

“Desert Raiders”

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

Newsletter of the Desert Raiders Association Number 11 November 2005



The Newsletter of the *Desert Raiders Association*

Editor: Peter Sanders
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Welcome to the action packed eleventh issue of our Newsletter; we hope that there is something of interest to everyone. The last six months have been the busiest ever for us, with everyone showing a splendid degree of commitment and enthusiasm for all our challenges. As well as completing most of our restorations, we have put together a magnificent calendar for the Military Vehicle Trust, attended some national shows, supported veterans reunions and got involved in tackling the Home Office on some clauses of the proposed Violent Crime Reduction Bill that will affect us significantly. In this issue, we cover all these activities, plus a Spotlight on the Popski's Private Army Wasp Flame-thrower Jeep, Book Reviews and more.

We held regular and frequent committee meetings over the summer (usually combined with a social gathering for a meal), in order to discuss and progress all our plans. Our Annual General Meeting was held at Beltring where the new Committee was elected - Paul Lincoln as Chairman, Clinton Long as Vice-Chairman, David Knudsen as Treasurer, Peter Sanders as Secretary and Tim Brown and Adrian Turner as Committee Members. With these active people in place, the Desert Raiders Association will go from strength to strength.



Peter, attempting to acquire a new item for the collection. The Bedford *did* actually tow the 88.

Violent Crime Reduction Bill

We have been dismayed to learn that there is a clause in the “Violent Crime Reduction Bill”, currently going through the Committee stage in the House of Commons, that will ban the manufacture, sale and possession in a public place of “realistic imitation firearms”. This includes deactivated firearms, so the effect would be to ban our displays of special forces vehicles carrying deactivated or imitation weapons at shows such as Beltring (which are “public places” within the meaning of the act). Such a clause would certainly immediately render our collection of historic firearms (currently valued conservatively in excess of £150,000) valueless. The Government says that there will be no compensation for this, claiming that we would still “have use of the items”.

The Desert Raiders Association has made strong representation to the Home Office, the MPs on the House of Commons Committee, our individual MPs and national bodies such as the Military Vehicle Trust. We have received vague reassurances that our deep concerns will be put to the Committee, but these may just be platitudes designed to placate us. We intend to keep up the pressure on the Committee to ensure that our interests are protected: it would help the cause greatly if all our members could write a short letter to their Member of Parliament pointing out that groups such as ours are being unjustly targeted. The main issues are:

1. to ensure that we can continue to display our deactivated and imitation weapons at shows, veterans gatherings, filming events, parades and so forth. *This has no possible risk of encouraging violent crime;*
2. to ensure that we can continue to purchase historic deactivated and imitation firearms for the purposes of kitting out our new vehicles (and, ultimately, for our museum). *Otherwise, our hobby will effectively cease;*
3. to ensure that fair compensation is paid if sale of such items is prohibited. *If we are not able to sell them should we take up another hobby, they have no value and we must be compensated for this.*

This is a major threat to the continued existence of groups such as ours. Please support the cause by writing to your MP voicing your concern and asking them to support (or table) amendments to protect our interests at any possible opportunity.

What Happened at the 2005 Shows?

Shows were limited to three main events this year: “Campaign” in Bedford, Beltring in Kent and the East England Tank Museum in Norfolk. Beltring was, as usual, brilliant and everyone had a great time over a full week. The other two shows were hampered by weather and other commitments, but were still fun.

1. “Campaign 2005”. June 11th and 12th. Held at Twinwood Airfield in Clapham, Bedfordshire. Clinton and Shaun worked miracles on the Bedford brakes until late on the 10th so that Peter was able to take the Bedford and SAS Jeep to the show early the next day. Unfortunately, Clinton and Paul couldn’t make it due to word commitments and David’s trailer broke down so he couldn’t bring his Jeep. Adrian, Dermot, Tim, David and Diane came for Sunday, so we put on a pretty good show, despite the moderate weather. The battle re-enactments were excellent and impressive, with a highly educational commentary - all in all, a good show.



Peter’s Jeep & Bedford at “Campaign”: Dermot, Adrian and Tim tying up the canvas.

2. Beltring, War and Peace Show. July 20th to 24th. Held at The Hop Farm, Paddock Wood, Kent. This was our biggest and best ever display anywhere, with eleven of our vehicles, plus a Chevrolet WA from France, the 8th Army Jeep, Tim Taylor’s Normandy SAS Jeep and the loan of a German 88mm dual purpose artillery piece for a short while. The Afrika Korps display has gone magnificently since last year and there is talk of them getting their own vehicle next year. Between the 3 groups, we put on a most impressive display and our only disappointment is that we did not win an award between us. This is amazing, as we are sure that we were far and away better than some who did win awards; we’re also sure that the public feel the same.

Getting everything to the show was a complicated affair, with full loads, part loads and trailers having to be organised and loaded. Clinton drove the Scania with the F30 and the F60, with the G1 Jeep in the F60. Some load! We had a large display area to fill, and fill it we did. As usual, a good time was had by all - interest from the public, visits by veterans, trips into the arena, renewing old contacts, friends coming to camp with us and so forth. Jack and Donna Valenti and Rick Butler livened up the proceedings as usual and we had a great time together.

Unusually for Beltring, Sunday morning was showery, so we packed up a bit early. This was a bit of an anticlimax to a great show, but the rest of the week more than made up for it.

Desert Raiders display at Beltring, 2005.



3. East England Tank Museum. August 13th and 14th. Clinton and Adrian were the only ones able to make it to this show near Thetford, with Peter's Blitz Buggy and SAS desert Jeep. Shaun from the museum set up a small sand pit for them and this made a great place to put on the display. Unfortunately, the weather was showery, requiring the covers to come on and off regularly: this also meant that visitor numbers were down. However, it was a good location, with lots of other vehicles and displays, so we wish this new event great success in the future.

The 2006 MVT Calendar is Finished!

The driving force for the Association in 2005 was undoubtedly our commitment to produce the MVT 2006 calendar. As you would expect, we showcased our 1940-1945 Special Forces vehicles in realistic-looking settings. This focused our attention to ensure completion of our on-going long term restoration projects before the end of the summer season, with everyone being under tremendous pressure to get their vehicles on the road. How we finished it on time will remain a mystery to us all! Looking back over the year, we seem to have done nothing else but plan, organise and complete the myriad of tasks involved in producing the calendar. It is remarkable that the locations, vehicles, crews, photographer and equipment all came together at the right times to ensure a successful series of photographs.

Most of the credit for the success of this venture goes to David for organising everything and keeping the rest of us on our toes. At the same time as driving the calendar forward and working non-stop on his ever growing fleet of vehicles, David maintained a full time commitment to his business. Without his enthusiasm and commitment the calendar simply would not have happened. Special mention should also go to Diane. She has been incredibly patient and supportive throughout the year - an absolutely fabulous lady. Thanks from us all, Di.

Secondly, a very big "thank you" goes to John Blackman, who did all the photography for the calendar. John came to the most unlikely locations in the wilds of Norfolk, week in, week out. He waited while we got vehicles set up, fought with the light (usually too bright, too dull, too hazy, too low, too high or from the wrong direction - rarely "just right"), having to stand in highly precarious places in order to get the best shots. John's photographs are superb, adding a really professional touch.



John Blackman, photographing yet another group of desert vehicles. You can see more of John's work on his website at www.militaryvehiclephotos.com.





Some of John Blackman's superb photographs: the ones in the calendar are even better! Don't forget to log on to John's website at www.militaryvehiclephotos.com.



Finally, thanks go to the owners and operators of the various locations we used: it's not every day that a quarry is asked to stop work and allow a group of fully kitted wartime desert vehicles drive around. They were all, without exception, very accommodating and interested in what we were doing.

The final photo shoot was undertaken just a week before the printer's deadline, so we cut it a bit fine. Fortunately the weather was good for every photo session, but we were all very relieved when the last photograph was taken and John Blackman put his camera away for the last time. Just as we were relaxing in the sunshine, we had a fly past by the Battle of Britain Memorial flight – a Lancaster and a Hurricane flew directly over the quarry. We all thought that this was a fitting end to an immensely challenging task and seemed to be a good omen for the final stages of publishing the calendar. Putting the calendar together has involved unrelenting effort by the Desert Raiders Association vehicle owners and support team for more than twelve months. Well done to everyone involved in the production. All that commitment has certainly paid off in the shape of the high quality 2006 MVT calendar. Copies are available from the Association, so please contact Paul Lincoln if you would like to purchase some.

Veterans Reunions

Various members of the Desert Raiders Association have participated in reunions and events organised by veterans' associations.

Paul, Scott and Adrian went off to mid Wales for a couple of days with the LRDG G1 Jeep. Paul bought a Land Rover Discovery only the day before, in order to be able to tow G1. They left Watton late in the day, travelled overnight and arrived in good time to set up in the sunshine. The lunch was well attended with over 150 guests. After what seemed like minutes it was time to pack up and leave, arriving home at midnight after a long but worthwhile day.

David and Paul E. took two European SAS Jeeps (armoured and unarmoured) to Essex for a day to meet up with veterans of the French SAS and their families. After lunch, David and Paul drove the veterans around in the vehicles they used some 60 years ago. The veterans association sent a nice letter of thanks for supporting the re-union - well done David and Paul E.

Paul and Scott attended the LRDG mini-re-union in September, where nine LRDG servicemen, and relatives of three more, got together again. It was a brilliant day and everyone had a great time.

We have been invited to bring a couple of vehicles to London in November for another reunion. Our aim is to take the Blitz Buggy and an SAS desert Jeep to illustrate the vehicles that the SAS used in North Africa. Finally, we plan to attend the ceremony at the Field of Remembrance in Westminster Abbey on Armistice Day, having been invited by a couple of groups. We'll let you know how we got on in the next Newsletter.

Obituary

It is with great sadness that we have to inform you that Archie Gibson passed away earlier this year, aged 86. Archie served in G patrol of the LRDG and drove David Stirling of the SAS in his truck in the early days. Archie was very enthusiastic about the vehicle restorations we have undertaken and appeared with us in documentary programmes on the LRDG. He was a great character and will be sorely missed by us all.

Vehicle Spotlight

The “Extraordinary” PPA Wasp Flamethrower Jeep *Peter Sanders*

Vehicle mounted flame throwing devices were developed by the British from 1940 onwards, for mounting in Universal Carriers and tanks. The carrier mounted equipment (technically, Flame Thrower, Transportable No. 2) was known as “Wasp” and existed in various marks. The Mark II and Mark IIC Wasps were introduced late in 1943, with a projector being fitted in the Bren gun housing. It had a range of 50 to 100 yards, a flame-fuel capacity of 75 or 100 gallons and a crew of two or three.

Carrier Wasps were used widely in Italy to clear strong points, machine gun nests and so forth. However, improved concrete bunkers, often inaccessible in the banks of rivers, posed problems that even carrier mounted Wasps could not tackle. Colonel Vladimir Peniakoff (colloquially known as “Popski”) had the idea of fitting a Wasp system to one of his Jeeps to solve this problem, but the RAOC informed him that this was not feasible because a Jeep was too small to carry all the heavy and bulky equipment. Undaunted, Popski had a go, coming up with a one-off Wasp Jeep that actually worked. It is not clear if it was ever used in action since the heat from the projector was apparently very significant for the gunner. After the first demonstration, there were no volunteers to use it! Nonetheless, it was an impressive feat of improvised engineering and would certainly have been an imposing sight in action.



Two views of the PPA Wasp Jeep in 1944. Photo Courtesy of PPA Preservation Society and Friends of PPA.



Fortunately, there is a good photographic record of this vehicle. Our thanks go to the PPA Preservation Society and the Friends of PPA for providing us with copies of these photographs and allowing us to reproduce them. By combining the photographs with handbooks and workshop manuals of the Mark II Carrier Wasp, it is clear how the PPA achieved this remarkable feat.

A standard Mark II/IIC Wasp projector unit was used, but for the Jeep mounted version, a special frame of thick steel plate was fitted on the passenger cowl, allowing some degree of traverse and elevation. To cope with the extra weight, the Jeep front panels were strengthened using angle iron, with the frame being bolted through to the Jeep chassis.

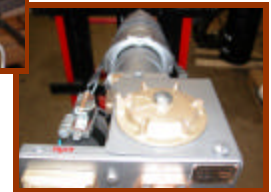
Pressure for the system was provided from a gas bottle, the gas being supplied to an evaporator, mounted in front of the driver. Hot water was piped through the evaporator from the Jeep cooling system: the bonnet of the Jeep was cut into two pieces to allow these pipes to exit. Heat in the evaporator expanded the gas, which was then piped under high pressure through a large bore pipe to the flame jelly fuel tanks in the rear of the Jeep. The flame-fuel was then piped, under pressure, through two large bore flexible hoses to the projector. This operated the same way as in the carrier Wasp, with an ignition circuit, a petrol supply and pressure control systems linked to the trigger.



Photos of the Mark IIC Wasp projector.



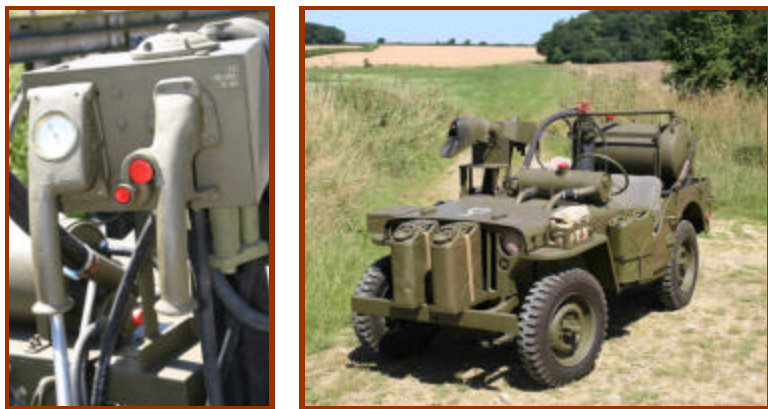
Thanks to the IWM, Duxford for providing access to their reserve collection.



At the beginning, I was so confused that I had to build a 1/15th scale model to plan the full size build! I made wood and fibre-glass masters of the projector nozzle, handles, buttons and control wheel, which were then cast in solid brass or aluminium. I made the rest of the projector from sheet steel and angle iron, using the museum specimens and wartime photographs as reference. Finally, this was all mounted on a steel pipe with a pivot, resulting in a close copy of the “Flame Thrower, Transportable No. 2”.



I bought a good, running, Jeep and did a small amount of bodywork, including cutting out the notch in the passenger dashboard for the flame fuel pipes. The rest was relatively easy and quick: a second bonnet, a lorry fuel tank, a compressor tank and a small gas bottle were modified to suit. I made the evaporator, valves, brackets and so forth in the workshop in Saudi Arabia over a six month period. Then, just before the deadline for the calendar, I spent a few days (and nights) with the angle grinder and welder to get the job completed. As usual, many things had to be done two or three times over during the year it took to finish the project, in order to get the details “just right”. Now the vehicle is as close to the original as I can make it, but there are still a few small things I would like to do to finish it off properly.



Vehicle Progress Highlights

So much progress has been made on all our vehicles that it is difficult to know where to start. Suffice it to say that everything is complete and “on the road” with the exception of the following. When you see the calendar, you will be able to judge how hard everyone has worked to get all the vehicles into tip-top condition.

David is still working on the engine for Doc Edmundson’s medical truck *Ford V8 01* pickup. Apart from that, it’s complete.



Doc Edmundson's Ford V8 01 pickup.

Chevrolet 1311. David has this very nearly finished, in double quick time. The body needs a bit more work, but it runs well and looks great in a subtle camouflage scheme.

David’s *Chevrolet 3 tonner (C60)* now has a body, but more work is needed over the winter to make it a “runner”. Still, it looks good and is an impressive vehicle.



Dave's two new Chevrolets — C60 and 1311.

Finished at last! Paul and Clinton’s *Ford F60* is now running and complete, with Adrian’s help. Work still continues in order to finish the details of the bodywork and there are few minor teething troubles to overcome (inevitable in a big project like this) but it was a star wherever it appeared in 2005.

Ford V8 01 pickup, Te Rangi II. As Clinton says “it’s not all there”. This is true as it still needs an engine, seats, steering gear and most of the fittings. However, Peter and David fitted the body and it’s now back at Peter’s garage in Norfolk. Maybe Clinton and Tim will start work on it after they’ve finished the F8?

Te Rangi II with body fitted.

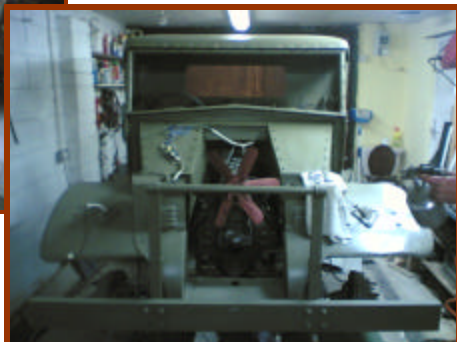


BMW R71 Motorcycle/sidecar combination. We spoke too soon on this as there was a hitch in the arrangements and the BMW R71 never arrived in the UK. Ted got his money back, but this means we are still looking for one. It may be a good project for one of the young “Desert Raiders” - any volunteers?

Ford F8. Clinton and Paul’s F8 did not quite make it for the calendar, so it will be unveiled next year. Tim and Clinton continue to work three nights a week on it, but these things always take more time than predicted. It is more or less complete and only the body and side lockers need to be fabricated.



Clinton and Paul’s F8 CMP in the final stages of the restoration.



Book Reviews

The Originals. The Secret History of the Birth of the SAS. By Gordon Stevens. Published by Ebury Press, London, 2005. ISBN 0091902703. Review by Peter Sanders. I just could not put this book down. It is nothing less than a first hand account of the SAS from it’s inception in 1941 to its disbandment in 1945, given in interviews some 20 years ago by surviving SAS originals. It is full of previously unpublished accounts and anecdotes from people who were actually involved: the narrative combines these recollections into a detailed, dramatic and wholly absorbing account of the SAS in North Africa and Europe. I cannot recommend this book too highly - every student of the SAS should get a copy. Buy on-line at www.randomhouse.co.uk.

Barce Raid. By Brendan O’Carroll. Published by Ngaio Press. ISBN 0-9582243-8-2. Brendan’s new book has just been published and we will review it fully in the next newsletter. The “Barce Raid” covers the famous LRDG raid on this Italian airfield and town, with over 166 pages packed with information and personal accounts from both sides, fully illustrated with photographs and maps. This is a “must” for your library; the book can be obtained from good bookshops or on-line at www.ngaiopress.com.

Forgotten Voices of the Second World War. Published by Max Arthur in association with the I.W.M. ISBN 0091897343. Review by Paul Lincoln. This is one of the best books I have ever read! In my opinion it should be compulsory reading for every boy and girl in their last year at school. It gives the views and memories of soldiers, sailors, airmen and women as well as civilian and civil defence personnel about their war. It has accounts of various actions and events, seen through the eyes of both sides, and often at almost a man to man level. There are stories of bravery, fear, life and death by the people who were there at the time. Two people might have a different view of the same incident, but it is always their view and not that of just one author. I read this book over a few weeks, rather than finishing it in one go; what it has to tell us just can’t be taken in that quickly. If you do get this book, please pass it on to your children and grandchildren to read. It really brings it home what war is truly about!

Magazine Articles

The Desert Raiders Association has recently been featured well in various magazines. Our vehicles have recently appeared in Military Machines International, MVT and IMPS Magazines, to name a few. The photos are generally very good (mostly taken at Beltring), although we are still often referred to as the “LRDG group” - we’ll have to improve our corporate identity!

Museum

We all keep talking about this, but there is no progress to report. Hopefully, the museum will be one of our key activities for 2006 so if you can help in any way, please let us know.

Filming

We’ve been approached by a film company who would like to take our vehicles to Libya to do a series of documentaries on the life of the LRDG in North Africa. They are asking for millions of pounds from Cannes film festival funding and will make a trailer with us soon to support their application. Watch this space and prepare to be film stars!

Sky TV spent a lot of time with us at Beltring. They are doing a short documentary, although the topic and airing date is not clear. Jimmy Patch excellently described his LRDG experiences and they interviewed some of us on the Living History aspects of the group, and on specific details of some of the vehicles.

Items for Sale

Desert Raiders Association Polo Shirt

We are still taking orders for the Desert Raiders Association Polo shirts. They sell at £12 each, plus postage, and are available to all Association members. Please contact Paul to place an order.

2006 MVT Calendar

The MVT has allowed us to sell additional copies of the 2006 Calendar to help defray the transport costs we incurred in preparing it. Please support the Association by purchasing one. They are available from Paul at £4.50 each, including Post and Packing to the UK. Overseas; please enquire.



Jimmy, Les
and Ron
visiting us at
Beltring.

Now that the panic of producing the calendar has subsided, we can all relax for a while over the winter. Of course, we still have to do the maintenance on our vehicles, as well as put the final touches to the new vehicles. Clinton has to finish the F8, David the 3 tonner, V8 01 and 1311, Paul the other 3 tonner and Peter the Ford V8 01, so no-one is really going to be bored!

The Newsletter Team always appreciate your feedback and comments, as well as any material you would like us to include in future Newsletters. Please don't hesitate to contact Paul or Peter by phone or through the post at:

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or by using our email address:

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We wish everyone a very Happy Christmas and a Prosperous New Year, and we hope to see or hear from you during the winter or spring.

The Desert Raiders Newsletter Team, November 2005.