

EX BLACK EAGLE NEWSLETTER

Commanding Officer's Foreword – Lt Col J N J Kingsford, CO KRH

A warm hello from a slightly chilly wood block in Zagan, western Poland. The Battlegroup have been deployed out here for some weeks now, so I thought it timely to provide you with an update. We have been conducting a lot of low level live and dry training with our Polish counterparts from the 10th Polish Armoured Cavalry Brigade. Our Polish hosts have been extremely welcoming; we have made the most of a number of opportunities to operate alongside them and see how their kit and equipment works. We are on the verge of our final week-long exercise which culminates in a Distinguished Visitors Day (DVD) on Friday 21st November, which is set to attract a number of high profile personalities from both the UK and Polish sides. This underlines the importance of Exercise BLACK EAGLE to UK Defence to demonstrate the relative ease with which the Lead Armoured Battlegroup can be deployed overseas at short notice. It also reinforces the considerable reassurance effect that our presence here provides to our hosts, as part of a wider raft of NATO immediate assurance measures to bolster our central and eastern European allies.



'The CO signs for the Training Area from his Polish counterpart'



'On to the Training Area; amongst the mud'

Luckily, it has not all been hard work. We managed to celebrate bonfire night with an inter-troop Guy Fawkes competition, complete with a huge bonfire and locally purchased fireworks. There have also been a number of cultural days out, including a visit to a German built underground bunker and trench complex from the 1930s called the East Wall and Stalag Luft III, scene of the legendary film *The Great Escape* (of Tom, Dick and Harry tunnels' fame). Certainly the most memorable trip has been to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Despite being over 4 hrs drive each way, it is undoubtedly a once in a lifetime experience. The site itself has been incredibly well preserved and maintained, attracting well over a million visitors a year. It stands as something of an epitaph to the assessed 1.3 million people executed there; it also serves as a warning to future generations as to the brutality of human nature when left unchecked.



'Soldiers from both nations at the opening ceremony of Exercise BLACK EAGLE'

As confident as I am that your other halves have already briefed you as to the wider importance of this exercise, I reiterate that this is very much a deployment, rather than a routine training event such as BATUS, Canada, or ranges in Castlemartin, Wales. As such I have to acknowledge that the welfare connectivity has likely been much less than you have been used to. Without going in to too much detail, there is a very clear and evident counter-intelligence threat which means that we have had to leave personal electronic devices such as mobiles and tablets at home. Although I appreciate that this has made it more difficult to stay in touch with your loved ones, I have to observe that a few weeks 'off wifi' has been good for everyone in terms of forcing us all to socialise with each other more!

For all of you that have had to juggle busy lives with work and children whilst we have been away, thank you for your patience and understanding. I recognise that this deployment has come at the tail end of a sustained period of training for all elements of the Regiment; even Army Headquarters recognises us as having been the busiest Regiment in the Army in 2014. We are due back shortly, with most back in by the end of November. For the first time since February we will actually have all squadrons and departments at home in Tidworth, which will make a pleasant change. After the usual round of pre-Christmas catch-ups and madness we will all take three weeks' Leave over Christmas and New Year; I wish you and your families a peaceful and well deserved break.

Deployment – Cpl Stringer, D Sqn KRH

In a word, the journey by land to Poland was cosy. We left Tidworth on the 14 October and jumped on a ferry at Dover before travelling by coach to Munchengladbach where we would take over the vehicles that would come with us to Poland. Whilst in Germany we were afforded a bit of down time where, amongst other activities, we managed to see a Bundersliga football match. Once the vehicles were all loaded on the trains and ready to go, we jumped into our sleeper carriage, which would be our home for the next few days. Amenities were simple, but we made do and enjoyed the changing scenery of central Europe. Upon arrival in Poland we were greeted by the rest of the vehicle crews who were glad to finally have their own wagons and were now able to crack on with getting ready for the exercise. Like the rest of the Battlegroup we were pleasantly surprised when we moved into our accommodation and the facilities that were provided for us within Karliki Camp.



'The tanks begin the long journey from Germany to Poland'



'Preparing to deploy onto the Exercise'

Life in Karliki Camp – Capt Wilson, IO KRH

Before deploying to Poland there were, as ever, a myriad of thoughts as to what conditions within our new barracks would be like. Naturally most prepared themselves for the worst, but arrived to quite the opposite. Karliki Camp is located within the forests that dominate the south-west of Poland and is made up of a group of simple, yet comfortable, accommodation blocks near the ranges on which we have been exercising. There is a dining facility in which the Royal Logistic Corps chefs have produced some excellent meals for the thousand or so troops on camp, several shops run by the sub-units and a shower block with all important hot running water.

Daily life within the camp is centred on keeping the Battlegroup and its vehicles and equipment ready for the various deployments onto the training area. However, there is plenty of time to conduct other training and activities, such as fitness training and movie nights, which fill the time nicely between being on the ranges or on exercise. We have been very lucky with the weather since arriving, which has made life immeasurably more pleasant and has allowed us to continue improving ourselves through numerous career courses and lots of low level training.



'An army marches on it's stomach; the chefs are doing a grand job'

'There has been lots of media interest so far'

When not exercising on the area or on ranges the working day usually begins at 0800 after a good breakfast from the chefs; the various sub-units crack on with looking after their vehicles and equipment or conduct lessons in the differing areas of their specific trade. Late morning may see a bit of physical training in the form of a squadron run or a TAB through the forest before returning to camp for a shower and lunch. The afternoon sees a similar routine with the working day wrapping up between 1600 and 1700, in time for a well earned evening meal. Without the plethora of home comforts that we are all used to, the evening is a time for rediscovering a skill that we have always been very good at reverting to when overseas; sitting around with mates with a brew in hand while talking for hours on end about everything and nothing.

Life in Karliki Camp is by no stretch of the imagination a five star vacation, but it is certainly not uncomfortable either. We have all we need to get on with our jobs during the day and everything else for a good meal, a hot shower and a good sleep in the evening. The Polish Army have clearly put a lot of effort into making our lives as comfortable as possible.

Cultural Trips – Capt Wilson, IO KRH

Poland is a country steeped in history, both modern and ancient, and it is important that the soldiers of the Battlegroup have the chance to experience some of this. Before arriving, various places were identified as potential sites for cultural visits, most notable of which were Auschwitz and Stalag Luft III concentration camps. Auschwitz needs little introduction and is by far the most popular choice amongst the soldiers, with Stalag Luft III being popular with anyone who has seen the movie 'The Great Escape'. Added to this was the site of an enormous line of German military defences built along the old Polish-German border during the 1930s, dubbed the 'East Wall' – it is more reminiscent of something from a James Bond film rather than a series of bunkers. Visits to all of these locations have been going on throughout the deployment with demand for places being strong on every trip, and very positive feedback from all who have attended.

Working with the Polish Army – Capt Sandeman, Ops Offr KRH

Working with the Polish Army has been an interesting experience for all deployed. From the start, it was clear that the Polish officers and soldiers, who had been charged with making sure our arrival and integration into the region was as seamless as possible, would work incredibly hard in order to help us. Since deploying onto ranges and the bi-lateral training exercise, the Polish units who we have worked with have been keen to learn from us and have helped us learn from them.

There have been the expected difficulties arising from language barriers, but this has been easily overcome. Our Polish counterparts (1st Polish Tank Battalion) are equipped with the Leopard 2 main battle tank, but we share a similar mentality with regards to soldiering and we have rapidly formed bonds based on shared experiences.



'Capt Sandeman on camera again'



'There's no better life' than life in the field'

Keeping the Battlegroup on the road – Capt Ashton REME, KRH EME

Keeping any Battlegroup on the road is no easy task. Imagine your own fleet for example, the shiny Ford S-Max on the drive waiting to whisk the children off to school or ready to carry the weekly shop home. Insurance, MOT, road tax and fuel are really all you need – AA or RAC cover is pretty important if you have a malfunction, you may also need to throw in a service every now and then! Well for us, insurance and road tax for all 213 vehicles is covered by the Crown but we do have a thing called a Mandatory Equipment Inspection (MEI) in place of the MOT. REME vehicle mechanics ensure that the MEI for every vehicle is in date and the vehicles are safe to use but this does not stop things breaking as they are used. The other disadvantage we've got over your fleet, is that ours is much older, some as ancient as the 1970s. So when they break, they break! The usual course of action is to drag the vehicle back to a 'safe' location, diagnose the problem and order the spare part. It may not be the automotive side that is broken, it could be the electric side or there may be an issue with the weapon system so all trade groups are kept on their toes. Stretched supply chains across Europe mean that it can take up to 7 days to receive a part from the UK – this may put the vehicle out of action for that long or it may mean it can still operate, but with limited functionality. On the whole though, we've not been doing too badly – availability hovers around 95% which means that at any one time, there are about 10 vehicles that need serious TLC. It's definitely a never ending battle; as they bend and break it, we mend it!



'Tank maintenance never stops'



'OC A Sqn wades through'



The King's Royal Hussars Battle Group
Exercise BLACK EAGLE 2014