Summer approaches very fast, so now is the time to review our winter activities and make our plans for the show season. There are many things to report since the November 2005 Newsletter; we hope that we don’t miss anything out.

We’ve finalised our show plans: as usual, Beltring (War and Peace, Paddock Wood, Kent) will be our main event; we will be there from 18th to 23rd July and hope to see everyone. Our Annual General Meeting will be held at Beltring on Friday 21st July, so this would be a good time to visit our display and have a chat.

There have been a few changes to our vehicle fleet, we have attended some veterans events, done some filming, appeared on the television and had lots of publications on our vehicles in specialist magazines. Our public profile is the highest it has ever been and we now need to maintain the momentum by developing our museum and charity status plans.
Reactions to the MVT 2006 Calendar

Reactions to the MVT/DRA 2006 calendar have been unanimously positive. We have received two letters of thanks and appreciation from the MVT; emails have flooded in to congratulate us on the production; the advertisers all liked the publicity they got; everyone appears to have been enormously impressed by the quality and the effort we all put into it. We even found that someone had framed the photographs and had them on sale at militaria fairs because he said they were so good! It has been great publicity for the Association and was certainly a most worthwhile exercise. Thanks to everyone who contributed to the production.

Sales have been brisk, so that the vehicle owners had their transport and fuel costs met, with a bit left over as a small contribution to the Association funds. We have retained a large number of the calendars so that we can send them to new contacts in order to illustrate what we do and the vehicles we maintain. If anyone wants another copy, please let Paul Lincoln know - after July, they are available at a significant discount!

We have plans to do another calendar for 2008 in a different format, just for the Association, but right now everyone is still recovering from the stress of pulling the 2006 calendar together, so plans for a 2007 calendar are on hold.
Publications
Publications written by, or featuring, the Desert Raiders Association have been appearing steadily over the last six months, especially thanks to the efforts of John Blackman who has put together some really superb features. Here is a listing of the major articles; we retain them in the Association Library, so if you want to see a copy, let us know.

Windscreen - Winter 2005 Issue 109. Pages 38-41 feature “The Calendar Guys” by Peter Sanders. It covers the making of the calendar, with the stories behind the Blitz Buggy and the PPA Wasp Jeep, plus some great photos.

Windscreen - Spring 2006 Issue 110. David Knudsen’s article “A tale of 2 trucks” is on pages 39-41. This describes how he found and restored his Chevrolet WA & Ford 01 V8, and the amount of research he did to get them right.

Military Machines International - April 2006. David’s Chevrolet 1533 is on the cover and pages 14 to 21 feature a fantastic article by John Blackman, with his usual superb photographs, on LRDG patrol trucks.


Classic Military Vehicle - January 2006. The cover picture is an action shot of one of our SAS Jeeps in the arena at Beltring 2005.

Classic Military Vehicle - February 2006. We have the centerfold, with a close-up photograph of David’s two SAS armoured European Jeeps.

Classic Military Vehicle - April 2006. Peter’s Wasp Jeep is on the cover and John Blackman has Part 1 of his 2 part article on PPA, again with great photographs of our vehicles. Peter’s Blitz Buggy also features in a small piece on the outcome of the proposed ban on deactivated weapons.

Classic Military Vehicle - May 2006. On pages 4 to 7, John Blackman concludes his article on PPA, with more photographs of our vehicles.
**Filming**

Paul and Peter starred for a few minutes in a Sattelite TV programme on the 2005 Beltring show. Their explanation of the LRDG and SAS history, vehicles and operations came over very well, and we received many emails of congratulation.

We did some filming at our favourite Norfolk sand pit, to recreate the battle of El-Alamein for an independent film crew. Paul, David, Clinton, Tim and Adrian, the lads from the Afrika Korps and 8th Army, plus Paul’s cadets turned out with a load of equipment and Paul & Clinton’s 3 tonner. The first job was "unsticking" one of the film crew cars, which got stuck in the sand. Then, a stronghold was built from boxes, sandbags etc. in the spare time between “takes”. This particular film shoot worked very efficiently as the directors had done their homework and there wasn’t so much of the usual hanging around while the film crew sorted themselves out. As the weather wasn’t good, they pushed on quickly and got all the sequences they wanted, even doing the "night" shoot in daylight.

The vehicle shots involved driving round and round, loading and unloading. After filming the attacks, defences, mine clearance and first aid scenes it was time for “McHaggis” (otherwise known as Clinton) to perform on the bagpipes. The only noise we heard was him grunting as he strained to make a sound, but we guess the music will be dubbed on later. The day ended at 5pm with a group photograph in front of the F60.

We have also established early contacts with other potential film makers, and have tentative plans for the summer, and maybe even an overseas trip in 2007, so our film making activities are on a “high” at the moment.
Show Plans for 2006

Beltring, the “War and Peace” show, at the Hop Farm, near Paddock Wood, Kent will be our main show this year, 21st to 23rd July. We will be there from Tuesday 18th until Monday morning, near our usual spot, but South facing. This year, our theme will be “Jeeps” and we currently plan to have 9 or 10 of them, plus the Blitz Buggy and the Ford F8. Our big tents and usual hospitality will be available; just drop in and see us any time. The Annual General Meeting of the Association will be held on Friday 21st at 3.30pm - a notice of the AGM has been sent to Members and a new committee will be elected for the coming year.

Peter will do a small display at two MVT shows in Devon - the Buckfastleigh weekend, July 8-10th (a great show with the Dart Valley Railway having a 1940’s theme) and the Okehampton weekend, September 9-10th, based at the MoD camp on Dartmoor and with superb road runs around the ranges.

We also hope to attend local shows in the Norfolk and Cambridgeshire areas, but these are not yet fixed. In addition, we may display at Militaria weekends later in year as these are good venues to publicise the Association. We’re leaving these events flexible as our availability depends so much on our work commitments. Get in touch with Paul for the latest plans, or if you know of other shows that you think we should attend.
Here is some of the background to David’s recreation of two important components of the LRDG motor pool – the Chevrolet WA of 1940 and the 1939/40 Ford 01 V8 pickup. These two vehicles formed the earliest patrols of the LRDG and David has been searching for suitable examples for some time.

A base vehicle for the Chevrolet WA was the first to appear. After a long search, it was with great surprise and elation that I saw a basic civilian 1941 30cwt Chevrolet Chassis and cab “in need of restoration”, advertised in a commercial truck magazine. The location was in Devon, about a 6 hour drive away, but this was no problem as Devon would be a nice place to take a short break. After a phone call to confirm it was still for sale and could be viewed, off I went the following day in hot pursuit! As usual, “in need of restoration” meant that it was near derelict, bodyless and with lots of parts missing. It was also too long in the chassis, but it was at least Left Hand Drive, since it was an American import model. The Chevrolet WA’s used in the desert were all Left Hand Drive, so this was one conversion job that I did not have to do. It looked like I would have enough to do as it was! Nonetheless, a deal was struck and after a short while the hulk was duly delivered up to me.

The first problem to overcome was to replace the 20” civilian wheels and tyres and I decided that I could not warrant starting on this desert adaptation and rebuild until I had converted it to the original 10.50x16s of the military version. These early trucks did not have the standard army split rim wheels, so the easy option was out. By a second stroke of good luck, I soon saw an advert for some 10.50x16 sand tyres, which I quickly purchased, along with the wheels they fitted. All I had to do was to get the inner tubes, then have the wheel centres adapted to fit onto the Chevrolet’s ten studs.

The second job was the shortening of the chassis and propshaft to bring it down to the correct Short Wheelbase length, a relatively easy operation..
Now, with the worst “problems” out of the way, the rebuild became a more standard process of engine and gearbox rebuilding, brake system, ignition and carburetor replacement, radiator reconditioning, rust removal and so forth.

After all this came the interesting part: the bodywork. The front sheet metal had to be significantly modified since the wings had to be re-profiled and widened (just as the LRDG had done 60 years before) to accept the wider 10.50x16 sand tyres. I was kindly allowed access to the genuine WA by the Imperial War Museum, before the Museum opened to the public, so that I could photograph and measure all the necessary fittings, features, adaptations and body construction at my leisure. It was clear from this that the front wings had been cut from front to back and a 4\(\frac{1}{2}\)” steel infill welded in to widen the wings enough to overhang the fat tyres, so I copied this exactly. Then, I removed the top half of the cab, fitting tubes for a patrol recognition flag and a Lewis gun.

Now came the job of fabricating the body. These trucks were supplied in North Africa in chassis-cowl form, which allowed local firms to build whatever type of body they wanted. The body they built for the army was constructed from steel plates, riveted to a steel framework, with a reinforced, hinged, tailgate. So, about 350 rivets later, all the sections were ready for assembly and at last it was looking like a truck again.

A wooden superstructure was made and fitted as on “Waikaha”, the New Zealand patrol truck in the IWM. Final touches were to make the number plate brackets, tie hooks, racks for the spare petrol cans, radiator condenser, sand mat carriers, mount for the Boys anti-tank rifle and other miscellaneous fittings. The seat was re-upholstered and sand mats were made to the original LRDG pattern. Paul managed to get a large batch of steel sand channels made and two of these went on the sides of the Chevrolet WA. Finally, it was painted overall in sand, with broad irregular brown stripes in the pattern featured in the wartime photographs of LRDG Chevrolets this period, fitted with a replica Egyptian number plate and all the personal kit the truck would have carried. I decided that my WA would be \textit{Te Hai}, truck T3 of the New Zealand patrol, so these markings were painted in the correct places. As one additional feature, I managed to get a No. 11 radio set – the type most commonly used by the LRDG and now very rare – from a business acquaintance in Australia, who brought it over on the plane with him when he visited the UK.
Next on the scene was the basis for the **Ford 01 V8** pickup truck, which appeared out of the blue when I saw an advert for a dismantled, partly restored Ford, described as a Western Desert Utility. I was intrigued by this rather vague description and the owner sent me some photographs of what he had. My best hopes were confirmed when it turned out to be a Ford WOC 1. This particular vehicle had been converted after the war to a Woodie station wagon, as many were, with 16” civilian wheels and tyres. In the early 1980’s, someone in London had got hold of it and attempted to put it back to original WOC 1 condition, stripping it down, keeping all the WOC 1 parts and discarding the rest. He had lots of photos, which showed that it still sat on its skinny civilian wheels, but it was clear that it could easily be made into an LRDG patrol commander’s Ford 01 truck since all the sheet metal, chassis, engine and gearbox were the same. It was situated in Devon (again), so I said to Diane “how would you like a couple of days holiday in Devon?”. Well, it was February, but she was quite happy to go, so off we set with a trailer in tow.

Eventually, we found the place and all the sheet metal was there, needing only a bit of repair due to light rust, but with no major damage. The engine was partly rebuilt, sitting on a pallet in the middle of the rolling chassis. The gearbox, radiator and a few boxes of other bits were stacked in the barn. We loaded everything onto the trailer and the next day we went up the coast for Diane’s holiday, before hitching up to the trailer and journeying home.

Once it was unpacked in the workshop, I had all the bodywork sandblasted and found that the front wings had already been widened in the same way as the ones I had to do for the Chevrolet WA (probably in a hurry by the British Army as they we not very evenly done). There were traces of sand coloured paint on the bonnet, which denoted that it was intended for Middle East use. The fact that the front wings had been widened early on also seemed to indicate that it was at least intended for use with the fat desert sand tyres.

I repaired, cleaned and painted the chassis, which was in excellent condition after the first owner’s work. I had a bench seat made, similar to the ones in the wartime photographs of these trucks, then set about planning the rebuilding of the rear pickup body.
The LRDG had at least seven Ford 01 V8 trucks: five of them were Left Hand Dive versions, with the original pickup bodies. The other two vehicles – a patrol commander’s truck (Te Rangi II) and Doc. Edmondson’s medical truck – were Right Hand Drive, with specially built India Pattern wooden bodies and appear to have been converted from station wagons. As my WOC 1 had always been RHD, my first plan was to rebuild it as Te Rangi II, but in the meantime Peter had got hold of a 1939 Ford Woodie chassis and cowl with plans to do exactly the same vehicle! Two Te Rangi IIIs in the group would look rather silly, so we decided that Peter would continue with his Te Rangi II and I would do Doc. Edmondson’s medical truck, especially as there are wartime photos of the Medical Truck alongside a Chevrolet WA in the same camouflage scheme.

So, “Doc.’s Truck” it would be, with a wooden extension at the front of the India Pattern buck to afford the patient some protection from the sun, wind and dust. Peter came up with a set of wartime 9.00x13 sand tyres fitted on rims that, amazingly, fitted my WOC 1 hubs and we did an exchange for some new tyres he needed for another of his projects.

I had two bodies made locally (one for me and for Peter’s Ford 01) and spent a day or two bolting it all together. In fact, I did it twice to get the bed height correct – it was too high the first time. I made up and fitted the usual desert modifications for the sand channels, aeroscreens, spare wheel carrier, gun mount (on this vehicle, the gun mount carried the Red Cross flag!) and radiator condenser. Then, it was time for a few coats of paint to get the camouflage scheme right, using the same paint that I had used on the Chevrolet WA. With the final touches of the Red Cross flag, yet another Egyptian number plate, some medical kit and stretchers, this truck now looks the part.

It was a relatively quick and easy conversion, resulting from the unexpected opportunity to get the correct base vehicle. The same cannot be said for Peter’s Ford 01 project, unfortunately. This has been dragging on as he decided to leave the work to a professional restoration company. This never happened as it just sat in their workshop, so there was a panic to get it looking right for the calendar photographs. I helped him put the body on Te Rangi II so it could at least stand alongside Doc’s truck in the same camouflage livery.
Chameleon

Peter and Paul have been delving deeper into the issue of the colour scheme for the Blitz Buggy. Originally, we had two published colour schemes for the Blitz Buggy in use by the SAS - grey (mentioned by Virginia Cowles) and green (mentioned by Johnny Cooper). More recently, Gordon Stevens, in his book “The Originals”, compiling interviews with SAS veterans, states that it was “olive grey” and thus seems to bring the two colours together. Then, we have Craig Fourie and Jonathan Pittaway, in their book “LRDG Rhodesia”, showing a photograph of the vehicle without the SAS badge and with a very light coloured appearance - possibly this was an initial sand colour scheme?

More recently still, our conversations with someone who should know (he was there, in the desert with the SAS) told us that it was a complicated scheme of light green (maybe this was “fern green”) with pinky, purply and brown patches. Perhaps these were undercoat colours breaking through a faded grey-green topcoat. Or, perhaps it was an overspray in irregular patches like the LRDG used (on our G1 Jeep, for instance). The wartime photos from the IWM appear to show a patchy or faded/worn look, so it does seem that the Blitz Buggy could have had a motley colour scheme for a period at least. In any event, you can expect the Desert Raiders Association Blitz Buggy to turn up in a variety of colours next year, until we find one we are happy with!

Could this be the Olive Grey colour some people mention? Sorry for those with black and white copies of the Newsletter!

Final touches on the Blitz Buggy

Two contrasting tones!
Old Vehicle News
The biggest news (after our rush last year to get everything ready for the Calendar) is the completion of Clinton’s lovely F8.  Clinton and Tim have spent hours and hours on this restoration and it has just been given the final coat of paint.  Peter (unofficial signwriter to the Association) has promised to do the special markings required.  See it at Beltring and find out why it is special!

Other vehicles have been given the once over to get them ready for the summer and a few have been modified as more wartime photographs have turned up.  Apart for this, there is not too much news on our existing vehicles since the last Newsletter.  Peter’s Ford 01 V8 still needs an engine: he has two Ford V8 engines in pieces and it may be possible to make one engine from the two if nothing else comes along.

New Vehicle News
Our vehicle fleet continues to grow.  David has bought Paul E.’s SAS Desert Jeep (complete with all the accessories), and a rare trailer for his European Jeeps, to keep them in the Association and has an eye on another large truck - more of this in the next Newsletter.

We failed to get the Chevrolet 1533 in Australia and the Fiat Spa in Italy; however, Peter bought a Chevrolet WA in France, instead.  It needs working on, but everything is there except the body, and it needs the correct wheels.  Peter and David will collect it this summer and it will be Peter’s next priority.  Does anyone know where he can find a 37mm Bofors gun for it?
Museum and Charity Plans
We have been thinking hard about becoming a Charity and establishing some form of museum, in order to show that the Association has a long term development plan. Paul, David and Peter are the champions for this. The two issues are linked and we have met with a consultant who specialises in setting up charities, to help us plan our way forward. Setting up a museum on our own does not seem a viable option, but we could join with other museums for short term displays. Our consultant suggested many different avenues we should explore and Paul will be following these up.

We will be building mobile display units, develop a plan for an exhibition area to show to potential venues, keep a clear record of visitors at shows, hold regular open days, investigate linking with local colleges to educate and train students. We have even bought a couple of 8 foot plastic banners to advertise ourselves! These are ambitious plans and we hope to have enough time to keep them moving along.

Christmas Night Out
The China Cottage restaurant in Watton was, again, the venue for this well established Desert Raiders Association get together. As usual, the food and drink were excellent and plentiful, and we had the special event room all to ourselves. Chairman Paul started the proceedings with a short speech reviewing the main Association activities throughout the year and toasted “absent friends”.

Twenty seven diners had a really jolly time, with much laughter, good humour and interesting conversation. Apart from the usual Committee Members, many of the Cadets who took part in the calendar were there, along with our support team of welders, mechanics, wives and friends. Three lads from the Afrika Korps travelled a long way to be with us and their presence was much appreciated. Our special guests were Mike Muirhead (Alex Muirhead’s son) and his wife Ellen and we were pleased that they enjoyed themselves. Although the Secretary (Peter) couldn’t make it, the Eid Al-Adha holiday will be at the end of December in 2006 and mid December in 2007, so he’s already booked trips back from Saudi Arabia in order not to miss out again!
Violent Crime Reduction and French Bills

Hazel Blears (Minister for Policing, Security and Community Safety) has confirmed in writing that the Violent Crime Reduction Bill will NOT prevent us from owning deactivated firearms, since the Bill ‘will not apply to deactivated firearms or for the purposes of Museums or historical re-enactment. The Bill defines historical re-enactment as any presentation or other event held for the purpose of re-enacting an event from the past or of illustrating conduct from a particular time or period in the past’.

She also makes it clear that we will have no problems displaying our vehicles fitted with deactivated or imitation weapons, or obtaining other such weapons to add to our display. We like to think that our strong and frequent representations were important in achieving this result.

There is, however, another very worrying development in the form of a ban on private ex-military vehicle ownership in France. A Decree has been passed into law that requires all owners of ex-military vehicles to declare them to the police to obtain a permit (which would not automatically be granted). There is a risk that other EU countries could jump on the bandwagon. The latest unofficial position is that the Decree is intended to catch only armoured vehicles, but we are keeping a close watch on this.

Obituaries courtesy of John Campbell, Guy Harris & Roy Paterson, FPPA.

With sadness, we have to report that Sergeant Eric Hamilton Brooks, B Patrol, Popski's Private Army, passed away peacefully in December at the grand old age of 97. Eric joined PPA as a signaller in September 1943, having previously served with the LRDG, "L" Detachment, 1SAS and, very briefly, 2SAS. Eric remained with PPA until August 1945, mostly in Captain Bob Yunnie's 'B' Patrol, eventually commanding the Signal Section.

We are also saddened to hear that Pamela Matthews, widow of Lt. Col. Vladimir Peniakoff ("Popski"), died suddenly at her home on 5th December, her birthday, at the age of 88. Pamela married Popski in 1948, honeymooning in Italy and spending a part, it is rumoured, as guests of Tito. Always lively and with an enormous sense of humour, Pamela will be greatly missed.
Veterans Events

In November, six Desert Raiders Association members supported a major re-union of some 700 veterans in London. We put on a small display with the G1 Jeep and the Blind Buggy, joined in the lunch, met up with old friends and made many new ones. This was an excellent day out, enjoyed by all.

Paul has been our main point of contact with individual veterans, their relatives and Associations. He attended a mini re-union late in 2005, where there were nine LRDG veterans present. Everyone had a good chat about old times and there were many younger guests present to ask lots of questions. This was a great day, hopefully to be repeated in 2006.

He also attended the Field of Remembrance service at Westminster Abbey, joining the LRDG representatives alongside those from SAS and PPA. There was a short private act of remembrance afterwards followed by a very tasty curry lunch.

Paul went to Yorkshire and met with Geoff Arnold, the well known LRDG navigator of both patrols and WACO aircraft, and "Mickey" Coombes, another well known desert man. Sadly, Mickey was not well and passed away a short time later. He was a lovely man who we will miss very much. Paul will do a full Obituary for the next Newsletter.

The local Royal British Legion asked Paul to speak at their area meeting on his pet subject. You guessed, the LRDG! They managed to stop him when he paused for breath after an hour and a quarter. Paul got lots of positive feedback and it good that the Desert Raiders Association is able to support such worth causes.

Paul’s final outing since the last Newsletter was to visit Lorna Almonds Windmill (one of "Gentleman Jim’s" two daughters), who has had a second book published (the first was about her father and is well worth reading). This time her subject is George Jellicoe, wartime member of SAS and commander of SBS. Lorna organised a launch party at the SF Club in London, with lots of well known people being present. Paul was fortunate enough to get an invitation and he will write up a review of Lorna’s latest book for the next Newsletter.
This completes the roundup of our activities over the last six months. As you will have seen, we have been very busy and making lots of progress on many issues - so much so that a few things have had to be shortened or held over until the next Newsletter. In addition to receiving items for future Newsletters, we are open to offers of help on anything of interest to the Association - any assistance with vehicle restoration, support on the charity and museum issues, maintaining our collection of literature and transport to shows, for instance. For this, or anything else, please don’t hesitate to contact Paul or Peter at:

Town Green Cottage, Town Green, Watton, Thetford, Norfolk. IP25 6RB

or by using our email address:

desertraidersassociation@yahoo.co.uk

With all our best wishes for an excellent Summer;
The Desert Raiders Newsletter Team, June 2006.