



“Desert Raiders”

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

Newsletter of the Desert Raiders Association Number 13 November 2006



The Newsletter of the *Desert Raiders Association*

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Distribution: Paul Lincoln

The passing of one of the stalwarts of the Desert Raiders Association makes everything else pale into insignificance. There is real sadness throughout the Association with the passing of Diane. Everyone involved in even the smallest way with us will have known Diane: she was the life and soul of all our activities. She was one of those people that everyone took to their heart immediately. Sadly, Diane succumbed to an illness she had been fighting for some time and passed away peacefully in September. Typically, right to the end, Diane was a fighter and attended Beltring 2006 with great enthusiasm, only going into hospital at the very last moment.

Diane was unique, with her incredible enthusiasm for life, bubbly personality and wholehearted commitment to everything that she put her mind to do. Diane was equally at home in the garage, workshop or kitchen and was a staunch supporter of the Desert Raiders Association, attending many of our events over the last ten years. She loved going around the arena at Beltring, driving down the runway at Duxford in a Jeep and just being at the shows with her partner David.

Diane was really proud of the achievements of “her boys” (as we were always known) and she will always be remembered by us all for her spirit, kindness and strength. Diane was a very brave lady who just would not give in, working almost continually throughout her illness. Her strength amazed the doctors and Macmillan nurses who treated her, many of whom attended her funeral at the Cambridge Crematorium.

Our sincerest condolences go to her partner, David, and, from a previous relationship, her daughter Karen and granddaughters Amber and Jasmine.

Diane, with some of “her boys” proudly displaying the award for best in show at the Bletchley Park Special Forces Show, 2001.



Diane, 1946 to 2006.



Biggin Hill, 1997



Tilbury Fort, 2000



Beltring, 1997



Filming with the Desert Raiders, 2001

Vehicle and Equipment News

A New, Complete 3 ton Chevrolet

David has acquired another 3 ton Chevrolet – a 1944 C60L CMP No 13 cab, to be exact. Originally destined to be another LRDG Heavy Section truck, it is in such great condition that David will keep it green, to represent the 3 tonners used by the SAS for lorried infantry to support their operations in Europe. It will look great with David’s SAS European Jeeps – look out for it soon.



Genuine SAS Jeep Equipment

David has obtained a genuine SAS European Jeep long range petrol tank. It came with excellent provenance as it belonged to Johnny Cooper’s Jeep “Constance”. Johnny used his Jeep (which he brought back to the UK after the war) as an off road vehicle in the south of England and he removed the tank to make more space in the back. What became of the Jeep is not known, but the petrol tank was donated to the Association by a friend of the family. The tank appears to be a modified GMC fuel tank, with an extra outlet (to allow the two tanks in the back of the Jeep to be interconnected) and is complete with an exterior rubber covering to give self sealing properties. David plans to install the tank (which is in good condition, despite having been stored outside for years) in one of his Jeeps, recreating “Constance” from some photographs he hopes to get from the same source. Having some original equipment on a recreated vehicle really adds to the interest – David is naturally pleased with his “find”.

Flimsies

The Internet is a wonderful thing. Peter was idly browsing an auction site when he came across a petrol can advertised as an unknown item. Clearly, it was a wartime “Flimsie” 4 gallon disposable petrol can, stamped MT 80 (80 Octane Motor Transport fuel) and was in great condition. Unfortunately, someone else also knew what it was and this pushed up the price. However, Peter won it. Imagine his amazement when the seller calmly announced that she had sixty four (yes, 64) more of them. Peter bought as many as he could afford, so now all the early Desert Raiders vehicles are kitted out with these rare cans. Some have even gone to Jack Valenti in the USA!!

Clinton & Paul's F8

Clinton has spent hundreds of hours on the 11 cab CMP F8 rebuild, ably supported by Tim, and it shows! It has been a full nut and bolt restoration, with no expense spared on the mechanics, bodywork or finish. It was completed and registered just in time for Beltring 2006 and this was its first official outing. It is currently in the markings of the 7th Armoured Division (see below, left), but this may be temporary until Clinton decides if it should be an LRDG truck, or even in some special markings for a very special operation (more details later). We will do a spotlight on this truck in the next Newsletter.



Blitz Buggy's New Colours

As we mentioned in the last Newsletter, the Blitz Buggy has been given a new colour scheme (above, right). Peter set to work with a mixed box of grey, sand, red, green and blue aerosol sprays. After a couple of false starts (which looked awful) he settled on two shades of grey, two shades of sand and red/brown, giving it a sort of weathered appearance. It is certainly striking!

Peter's Chevrolet WA

Peter and David went over to France this summer to collect a Chevrolet WB chassis. They brought it back to Norfolk for Andy to get it ready in time for Beltring 2007 as a stripped down "taxi" used to evacuate Tobruk. Peter plans to change it before Beltring 2008 into the Bofors 37mm armed truck operated by the LRDG in the very early days. It now has a running engine, the chassis and propshaft have been shortened to the correct WA length, it has all been shotblasted and primed, Andy's made new wheels and it has been given the first coat of "desert sand". Peter visited the Imperial War Museum to take a mass of close up photos of their LRDG WA: he has also found some previously unpublished wartime photos of the LRDG Bofors WA truck.

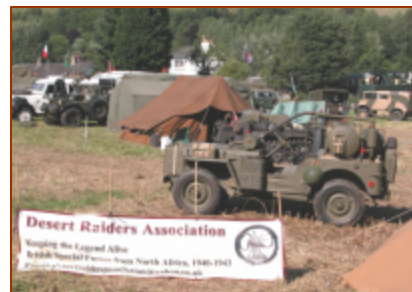


2006 Shows and Events

After the stress of getting the 2006 calendar completed, it was nice to be able to relax at the shows this year. Here is a review of the main events we participated in.

Buckfastleigh

The first show was the local MVT weekend at Buckfastleigh in Devon. Peter took the PPA Wasp Jeep and stayed for 4 days. He went around the local roads in convoy, including the usual long run over Dartmoor to Widecombe and back. The weather was sunny and it was a great event - note the new Association banner!



North Norfolk Railway

Clinton took the F8 out to the Norfolk Military Group weekend at the North Norfolk Railway. Everyone admired the new truck: Clinton was very pleased with their reaction as these guys really know their military vehicles.

Visits to Wales

Paul and Clinton spent a great September weekend with some of our vehicles at a somewhat showery event in Wales. They were entertained superbly, having a free run of the facilities. The Blitz Buggy, G1 Jeep and Peter's SAS Jeep went in a covered tautliner and were driven around, much to the appreciation of the audience. Paul brought a static display of LRDG/SAS equipment, badges and uniforms. Following on from this visit, Peter was asked to advise on the restoration of an SAS desert Jeep in official stores in Wales and planned for display at a private museum. Peter visited on a wet October day: the Jeep turned out to be an early restoration by Russel King and is essentially very well done. It is a bit rough at the edges and a few things are not quite right, but it will be easy to make it a nice looking Jeep. Peter will act as a sort of long distance consultant to help them make the changes.

Beltring

We say this every year, but this year was the biggest and best ever Desert Raiders Association display at the War & Peace show, Beltring. We got a massive pitch, but it was still not big enough because we put on a superb display with the Eighth Army and Afrika Korps Groups and the PPA Preservation Society from Belgium. We had our Bedford OX, Ford F8, G1 LRDG Jeep, Blitz Buggy, PPA Wasp Jeep, PPA patrol Jeep and five (yes, FIVE, SAS desert Jeeps). The 8th Army lads brought their great living history display, complete with Jeep. The Afrika Korps turned up in a huge lorry full to the brim and set up their tents, campfire and so forth. They also had two BMW motorcycle/sidecar combinations in Afrika Korps markings (to Sonderbervand 288, matching the Bedford nicely). To top it off, Paul managed to borrow a German 37mm antitank gun and they dug a gun pit for it. Finally, the PPA PS lads came all the way from Belgium with two more PPA patrol Jeeps, so we really filled the space to the brim.

As usual, the weather was terrific - on many days, it was much too hot - and we all had a great time. The interest from the public was very strong and we had many SAS, LRDG and PPA veterans turn up to encourage us. It's always great to see them.

To cap it all, this year, we got three awards between us:

- Clinton got Runner Up prize for Best Canadian Vehicle;
- Paul got the prize for Best Jeep in Show;
- The Afrika Korps team got Runner Up Prize for Visitors Choice of Display.

Well done to everyone; it is nice to be recognised. Here are some photos of us at Beltring 2006, including the prize winners.



Vehicle Spotlight

“Harriet”, our new LRDG Heavy Section F60 3 tonner

Paul Lincoln and Clinton Long

Paul and Clinton have just finished a six year restoration project on a Ford CMP No 12 cab F60 three tonner; this is the story behind this epic rebuild.

Ford F60 3 tonners were one of the variety large vehicles used by the LRDG Heavy Section to transport supplies from the Nile delta to bases hundreds of miles away in the inner desert. An initial ten vehicles were soon doubled in number to increase the volume of stores and to allow some of them to go behind the enemy lines and set up hidden dumps. These allowed patrols to top up with supplies and increase their range, as well as being a life saver for evading LRDG and SAS troops. The C.O. of the Heavy Section was Captain Phil Arnold, known to all his men as “Skipper”. His patrol fitter was Les Sullivan and Harry Grivil was one of the drivers, as well as Les’ friend. The “Skipper” was renowned for his habit of rescuing German and, especially, Italian trucks to save wear and tear on his own vehicles.

In January 1943 a convoy of Heavy Section trucks entered the oasis of Hon, along with a LRDG operational patrol. The Italians had literally driven out the other side as they arrived and hadn’t had time to remove the wire fences and warning signs around the minefields. The patrol was required to go straight back out, but two of their 30cwt trucks needed mechanical attention before they could move. As there was only one fitter per patrol, Les was called upon to repair the second vehicle. Having removed the offending part, he was about to put a new one on when Phil Arnold pulled up in a Jeep and asked him to go with him to look at some abandoned Italian R60 lorries. Les explained the situation and asked for 20 minutes to finish his task. Phil Arnold told him not to worry as Harry wasn’t busy and he would take him instead. Les returned to the job in hand, until he was interrupted by two loud explosions in quick succession. The Jeep had driven over two mines that the Italians had hastily laid in the track and Les had lost his friend and his “Skipper”.



Three CMP No.
12 cab F60 three
tonners

Heavy Section vehicles, in common with many patrol vehicles, had names beginning with the patrol letter. We couldn’t really call our F60 “Harry” so we went for the nearest practical thing and named it “Harriet” as our tribute to the unsung heroes of the Long Range Desert Group, the Heavy Section.

It was back in 2001 when a F60 came up for sale at the bargain price of £250. As would be expected, the poor old girl was reduced to a chassis, wheels, cab floor, bulkhead, wings and engine. The rear body consisted of a few bits of rusted steel heaped on the rear chassis. However, there was also stack of cab parts tucked in a shed, and even a V8 engine that was reputedly reconditioned for the truck, so a deal was struck and the parts were taken back to Norfolk.

Then it was down to work. The chassis was taken over to the grit blasters – this showed just how badly it had been attacked by the weather. The last 3 feet (from the axle to the tow bar) was now so thin that we couldn’t trust it to even hold the weight of an empty body on top of it. So, we bent some steel sheet to “U” section and welded it inside the thin, 60 year old, frame. We managed to round up the components for a replacement tow bar and these were fitted. We could now begin to get a coat of red oxide over the grey primer.

Collecting the F60 and parts.



Next priority was to get us mobile again. Whilst stripping down the springs, we had a lucky escape. Paul was unwinding the nut with an odd squirt of WD40 to assist: the nut came off in his hand and, just after he stood up, there was a loud crack and the spring just exploded into separate leaves, one of them hitting Paul in the knee cap. Paul was unable to feel his leg at all and began to feel very sick. If this had happened two seconds earlier, before he had stood up, the Ford might have gone from shared ownership to being all Clinton’s! We checked the brass pins at each end of the spring, where they attach to the chassis, and found them to be as new. Perhaps it wouldn’t be such a job after all. Short-lived optimism, as, upon inspecting the engine, we found that frost had cracked the block, so there was nothing for it but to collect the heap of clean but useless components.

We now needed the wheels on. Two of the tyres were dated 1941 and this suggested that they may well have been the ones fitted in the factory. We oiled up the split rim nuts and separated the two halves. Then it was out with the sledge hammer and angle irons. To get the tyres off. After many sweaty evenings, the rims went to be blasted and primed. The front tyres were nearly new road pattern and we found another pair to replace the 1941 rear tyres.



The F60 before restoration.

While the chassis was still propped up in the air, we completely replaced all the brake pipes and thoroughly honed out all the wheel cylinders, fitting brake parts from some spares we previously bought. The axles and back plates were then blasted, primed and sprayed, prior to being re-fitted. This got us mobile again and the next job was to replace some of the shock absorbers that were leaking. Unfortunately, at this point, we noticed that the top plate had been loosened on the gearbox and water had seeped in, leaving the whole inside assembly rusty. Out with the spare gearbox and the cleaning materials.

We got Bob (the V8 man) to check it over a V8 engine for us - better safe than sorry! He refurbished it until every last part shone, then we were allowed to paint the re-assembled lump ready for the big lift. Fitting the engine was the turning point. Once that is done it should be downhill all the way (well that's what we told ourselves!).

We made a cab floor using an original one as a pattern. The biggest change in the re-building of a CMP vehicle comes about when you re-fit the cab arch frame; suddenly it becomes 3D!

The painful task of sorting out the straight, bent, crushed and rusty cab parts began. We struck gold when it came to the replacement of panels because we met Andy, who was making parts for a DUKW, and he agreed to help us out. He crafted new panels as required and, gradually, the mixture of old and new began to take shape. Adrian, one of the first "Desert Raiders" crew, sorted out the rotten wood in the cab roof, while we applied filler and paint to the bent, battered and pitted metal parts.

With Beltring 2005 just six months away, the panic set in! At this point we gained another two "Desert Raiders": James, a mechanic, and Damo, a gardener. They came over on two evenings a week and things began to move along. We began building up the wiring harness from scratch and progress was good until we took a break - suddenly all the wires looked the same!

Eventually, the moment of truth had arrived. Petrol, fire extinguisher, battery, prayers, hit the button and----nothing!!!! After a bit of fiddling with the ignition switch, away we went instantly. The sharp crackle from the 3.91 litre V8 was so good that we didn't want to add the silencer. It ran like a clock, but would it drive? Clutch down, into gear, a few revs and off we went like a rocket! At the far end of the yard, hit brakes and dip clutch - nothing, the brake pedal was solid! A quick clean up of the servo, re-fit and off we went again. Second time lucky! It should be downhill all the way, but as War and Peace was just a few months away, it would still need maximum effort.

The first priority now was to get on with the cab and roof. Close inspection revealed bad rusting at the bottom and the need to replace sections, which was more difficult than expected. Meanwhile, the various panels that were missing appeared from Andy's workshops and were painted in green. Finally, the moment arrived and we crowned our efforts with the windscreen surround. This meant that the roof could now be dropped on and bolted together.

One major piece was still missing from the jigsaw - the rear body. We managed to use Dave's F60 as a pattern, but there was a huge amount of work for Norman (our welder) to do. With all major components in place, we turned our attention to the small bits and pieces: condenser can, seat frames, TAC sign plate, bridge plate (complete with LRDG scorpion), rifle mounts, cradles for the sand mats, brackets for the sand channels and spare wheel mounting.

It was now the week-end before War and Peace and we intended to be there. It was 2005, 65 years since the formation of the LRDG, 60 years since the disbandment of the LRDG and SAS. An important year! All that remained to do were the tail board closers and gun mount, followed by the final spray coat. Fortunately for us, Jack Valenti and Rick Butler were over from the LRDG Preservation Society in California to lend a hand. Rick was a human dynamo, covering huge amounts of ground and helping to finish all those last little jobs. That was it, out of time. A 300m test drive and it was time to load up. Beltring 2005 went well, with a very impressive attendance, and our truck proudly displaying the name "Harriet". Les Sullivan has seen and ridden in the truck: his only comment was "No sand tyres". So, if anyone knows where there are four 10.50x20s.....



The finished F60 with cargo and G1 Jeep!

Obituaries

Compiled by Paul Lincoln.

One of the saddest parts about writing for the Newsletter is reporting the death of readers. This is made even harder when they are friends as well. This year I have to write about five such supporters of the Desert Raiders Association.

Mickey Coombes. Although Mickey passed away early this year, this has been my first opportunity to say anything in print. I only ever actually met Mickey once, shortly before he died, but I heard a great deal of his wartime exploits from my friendship with the Skipper. Few names would crop up in our hours together more than his and there was obviously a tremendous bond between these two men. Mickey would sometimes drive the Skipper in the desert: sixty years later, Mickey would entertain him at his home to break a journey to Scotland. I would often hear a little snippet from the Skipper of those early days and the part Mickey played. When I went to see Mickey in hospital in York, I took him a copy of our 2006 calendar. He studied each page with care, stroking the surface and identifying every gun and vehicle in his lovely West Country accent. I could see why the Skipper thought so much of him. What a lovely man.

Geoff Arnold. At the risk of sounding repetitive, Geoff was another lovely man. Geoff learned to navigate on HMS Conway and this skill earned him a job with the LRDG in the desert. Soon he was navigator on one of the WACO light aircraft and would fly with Bill Kennedy Shaw from one side of the desert to the other, navigating accurately over featureless mile after mile. He told me some stories of his adventures when I called to see him late last year. After the desert war finished, he went, very briefly to "A" Force, before being hijacked by SOE. He developed a means of identifying the enemy coastline to ensure that the agents were dropped in the right place and he often helped find those spots himself. It was a pleasure and honour to be in the company of such a clever and agreeable man.

Obituaries (continued)

Third on my sad list is "**Doc**" **Lawson**, who took over as LRDG MO from "Doc" Edmundson and covered the majority of the war in the desert after the arrival of Y Patrol. He gave us military vehicle buffs a unique truck in the form of his Medical Inspection room Mk1 and Mk2. His best known adventure took place on the Barce raid when he accompanied the wounded back to LG125 and sheltered them from air attack with his own body. Once again, his was a name that readily came into my chats with the Skipper, who obviously admired and respected him greatly. Doc Lawson was another great man that I was privileged to know.

Arthur Arger is another friend that I will miss at the get-togethers. Known to all as "Arger," he would tell of his interview for the LRDG in early 1941. When asked what he did for a hobby, he thought that his aspirations were about to be thwarted. He replied, honestly, that he bred budgies and was told that that would do nicely. Arthur was a popular and well known member of Y Patrol throughout the desert campaign, as well as being a stalwart of the LRDG Association events to the end. I will miss him greatly.

Finally, someone that I never met in person. "**Tim**" **Heywood** was THE signals expert. His standards were exceptional and this made him ideal for a unit whose survival and success depended on communication. His men achieved signals transmission over 1100 miles on a No11 set designed for about 20 miles. Despite not having met him, I did communicate by letter and Tim was an enthusiastic supporter of Desert Raiders Association, answering many letters full of questions we posed on the LRDG. He was a clever and exceptional man, an unsung hero of LRDG history.

Filming

We have done one small bit of filming, but only a very small scene in a bigger production, with little focus on the LRDG or SAS. Adrian and Tim were the stars this time, with Paul providing the kit. We still have a couple of big filming projects in the offing, but they have gone quiet recently while funding is being sorted out.

Book Reviews

In Action with the SAS, by Roy Close. Published by Penn & Sword, London, 2005. ISBN: 1-84415-286-3. Review by David Knudsen. I found this book a very easy to read and absorbing account of one man's journey, not just through the war, but through his life. His feelings of growing up in modest surroundings to enlistment and early training are very interesting in themselves, quite apart from the details of his SAS operations. He achieved much through study and ability, and it was fascinating to see how Roy used the contacts he made during the war to shape his career in peacetime afterwards. For us vehicle buffs, there was some useful information on the development of the SAS modifications on the Jeeps, and the transportation of them to the front line. All in all, this was a very worthwhile read, with some great photographs, and I highly recommend it.

A British Achilles, by Lorna Almonds Windmill. ISBN 1-84415-354-1. Review by Paul Lincoln. Lorna is one of the daughters of that SAS legend "Gentleman Jim" Almonds, and a supporter of the Desert Raiders Association. Following her success with the book about her dad, she has now written about another wartime legend, George Jellicoe. I was introduced to George Jellicoe many years ago by David Lloyd Owen at a LRDG re-union and I managed to meet him again at the book launch in London. Lorna's book falls into three rather different parts. In the first part we get the background and young life of George, son of Admiral Jellicoe. We then move on to my favourite section, the war, which gives a brilliant insight into a man who didn't seem to even consider the possibility of getting killed. He went on one operation after another, facing all sorts of dangers with impunity. Eventually, he rode into Athens on a bicycle to liberate the city! The third part deals with George's post war political career. His obvious talent for politics and hard work emerged, gradually working his way towards the top where a scandal brought him to an abrupt halt. Had he been a less honourable man and kept his head down, things might have continued to greater heights. I found this to be a very interesting read (early days in politics excepted) and it would be of interest to anyone who studied the wartime work of SAS, SBS and SOE.

Annual General Meeting

We held our AGM at Beltring. Paul gave a stirring speech reflecting on all the things we had achieved in the year: our best ever displays at Beltring and other shows; our strong representation on the Violent Crime Reduction Bill; the excellent 2006 calendar, universally acclaimed; filming for various production companies; publications in a wide range of magazines; continued contacts with veterans; our rapidly growing fleet of vehicles. All the committee offered themselves for re-election and Paul, Clinton, David, Peter, Tim and Adrian were re-elected. In addition, James and Damien were also elected as committee members to assist with running the Association - welcome to them.



The Association in full cry after the AGM.....

This has been a very eventful six months for us, with sadness being mixed with great achievements. The Association continues to go from strength to strength and we hope that this Newsletter captures something of what has been happening this summer. Contact us at Town Green Cottage, Town Green, Watton, Thetford, Norfolk. IP25 6RB, or by email at:

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**With all our best wishes for the Festive Season;
The Desert Raiders Association Newsletter Team.**