



“Desert Raiders”

**Keeping the Legend Alive
British Special Forces in North Africa, 1940-1943**

Newsletter Number 7 January 2004

Aramis, CMP Ford F30



The Newsletter of the “Desert Raiders” Group

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This is our seventh newsletter, covering our activities, events, successes and failures over summer 2003. Another six months have gone by in a blur since Newsletter 6 – where did the time go? For further information on the group’s activities and plans, please contact Paul Lincoln by Email at desertraidersuk@yahoo.co.uk or Peter Sanders at peter_f_sanders@yahoo.co.uk. We must have been busy with one thing or another, so let’s have a recap on Summer 2003.....

We must begin by apologising to those of you who got Newsletter No. 6 a bit late – we were a victim of our own success. Our circulation increased so much during 2003 that we didn’t make enough copies. By the time we realised this, Ruth (our local school secretary and part time Desert Raiders helper) was in the middle of exams and couldn’t do an instant re-print. Hopefully, you all got one eventually.

Shows and Events.

We managed quite a few outings to national and local shows this (last) year: most of them were successful, but we didn’t get off to a good start.

Thetford.

Clinton and Paul wanted to make the first outing to be the annual ceremony at the 7th Armoured Division memorial in Thetford Forest. This is where the “Desert Rats” were camped during their training for D-Day. There is now a nicely restored Comet tank, mounted on a plinth beside the road. They were up and about early on a bright June morning – Aramis (F30) started nicely and was loaded with all the necessary stores for the day. It is only 9 miles from home to the Thetford Forest memorial, so, being tax and MoT exempt, Clinton drove it, followed by Paul in the transit flat bed, towing the G1 LRDG Jeep on Peter’s trailer.

Aramis went slower and slower and there was obviously something very wrong. It seemed like an electrical fault, probably the coil breaking down. What to do? The best bet was for Paul to go back to the workshop, leave the Jeep there (in case Aramis needed a tow) and return with the spare coil. Coil changed, off went Aramis – great. Paul went back to collect the Jeep – and caught up with Clinton and Aramis at the side of the road 1 mile short of the memorial! So, either the new coil was also faulty (or not heavy duty enough) or it was the condenser, which would be a major job. Decision time again. As there were only two of them, they couldn’t leave one vehicle and tow the other to the event, so, reluctantly, Paul had to take the Jeep home and return to tow Aramis back to the workshop. Not an auspicious start to the season.

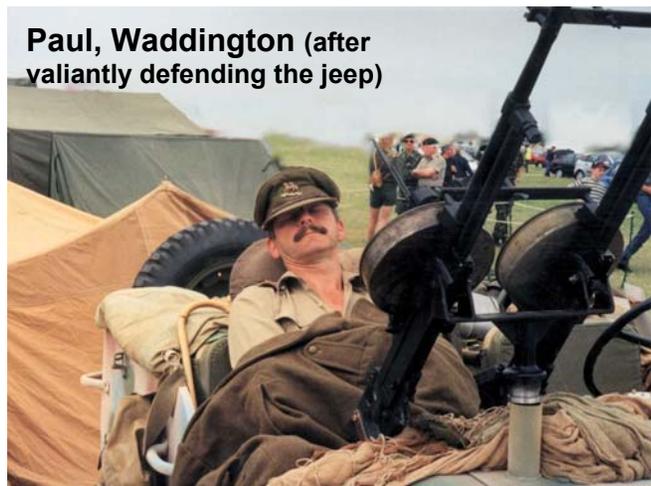
RAF Waddington.

This was a more successful outing. Only Paul, Clinton and Peter could make it, although Paul Mk 2 was helping out with the autogyro display and came to give moral support. They went with the G1 Jeep (on a Transit recovery truck loaned by Wayne) and the SAS Jeep (on Peter’s well used trailer). All the gear was packed into the Jeeps and, fortunately as it turned out, well covered over. It started raining at the Lincolnshire border and by the time they got to Waddington late in the day, it was pouring down. After some difficulty finding the right spot amongst all the aircraft, they pulled up onto the hard standing and spent the night as best they could: Peter and Clinton in vehicle cabs, Paul under a (partly) waterproof sheet beside the Jeep.

Saturday dawned damp and dreary, but it soon brightened up. Luckily, they found a space to set up the display. There seemed to be more vehicles than available space, so it was lucky they arrived early and “bagged” a good spot overlooking the runway! After laying out the Hessian “sand”, it was time to erect the Palm Trees. Peter imported three 15 foot glass fibre and plastic trees from the USA – they have a hollow trunk to take a wooden stake, looking very realistic and make a great backdrop to the display.

There was a tremendous amount of interest from the public during the intervals between the air displays and a record number of children passed through both Jeeps to have their photograph taken.

Eventually they had to put up the ropes to keep things under control. Sunday followed in much the same vein and the rain held off until getting back to Norfolk. It was a pretty good week-end, but not up to previous Waddington shows, where the display was in a hangar. Still, the Desert Raiders did show their faces north of the Wash this year!



Paul, Waddington (after valiantly defending the jeep)

Buckfastleigh.

Peter took his Bedford OXD and SAS Jeep to the Devon MVT annual bash at Buckfastleigh in Devon for a solo performance. The “Afrika Korps” Bedford towing an SAS Jeep on a trailer certainly makes an impression on the motorway. Peter arrived at 10pm on Thursday, camped under the stars as it was great weather all weekend and set up the display next day. Saturday and Sunday were the public days and were very busy. There was a road run of 50 vehicles over Dartmoor – down and up Widecombe Hill in the Bedford was “interesting” and convoys around the local villages added to the fun. All too soon it was time to pack up and drive to Beltring, where a flat battery and a blown trailer tyre created some excitement along the way.

Beltring, War & Peace Show.

The War and Peace show is a regular event for us – it was the ninth year in a row, as far as we can remember. This year, we organised ourselves a bit better than usual and arrived early. Peter arrived on Monday to set up the palm tree oasis (direct from Buckfastleigh, a round trip of 500 miles for the Bedford towing the SAS Jeep – not bad for a 60 year old vehicle).

Paul and Clinton arrived on Tuesday with Aramis and G1 Jeep. Finally, Dave and Dianne arrived on Wednesday with their smart new SAS Jeep. Adrian Mk 2 came down as usual on the Thursday night and stayed for the weekend. This was the first use of the 20-man Swedish bell tent we bought last year – it worked a treat and we had masses of space for the troops. We left the showground on Monday, so there wasn't the usual frantic rush to pack up on Sunday afternoon and drive home.

You may recall that we had a new “foot soldier” join us last year, in the form of Ted. This year, we had an added bonus, because Ted brought his ex-REME friend, Keith, with him. They were both kitted out smartly in K.D.'s and white SAS berets. Their uniforms fitted in well with Aramis as that is what the “parashots” wore when the LRDG first transported them. Keith was just as good an addition to our ranks as was Ted – he even drove one of the Jeeps around the arena, with the biggest grin you ever saw. With this sort of help, Desert Raiders will long continue to “keep the legend alive”.

On the subject of “new blood”, we had two more new recruits join us at Beltring: Paul's son, Scott, and his friend Tom came as well. Although Scott is only 15 years old, he is 6'4” tall and built like that well known type of outbuilding. They certainly looked the part in their desert kit. As we were short staffed on the SAS vehicles, they were issued with their sand berets. They then got something of a lecture on what it meant to wear it, what they were representing and what they had to live up to. Neither of them let us down and they only wore their SAS berets for manning the vehicles and to pose for the public in the display. The fact that they are both NCOs in the Norfolk Army Cadet Force was a major influence on their behaviour. They both had a brilliant time and couldn't wait for their next show.

As usual, we had some special visitors: how we love to see them and have a good chat. It was a first for Les Sullivan to drive himself from London by car, and we were so pleased that he did. Les was the fitter in the LRDG Heavy Section, so you can imagine what a grilling he received from Paul and Clinton, who have been working on recreating a Heavy Section Ford 3 tonner for two years.

Three of our other regular visitors also appeared: Jimmy Patch, sprightly and gentlemanly as always, and Ron Maitland-Flanagan, with the inevitable bacon sandwich. We gave Ron another tour around the arena in a Jeep, behind the .5 calibre Browning – it seemed like he enjoyed it! Jim Horsfield, as usual, came to see us. We are so pleased that he makes the effort to meet with us every year at Beltring and we are very honoured to sit and chat with him.

Jack and Donna Valenti of the LRDG Preservation Society in California were over here again this year and spent lots of time with us. It's always great to see them and exchange gossip - also an exchange of a Bagnold sun compass for Vickers K's was made this year, so everyone was happy.

We had one more chap drop in on us – an American officer, whose name we can't recall. He was very interested in what we do and talked for ages. When asked if he would like to crew a Jeep in the arena, he was straight into uniform and behind a pair of Vickers Ks. He told us several times what an honour it was to represent the LRDG.

This year was notable for the lack of so called “experts” who claim to know more about the LRDG than we do. There was only one rather poor attempt at an SAS Jeep (a Hotchkiss, complete with windscreen), but the owner did not make any attempt to join us, or show any interest when we looked around his vehicle in our SAS and LRDG kit.

All in all, we enjoyed the show, but politics and greed reared their ugly heads once more and we may be witnessing the beginning of the end for War & Peace.

August saw a break for us: Peter was back at work in Saudi Arabia and everyone else was busy or on holiday. Paul and Scott were on Army Cadets Force annual camp in Cumbria – helicopters, urban fighting training, abseiling off towers, crawling through sewers and firing large quantities of ammunition. Paul was very proud when his son was promoted to full Corporal – Scott had worked very hard and fully deserved the extra stripe.



(winner of the “most guns on a Jeep” competition)



Detling, Military Odyssey.

Our next outing was back to Kent again, for the Military Odyssey at Detling, Kent County Showground. We were in a slightly better position than last year. Paul, Clinton, Peter and Adrian Mk 2 were on show in glorious sunshine with the G1 and SAS Jeeps. We laid out our “sand”, put up our palm trees and relaxed in shorts and head dress, whilst other re-enactors sweated in their thick uniforms. We had a huge amount of interest in our display and many sensible questions asked. Once again, we were delighted to supply Jimmy Patch and Ron Maitland-Flanagan with tea and to have a good chat about the “real thing”. Next year, this show moves to a 3 day Bank Holiday slot, and it should be good.

North Norfolk Railway.

The last show of the year was a local venue, yet again with the two trusty Jeeps. Peter was back in Saudi again, so Paul took the G1 Jeep, with Scott and Tom as crew. Clinton took Peter's SAS Jeep and also took his family along as the North Norfolk Railway is only 40 miles from home. The weather was again scorching hot, so it was off with the shirts. It was a nice day out and we had a fair bit of interest, so it was a good end to the show season.

Palm Trees & Vickers Ks



Scott & Tom

Vehicles.

There has been a lot of progress made on all our vehicle projects this year and we hope to have most of them completed for next season.

Dave.

Dave has been busy finishing off his first pattern Chevrolet WA – the type that is in the IWM. He is now at the stage of adding gun mounts and POW can racks, having finished the bodywork and mechanicals. It should be completed in a few months and will be a real showstopper in the 2004 season. Dave’s next idea is to get another Chevrolet from the USA, so we will have the final missing vehicle in the Desert Raiders collection – a 1311. He has found the correct vehicle, so here’s hoping the deal goes through.

Dave has plans to repaint Te Anau II (Chevrolet 1533) in Rhodesian markings: we’re trying to convince him that pink would be nice!

Paul Mk 2.

Paul had some very bad luck this year, as his house caught fire and the roof burnt out. Fortunately, the dog woke him and everyone got out safely. This obviously put the brakes on his Kubelwagon rebuild, but it is moving again now.

Clinton & Paul.

Progress is steady on the 3 ton Heavy Section Ford. It has proved to be the most drastic project Paul and Clinton have ever undertaken since it was a total strip and rebuild, with many parts missing or beyond repair. Body panels have been made from scratch and replacement parts were located in Holland. The engine now runs and it is looking good for the summer season.

Paul and Clinton have also tracked down an ultra-rare Ford 8cwt; it is almost 100% complete and they’ve clubbed together to buy it and ship it over from Holland. They did plan to restore the F8 as Te Rangi III, but Brendan O’Carroll recently sent them a photo of Don Steele driving an F8 with what looks like a 20mm cannon in the back. Now, where can we find one of those? After the F8 is done, Paul and Clinton will have a vehicle for each patrol, plus a representative from the Heavy Section support unit. Paul says his next project will be a European SAS Jeep for Scott (oops, maybe that’s a secret?).

There will only be minor jobs to do over the winter on Aramis (sorting out the electrical system and maybe a repaint) and the G1 LRDG Jeep (the gearbox is temperamental and the gun mount needs to be modified for the twin Vickers Ks).

Peter.

Peter is not letting being cooped up in Saudi Arabia stop him from getting involved in Desert Raiders restorations. He is making parts for his vehicles out there, but is cheating by getting two projects done by professional restorers. He has a Ford V8 01 pick-up (Te Rangi II) being done in Bristol: all the panels and woodwork are finished. He bought an engine and gearbox for it, but the problem is that the transmission doesn’t fit the propshaft. All the same, it should be finished early in 2004. The other project will certainly be an eyecatcher – David Stirling’s famous “Blitz Buggy” (a modified Canadian Ford “woodie” disguised as a German staff car and used in various SAS raids). Peter imported a 1941 Ford from the USA and found a complete set of body panels in the UK. He now has all the parts, so it should be a straightforward job for the firm in Norfolk. Peter is looking for any information on this unique vehicle, so if you have even the smallest detail, please let us know.

The stuck clutch on the Bedford was freed (again) and the broken exhaust manifold was replaced last winter. However it still blows and maybe the faces need skimming. Another job to be done before next season. Peter’s SAS Jeep now sports 3 genuine deactivated Vickers Ks, as he dug deep into his pockets and bought a superb pair on a twin mount to replace his aluminium reproduction ones.

Further Stardom?

We haven't done any film work for some time, but the various documentaries we starred in have been shown regularly over the year. We often get a call "we saw you on the TV last night". Then, out of the blue, Paul got a phone call from a mysterious Irishman who called himself "Gerry" and asked all sorts of questions about things to do with the SAS. Naturally Paul was very guarded, until he found out how Gerry had got in touch with us. It seems that our old friend Mike Morgan had sent him our way and that Gerry's film company was about to make a one hour programme on Paddy Mayne, with some recreated WWII scenes. The reply to the obvious question "what do you want" was unexpected, but, delivered in a soft and disarming Dublin accent it was "Well, what do you suggest?". All of a sudden Paul felt like an old hand in the film industry and offered to help any way he could. Gerry said he wanted to come over on day one, stay the night, film on day two and go home on day three. Paul arranged hotel accommodation, film locations, 3 vehicles, 12 extras, a mass of SAS and German uniforms, eating arrangements, an SAS veteran (Albert Youngman), weapons, pyrotechnics and a live firing weapons crew. Wow – a one man casting agent, location coordinator, visual effects supervisor, stunt arranger, props director, wardrobe master and gaffer.

Came the appointed evening, Paul met with Gerry and his cameraman at the local hotel to finalise things for the following day. Early next day, off they went to one of our favourite filming haunts at the Muckleburgh Collection in North Norfolk. First thing was a quick conversion job on the G1 Jeep to make it look like as SAS one. As it already had twin Vickers Ks on the front, this mostly involved piling on extra Jerrycans and kit. By then SAS veteran Albert Youngman had arrived, so he sat in the Jeep behind the guns for an extended interview. Albert joined the SAS in the early days of 1942 and served up to the end of the war, mostly with Paddy Mayne. Everyone was keen to get into the required kit – the only problem was that they didn't know if Gerry wanted the European or desert scenes first and he was still interviewing Albert. So, the logical choice of desert kit was made – wrong, and the desert-clad men had to do a quick change into green battle dress, much to the amusement of the public who were driving past!

The first shoot involving the Desert Raiders was about Paddy's fourth DSO. Dave's European Jeep raced up and down the roadway, scattering the "Germans" in all directions. Paddy's men dodged behind cover whilst Paul tried to prevent the public driving into "shot". Paul previously played the part of Paddy Mayne for a previous documentary as he is over 6 foot tall, but this time his friend Ian played Paddy for the European scenes. Paul had kept his beard to play Paddy for the desert scenes, so there will be two "Paddy Maynes" in this documentary!

Eventually, all was to Gerry's liking and they moved to the dusty tank playground for the desert work. Mike, our pyrotechnics guru, set up his "fireballs" to simulate exploding aircraft. It took ages to get the right shot of the Jeep, then they filmed the Jeep and Ford together, representing the first successful SAS raid on an airfield.

Muckleburgh has such a wide range of scenery, and still sports an old radar station, complete with high barbed wire fencing. Some Venture Scouts camped inside were much amused to find Wehrmacht sentries on guard. It was difficult to persuade them to go away, even when the SAS started stabbing them! Mike had the answer and painted a grizzly picture of what a fireball could do to a Venture Scout in a nylon anorak.

By now, the daylight had gone and there was only time to do the big scene once. All was ready and three SAS brigands ran down the "wadi" after raiding the airfield. At the director's signal, the skyline erupted. They stopped briefly to gaze at the effects of the "Lewes bombs" on the German aircraft. As the flames died down, the Desert Raiders turned again and ran past the camera straight back into the real world.

Now, it was the usual story of rushing around in the cold and dark to collect everything together as fast as possible, load up the vehicles and get back home to bed. Everyone had a great day out and we got some photos, which we'll include in the next Newsletter. Watch out for the documentary as it promises to be a good one. Naturally, we'll review it when we see the complete thing.

Museum Update.

You may recall that we were in contact with the Bressingham Steam Museum with a view to enhancing their existing displays by adding, firstly, the old “Wartime at Watton” collection and eventually a Desert raiders display. We enquired about your thoughts on this idea and on the possibility of a memorial to the LRDG being included. All the responses we got were very positive and we thought that we should get the ball rolling by showing our intent. So, Peter and Paul loaned the museum a good selection of our Home Guard items, to add to their Dad’s Army and Home Front themes. Paul has discussed moving the Wartime at Watton collection again with them recently and the plan is to get the Army Cadets involved in the museum expansion programme as part of their training.

The Desert Raiders project seems like being the most expensive scheme and we are a bit wary of applying for a grant until a firm plan is drawn up. We will continue discussions with the museum and we’re sure to have more news in June.

Research.

Paul’s quest to determine the fate of the 16 men who died whilst serving with the LRDG in the desert continues. He now has a few leads, particularly from Les Sullivan who tells a particularly harrowing tale of how fate saved him from being buried alongside Phil Arnold instead of Harry Grivil. Needless to say, Jimmy was able to help a lot, but the biggest breakthrough came from the LRDG Rhodesia book.

A couple of Newsletter readers have been able to help with more details of these 16 men, but a few gaps still remain. There are two men with only a few sketchy details: Signalmen B. Jordan, Royal Corps of Signals (Rhodesia, 13-12-1942?) and Corporal G. Yates, Royal Army Service Corps. Sgmn. Jordan is listed in Bill Kennedy Shaw’s book as RC of Sigs, but in LRDG Rhodesia as Gnr. Jordan. Cpl. Yates seems to have disappeared without a trace – it seems likely that he was in the Heavy Section. Paul would appreciate any further help and when his researches are complete, he will report fully.

New Books.

There is one new book that has stood out head and shoulders above everything else that appeared this year. “LRDG Rhodesia” is a large format book, full from cover to cover with fantastic pictures, memories of the men and descriptions of events from the Rhodesian LRDG Patrol. “Kiwi Scorpions” by Brendan O’Carroll was a major work, but Jonathan Pittaway and Craig Fourie have done their fellow countrymen equal justice; “LRDG Rhodesia” is a mine of information on the Rhodesian contingent. There are inevitably some mistakes, but these will no doubt be corrected in the promised reprint. We hope to add a few photographs of our vehicles to the new edition. Verdict – expensive, but worth every penny.

Mike Morgan’s excellent “Sting of the Scorpion” is now out in paperback and Mike tells us that he has added in some extra photographs. This is still the best “other ranks” view of LRDG life – even if you have the hardback edition, get the paperback as well, if only for the extra photographs.

Mike has just finished working on a book about Stan Hollis, the CSM in the Green Howards, who won the only VC on D-day. Although the book does not cover the North African campaign, Stan Hollis’ company commander was Major Ronnie Lofthouse. He married Paul’s auntie Mary and so became his uncle. It’s a small world!!

A book just in and waiting to be read is “Churchill’s Folly”. This is about the debacle on Leros, where the LRDG were deeply involved. It looks like a good read and we’ll give a review of it in the next Newsletter.

Finally, one to watch for in 2004 is Brendan O’Carroll’s next book – it covers the Barce Raid. He has done his research, finished the text, gathered up his photographs and is ready to go to print. We’ve been in touch with Brendan over the past year, helping with odds and ends and photographs. Brendan has put in a lot of serious study to pull his information together and it promises to be a great addition to the library. Again, we’ll review it when it comes out.

Social Events.

We held a few quiet Desert Raiders social events after the show season. Peter hosted a barbeque in the form of a house warming party. The men seemed to spend most of the time in the barn looking at vehicles whilst the ladies sat outside and chatted, so everyone had a good time. One Christmas meal was held in November near Cambridge, with a second one being held in December to make sure that all the Desert Raiders met up “out of season”. Most of the Desert Raiders and their families managed to get to one or other (or both) of the meals and they were great successes, enjoyed by all.

Shows for 2004.

We were planning to go to Normandy in June for the D-Day commemorations with the 3 tonner and the Blitz Buggy. However, we didn't think it wise to take the vehicles straight out of the workshop on an overseas trip, so Normandy will have to wait. Our plans for 2004 are to go to “Campaign”, a World War 2 only show near Bedford (10-11 July); to War & Peace, Beltring (21-25 July) and Military Odyssey, Detling (27-30 August), plus the usual mix of local shows. However, we are planning a special event in June 2004. It's not been finalised yet, but we hope to have most of our Desert Raiders vehicles at Muckleburgh, Norfolk, for a Desert Raiders weekend. It should be a big, exciting, event and we'll need as many crew members as we can get. So, keep in touch with Paul or Peter for the latest details.

Finally, we must apologise for the late arrival of Newsletter No 7. The pressure of work prior to Christmas beat us and Ruth retired, leaving a gap in the printing department which Peter has stepped in to fill. We hope that you like the slightly different layout to the Newsletter. If you have anything you want us to include for the June issue, please send it to Paul or Peter. And, if you would like to receive the Newsletter electronically, we can Email it to you as an Adobe Acrobat (.pdf) file – just give us your Email address.

Look after yourselves.

All the very best from:
Paul and the rest of the Desert Raiders



Paul, Peter, Dianne, Clinton, Dave, Adrian Mk2



The Desert Raiders SAS patrol looking cold and bored, waiting for the film crew to get their act together