



“Desert Raiders”

Keeping the Legend Alive

British Special Forces from North Africa, 1940-1943

Newsletter Number 9 January 2005



The Newsletter of the *Desert Raiders Association*

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This Newsletter is bursting with a review of all our activities over the summer: we have so much material that a lot of it has had to be left over until the June issue. This is a very good reflection on everyone's high degree of activity and enthusiasm, so read on for all the news, information and gossip. The Association now has our own Email address, which is: desertraidersassociation@yahoo.co.uk, so you will find it easy to get in touch. All the Committee members can access the Email account, so you can be sure that your message will get the correct person.

Shows and Events.

There were mixed fortunes for the shows and events in 2004, due to weather and work commitments, but we were out and about.

7th Armoured Division memorial service. (Thetford Forest) - 27th June. In 2003, Paul and Clinton failed by one mile to reach this service. In 2004, they took no chances and transported the LRDG Jeep on the back of a recovery truck. Although directed to park at the back of the vehicle park, they managed to manouever a lot nearer the front, as befitting an LRDG vehicle. It was good for the Association to represented at this service and pay our respects.

Muckleburgh. (Weybourne, Norfolk) – 19th-20th June. Peter, Paul, Ted and Clinton tried to load the F30, Bedford and LRDG Jeep onto the low loader, but there was no way to fit all three vehicles on. So, plan B came into play - to load the F30 and 2 Jeeps onto the low loader, with Peter driving behind in the Bedford. Everyone met up on a cold, windswept and damp Norfolk hilltop on Friday afternoon to set up the first display of 2005. It is a massive site, with many different groups participating. They were able to dig trenches, gun pits (even for a German 88mm), foxholes and drive tracked vehicles around, so this has the makings of a good show – providing the organization and publicity is improved.

We were left to our own devices to choose a suitable location as there was no clear plan from the organizers, but we eventually found a good spot some distance from the museum. We were joined by a large contingent of cadets from Paul's Army Cadet Force unit, and they added life to the display. Dave and Dianne, Scott, Tom, Adrian and Ted turned out and we were joined by Tim (an army cadet instructor). Tim has fitted into the team very well and he now helps with the 3 tonner twice a week. Saturday was a fine day and the Bedford, F30 and three Jeeps looked a great sight to visitors on the showground. Unfortunately, Saturday night and Sunday turned out wet and visitor numbers were disappointing – we packed up early on Sunday as the weather was clearly set in for the day. Despite the weather, we all enjoyed the event and hope to participate if it is held next year.



Campaign 2004. Twinwood Airfield, Bedford – 10th-11th July. Wet weather put a real dampener on this show. Paul and Clinton had other commitments, so David and Peter planned to set out with their vehicles and put on a small display. Just before the show, Peter and Clinton changed the gasket on the Bedford engine (again). The job went smoothly and Peter set off in bright spirits with the SAS Jeep in tow on Friday morning. Five miles out, the rain started and the Bedford died, just after reaching the main road (why do vehicles always break down in the most awkward places and in bad weather??). Clinton came to the rescue but there was no sign of life from the engine. There was nothing for it but to use the Cherokee to tow the SAS Jeep home, then return and tow the Bedford. The problem was eventually traced to a blocked idler jet in the carburetor, caused by sediment disturbed during the gasket change. By the time this was rectified, it was too late to get the Bedford to the show. The poor weather (and the thought of the display being reduced to one Jeep) caused David to back out as well - so, reluctantly, we had to notify a “no-show”.



Two views of Peter's "Campaign" breakdown



War & Peace. Beltring - 21st-25th July. “*The best laid plans of mice and men...*”. Scott was on an Army Cadet Instructor’s Cadre the whole week and couldn’t attend, but everyone else came for at least some of the time: Paul, Clinton, Peter, Adrian, Ted, David, Dianne. Paul planned to be in Kent on annual camp with the ACF at the time of Beltring, and this was ideal as he could “pop in” for the 5 days of the show since it was not far away. However, at short notice, the MoD decided that Cornwall was a much better place for Paul to do his camp, thus creating some logistical difficulties.

Peter had a business meeting in Southampton on the first “setting up” day of Beltring and turned up late. The low loader was loaded up with three vehicles the week before Beltring, so Clinton could drive down early in the week. Peter organised transport for the Bedford, David did the same for the new Chevrolet WA so, in the end, everything arrived at the showground. As usual, it was a great show, with good weather.

This was our biggest vehicle display ever: we had the F30 (now re-incarnated in fresh paint as Y2), the LRDG Jeep, two SAS Jeeps, the Bedford, a Jeep trailer upturned as a wreck and, the star of the show – David’s smart new Chevrolet WA. This looks really terrific in its brown and sand camouflage scheme.



We had the usual visits from our enthusiastic veterans (it is always really nice to see them and chat about things LRDG/SAS related) and veteran enthusiasts. This year the Desert Raiders teamed up with a group representing the 8th Army (Andy & Simon) and another representing the Afrika Korps (London Ambulance guys). They all had excellent equipment and were knowledgeable about the units they represent. We got on well with them and we plan to display alongside them in future to add different aspects of the same period and events. All too soon, the show came to an end and the Desert Raiders went home. Well, not quite - Paul still had to get back to Cornwall and Peter had to get the Bedford to the Firepower Museum in London. Thus, Paul hitched a ride to London with Peter to catch a coach from Victoria and Peter headed back to Saudi Arabia the following day.

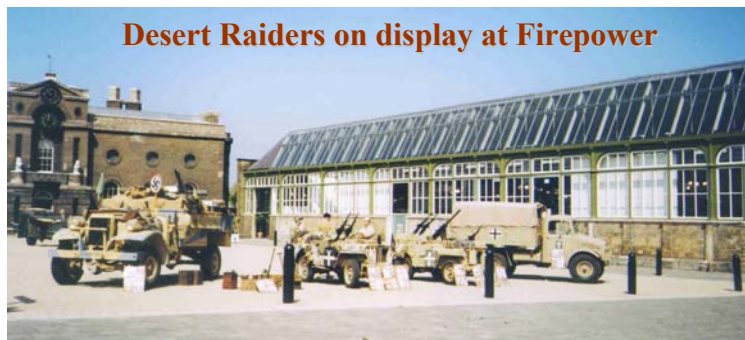
**8th Army, Afrika Korps
and LRDG Mobile Phone**



Detling. 27th-30th August. We had a good turn out at the Military Odyssey show in Kent – Paul, Clinton, Adrian, Ted, Scott, Tom, Tim, David and Dianne were there, with the F30 and a few Jeeps. We were even joined by a desert tank from Bovington! Our pitch was close to one of the arenas and we had lots of interest from visitors and veterans relatives. The good weather was lovely, and the multi period show was, as usual, superb, but the traffic going home was terrible: Clinton and the Scania were stuck for hours on the motorway and this was a real downside to the show.

Firepower. 14th-15th August. As noted earlier, Peter and Paul left the Bedford at the Royal Artillery Museum, Woolwich, after Beltring, to be ready for the special weekend open day in August. In truth, the delivery was not as easy as expected. The gate to the museum had a 2 metre height restriction barrier, so the Bedford would not go under.

Eventually the gatekeeper arrived to open the barrier. No-one was expecting the Bedford as they had forgotten it was coming and the exhibition hall was locked, with no key available! The barn door into the main hall was too narrow for the Bedford (and at a crazy angle), so the only option was to drive through the exhibition hall fire doors and leave the truck in the courtyard. The Bedford got through with one inch either side to spare. All's well that end well, and no harm was done. For the weekend, Clinton turned up with the F30 and 2 Jeeps and David brought his Jeep, so the Desert Raiders put on a great display outside the old Arsenal buildings, with help from a few of the Afrika Korps boys. A good weekend was had by all, including the steady trickle of visitors drawn in by the publicity. The Museum laid on accommodation and paid fuel costs; they were pleased by our interactive weekend and hope to run the same event next year.



Field of Remembrance. Paul, Peter and David attended the Field of Remembrance ceremony at Westminster Abbey on 11th November. This was a very moving event and it was a privilege to meet with veterans from the SAS, LRDG and PPA. All three units had very well laid out plots, which were inspected by the Queen and Prince Philip. Lunch (with relatives of Popski and those who served with him) was hosted by the PPA Preservation Society. Many thanks to Guy and Roy for their great organization: we plan to attend next year and have already been promised tickets.

Museum.

Developments on setting up a museum have been disappointing. Our efforts to set up a display at Muckleburgh came to nothing – the owner promised to meet us at the show in June and sign the loan agreements. Unfortunately, he did not make it, and the Museum Manager had no powers to do anything. So, we decided not to set anything up until we have an agreement: as the owner hasn't subsequently replied to any of our emails, this was probably wise!

We are, nonetheless, exploring other possibilities of combining with an existing museum. We hope something will come of this in the medium term, but it is a real struggle to get a museum started.

Transport.

This year saw the first outing of the Scania articulated tractor unit fitted with a 40 foot low loader trailer, pictured in this newsletter. It was very successful and eases our transport problems a lot. The swan neck takes a Jeep nicely and it has enough room for two other vehicles. It means that, in one load, we can now take 2 Jeeps and the F30 Ford, or the Bedford, a Jeep and a small Ford. Next year, we may be able to exchange the trailer unit for a longer full flat bed, which will be even more flexible. Thanks go to Clinton for organising this, and doing all the driving.

Peter has bought a large, 3.5 tonne, twin axle trailer for the Cherokee to tow – it is so wide that it won't go up his drive and he had to cut 6 inches off each side! The new trailer will take a Ford V8 01, F8 or C11ADF – again, giving much more flexibility. Ted now has a tow hitch fitted to his Land Rover – a mistake, as now he will get pushed into towing Jeeps around on a trailer!

Finally, the East England Tank museum has been able to provide (relatively) cheap transport this year. They have been able to accommodate various Desert Raiders vehicles on part loads or backloads going to/from the major shows and this has been a great help in reducing the transport costs. Visit the museum if you can – there is lots to see.

Vehicles.

All our existing vehicles continue to run well, just needing the usual maintenance and servicing over the winter. *Aramis* has a new number a paint scheme and now starts well. Here's the status of our major projects:

Chevrolet WA. This is finished and photos of David's WA feature in this newsletter. This is a superb vehicle - well done David, it's a great effort. David has a question for you, though – what was the purpose of the bracket on the front right hand side of the buck? This photo is from Waikaha in the IWM. David has made a copy of the bracket, but what did it do? If anyone has any ideas, please let us know.

Do you know what this is for?



C11ADF "Blitz Buggy". Peter (well, the vehicle restoration company, actually) has finished the Blitz Buggy, and pretty good it looks. All it needs is the finishing touch of the SAS badges on the side. This has been a top quality rebuild and was well worth the time it has taken. Look out for it on the show circuit next year.



PPA Jeep. The next project for Peter is a Popski's Private Army Jeep as used in Italy. But, it is not just any Jeep: it was fitted with a WASP flamethrower unit taken from a Bren Carrier. The RAOC said that it could not be done, so how and why did the PPA do it? Peter has spent ages looking at archive photos, examining museum specimens and studying workshop WASP manuals. Look out for the answers and pictures in the next Newsletter.

Ford F8. Clinton now has a garage full of parts and a bare chassis. Originally, Paul wanted to re-create Don Steele's truck with a 20mm cannon on board, but Clinton wanted a truck he could drive his young family around in! Fortunately, a solution to this dilemma came from a chat Peter had with Peter Clayton (Pat Clayton's son) - this is a well guarded secret for the time being, but it will add yet another aspect to the Desert Raiders display.

Ford F60. There has been a lot of progress on the F60, with Tim helping a great deal. In order to "get it just right" the F60 will be finished in green, then the visible bits will be sprayed sand. Some Heavy Section F60s retained the cab roof, so Paul and Clinton used a good one from their store. A new cab back has been made, it is wired up, is mechanically running and has been christened Harriet, HS14. Look out for a big article by Paul and Clinton in a future newsletter.

Peter's V8 01 Ford Pickup. This project continues to be a nightmare. The chaps restoring it have not done anything recently as the vehicle has been locked away in a garage at the home of one of the mechanics. He does not seem to have access any more and Peter is concerned that he will never see it again. Drastic action may be needed over the winter to recover it!

David's V8 01 Ford Pickup. This vehicle is now stripped down to the chassis, with the sheet metalwork (front wings and cab) having been repaired and repainted. Although the engine is missing some parts, it has a brand new gearbox, so the mechanicals look relatively easy. David has decided to rebuild Doc Edmundson's medical truck as there are lots of good photos of this vehicle and David has some WWII medical chests and stretchers to kit out the vehicle. David is planning to have the Ford ready to roll by the summer.

SAS European Jeeps. David has two green projects on the go at the moment; both are nearly finished. His SAS armoured screen Jeep is a copy of a picture with Joe Schofield manning twin Vickers Ks and O. Jeavons driving. The other Jeep is one that was dropped into France after D-Day. This one is based on a photo in the Forêt d'Orleans in June 1944, with Jim Almonds manning the guns and Ian Fenwick driving. Well done to David for another pair of fine vehicles.

Filming.

On again, off again, on again, off again – that’s the story of filming this year. We have had a few approaches for film work, but none of them came to anything. Either it was at too short notice, or we didn’t have the vehicles available, or they didn’t want to pay for vehicle hire. TV footage of the Desert Raiders vehicles seems to surface regularly. In addition to re-runs of the previous productions, a recent BBC documentary featured Desert Raiders vehicles filmed many years ago.

2005 Season Plans.

The main event for 2005 will be the photo shoots for the calendar. Our main show will be a big display at Beltring – alongside our new-found friends. We will limit attendance at other shows, but we may take a few vehicles to Campaign in June and another in Yorkshire in May. Please contact Paul or Peter for the latest plans.

Lectures to Norfolk Military Group.

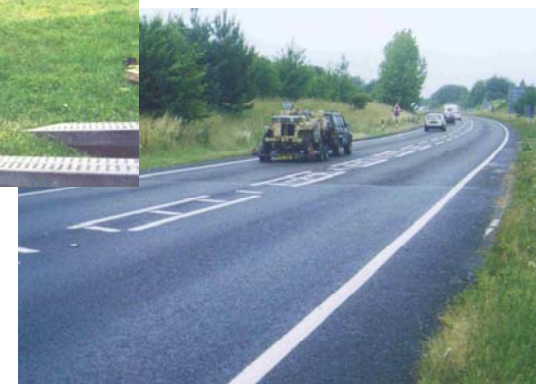
The “Skipper” gave some superb talks to the NMG on the LRDG during his Presidency, with the aid of a big map of the operational area. In 2001, Paul convinced him that a third talk was well overdue and, of course, it was fantastic. The talk (the Skippers last public talk on the LRDG) was captured on video and Paul is now getting copies made for our archives. The corollary of this is that Paul was asked to give a talk to the NMG on the LRDG in 2004, and he kept the large audience entertained for well over an hour. Well done Paul – it shows how much interest there is in the LRDG.

IWM Visits.

Peter, David and Dianne visited the IWM on various fact-finding missions. They scoured the photographic archives in London for the Calendar and purchased 36 unusual, unpublished prints. In Duxford, they visited the flamethrower collection (not on public display) for Peter’s WASP project, taking a lot of photos and measurements.



Homeward bound...



...one way or another.



That just about wraps it up for another hectic show season. We were hoping to get this Newsletter out in December, so we could wish you all a very happy and enjoyable festive season. We missed a deadline, so we are late and all we can do is hope that you had a good Christmas, and that you have a prosperous, entertaining, 2005.

We make our usual call for your comments, suggestions and contributions for future issues. Please don’t hesitate to drop Paul or Peter a line – the Post Office still delivers letters, or you can use our new Email address - desertraidersassociation@yahoo.co.uk.

The Desert Raiders Newsletter Team, January 2005.