

Welfare Support

Over the past years the role of a Unit Welfare Officer has changed drastically and not only in name as we are no longer Families Officers, who were primarily focused on the married soldiers and officers, we now have responsibility for the welfare of single soldiers and their extended families. In addition the work load has increased because of the constant 'roulement' (organised rotation) of personnel moving in and out of operational theatres.

The welfare mechanisms have changed and I personally find myself as a confidant, surrogate father, kindly friend and caring uncle. All of these roles are played at some time or another particularly when you have a young wife with small children facing separation for the first time. I am sure you can appreciate the strains placed on a marriage particularly when the separation suffers from intense media coverage. I also face questions from parents, grandparents and girlfriends who are not familiar with military terms but have the same worries and concerns about their loved one who is deployed away from the UK. We regularly ask families and relatives not to sit watching the news and to only rely upon information passed by us but unfortunately during a lonely evening there will always be someone who watches and then starts to worry.

To a certain extent I suppose an operational tour of duty is easier for the soldier than for the family. The soldier is undertaking a role for which he has been professionally trained and operates in an environment which has few distractions so he can remain focused on the operational mission. On the other hand the families back at home have to face the normal routine and dramas of life - getting the children to school, nursing a sick child, worrying about getting to hospital for a maternity appointment!

I can honestly say that each and every day brings a challenge and personally I am blessed with excellent support from my chain of command who place a high priority on robust welfare support. On the other hand I would be absolutely lost without the help of the Service charities and support agencies.



A TV to watch the football and a bike to get around Bastion are examples of the use of our Geo Fund money.



In particular I am truly grateful for the excellent financial support I have received from your branch of the REA. I am constantly reminded by your committee that funds are available in support of operational efforts and this has manifested itself in the form of bicycles, televisions, and a raft of electrical items. All of these items help to enhance the morale of our soldiers

and officers who are on operations providing geographic support to the missions that are currently being conducted in Afghanistan. Our women and men are working in increasingly harsh conditions, but are enjoying the challenges of working in a real time scenario. All efforts towards enhancing the morale of our troops are appreciated and your support has been truly memorable.

Nick Collins