operation brunch, the Squadron departed Camp Bagnold to start the final operation. This operation initially started with a 500km route reconnaissance led by C Squadron. Whilst this is our core business it was still a testing and challenging phase for the Squadron as we led the remainder of the Task Force across difficult terrain. On the 20th October, after three days on the march, elements of the Squadron were sent off to find alternative routes. On their return, and in a similar scenario to the incidents in September on Operation MAKARA 2B, the lead Troops identified insurgents with weapons, on a motorbike. The Troops set about to interdict the individuals in order to detain them for carrying illegal weapons. The insurgents moved into an area of dense vegetation and, to great surprise to all in the Squadron, they shot at us. The remainder of the situation has been widely reported in mainstream media, however it must be said that the bravery and professionalism of the officers and soldiers shone through with the situation finishing with the two insurgents being killed. This shows the real difference we are making to the security situation in Mali and the protection we are continuing to offer the population. A day later, with the previous days incident still in the forefront of the Squadrons minds, a number of the Task Force were caught out in a bush fire. Sadly, one of our vehicles was set on fire and went up in flames; whilst dramatic and another shock, the crew managed to get away safely.

Despite the challenging and eventful first few days of the operation, it continued with great success, with the Squadron managing to find a route which saw the Task Force enter a town called Menaka. We stopped for a few days in the UN Super Camp in this town, which provided a slight rest and some well-earned Wi-Fi and air conditioning. The middle phase of the Operation saw C Squadron hosting journalists from The Sun and The Independent as we entered remote villages to speak to the population and provide security. It was a pleasure to host them and provided an opportunity to capture lots of Squadron and Troop photographs. The final phase of the Operation saw a period of vehicle maintenance in the Super Camp and then a quiet return back from Menaka to Camp Bagnold in Gao. The Squadron drove up the road on the final day flying the Squadron flag, Welsh flag and Fijian flag as a celebration of a very successful last patrol. Everyone was delighted to enter the camp for the last time and receive a cold can of coke and a burger.

Spirits were high at the conclusion of Operation MAKARA 3 and the Squadron look forward to November, a month when we start to return to the UK. This end of tour phase will be covered in our final newsletter produced in early December and will coincide with us all returning to our support networks in the UK – we are all very excited to be coming home!

Thank you all again for your continued support and welfare parcels. I hope this newsletter finds you all well.

Major Bryn Williams

C Squadron Leader



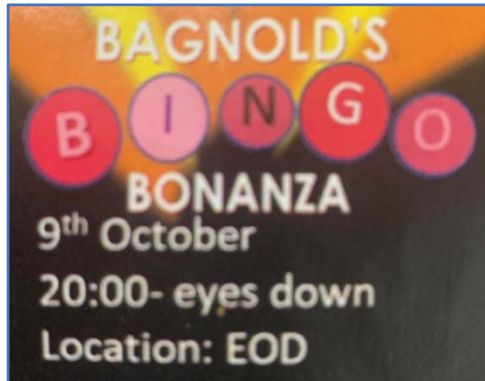
## Photo Collage – October 2021







## Task Force Bingo Night



*Some people made a real effort with the fancy dress!*

The Task Force Nurses put on a great Bingo Bonanza event to raise money for charity. Over 200 people attended and the night was a great success. If you chose to go, you had to wear some form of fancy dress. As you can imagine, it's not easy to put together a costume out here, so people were very inventive. Some people got loved ones to send out costumes, like Cpl Gilliam who was sent a complete superman outfit!

The girls managed to raise over £2000 and the German PX shop donated some great prizes to show their support. As a thank you to them, they were invited to enjoy the evening with our Task Force.

## C Squadron Welcomes Some New Editions



*Lt Fetherstonhaugh on his first patrol*

C Squadron has been joined by two soldiers and one officer. These guys have been training back in the UK and maintaining a level of readiness so that they can be called up at any time. Their time has come!

It is great to have some fresh faces in the ranks and they all had a very successful final patrol of Op Newcombe 2.

Lt Fetherstonhaugh – Vehicle Commander

LCpl Tomkins – Gunner

Tpr Wilson - Driver

## Task Force Training Day



*The dog handler demonstrating how they find IEDs*

Before each patrol we go out on, we receive a selection of specific lessons. These lessons are designed to ensure each one of us is 100% confident we can deal with any situation we come across on patrol.

This training program featured:

- Counter improvised explosive device training
- Rules of engagement and detainees
- Medical training
- Returning fire against the enemy

Everyone in the Task Force is trained to the highest standards in all these areas, however you can never practice enough!



## Sustaining The Task Force At Reach



The Concept behind the Long Range Reconnaissance Group (LRRG) is that it can go further and longer than any other troop contributing country out here in Mali. The LRRG can move hundreds of kilometres and stay out for up to 30 days. This is an impressive capability and one that makes us highly useful to the Force Commander. However it is a huge job to sustain the Task Force and to keep it moving.

The way this is done is through the A1 Echelon. The task force moves with a large packet of vehicles that include the deployable hospital and explosive experts. These vehicles also carry food, water, fuel, spares and experts in a variety of fields. Therefore, everything we need is always there with us. If we don't have it with us, the UN will fly it out in a helicopter. We even have the ability to fix our vehicles in the desert.

## The GMSG – Deployable Hospital

One of the most impressive and vital elements of the Long Range Reconnaissance Group (LRRG) is the Ground Manoeuvre Surgical Group (GMSG) or the deployable hospital. This is a fully operational hospital that can treat almost any injury or ailment as well as facilitate surgery for even the most severe injuries. The treatment or surgery will be given by a selection of the UK's top surgeons and doctors who are out here in the desert with us.

This capability means the Task Force is able to go further for longer and still have the medical cover available if required. This capability is totally unique and is designed around the nature of the operations conducted out here. Essentially we have world class doctors, surgeons, anaesthetists, nurses and equipment deployed hundreds of kms out in the desert ready at all times, which is very impressive!



## Creepy Crawlies



Op Newcombe is a dangerous deployment for many reasons, but our soldiers are trained to the highest standards to prepare them for any combat situation. However what the cold and green hills of Salisbury Plain don't prepare you for are the deadly and ugly array of creepy insects, spiders, scorpions and snakes out here in Mali.

Soldiers have had to deal with scorpions on their body armour, sand spiders in their boots and snakes under their vehicles! Some of these are highly venomous and we must be very careful not to get stung or bitten. The most frustrating of all insects are the mosquitos. Every night they come out in full force. Our mosquito domes and deet cream are as vital as our rifles out here!





## C Squadron Making Headlines

Op Newcombe 2 has been busy for C Squadron. We have achieved a lot of success which we can finally talk about. We have seized prestige weapons and equipment, taken three Insurgent fighter detainees and most notably, won a significant fire fight against two Insurgent fighters. The soldiers of the Squadron have proven themselves to be of the highest quality. They can all go home to their families feeling very proud. Here are some pictures and news snippets...



**Daily Mail** MORE STORIES

British troops kill two AK-47-wielding ISIS fanatics during 20-minute gun battle after their armoured car came under fire on UN mission in Mali

By Chris Pleasance for MailOnline  
12:41 21 Oct 2021, updated 12:50 21 Oct 2021



1.3k shares

201 comments

British troops were on a UN mission in eastern Mali when they were attacked

Back into battle with the jihadists



Norfolk troops kill terrorists in Mali after coming under attack

Thomas Chapman



Published: 2:58 PM October 21, 2021



INDEPENDENT

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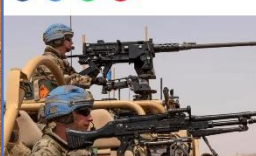
News > World > Africa

British troops shoot Isis jihadists in Mali — first killings by regular UK forces since 2014

A 20-minute exchange of gunfire followed an attack on British armoured vehicle

Kim Sengupta in Gao, Mali

Thursday 21 October 2021 01:43



**EXCLUSIVE**

News > World News

**BATTLE OF DEVIL DUNE** Crack British troops on world's most dangerous peacekeeping mission tell of their deadly battle with ISIS terrorists





## C Squadron

### A word from Trooper Jones – 2<sup>nd</sup> Troop



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I have been in Mali for 5 months now and it has been a truly great experience. From stepping off the plane into 45 degree heat to then dealing with sandstorms and rain like you have never seen before. I've seen some things that I never thought I'd see like 10 goats strapped to the top of a VW camper van and lorries stacked 30 feet high. It feels great to be apart of a mission that is here to help the people of Mali. Out on patrol we get to see the positive effect of our actions which I find very satisfying.

Camp life is good here and the facilities are excellent like the gym and welfare centre. The food is very nice, especially Sunday brunch which is essentially a Man vs Food challenge! One of my achievements outside of operations is learning how to cut hair. Trooper Sell and I have our own barber shop now. We have named it Beefhead Barbers because we have been hitting the gyn and chasing the gains. We are now established as the freshest cuts in Mali!

The last few months have been the most challenging for me because my little girl was born 2 months into the tour. She is called Olivia. I can't wait to get home and meet her and see my partner and other little girl Ava. I look forward to spending a well-earned Christmas with them. Not long to go now!

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### A word from Trooper Smith – 4<sup>th</sup> Troop



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I was deployed on Op Newcombe 2 with C Squadron as a battlefield casualty replacement (BCR), which is essentially a reserve held at readiness to fly out to Mali if required. I am very happy to be out here doing the job I love. This is my very first tour as a soldier in the British Army and being out here means I will be the first person in my family to earn a medal since World War Two.

I spent a week in camp to acclimatise to the harsh and hot environment out here and was then flown out to meet up with C Squadron who had already deployed on a long and successful patrol. I was only there for the last week of that patrol but it was an incredible experience! All of the boys who have been here since the start showed me the ropes and how to operate in the Malian desert. Its good to be with my Sqn again. We have just got back from the final patrol of the tour which was a great success. I now feel confident in the role I have been trained for.

I'm very excited to see my family who I know are very proud of me. I am definitely looking forward to having a nice cold pint of Guinness with my Grandad and telling him about the experiences I've had out here in Mali.

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## Attached Arms

### Corporal Gwilliam – Royal Electrical & Mechanical Engineer



I am Corporal Gwilliam, Class 1 vehicle mechanic attached to C Squadron on Op Newcombe 2. My job role is to fix and maintain the vehicle fleet in camp and on patrol for the Squadron. This has been an incredibly busy deployment for us mechanics! Due to the terrain and length of the patrols, the vehicles have been put to the test. When we are out on operations, we try to keep the vehicles going either by changing parts if the spares are available, or we will figure out a temporary fix to keep them going until spares arrive.

I have had the opportunity to be involved in dismounted patrols into villages to speak to civilians and gather information. We have found that the civilian females are much more comfortable speaking to a female soldier and it is very rewarding being able to listen to their problems and provide security for them. Being able to step into a completely different role and patrol with the troops has been an amazing experience for me and one I will not forget!

We are almost at the end of the tour and it's been a great success! Now we all can't wait to get home and see our loved ones.

### Sergeant Taylor – Recce Engineer Sergeant



I am C Squadron's Engineer Reconnaissance Sergeant. I advise the Squadron and Task Force on all matters within the remit of engineering. That might be mobility, counter mobility or survivability. This can be anything from upgrading a route to accommodate all of the vehicles in the Task Force to sighting and setting up a water supply station which could provide clean water to the deployed soldiers.

Whilst deployed on Op Newcombe 2, I have done a number of jobs including Squadron Physical Training Instructor. This has involve training the Squadron to keep them fit out here and also leading with the acclimatisation training for the new personnel into theatre. I have also been an operator/gunner on a Jackal, manning the heavy machine gun within a Sabre Troop. As well as these jobs, I have looked into how mobility of the vehicles here is effected by the wet season and how to get the most out of them whilst on operations. Hopefully my findings and recommendations will be of use to future rotations.

I have enjoyed my time on tour both in camp and out on operations. Hearing the local populations from small villages say how much safer they feel with us around gives us all a sense of satisfaction. This is just one example of the rewarding aspects to this peacekeeping role. It proves that our presence here in Mali is not only worthwhile, but essential, if the UN wants to achieve its aim of lasting peace.



## Quote Of The Month

“The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.”

John F Kennedy - 1961

## Fun Facts

- The U.N. has six official languages - Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish.
- 2 of the 5 hottest temperatures recorded on Earth are from Mali!
- Russia, China, the United Kingdom, and the US were the first who pledged to work together to maintain peace. This came to create the United Nations Charter.

The Squadron would like to say a huge thank you to everyone who has supported the soldiers here by sending out parcels. They are appreciated more than you know.

Please **DO NOT** send anymore parcels to Mali. The Squadron will have left before they arrive.

Facebook group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/301350168268555/>

Date of next and final C Squadron issue: December 2021