



Royal Marines Detachment British Forces - British Indian Ocean Territory

Celebration and Remembrance

Foreword by Major Bob Perry RM,
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The theme of the last couple of months in Diego Garcia has been of celebration and remembrance. The Corps Birthday was celebrated in fine style with a Regimental Dinner held in the US Navy CPOs' Mess. The event was superbly organised and presided over by the Detachment Sergeant Major, WO2 Billy Bowker RM, and was attended by all Royal Marines serving on the island along with a number of invited Service and civilian guests. It was the first occasion that many of our young Marines had attended a formal regimental dinner and it was an ideal opportunity for them to experience first hand the history and traditions of the Corps, as well as having a tremendously enjoyable evening.

In early November, a team comprising four Royal Marines and two Naval ratings travelled to Singapore to participate in the 70th anniversary of the Padang to Changi march, following the route taken by Allied POWs after the fall of Singapore in 1942. This extremely poignant event is described in further detail below. Remembrance Day was commemorated by the British Forces at a service held at Pointe Marianne Cemetery; among the wreaths laid was one in remembrance of all Royal Marines who had died in the service of their country. On completion of the short service, all personnel retired to the Brit Club for a belated Splice the Main Brace to celebrate Her Majesty's Diamond Jubilee (due to the isolated location of DG, news does take some time to reach us!) Finally, our US colleagues duly celebrated Thanksgiving Day with numerous sporting and social events organised across the island. The centrepiece of the day was the 'Turkey Trot' 18-mile marathon from GEODSS, the deep space surveillance station to Downtown. The event, a relay style road race consisting of a team of six competitors each running a three-mile leg, was more than convincingly won by the Royal Marines with most Bootnecks clocking a sub-18 minute leg. Cue a quote from a glum looking US Commanding Officer as he presented the prizes: 'It wasn't even close...'

The 70th Anniversary of the Padang to Changi March

by Cpl 'Mitch' Mitchell and LCpl 'Ads' Lilley

In November 1942, following the surrender of Singapore, over 50,000 captured Allied Prisoners of War were marched from the Padang to the east of the island where they were imprisoned in and around the military base called Selarang near the village of Changi. The detained civilian population was also marched to the east and imprisoned in Changi prison itself, one mile away from Selarang. Eventually, any reference to the area was simply made to Changi. 'Sandbag', an association of former UK and Commonwealth Service personnel based in Singapore and the surrounding region, organised a Remembrance march on 3 November 2012 to retrace the 28-kilometre route taken by Allied POWs 70 years ago and help raise funds for the Royal British Legion and Help for Heroes.

It was difficult not to get injured in the stampede that resulted from a dit appearing on Daily Orders calling for volunteers to spend an all expenses paid (almost!) long



Royal Marines leading the 'Sandbaggers' towards the end of the Padang to Changi march

weekend in Singapore. It transpired that the XO had received an invitation from the British High Commission in Singapore to send a British Forces team to participate in a 70th anniversary event that commemorated the march undertaken by Allied POWs following the fall of Singapore in WW2. After many favours were called in and bribes offered (to no avail) the team was finalised: Cpl 'Mitch' Mitchell (D2), LCpl 'Ads' Lilley (ARM1), and Mne 'Matty' Ratcliffe (PW3) would join the XO, to participate in this historical event. To add balance to the team, we also allowed two matelots in on the event - Leading Regulator Steve Fram (in case any of us were arrested in Singapore for chewing gum, jay-walking or smoking in an undesignated area) and Leading Communicator Kyle Hope (to establish secure comms with local taxi firms to ensure we all got home safely after each run ashore).

Due to the fragility of the AMC air bridge between DG and Singapore, the XO decided that it would be better if we flew up a day earlier than planned in order to acclimatise and be able to fit in another run ashore before the main event. This was a hoofing call and allowed the team to get to know intimately the delights of Clarke Quay, the western end of Orchard Road, and numerous other attractions in Singapore. We also managed to gate-crash a kids' Halloween party in the bar of the British High Commission where Matty Ratcliffe, without too much persuasion, readily agreed to judge the under-5s' best dressed witch costume competition and organise the party games (or was he just trying to impress the young mothers?)

Our accommodation was provided courtesy of the New Zealand Navy at Sembawang Naval Base. From the outside the building looked a bit like a derelict building in the Gaza Strip. However, inside 'The Fern' was an extremely comfortable hostel type facility that had recently been opened primarily for Kiwi military personnel. Located a short distance from the large US Exchange and the Terror Club complete with swimming pool, 'The Fern' also boasted free internet and breakfast thrown in. The OIC of the MoD operated Singapore Oil Fuel Depot kindly loaned us a self-drive people carrier for the weekend, which allowed us to freely explore the area.

Kranji War Cemetery was high on our list of places to visit and it was the first time that many of us had visited a Commonwealth War Grave Commission site. Over 3600 graves are located at Kranji including those of many Royal Marines who were killed in WW2 and during more recent



Mne Stan Barton reading the Convening Order at the Corps Birthday Regimental Dinner

conflicts when 3 Cdo Bde RM was based in the Far East. We especially wanted to visit the grave of Major Reginald Ingleton RM who took part in the ill-fated Operation *Rimau* mission in late 1944, to destroy enemy shipping in Singapore Harbour. Major Ingleton and nine other Allied commando troops of Z Special Unit were subsequently captured by the Japanese and after being put on trial for ‘perfidy and espionage’ were ceremoniously beheaded by their captors on 7 July 1945, just three weeks before the end of WW2. There wasn’t much chatter on the way back to Sembawang as we all reflected on the sacrifices of brave men who died and now lie a very long way from home.

The weather on the day of the actual march was grey and heavily overcast as we met up with the hundred or so members of ‘Sandbag’, along with their families and friends, at the Cenotaph, adjacent to the Padang. Across the road at the Singapore Cricket Club, the International Rugby Sevens tournament was in progress and we learned that play would be interrupted for a minute’s silence prior to the start of the march. As we were in uniform with Royal Marines emblazoned across the backs of our t-Shirts, some well meaning expat thought it would be a good idea if the Royal Marines led the ‘Sandbaggers’ on to the centre of the pitch. The XO was quickly pinged as the parade Adjutant and soon realised that it would be easier herding cats than civvies - at least our feline friends probably know the difference between left and right! As quick march was ordered, the heavens opened; the civvies scattered in the torrential downpour, and the event turned into more of a wet t-shirt competition! After the immaculately observed one-minute silence in the pouring rain, we marched off the Padang to rapturous applause from the packed stands, with the ‘Colonel Bogey March’ (‘Bridge on the River Kwai’ theme tune) bellowing from the PA system.



Remembrance Day at Pointe Marianne Cemetery

During the 28-kilometre march to Changi we spoke to many of the former Servicemen who had settled in Singapore, the majority claiming that they already were or were well on their way to being millionaires! One expat claimed he owned a factory that was the biggest importer of branded sports equipment in Asia. After a couple of not too subtle hints he was persuaded to donate some freebie sports equipment to BF BIOT (which he duly delivered the next day). Another former serviceman promised us t-shirts that promoted his dog-walking club(!) and a former RM PTI (once a Bootneck always a Bootneck!) was only too keen to offer us free membership of the chain of gymnasiums that he managed whenever we were transiting through Singapore. At numerous RVs during the march (funny how they were all at bars) many bottles of ‘Tiger’ beer miraculously appeared from grateful ‘Sandbaggers’ and their families and friends who were so pleased that serving UK military personnel had taken the time to participate in the event.

The high profile march was covered by several TV stations, including the Straits Times and British Forces Broadcasting Service, who were keen to interview us about how it felt to be participating in such a historic event. The march ended at the chapel at Changi Museum. After a short memorial service Cpl Mitchell gave the exhortation and, following the ‘Last Post’ and ‘Reveille’, the XO laid a wreath on behalf of the Corps in memory of all those who had died or suffered during the tragic events in Singapore seventy years ago.

We arrived back in DG in the early hours of the morning tired, but with new knowledge of our Corps history and proudly wearing our Singapore (South West District) Dog Walking Society t-shirts!

Finally, we would not have been able to participate in the event without the most generous sponsorship from our friends at Cable & Wireless (Diego Garcia) Ltd; a big thank-you to Managing Director Mark Heron and Chief Engineer Dave Haworth.

Everest Base Camp Charity Challenge

by Sheryl and Steve Murray

Steve and Sheryl Murray are pictured at Everest Base Camp in aid of The Royal Marines Charitable Trust Fund, Breast Cancer Care, and the Fire Fighter Charity. Sheryl said ‘We arrived there after a seven and a half hour trek. The wind howled around us on the final ridge which made it tough, but we got there in the end. Half an hour for pictures and then a three and half hour trek back - we were shattered and I have to confess to sobbing like a baby with relief when we arrived.



‘It was a tough challenge, especially as we were the two eldest trekkers (Steve 54 and myself 52), but it was so worth it. We are pleased to say that we have raised nearly £11,000 so far, with one event to be held: a static cycle ride at Asda Superstore in Havant.

‘Sadly it was too cold to take off our coats and wear the Royal Marines Charitable Trust Fund t-shirt for the picture, so we just held it up.

‘We are so pleased to be able to pass on at least £3,333.33 to the RMCTF and the other two charities - and will forward the share of the Asda event later’.