

EXERCISE TRIG SOUTH 14

In order to assist the enduring security of the British South Atlantic Islands, 14 Geographic Squadron was requested to complete a series of Geodetic (GPS) Surveys covering several sites across the Falkland Islands. This included two helicopter refuelling sites, the Onion Range training complex and a critical fuel and communications pipeline supplying an active radar observation post atop Mount Kent.

November 2014 saw the men and women of 14 Geographic Squadron, 42 Engr Regt, travel to the Falklands in order to carry out the tasks. On arrival the freight was unloaded and prepared to move, after a few days of finding our feet the Sappers and JNCOs were split down into 4 teams ready to travel to the four different locations across the islands.

Travelling to each of the locations was a fairly simple affair despite the slight issue of some rough weather on the ferry crossing that turned into an early scene of Saving Private Ryan with the landing craft ferry being thrown about. The teams got to grips with new accommodation, some being housed in the prefab accommodation at Onion Range and Mount Kent, whilst the Fox Bay crew found themselves at home with the local government officer, warm and dry. The Hill Cove team found that the roof to their 50 year old barn was not as waterproof as they had hoped and had to break out the ponchos.

Breaking into the main survey, the teams got stuck into the routine with early starts and late finishes. The mood was upbeat as was the weather, well mostly, high winds on Mount Kent made for interesting working conditions with clothes nearly torn from bodies and our lighter Sappers filling pockets with stones for ballast. The very rare glimmer of sunlight on the mountain was emphasised with a low level fly by from a RAF Typhoon, a good break from the nonstop work routine. The weather at Onion Range was living up to its reputation of bringing a tear to the eye with driving rain and hail stinging any exposed skin, making the task a little uncomfortable. Meanwhile on the western island the other teams were enjoying the summer time that was on offer in the southern hemisphere. Fox Bay was bathed in brilliant sunlight which brought the temperature to a sweltering 11^o; some softies were even unzipped whilst scurrying around the helicopter fuelling site. The team to the north at Hill Cove had discovered that the site they were requested to survey had since been de-commissioned and dismantled; nonetheless the team adapted their approach and began a running survey travelling around the island to visit and GPS survey as many mapped helicopter landing sites in the time allowed, whilst of course visiting the farms and wildlife in the area, though once you've seen one penguin...

The teams now had 5 days to get their various sites fully mapped and recover back to Mount Pleasant, an achievable task resulting in each team having at least a full day to explore the local area. Many lessons were learnt over this short time that both the Sappers and the seniors in the Sqn will value, including a slight training gap and the knowledge that penguins stink like nothing else on earth. With a flying visit from SHQ on the closing days of the task the Western Island teams recovered in convoy to Goose Green and San Carlos for a battlefield brief from SSgt Wiggins. On recovery to Mount Pleasant the teams had 36 hours to turn around our kit for the green phase of the exercise.

The fast turn round from the survey task was achieved with the slick workings of a Sqn in its element, a quick kit inspection to check that the Sqn would be in full working order for the duration was followed by a road move to Onion Range, an 80km² open live fire range which happens to be filled with baby's-heads and giant sponge bogs that swallow vehicle and man alike. The road move set the mood; rough, cold and wet were the order of the day in the back of the TCV. Apparently it wasn't too bad in the air cushioned drivers seat, or in the Land Rovers. After we had been disorientated and shook loose the Sqn arrived at Onion Range complex and bedded in, lessons and briefs of what was to come followed.

The Live Fire Tactical Training (LFTT) began with a look back to 1982, this entailed the movement of kit across from a roadside Land Rover to the firing lane a good kilometre away. It all appeared to be going fine until one of the smallest Sappers in the unit disappeared into a shoulder deep moss hole, no injuries sustained just a red faced Sapper and the amusement of everyone else. It was a sobering walk as we experienced a tiny amount of what our predecessors on the island had. We moved onto the LFTT with gusto now and the live firing began; individually at first, with a double river crossing and 5 targets to our front, as the training and lessons kicked in the wooden figure 12 targets didn't stand a chance. After every individual had passed through the lane we moved onto pairs and fire team tactics for the section level assault that was to follow in the coming 3 days. Once the Sqn had completed a full section level assault up the "Lane of Pain", as it was now known, it was time to switch to a blank fire scenario out on the exercise area. All this was a relief to an exhausted WO2 Watson, who had accompanied every single attack.

The Sqn re-deployed into a harbour area after yet another brain shaking TCV ride. Once we had arrived and settled in, the routine quickly re-established itself with a flurry of activity to set up a working harbour area before darkness fell. The night was quiet, some call it the calm before the storm, we were tired enough not to notice. The next day was a whirlwind of lessons for the Sappers that went by fairly quickly, then the night engulfed us and the weather came back with vengeance, ponchos were strained at bungee cord bonds and the clouds cut out any visibility. Naturally this was the night our "enemy" appeared, like badly trained ninjas they came forth but were pushed back from the harbour by the ever alert stag positions. This left the rest of the Sqn to hunker down against the elements. We had a slight insight into what it was like back in '82 with 5-10 metre engagements occurring all night with our enemy, nerves began to strain with the constant threat of attack, an eye opening experience. Morning broke, the enemy had withdrawn, and routine began with some minor repairs that usually follow a storm passing through a harbour area. "You're soldiers first!" was the morning call and those downcast eyes turned to steel as resolve was dredged up from unknown depths, the days orders were received and so began our patrols. The planning from the section commanders proving invaluable as the enemy failed to find one section's patrol and was completely outmanoeuvred by two section, this was, as always, followed by the final attack. The enemy positions were pre sighted and our plans were made, using the ground brilliantly the two sections were in position quickly and the fire support started to pour suppressing fire onto the enemy positions. The assault went in and the position was neutralised, "why have you stopped firing?" asked the exercise staff, surprised at the speed of attack, "he's dead" the answer came back. Victory for the Sqn, or so we thought, a casevac as always follows a final attack. Down over the moss and the babies heads we battled towards the TCV for the extraction to Mount Pleasant, and relax. "Right, get your weapons cleaned. GPMG's first." No time to relax yet.

On completion of the green phase the Sqn now had some down time before travelling back to the UK, this meant it was time for the much anticipated fancy dress dinner night. A superhero theme was the order of the night that followed a dinner put on by the chefs at Hillside camp in Stanley. A full Regimental style "Top Table" dinner, albeit in superhero fancy dress, where thanks were given for our attached arms; John "Radioactive Man" our medic, Kenny "Chief Chips" our Chef and OCDT Horswill. The dinner was followed by an overwhelmingly warm welcome into the local pubs in Stanley. Throughout the night the drinks flowed inevitably leaving some a little worse for ware the next morning. That bleary morning soon saw the Sqn perked up and fresh with the Act of Remembrance atop Sapper Hill overlooking Stanley, a solemn but inspiring event that emphasised what we as Sappers are truly capable of.

Our time in the Falklands had come to an end, with our surveys completed and our customers satisfied, it was back to Wyton station via an 18 hour flight to reflect on the privilege and honour of supporting the enduring security the Falklands Islands.