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*Dear Angus,*

*1 Apr 19*

I wrote shortly after assuming Command in February of last year. Conscious that our contributions to the Regimental Journal have recently been submitted, and that you will all receive the monthly electronic update from RHQ, I thought it was still worthwhile writing to you with a short update on the Battalion from my perspective. As ever much has happened that will hopefully be of interest to you.

We have now completed our first full cycle of the Specialised Infantry ORM. B Coy have re-entered the training pipeline and A Coy have entered their eagerly awaited Committed Phase, assuming responsibility from C Coy who are now on Contingency after a busy but rewarding eight months deployed.

The Coys have all incrementally contributed to, and refined, the training pipeline to ensure that at every turn we are getting better collectively. To illustrate this, B Coy currently have JNCOs on French Long Language Courses and will shortly run some of their live firing for the entire Coy in French. They are also seeking every opportunity to hone their teaching skills – Queens UOTC are fast becoming a beneficiary of tuition from our junior soldiers. Of course, continual improvement is not possible without a modicum of ORBAT stability and it is for this reason that we now seek to retain our junior ranks until they are due their first external posting (routinely as a Cpl to ITC Catterick). That B Coy retained roughly 2/3rds of their manpower speaks volumes of the role; bar two individuals the remainder that left did so for career enhancing posts and we will hopefully see them back in the future. Team 1 from A Coy have just finished exercising at the Joint Readiness Training Centre at Fort Polk in Louisiana where they more than held their own when attached to a US SF Coy.

Our operational focus across Sub-Saharan Africa has now been re-focussed to West Africa. This is a welcome change as there was simply too much demand for a single Battalion across such a large and unstable region. This means that after almost 18 months of a persistent presence we have now handed our responsibilities in Somalia (Operation TANGHAM) over to 2 PWRR; they are an excellent unit and we wish them every success. That being said, our focus will not be purely on West Africa for a little while yet. C Coy supported 4 RIFLES with a Team in Iraq over the last cycle and A Coy will do the same until October of this year. OC A Coy will also command the operation, working directly to CO 4 RIFLES. These wider opportunities are excellent for spreading best practice, sharing experiences and of course ensuring medallic recognition. I hope that by this October we will have a Coy Tac forward permanently in West Africa (based out of Abuja) to accelerate our efforts there.

As I write, A Coy are quickly establishing our foothold in Cameroon. Team 3 have made an excellent start and whilst it remains to be seen what the UK's long-term approach is to the country, the deployment provides an opportunity to deepen our understanding of the Lake Chad Basin and wider efforts in the Sahel.

Nigeria remains our priority tasking and the commitment to their 707 Special Forces Brigade is set to grow in the coming months towards two teams. We hosted and entered the first Cambrian Patrol Team from Africa at the end of last year – that the 707 Brigade team completed the competition and performed so well is testament to the hard work our Jocks are conducting in Nigeria. That we also managed to enter a team that won a silver medal despite injuries and having to focus on preparing the Nigerians is, I think, highly commendable. We in the Battalion were very proud of the B Coy Team led admirably by Lt Chris Colwell.

I have written this letter on my journey back from Burkina Faso where I was visiting Operation MANSIO, the UK contribution to a US AFRICOM Counter-VEO exercise. It was pleasing to see the same team from the Cambrian Patrol out there, accompanied by elements of Team 11. From our perspective Op MANSIO involved training with our partners in Nigeria and Cameroon before re-deploying to Burkina Faso for the multi-national confirmatory exercise. Team 11 from will return to Nigeria with their partners from 707 Brigade and conduct continuation training there until relieved in March by Team 1. With the exception of Xmas leave they have been in Nigeria since Jul 18; persistence and continuity at its very best.

At Battalion level these enduring commitments place a significant but rewarding demand on BHQ. We are constantly improving on how we deliver; our requested presence at PJHQ and MOD to offer our expertise is becoming more and more common, and I hope is a sign of our growing credentials. But, we must not get complacent and we all know that there is much we still need to achieve. As a HQ we also had the good fortune to run Ex MAYAN STORM 2 in Belize at the end of 2018. This is the MRX for the Spec Inf Coys about to deploy so we therefore had Coys from 1 SCOTS, 4 RIFLES and 2 PWRR under command. In addition, we were joined by 77 Bde and 42 Cdo, both of whom we have a growing relationship with. The exercise assured and validated the Teams and Coys to deploy into the highest threat environments – but also their ability to work alongside a partner force. This latter phase involved deploying across Belize, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago to train a variety of military and non-military forces.

Regimentally we strive hard to continue the many wonderful traditions of 1 SCOTS. Despite somewhat lower numbers due to our commitments we all feel it is important to do so in order to maintain our identity. This year we celebrated Regimental Day and Minden Day. The Officers' Mess held all the usual key events including Gallipoli and St Andrews (Black Hackle Dinner Night) albeit a bit earlier than normal due to the deployment to Belize. Likewise, the Warrant Officers' and Sergeants' Mess held the Loudon Cup and a most fantastic Burns Supper. The annual challenge was also re-introduced at Christmas time. Our Pipes and Drums remain a key part of our Golden Thread. Many of you will be aware of the challenges we have faced since re-rolling. I am happy to inform you that through the excellent support of RHQ, and especially of Tom Perkins the Divisional Lt Col, that we are now able to plan with much more certainty. If you become aware of opportunities that would help our recruiting efforts for the Pipes and Drums, and be retention positive, we would love to hear about them. On the sporting and AT front we have made the most of what we can: competing in the Minor Units football cup; a highly credible performance at infantry squash; and infantry golf. 7 SCOTS have helped massively with AT on an individual basis and C

Coy will conduct a number of overseas expeditions this year. Finally, we sent three Jocks to the KOSB Association battlefield study in Ypres last year and will do so again this year and somehow we will find time to run a Battalion level trip to Monte Cassino and support the Group one to study the Spanish Civil War.

Throughout the past year the quality of our soldiers, but especially our JNCOs has constantly struck me. From the jungles of Belize to exercising with US SF in Louisiana, they have excelled and have never been found wanting. The change in them over the course of a cycle is striking and evidence of what empowerment and trust can deliver. Given the broad Regimental representation within 1 SCOTS, I think is insightful to our wider quality. We should all be very confident that our future is in safe hands. The messaging over Specialised Infantry remains a little confused within the SWI Division and I hope to improve it in the coming year; I hope this summary illustrates that life is good but hugely interesting and professionally rewarding with lots of variety and opportunities. Our results from JNCO Cadres, Brecon and promotion boards demonstrate that it is anything but career-fouling. Any assistance in conveying the positive experience that awaits volunteers would be most welcome.

As ever, should you find yourself in Belfast you would be most welcome.

I hope this letter finds you well. I will be home for two weeks over Easter - would be great to catch up.

Yours,

Andy