

THE RAPID RESPONSE TEAM

Shortly before or after the opening of “events” in Northern Ireland in 1969, an officers’ day demonstration of rapid response reproduction of Northern Ireland town plans using A-Z type town plan source material was given in one the Hermitage blocks. The demonstrator was Lt Col J. Coulson, clad in a white laboratory coat and the demonstration was based on a dyeline copier, possibly of the Oce type.

Not long after, 13 Field Survey Squadron at Barton Stacey then commanded by Major C.N. Thompson was trialling a Rapid Response Team under Capt. J. Rylatt with appropriate equipment based on an LWB Land Rover and trailer with an attached canvas shelter extension.
(From memory)

Possibly simultaneously, or maybe even earlier, at an AFNORTH study period in January 1969 and at an AFCENT/AFNORTH conference in May 1969 the concept of a small, compact, mobile unit capable of supporting a formation headquarters in the field in the provision of graphic intelligence in a rapidly changing situation was being presented.

The factors which influenced the design of this unit were the need for it to be mounted in a standard vehicle with cross-country performance as good as the formation’s it was supporting. The crew and its personal equipment were to be minimal and deployable in the vehicle. The equipment was to be readily available commercial equipment. The power requirement were to be met by the formation headquarters’ equipment. The equipment was to cope with standard NATO-size products. First copies were to be produced in minimal time, say 20 copies within 20 minutes of receipt of originals.

The result was a LWB Land Rover and trailer with a crew of three, a Photo-Tech Corporal, a Carto-Tech Sapper and a Sapper Driver with the following equipment : -

- a. Rotolite Diazo Jet Mk II. To reproduce positive transparent or translucent originals from line work in a single operation. Copies could be on paper or transparencies for use as overlays. A UV light source was used for exposure and development was by ammonia gas. Maximum width was 40 inches and material was supplied in 25 and 50 metre rolls. In practice 30 inch was a practical width.
- b. Contact Frame. A standard contact frame similar to that in the mobile train was used with an improvised light source for continuous tone work and originals not on a transparent base.
- c. Agfa Gevaert Rapidoprint LL9. This was used to activate and stabilise the latent image produced in the contact frame. Activator and stabilizer solutions were pumped to separate troughs and rollers carried bromide paper through the machine. The complete process took about 15 seconds. The image could be fixed otherwise would deteriorate with time.
- d. Rotatrim. Used for trimming of copies to size.

The power requirement was 3 kilowatts, single phase, 50 cycle, 220 volts.

In the U.K., a prototype vacuum contact printing frame which also served as a portable light table was trialled and a ventilated drying chamber for Rapidoprint bromides was also designed.

What happened next is not known by the compiler of these notes but it is thought that other members of REA (Geo) might be able to add to these brief notes or perhaps provide photos. If so, please communicate with the editor.

(PRO WO 402/151 Summary from Close-support Map Production, a BAOR document, with detailed Stores/LWB & Trailer Loads Annex) Seen 18-12-08

LETTER FROM Jim Hyde received about New Year 2009 : -

Chronology.

- a. 1969-1970 Rapid Response Team
- b. 1970-1972 Close Support Team
- c. 1972-1973 Exhibition Team
- d. 1973-???? TACIPRINT

a. 1969-1970 - Rapid Response Team (RRT)

In early 1969 after the opening of events in Northern Ireland, I was called into Repro Office in Block 27 of B Camp Barton Stacey to see Capt J. Rylatt R.E. I was shown two machines, an OCE Dyeline and an LL9 Rapido Printer, an early forerunner copying machine using coated paper, activated paper and expendable stores.

I was told I had to produce copies of town plans of various towns in Northern Ireland, the number of copies to be notified later. (It was found at the start of operations that no town plans or maps were available for planning or operations). The results would be wanted as soon as possible.

The repmat which we received for this task was, for the most part, transparent positives. These had to be transferred to transparent negatives. Some consisted of paper copies which had to be transferred to film.

These had been acquired from the appropriate local Council Offices. The paper copies were made transparent with linseed oil or baby oil with some enhancement by retouching where we had the time, then printing the copies.

After a week or two I realised that time was being wasted by the delivery of repmat to the Squadron and delivery of copies back to HQ Northern Ireland, Belfast. I suggested that the machines and other ancillary equipment be put in a Landrover and trailer and taken to Northern Ireland. This would speed up the delivery of the finished copies. (I had an ulterior motive [I presume a medal] it was vetoed by Survey (my opinion was that Survey did not want to lose control of a new idea they had thought of (empire-building) very important to Survey as a whole)

Most of the Planning and Operations carried out in Northern Ireland were on these "Dyeline" copies supplied by the Rapid Response Team from 13 Fd Svy Sqn, B Camp, Barton Stacey.

b. 1970-1972 - Close Support Team (CST)

This enterprise was a follow-on really from the rapid response side. It was called "Close Support" so called to try to support any higher formation (to advertise the Survey role of the R.E. and to integrate more).

This was, in essence, support for Divisional HQ's, 3 Division being just down the road from Barton Stacey at Bulford.

The team consisted of a long wheelbase Landrover with a 12 x 12 foot shelter attached to the rear of the superstructure. This was it to be able to fit in the circle enclosing the "Birdtable". This only increased the circumference by one vehicle which was acceptable to the Division. It would only be this size because of the speed it could be broken down and moved to a new Divisional HQ location.

We took all the machines that we had been using on the Rapid Response element and one book I knew we would require, having served in East Africa Command, which was "Staff Duties in the Field".

This was where my first trouble arose. No-one would let me borrow theirs. They treated them like gold-dust. I soon found out why, I had to get a copy from the Library and it needed about twelve month's amendment to bring it near up-to-date.

On the first exercise that CST was called upon to support, the journey from Barton Stacey to Bulford was undertaken with some apprehension as we knew nothing of the working practices of a Div HQ. My two assistants were Spr Bacon and Spr Jacobs who had also been on the RRT. These two must have done something to annoy someone to be attached to me on all these unusual tasks that I seemed to draw.

On arriving at Bulford and reporting to MT to join the "train" things went well and I thought we had cracked it, having arrived at the first location and being admitted to the "circle" after some grilling by the R.M.P. Div Security staff side since we were not on their "list". (The grenade above my three stripes helped a bit). I told them to get on to the DCRE who sent someone in authority to explain our presence. (This did not bode well with the R.M.P.).

The first twelve hours went well. All the draughtsmen of Arty, Int and Engrs used our services and we supplied multi-copies of their overlays. These each needed checking for errors before being despatched, being a mechanical copy.

The big shock came after 12 hours had gone by, when suddenly everybody started breaking up camp. "Step-up" and "Main" was now at such-and-such a location, oops, this soldier should not have told me, not even knowing the whereabouts of "New Main". I had got away with finding my new position this time. It's alright for the "powers-that-be", they just jump into their Landrovers or Armoured Cars and get taken to "New Main".

Arriving at "Main" some thirty minutes late I was met by another different set of "????? Manic" "People" and again was told we were not on the "list"; another argument/discussion and again being helped out by higher echelon. Thinking that I have to sort this problem out, the problem being that the R.M.P. did not like taking down barbed-wire fence surrounding the "circle" to admit us, I had a word in the R.M.P. Sergeant's ear, that the gap in the "circle" was for me, so why didn't he start and finish the wire at this gap to save his men work in undoing sections of wire and putting it back again. Though being a wooden-head, I think I convinced him and it got them to accept us as one of the HQ elements.

Another problem loomed in the near future. When were we going to get some sleep? I told the Sappers that when they had no work on, or when one person could do the job, that the other had to get his head down in the back of the vehicle or under the G.S. table that we were using in the shelter. With three men in a 12 x 12 foot shelter with table and chairs and machines, and a paraffin stove with a fire-bucket of water on it for washing and shaving, there is not much room for anything else, but though we smelled a bit we were clean-shaven at the end of the week. As the only driver I napped in the front of the vehicle whenever the chance occurred.

We had all been on Survey exercises before this but this was as different as “chalk and cheese”. Once or twice we could not “wangle” the co-ordinates of the new “Main” out of anybody and then the problem became a detective mission following new mud on the roads, looking at entrances of fields for tyre tracks, asking locals if they had seen army vehicles in the last hour, or looking at the tops of wooded hills for radio masts poking through.

During the fourteen moves in the week we were late arriving about nine hours, an average of 40 minutes each move. If this was going to be an ongoing thing we needed two vehicles, one for “Step up” and one for “Main”, as had all the other branches.

Overall we were welcomed by the R & F of the other branches and heard no adverse comments from the staff.

We had three or four exercises with the HQ. We had learned a lot from the first exercise. Exercises are all about what to take and what not to take and what makes life easier.

Our 240 volt power came from the HQ lighting circuit. This was when all things were written or verbal over the radio and with no computers. I sometimes dimmed all the lights in all the shelters and at the “Bird table” to make it more realistic but they didn’t think so!

Although we were nearly always late, we tried our best. We must have been of some use as they had us back again. I was glad we had not kept our original title of RRT since the R.M.P. security staff would have had a field-day with it!

c. 1972-1973 - Exhibition Team.

This team again was three men, all that could comfortably fit in a long wheelbase Landrover, Sgt (Air Svy Tech), Cpl/Spr (Field), Cpl/Spr (Print). Using our old and trusty Landrover and travelling to various Universities and Colleges to try to interest students to join the RE Survey Service.

We carried large Exhibition Boards in a collapsible “Speed Frame” metal frame on which were mounted photographs. Field and Air Survey instruments were displayed on G.S. tables to allow some “hands-on” experience.

d. TACIPRINT.

Taciprint came into being later when I was posted to 135 Sqn as SQMS.