

COMBAT ART

Personal Reflections from Afghanistan



The exhibition features the following artists:

Capt H Morgan
Cpl A Lowry
A Gornall
L Cpl Falvey
M Mason
Mne Goddard
Mne Hargreaves
Mne Keen
Mne Neen
Together with many unknown artists

Maj D Spink
Mne Worsnop
Cpl Coulbeck
Mne E Finlay
Mne B Maclean
Mne/Acting L Cpl T Harrison (QCVS)
LA (Phot) R O'Leary, Unit Photographer
Mne E Conway
CSM J Twycross

COMBAT ART – Personal Reflections from Afghanistan

Combat Art is a groundbreaking two year arts project that culminates in this exhibition at The Market House (West Wing) in the centre of Taunton, Somerset from 9th – 23rd November 2013. The exhibition documents the 40 Commando, Royal Marines' last tour of Afghanistan with, for the first time, access to an extra piece of military kit – the Combat Art Kit.

The project has been developed and delivered by Art Kits, a not-for-profit company established to distribute and support the usage of art kits and materials as widely as possible.

The following organisations are proud to support Combat Art, and indeed the project could not have gone ahead without their financial support:

Royal Marines Charitable Trust Fund
Go Commando
Pardoes Solicitors
Brewin Dolphin Investment Management

with further in-kind support from Project Taunton, Cotleigh Brewery, Royal Marines Museum and the British Legion.





THE COMBAT ART KIT

The Combat Art Kit is the brainchild of Royal Marines widow Anita St John Gray, who together with artist/curator Tim Martin, artist Jon England and arts educator Stuart Rosamond have developed and delivered the Combat Art project. The real work began in 2012 when, through consultation with a variety of people from the Royal Marines, including former Commanding Officer's at 40 Commando, Col M.J.A Jackson RM, recently awarded the DSO, and Col Alan Hooper RM, as well as Rev Paul Andrew Chaplain RN, Second in Command Major Karl Gray RM and Company Commanders, the bespoke camouflaged kit was designed, manufactured and distributed to 500 Royal Marines from all ranks.

The specific aim of the project was to offer the Commandos the opportunity of documenting and reflecting on their final tour of Afghanistan through using the Combat Art Kit. Neatly fitting into a combat trouser pocket and containing high quality art materials, it was hoped that the kits would act as a vehicle for personal expression - a document of experience as it happened.

The benefits of using creativity and art to support physical, psychological and emotional wellbeing have been well documented over the past 30 years. The effects of post-traumatic stress disorder, currently receiving extensive media coverage, also makes this project even more important, and timely. It was always hoped that the art kits would be seen as a natural extension of their larger deployment kit and through having a positive effect on individual's wellbeing will ultimately become standard issue for the military.

The 'Combat Art: Personal Reflections from Afghanistan' exhibition showcases some of the usually unseen creativity of Royal Marines whilst on active service. A number of Royal Marines have generously chosen to share the contents of their kits with the wider public and these smaller drawings and paintings are complimented by larger works; including photography, objects and film, all made in the field.

'There has always been a link with art and the military, going back to the First World War and before that There are two aspects to it, one is there is a lot of time when you are on operations with time on your hands ... filling dead time is important. Secondly it allows the mind to move into a different field ... one of the things that art does is to provide the other side of the coin to the horrors of war and in many ways it has a very therapeutic point of view ... a release of stress can be very very helpful.'

'The only time I have ever kept a diary ... I've found it a release valve ... it recorded the key things but also the why I felt ... it became a release for my emotions. ... and when I go back into those diaries, maybe years later, that particular thing that I describe or the emotions that I felt comes flooding back to me ... it seems to connect you back to what you experienced at the time.'

Col Alan Hooper RM



'Combar Art was a really good tool for the lads to express their emotions through drawing, a great opportunity to get down on paper what their thoughts and feelings were at the time during the seven months we were there.'

... I do honestly believe it has therapeutic value ... as a way to quantify what their thoughts and feelings were at that time after an incident.'

LA(Phot) Rhys O'Leary





'I thought the kit was useful ... it is an interesting way of recording an event from the viewpoint of everybody, right from the Marines up to the Commanding Officer'

Major Karl Gray RM





Royal Marines Museum - Collecting from Afghanistan

The Royal Marines Museum collects, displays and interprets material which covers nearly 350 years of Royal Marines history. As the Museum moves to collect more items for its' collections contemporaneously, rather than waiting for them to be brought in years or decades after the events that surrounded them, Operations in Afghanistan have featured heavily in our work.

The Museum has collected a broad range of material – things which can be regarded as special, whilst others are very much more ordinary. The process involved in assembling the material has involved commissioning, appeals for material, direct collecting and recording. The material covers every unit and operational tour undertaken by the Royal Marines, from Brigade through to unit deployments, as well as the different specialisations from a very versatile Corps. An oral history account from a combat intelligence specialist sits alongside the sign from a Forward Operating Base, a typical home to large numbers of the men who served in Afghanistan. Material also represents those men detached from the Corps who served alongside other nations, and the important work undertaken alongside Afghan forces of various types.



Combat clothing worn by CSM Paul 'Buck' Ryan, 40 Commando. Op HERRICK 12 (Afghanistan) 2010



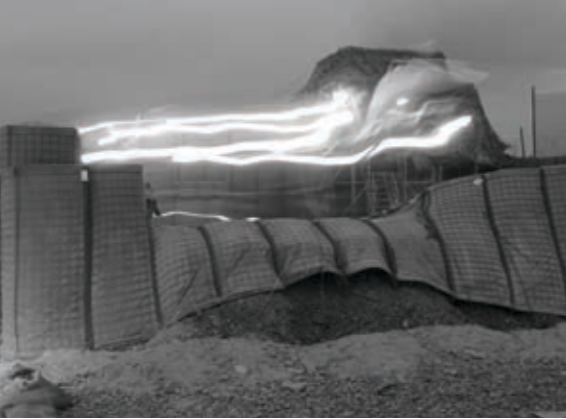
altar piece, made from 30mm shells. Camp Bastion, Op. HERRICK 9, 2008-9

In scope the material includes fine and decorative art – from commissioned watercolours to modern day equivalents of trench art. Evocative material is also encompassed, including a body armour and helmet associated with acts of gallantry. More simple everyday items have been collected. These include nearly a dozen different types of boot used over the duration of the campaign, through to privately produced tour t-shirts.

Material has included the obviously military – such combat clothing and load carrying equipment, through to the more unexpected, such as a home-made cricket bat. A lot of the items have powerful stories closely associated with them – a combat shirt from the kit sale of a Marine killed in action; the oral testimonies of nearly 30 men describing everything from their impressions of what they were doing and achieving, the sorts of phone calls they made to their families and for some witnessing the deaths of their colleagues and friends.

The Museum will continue to collect and preserve material relating to Afghanistan. The perspectives of the men who made, and we were witness to this history, will also be collected to help our understanding of the conflict now and into the future.

Ian Maine, Curator, Royal Marines Museum



Acknowledgements

This catalogue accompanies the exhibition:

COMBAT ART
Personal Reflections from Afghanistan

The Market House (West Wing), Fore Street, Taunton, Somerset. TA1 1JD
9 - 23 November, 2013



We are indebted to all those from 40 Commando that were inspired to use the Combat Art Kit or creativity whilst on tour in Afghanistan, together with those at the base who supported this project from the start.

We would also like to thank the following organisations and individuals for their kind support and advice: Col Alan Hooper RM, Royal Marines Charitable Trust Fund, Go Commando, Pardoes Solicitors, Brewin Dolphin, Royal Marines Museum, Project Taunton, Cotleigh Brewery, the British Legion and those volunteers that kindly helped us put the kits together at The Brewhouse, back in August 2012.

Art Kits Ltd is Anita St John Gray, Tim Martin, Jon England & Stuart Rosamond

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Art Kits is a not for profit company, limited by guarantee, established to deliver Combat Art and other similar projects. The company's aims are to distribute and support the usage of art kits and materials as widely as possible, with the objective of supporting the kit's usage as a means of self-expression and enabling the creation of archives for future reflection. CARRY, CREATE, CONNECT is the company's motto. www.artkits.co.uk

Further information on our main supporters

Royal Marines Charitable Trust Fund (RMCTF)

RMCTF's challenge is to raise £6M by the 350th anniversary of the Royal Marines in 2014 to support the: Recovery Pathway - helping the wounded and injured begin their transition into civilian life; Decompression/Quality of Life Pathway - helping those still serving and facing successive tours in high threat environments; Through Life Pathway - continuing the same level of support and care once the beneficiaries break their formal links to the Corps. Sadly, but importantly, the RMCTF also provides a grant to the next of kin of those who die in service within 48 hours of the event. www.rmctf.org.uk

Go Commando

Go Commando was founded in Taunton in November 2010, following overwhelming support for the men of 40 Commando during and after the Herrick 12 tour in Afghanistan. It is now a national charity, supporting all Royal Marines and their families. We recognise the burden on families when men deploy and aim to provide support for them: many women find themselves miles from family, raising small children on their own whilst their men are at war or carrying out training. www.gocommando.org.uk

Pardoes Solicitors

Pardoes is a dynamic, forward thinking law firm with roots in the South West region. We seek to deliver high quality advice, exceptional service and cost effective legal solutions throughout the South West. www.pardoes.co.uk

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Art washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life. Pablo Picasso

'Art opens the closets, airs out the cellars and attics. It brings healing.' Julia Cameron

'I found I could say things with colour and shapes that I couldn't say any other way -- things I had no words for.'
Georgia O'Keeffe

