

Booklet No 1 – 16 Geographic Support Squadron Royal Engineers



In Celebration  
of the  
25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
of the Formation  
of  
16 Geographic Support Squadron  
Royal Engineers  
From 1995 to 2020

\*\*\*\*\*

Complete with a brief history of

16 Survey Company

Royal Sappers & Miners

From 1825 to 1905

and

16 Coast Battalion Fortress Company

16 Fortress Company

16 Anti-Aircraft Search Light Company

16 Electrical and Mechanical Squadron

16 Field Squadron

16 Survey Support Squadron

Royal Engineers

From 1905 to 2000

**In Celebration of the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
of the Formation of  
16 Geographic Support Squadron  
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From 1995 to 2020**

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**Major (Retired) Nick Collins RE  
Officer Commanding 16 Survey Support Squadron  
October 1995 – December 1995**

I think it has surprised numerous personnel who have served with **16 Survey Support Squadron** (now **16 Geographic Support Squadron**) that 25 years have passed since it was reformed as a Survey (now Geographic) Squadron. Readers will be able to see that from the history, **16 Company/Squadron** was actually formed 195 years ago, so along with 13 Squadron (1824) and 14 Squadron (1825) there could well be a very large celebration for their 200<sup>th</sup> anniversaries in a few years' time.

**1994.** After a tour as Repro Troop Commander in 13 Map Production Squadron and command of a 19 Specialist Team Royal Engineers detachment to Norway, I was posted to be the Troop Commander of Support Troop at 42 Survey Engineer Group based at Hermitage. This was a totally new challenge because for the first time I was not only involved with personnel from Royal Engineer's Survey but also RE Motor Transport, RE Quartermaster's G4 Logistics; RE Signals, Royal Logistic Corps; Royal Army Medical Corps; Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers; Adjutant General's Corps, Army Physical Training Corps (now Royal APTC) and a host of Civilian Staff who all gave superb support to the units based at Hermitage which included the Royal School of Military Survey. After several months of learning how to manage this eclectic 'band of brothers and sisters' it became very clear that as a Troop we were too large and did not have the correct status recognition to units outside of Hermitage. We had a vital role and were a Command element in our own right so needed to be a Squadron rather than a Troop. In early May 1995 I discussed with Colonel Peter Walker OBE, the Commander 42 Survey Engineer Group, whether there was a requirement for a Support Squadron similar to the Headquarter and Support Squadrons in RE Regiments. The discussions were held over a number of weeks and in his role as the Commander; an excellent staff officer; and personnel motivator Colonel Peter Walker gave direction and guidance to what would be an extremely unusual and difficult task during a period of Defence cuts, which had seen many Regiments and Units disbanded and amalgamated. Before covering how Survey recaptured **16 Squadron** back into its ranks, we must first look at the illustrious history of **16 Company (Squadron)**.

**SIGNIFICANT DATES, LOCATIONS AND PERSONNEL**

**SURVEY**

**20<sup>th</sup> October 1825.** The **16<sup>th</sup> Company** was raised by Royal Warrant and consisted of 62 Non-Commissioned Officers and soldiers. These men were specifically selected from members of the Corps at Chatham and trained for their highly technical duties under the direction of Lieutenant Colonel Charles Pasley RE, who commanded the Corps Establishment at that station.

**1826.** 60 men under Lieutenant Gregory sailed for the West Indies in the transport *Shipley*; on the 19<sup>th</sup> of April however, the *Shipley* foundered off Kitridge Head, Barbados and was a total shipwreck. The Company lost all its stores and equipment but happily, the 60 men survived. Lloyd's List reported that on 19th April 1826 the transport *Shipley*, from Cowes and Madeira, had struck upon Cobbler's Reef, drifted over, and was totally lost. However, all her crew and the troops aboard were saved.



*1825 Dress – Royal Engineers  
Image courtesy of Alan Gordon*

*Cover images - 1854 - Working Dress for Royal Sappers and Miners  
The Health Secretary briefs using a map produced by the Geo Team in SJC(UK)*



**1826.** A party was constantly detached to Berbice (now part of Guyana) for the service of the Engineer Department and in about **1827**, 2nd Corporal Thomas Sirrell superintended the construction of the hospital at Antigua, where he eventually died.

**October 1826.** The Company were in Coleraine to help with the Survey of Ireland.

**1839 to 1842.** They were in Limerick, and then moved to York, England that year and Southampton in **1843**, where they stayed until **1847**, working on the Ordnance Survey of Great Britain.

**1845.** They were in Perth, Scotland and between **1859** and **1860** back in Ireland at Newry.



*1854 - Working Dress for Royal Sappers and Miners  
Courtesy of History by TWJ Connolly (1857). Volume II, plate XVII*

**1861.** They returned to Southampton and in **1872** they were in Edinburgh, **1874** Oxford, **1876** Reading, **1878** Clifton, **1882** Ipswich, **1887** Bedford and **1901** Belfast. During these periods of time detachments were on various boundary commissions and surveys abroad.

**1878.** Volunteers had been called to form submarine mining units for the defence of our ports, and in **1885** the Coast Battalions were formed to maintain stores and instruct volunteers in the art of sea mining.

### **COASTAL DEFENCE COMPANIES**

**1905.** Submarine mining duties of the Coast Battalion Sections were handed over to the Royal Navy and the **16<sup>th</sup>** and **49<sup>th</sup>** Company carried out work in conjunction with the Royal Garrison Artillery.

**1906.** The Company was recognised as **16 Coast Battalion Fortress Company** and was situated on the Humber with detachments on the Mersey until 1907, the Tees until **1923** and the Tyne until about **1926**. During World War I the **16 Tyne Fort Works Company** was employed primarily on draft finding duties, and in **1919** the Company was disbanded and the personnel helped form **594<sup>th</sup>** Company Territorial Army Tyne defence, **595<sup>th</sup>** Company Territorial Army Middlesbrough and Hartlepool defence, **596<sup>th</sup>** Company Territorial Army Hull defence and the **597<sup>th</sup>** Company Territorial Army Clethorpes defence. In October of that year, however, the **594<sup>th</sup>** Company Territorial Army was renamed the **16 Coast Battalion Fort Company**, the remaining Territorial Army Companies being disbanded.



*16 Company/Squadron Sapper  
1860-1870*

**1927.** The Company was renamed the **16<sup>th</sup> Fort Company** at North Shields, and between **1928** and **1932** they were at Tynemouth with a detachment at the Humber. In **1932** the Company was absorbed in the **4<sup>th</sup> Fort Company** at Fort Monkton, Gosport.

## MALTA SEARCHLIGHTS



*Designed to be able to spot and dazzle aircraft, by lighting up the night's sky. Each installation would have consisted of a circular metal enclosure with a huge light, and possibly mirrors.*

**1935.** The Company was renamed **16<sup>th</sup> Fort Company** and continued manning the Malta searchlights until the end of the battle for Malta. As Royal Engineers the men enabled the Company to discharge a dual role, training its men as searchlight soldiers and assisting in the construction of its own stations. All night manning of these positions, under conditions comparable to war time, formed part of the training and the Company helped construct permanent defences.

**May 1935.** Four more engine rooms were completed, and the engine and equipment installed. By the end of August, the political situation in the Mediterranean had deteriorated so the provision of Malta's defences was accelerated and the two remaining engine rooms were completed and brought into use. For six weeks, at this period in time, the Company had its first taste of all-night manning under war conditions. In September the Company was brought up to war strength for manning 24 lights by the arrival from 1<sup>st</sup> Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Group of Lieutenant L G Robinson and Lieutenant D N Moore and 173 Other Ranks with sufficient equipment for 12 searchlight detachments.

**June/July 1935.** The Company held the usual Summer field works camp at Ghajn Tuffieha, and a command field works course was run by the Company in August. Although the strength was sufficient to man 24 stations, only 7 new stations were completed during the year bringing the total to 19. The original positions were provided with Crossley engines of Great War pattern, but the new ones had up to date Lister Diesels. By **1936**, however, the emergency in the Mediterranean was over and in October, Lieutenant Moore and the reinforcements received in the previous September returned to England, leaving the Company at its normal strength of 144 Other Ranks, sufficient to man twelve Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Sections. The officers were then Major Baillie MC, Captain Cowie, Lieutenant Robinson, and Lieutenant J V B Jervis-Read, who joined in April 1936.

**November 1937.** Major Baillie MC left the island, and the Company was taken over by Major S G Calpin, transferred from 24<sup>th</sup> Fort Company, another unit with long connections with the island. Captain Cowie left on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of November 1937, and Lieutenant P J Kent (temporary Commission) joined from the UK on the 28<sup>th</sup> January 1938. It is believed that Lieutenant P J Kent went on to be Brigadier Peter J Kent OBE and he signed the commemorative postal cover in 1975 (which is covered later in this article). In 1937 the War Office authorised a Maltese section of 45 Other Ranks and some men were transferred from the 24<sup>th</sup> Company, and the section was completed by men locally recruited.

**1<sup>st</sup> September 1934.** **16 Company** regained its entity and became the **16 Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Company**, Malta. At the end of the year 70 Other Ranks arrived in drafts from the UK and the Company, commanded by Captain D Cowie, became 142 strong. This was sufficient to man 12 searchlight stations, but from that time until **May 1935**, only six stations were ever manned, the remaining stations being incomplete and required engine rooms.

**October 1934.** Major A C Baillie MC, arrived in Malta to take command and set to work preparing the island for searchlight defence on a calculated war time basis and in the same month Lieutenant C E J Sparrow joined to complete the full peace establishment of officers.





By March 1939, there had been 80 new arrivals from the UK and 65 departures, and 7 Maltese transferred from 24<sup>th</sup> Fort Company and 12 Maltese recruits were posted in.

Normal military and technical training and some experimental work continued. New plant was installed; drill, physical training and bayonet fighting formed much of the training, with ceremonial drill once a week, and from October to December training occupied one day per week. The Company's musketry results were good, and 36 men gained marksmanship, there being 49 first class and 47 second class shots. This left only one third class shot! The Company also won the Royal Maltese Artillery Challenge Cup and Malta Command Small Units Cup. Throughout the Summer, War Office height finding trials took place and necessitated three night runs a week from January to October. The Maltese section was trained as a crew at the Birkirkara Station, and trade training was carried out at the Fortress RE Workshops at Hornworks where two first class, 8 second class and 17 third class certificates were gained. They won the small units football league and came second in the Royal Maltese Artillery Open Mile and in both Water Polo leagues. No 1 Section won the Manton Trophy for inter section games and efficiency.

**31<sup>st</sup> March 1938.** The Company strength was 4 Officers and 185 Other Ranks, twenty of whom were Maltese.

**1938.** The musketry was even better and 71 men became marksmen, two now being 3<sup>rd</sup> class shots; 29 more men gained trades certificates at Hornworks, seven more Maltese were transferred from 24<sup>th</sup> Fort Company, the total now being 35, and the Company again visited Ghajn Tuffieha Camp where they built a machine gun emplacement in the side of the cliff near the camp site.

A swim from Marfa Point on Malta to the Island of Gozo was arranged, a distance of 4 miles, which 16 men managed to complete. The Company were runners-up in the Royal Life Saving Cup (Malta) and Sapper Broom was awarded the Royal Life Saving Association Certificate and No 2 Section won the Manton Trophy, keeping it in the Company. Intensive courses for Search Light Operators and Engine Drivers were carried out and 21 new arrivals from Palestine had to be trained from scratch.

During the 1938 Emergency period the Company occupied all 19 stations which were in a high degree of readiness, and the detachments remained in their stations after the situation had eased to improve maintenance and habitation.

**11<sup>th</sup> January 1939.** Captain R F Daniell transferred from 24<sup>th</sup> Fort Company, took over **16 Company**, and Major Galpin left for Staff duties.

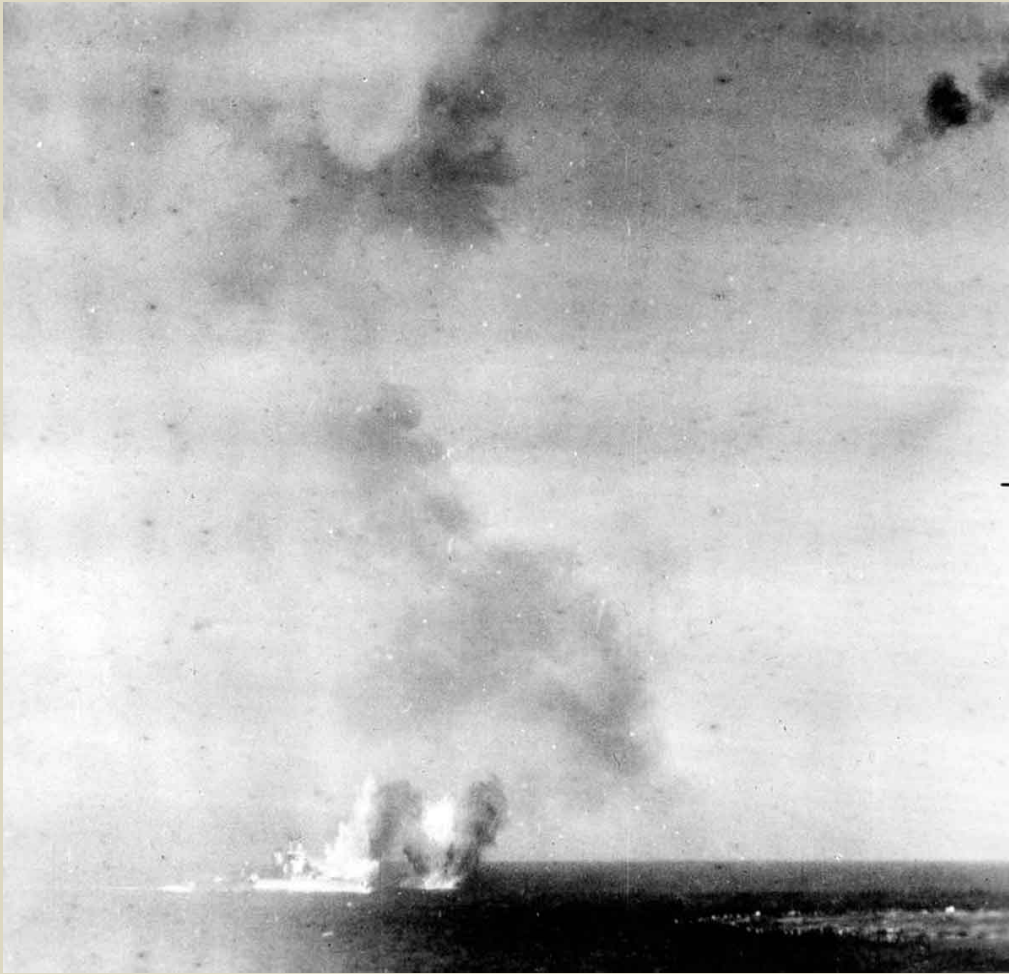
**1939.** A course for "Spotters and Listeners" was held during January and a Detachment Commander's course in March. They averaged three-night runs per week during the period of Anti-Aircraft Search Light training.

**31<sup>st</sup> March 1939.** The strength was 188 British Other Ranks and 50 Maltese, Lieutenant Jervis-Read was Second in Command and in charge of No 1 Section, Sergeant Quy commanded No 2 Section and Lieutenant Kent No 3 Section.

Later in 1939 and shortly after the outbreak of war, Major J E T Nelson, one of the Army's Searchlight experts, took over the Company. Major J E T Nelson, who later commanded 35 Army Engineer Regiment, in which **16 Field Squadron** was later to serve, came from the Anti-Aircraft Defence School, and his arrival signalled rapid developments in the island's Anti-Aircraft Search Light defences. The Royal Maltese Artillery reinforced the Company, while Malta was attacked by the Italian Regie Aeronautica (Italian Royal Air Force), immediately after they had declared war. From the very start the island's defences revealed superb teamwork and the keen preparation and training which had characterised their pre-war duties, brought rich and rapid results, which quickly removed the sting from the Italian attacks.

**December 1940.** The 40<sup>th</sup> Search Light Regiment was formed, and in **January 1941**, 484 Search Light Battery RA, originally a RE Search Light Company from South Wales, arrived as reinforcements. The Regiment was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel J E T Nelson and he was succeeded by Major P J Kent, who had been with the Company three years. This was indeed an RA/RE marriage and a happy one.

It was not long afterwards that Malta suffered the first large-scale night bombing attacks, and the Regiment took part in the now famous "battle" for HMS *Illustrious*.



10<sup>th</sup> January 1941 - HMS Illustrious attacked by dive bombers, in the Mediterranean off the Italian island of Pantelleria.

In the first action by German bombers in the Mediterranean, HMS Illustrious survived a ferocious attack including that of over 40 Ju-87's and Ju-88's, to make it to Malta.

*A bomb explodes on HMS Illustrious while another near miss lands next to her.*

1941. In the early months an infuriated Luftwaffe attacked the island night after night. Mines and bombs showered down in a vain endeavour to strike terror into the hearts of the people and the garrison alike, but the ruthless, vicious enemy was successfully baulked by the great work of the night defences.



*Tracer fire and shell bursts over Grand Harbour, Valetta, during a night air raid*



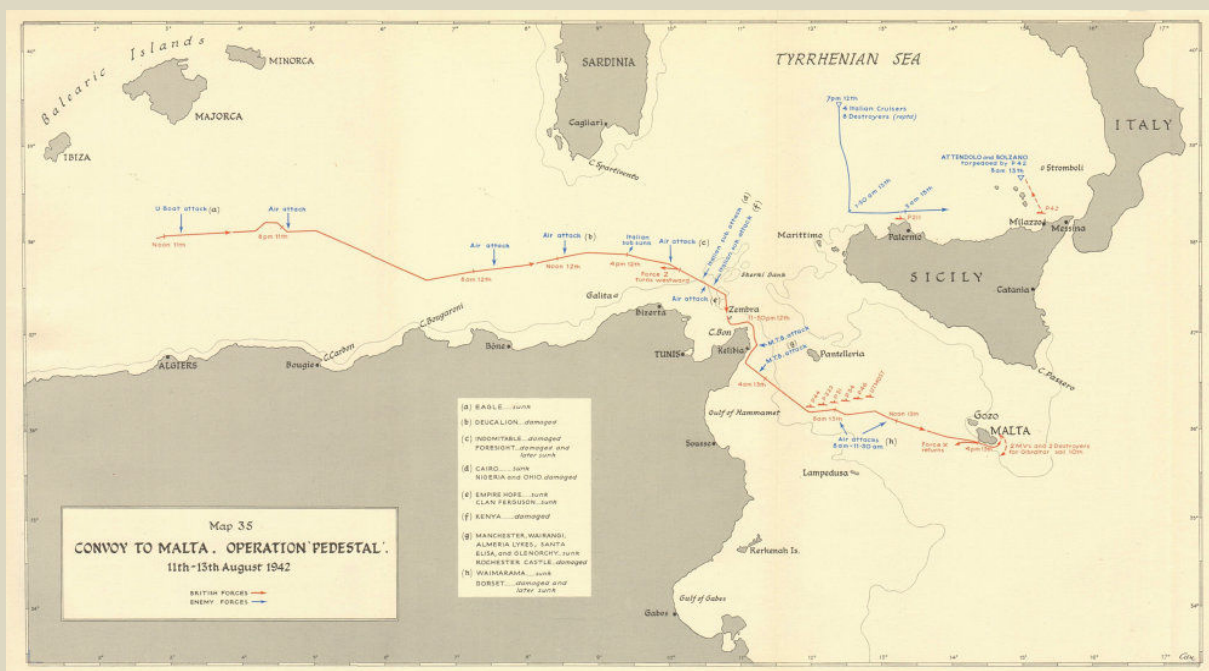


*15<sup>th</sup> January 1941 - Malta Endures Longest Air Raid*

The record of the **16<sup>th</sup> Fort Company** at this time was a great one, and the results achieved were beyond their expectations. The Germans made a second effort to beat down the island and its defenders by mass raids both day and night from **December 1941 to May 1942**, but the Company maintained its splendid record of success.

**March 1942.** Major D M L Slader took over command with Captain W L L Davies RA as his Second in Command. It is from the latter's record that much of the war time history of the Company is available.

**11-13<sup>th</sup> August 1942** Operation Pedestal was a British operation to carry supplies to the island of Malta. The Axis conducted the Siege of Malta, with air and naval forces. Despite many losses, enough supplies were delivered by the British for the population and military forces on Malta to resist, although it ceased to be an offensive base for much of 1942. The most crucial supply item in Operation Pedestal was fuel, carried by SS Ohio, an American tanker with a British crew. The convoy sailed from Britain on 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1942 and passed through the Strait of Gibraltar into the Mediterranean on the night of 9/10<sup>th</sup> August.



*11 - 13<sup>th</sup> August 1942 Convoy to Malta - Operation Pedestal*

The Axis attempt to prevent the fifty ships of the convoy reaching Malta using bombers, German E-boats (fast attack craft) (German: Schnellboot, or S-Boot, meaning "fast boat"), Italian MAS boats (torpedo-armed motorboat) (Motoscafo armato silurante) and MS (German-built boats of the Yugoslavian Navy, captured by the Italians in 1941, when their indexation was replaced from MAS to MS), minefields and submarine ambushes, was the last sizeable Axis success in the Mediterranean. More than 500 Merchant and Royal Navy sailors and airmen were killed and only five of the 14 merchant ships reached Grand Harbour.



*A heavily bomb-damaged street in Valletta, Malta. This street is Kingsway, the principle street in Valetta. Service personnel and civilians are present clearing up the debris.*

**November 1942.** The Allies landed in North Africa and the enemy's attacks abated. Naval convoys once again came down the Mediterranean and the 16<sup>th</sup> Fort Company joined in their jubilant reception.

Conditions improved steadily and by October 1943, with the enemy withdrawing up the leg of Italy, the Company with a RA Coastal Regiment and an Infantry Battalion were the first to leave the island for home.

The Company had gone into action over 3,300 times at night and had stood-to with small arms during the day raids also. The searchlights had also been used as homing beacons for our own aircraft and only, on very few nights towards the end of the battle, were our aircraft grounded.

Air Vice Marshal Forster Herbert Martin "Sammy" Maynard CB AFC, Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Pughe Lloyd, GBE, KCB, MC, DFC and Air Chief Marshal Sir Keith Rodney Park, GCB, KBE, MC & Bar, DFC, all paid tribute in Special Orders to the fine work of the Malta Searchlights. They broke all records by engaging and illuminating an enemy at 24,000 feet and they brought down an Me109 German fighter into the sea by rifle and Lewis gun fire.



*Lewis automatic light machine gun*



The Company Sergeant Major was awarded the George Medal, a Sapper the Military Medal and six men were Mentioned in Dispatches. Twelve men sadly lost their lives.

## ENGLAND AND EUROPE

**1944.** Early in the year the Company became the **16<sup>th</sup> Electrical and Mechanical Squadron** and consisted of a Headquarters Platoon and 5 Platoons which included many who had returned from Malta. Major C W Glannister took over command from Major Slader.

**6<sup>th</sup> June 1944.** The Company embarked and were “phased in” on D+3 on the beaches of Normandy, France. The work was varied and consisted of electrical and water installations in the many tented hospitals and the lighting of the beaches. Prisoner-of-War camps and Rest camps were also lit, and temporary lighting was installed in the civilian hospital, cinema, and theatre in Bayeux.

The Company, a Line of Communication unit in the 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group was employed over most of Normandy on servicing and maintenance work and in early 1945 moved up into Belgium and helped erect dock lighting in Antwerp.

**March 1945.** Major F A Richmond took command and in May 1945, after the conclusion of hostilities, the older men were posted home on demobilisation and were replaced by ‘younger blood’. They returned to England later that year and shortly after sailed for the Far East. It was during this phase of the War that 1879349, Sapper George L Gamage served in the Squadron. In **September 1945** he put down his memories on paper and these have been the basis of this history. Little is known of the final war time history of the Company, but in 1946 they were in India and after in SE Asia, presumably Burma or Malaya. In **October 1947** the Company, then 122 years old was placed in suspended animation.

**December 1955.** The Squadron embarked for Ripon and later moved to Marchwood and Aldershot prior to the Suez crisis in 1956. Following Israel’s attack on Egypt in November the Squadron embarked for Egypt arriving in Port Said on **10<sup>th</sup> November 1956.** **16 Squadron** was one of the first units ashore and its main task was the handling of cargo and ammunition from ships into barges and smaller craft. Several weeks later, with the evacuation of Egypt in progress, **16 Squadron** moved to Cyprus, once again with the main task of sorting out the huge mountain of stores arriving from Suez. When this task was completed the Squadron moved back to Ripon in **January 1957.**

## WEST GERMANY

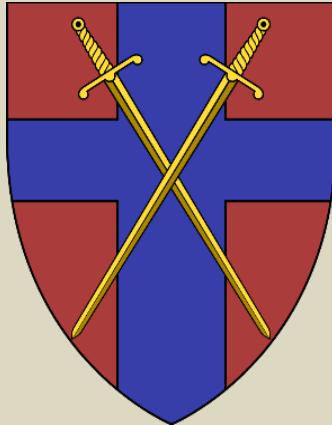
**September 1957.** The Squadron moved to Osnabruck in West Germany. For the next seven years the Squadron remained part of 35 Corps Engineer Regiment and in **1963** a Troop of the Squadron was sent to Yugoslavia following the destruction of Skopje by an earthquake where soldiers constructed emergency accommodation for the victims. Whilst some members of the Squadron worked on amphibious bridging vehicles (rigs) at Hameln in West Germany.



*An amphibious bridging vehicle crew on the Weser River at Hameln, West Germany  
Photo courtesy of 'Bromsgroveman' from the Sappers Site*

**1964.** The Squadron became part of 2 Division Engineers and was affiliated to 6 Infantry Brigade providing general combat engineer support.

**June 1967.** The Squadron provided the main element of an Engineer Task Force on one of the largest earth moving projects in the history of the Corps during the construction of a civilian airfield at Greven, near Osnabruck. Several personnel have recounted their memories of Greven, online at the 'Sapper Site for all Royal Engineers', listed under **16 Squadron**. Following the reorganisation of Royal Engineers in British Army of the Rhine the Squadron became part of 23 Engineer Regiment in **1967** and supported units of 4 Guards Armoured Brigade.



**1972.** The Squadron carried out a four-month tour in Belfast, Northern Ireland in the Infantry role as part of 23 Engineer Regiment Group.



*1972 - 16 Squadron at St Matthews Church, Newtownards Road, Belfast  
Back L to R: Jim Savage and Kev (Scouse) Manley. Front: (Scouse) Cooney  
Photo courtesy of Kevin Manley from the Sapper Site*

**1974.** They were again in Northern Ireland this time in Londonderry in the Engineer role in support of 8 Infantry Brigade.

**21<sup>st</sup> November 1975.** 16 Field Squadron RE marked its 150th Anniversary by producing a commemorative postal cover through the Philatelic Officer who was based at the Corps of Royal Engineers, RSME, Chatham, Kent. A limited amount of the covers was specially signed by Brigadier Peter J Kent OBE who was an Ex Officer Commanding of the Squadron. Each cover contained a short history of 16 Field Squadron which has been covered in this article. The cover was No 29 in a series of 60.





*Commemorative cover with signature of Brigadier Peter J Kent OBE*



*Commemorative cover without signature*

**1976.** Saw the amalgamation of 23 Engineer Regiment, 25 Engineer Regiment and 43 Field Support Squadron into 2 Armoured Division Engineer Regiment, and **16 Squadron** remained under the command of this new formation. The Regiment took part in four weeks of intensive field training exercises designed to prove the freshly organised formation. The successful exercise was named 'Spearpoint 1976' and as a result the Army Restructuring Plan went ahead with minor organisational changes.



*The formation of 2 Armoured Division Engineer Regt  
Photo courtesy of Mr Mick Hughes*

**October 1976.** The following text has been taken from Gateway Issue No.13 - Newspaper for British Soldiers and Families in Osnabrück and District.

“The Parade which took place in Roberts Barracks, Osnabrück, marked the end of the short history of 23 Engineer Regiment. It also closed the history of 25 Engineer Regiment which had been in existence since 1950. By the time the Field Squadrons had marched from the square, a new Regimental title had been given to the re-formed Parade: "2 Armoured Division Engineer Regiment."

The Parade and its ensuing Receptions in the Officers and Warrant Officers' Messes were the only events to mark the change of titles. Five squadrons occupied the square in an impressive parade during which the old Regiments saluted each other by firing a ceremonial volley into the air. After countermarching through the opposing ranks to arrive, the squadrons left the parade in their correct order of seniority and the new Regimental Flag was raised to a fanfare played by the Band of the Devonshire & Dorset Regiment. The Review of the Parade was carried out by Major General E M Mackay CBE.

**June 1977.** The Squadron departed with the Regiment for Northern Ireland. The Squadron was part of an Arms Group performing in an Infantry role, this was the first time this had ever happened to an Engineer Regiment. They returned from their patrols in Belfast City in **October 1977**.

**1978.** The Squadron successfully completed the last of almost 300 vehicle garages built as part of the project ‘Operation Tortoiseshell’.

**October 1979.** Saw the Squadron, under command of the Regiment, take up another infantry role in Northern Ireland and they returned from these duties in January 1980.

**January 1981.** 2 Armoured Engineer Division was redesignated 25 Engineer Regiment with **16 Squadron** under its command.

**May 1982 and April 1985.** Saw **16 Squadron** despatch a Troop of its men to Northern Ireland on a roulement tour under the command of the Chief Royal Engineer Northern Ireland.

**1986/1987** A tour of duty in the Falklands was carried out by **16 Squadron**.



*1986/87 Stanley Airfield Lifting M2 Matting  
Photo courtesy of 'arthurdaily' from the Sapper Site*

**August 1992.** **16 Squadron** was disbanded as part of the new round of Defence cuts.



# 16 Survey Support Squadron Royal Engineers

**6<sup>th</sup> June 1995.** The Commander 42 Survey Engineer Group, Colonel A P Walker OBE, identified the requirement for a Headquarters and Support Squadron. In consequence the Troop Commander of Support Troop, Captain N J Collins, researched the history of Military Survey and in particular consulted with Major (Retired) A Gordon, the Survey Historian, to identify which units had previously been a part of Military Survey but had been disbanded. It was decided that we would resurrect and number the Squadron, so it had significant meaning to the Military Survey organisation. All the old Squadron numbers of 19; 22; 32; 47 and of course 16 were considered. As 19 Squadron had only recently been disbanded and had reformed as 19 Specialist Team Royal Engineers it was decided that a complete change of numbers would be appropriate by adopting the third oldest designated number from the original Royal Sapper and Miner Companies. In December 1824 and April 1825, the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> respectively were formed to assist in the Trigonometrical Survey of Ireland. At this time, the authorities were so convinced by the good sense of employing Sappers and Miners on this work that it was decided to raise a third Survey Company which would be called the **16<sup>th</sup> Company**. All this staff work to reform the Squadron seemed very surreal at a time when the British Army was axing units due to Defence cuts.

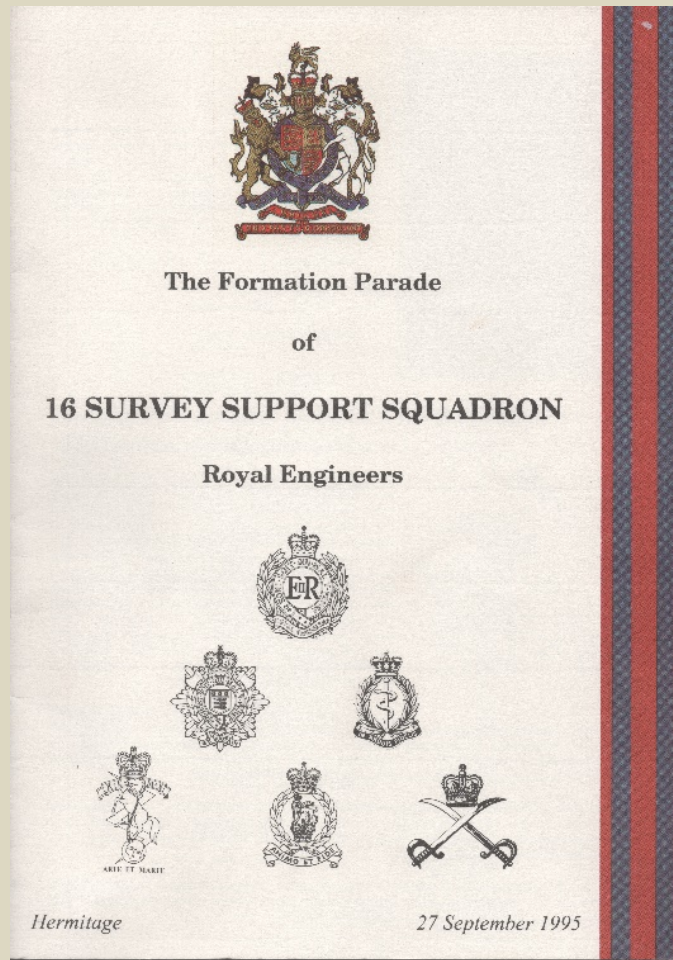
An approach was therefore made to the Regimental Colonel at Chatham, Colonel C P R Bates, to adopt the number 16 and the title Survey Support Squadron. After more staff work, a formal application was made to the British Army's Establishment Committee to form a new Squadron complete with a full equipment table. A General Staff Order dated the **31<sup>st</sup> July 1995** gave the authority for The Redesignation of a unit to **16 Survey Support Squadron**, with an operational effect date of **1<sup>st</sup> October 1995**.



A copy of the General Staff Order dated the 31<sup>st</sup> July 1995  
 in amongst some historic correspondence



**27<sup>th</sup> September 1995.** The Formation Parade of **16 Survey Support Squadron** was held at Denison Barracks, Hermitage, Berkshire.



The parade was reviewed by Major General R Wood, Colonel Commandant Royal Engineers, in the presence of Major General M P Wilson, the Director General Intelligence and Geographic Resources. On parade were contingents from 13 Squadron, under command of Captain J Adlington; Royal School of Military Survey, under command of Captain W Shay; and 16 Squadron, under command of Captain N J Collins. The Corps Band, under command of Captain A Chatburn was in attendance to add real flavour to a parade which was well attended by the military and civilian staff from Hermitage.



*Support Troop, 42 Survey Engineer Group march on parade*



*Civilian Staff and Families watch the parade*



*The Officers Perambulate'  
L to R: Captain W Shay, Captain NJ Collins, Captain J Adlington*



*The newly formed 16 Survey Support Squadron march past the Inspecting Officer – Major General R Wood*





*Inspection of the Squadron by Major General R Wood – Colonel Commandant RE*

## **SQUADRON STRENGTH AT FORMATION**

On the day of its formation 16 Survey Support Squadron had a strength of 8 Officers, 59 Soldiers and 58 Civilians.



*1995 - 16 Survey Support Squadron outside Headquarters 42 Survey Engineer Group at Hermitage*



42 Survey Engineer Group at Hermitage had to implement radical changes to its technical role by offering a return to mobile geographic support to the Field Army. It was clearly identified that the Group could not continue to churn out maps and charts from its printing presses from a static environment. The Geographic soldiers needed to work out of a mobile reproduction train – box bodies on vehicles containing terrain analysis equipment and a host of other high technology systems. To enable both 13 and 14 Squadrons to function there was a requirement for technical support at all levels and therefore **16 Squadron** had the capabilities to support that need.

**16 Survey Support Squadron** has behind it a solid and diverse history which represents many facets of the history of the Corps itself. Founded as a Survey Company it has morphed into many different roles over many years. It was with great pride that the number 16 was welcomed back into the establishment of 42 Survey Engineer Group in 1995.



**2000** The Squadron was renamed **16 Geographic Support Squadron Royal Engineers** in line with the renaming of the Regiment to 42 Engineer Regiment (Geographic). For the sake of Corps history, it is hoped that someone will now step forward and be inspired to write an article about the years that followed the Formation Parade. In recognition of the Corps Motto “Ubique” (Everywhere) and “Quo Fas et Gloria Ducunt” (Where right and glory lead) and Corps Regimental Quick March we need a volunteer!

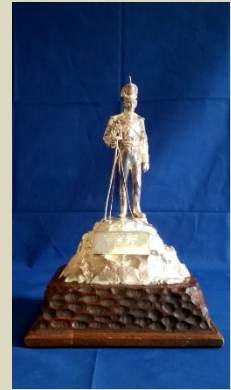
*Wings to bear me over mountain and vale away;  
Wings to bathe my spirit in morning’s sunny ray;  
Wings that I may hover at morn above the sea;  
Wings through life to bear me, and death triumphantly.*

*Wings like youth’s fleet moments which swiftly o’er me passed;  
Wings like my early visions, too bright, too fair to last;  
Wings that I might recall them, the loved, the lost, the dead;  
Wings that I might fly after the past, long vanished.*

*Wings to lift me upwards, soaring with Eagle flight;  
Wings to waft me heav’nwards to bask in realms of light;  
Wings to be no more wearied, lulled in eternal rest;  
Wings to be sweetly folded where Faith and Love are blessed.*

## STATUETTE OF A SAPPER

To enhance the Squadron's standing, research was also carried out into the Statuette of a Sapper standing on a rock with the Surveyor's theodolite and tripod because it was believed that this piece of silver, owned by the Corps of Royal Engineers, was directly affiliated to the Squadron. The statuette was commissioned by the Officers of 23 Engineer Regiment and presented to **16 Field Squadron** on the occasion of their 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary on the **20<sup>th</sup> October 1975**. It was created by E Barnard and Co of London and since the disbandment of **16 Field Squadron** in **1992** had been displayed at 35 Engineer Regiment. After some careful negotiations between the Corps, 35 Engineer Regiment and **16 Survey Support Squadron** it was agreed that the statuette would be aligned to the newly formed Squadron. It was collected by Colonel Peter Walker during one of his trips to visit Survey soldiers in BAOR. It now takes pride of place at Regimental dinners when it sits in front of the Officer Commanding **16 Squadron** in the Officers' Mess and in front of the Squadron Sergeant Major **16 Squadron** in the Warrant Officer's and Sergeant's Mess.



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### Source Materials

1. *History of the Corps of Royal Sappers and Miners from the formation of the Corps in March 1772 to the date when its designation was changed to that of Royal Engineers in October 1856, Volume I, Second Edition with considerable additions by Thomas William John Connolly – Quartermaster of the Royal Engineers. Published by Longman, Brown, Green, Longman and Roberts in London 1857. (Special reference should be made to 1825-1826, pages 263 – 268). Copy available from Google E Books.*
2. *Jackson's Woolwich Journal - dated 1<sup>st</sup> September 1860. (Full reference not found).*
3. *An article from the Sapper Magazine by Warrant Officer Class 2 E J Harris RE, dated Jun 1946. (Excerpt extraction)*
4. *An article from the Sapper magazine by Sapper G L Gamage, dated April 1962.*
5. *Internet: The Sappers Site For all Royal Engineers – 16 Squadron – Pocket History of 16<sup>th</sup> Field Squadron by Major RB Hill from information supplied by Derek Stevenson and a variety of information posted by ex-members of 16 Field Squadron.*
6. *The Formation of 16 Survey Support Squadron Royal Engineers Programme, dated 27<sup>th</sup> September 1995.*
7. *Directorate of Army Staff Duties, Ministry of Defence – General Staff Order – The Redesignation of a Unit, dated 31<sup>st</sup> July 1995.*

**OFFICERS COMMANDING  
16 SURVEY SUPPORT SQUADRON**

Capt N J COLLINS RE	Oct 95 – Dec 95
Lt Col G C PARKES RE	Dec 95 – Nov 97
Maj A KEELEY RE	Nov 97 – Nov 99
Maj J P SMITH RE	Nov 99 – Nov 00

**OFFICERS COMMANDING  
16 GEOGRAPHIC SUPPORT SQUADRON**

Maj J P SMITH RE	Nov 00 – Jul 01
Maj N D MARKS RE	Jul 01 – Jan 03
Maj C P SLADDEN RE	Jan 03 – Aug 04
Maj D L ROWLANDS RE	Aug 04 – Sep 06
Maj P E GAUCI RE	Sep 06 – May 08
Capt S J FAIRNINGTON RE	May 08 – Aug 08
Maj A W SWAIN RE	Aug 08 – Sep 10
Maj A M WILLIAMS RE	Dec 10 – Nov 12
Capt D R BRAND RE	Nov 12 – Mar 13
Maj A D RUDD RE	Mar 13 – Jun 15
Maj M A BUGLASS RE	Jun 15 – Feb 17
Capt L N WYATT RE	Feb 17 – Jul 17
Maj R TEARLE RE	Jul 17 – Jul 19
Maj G McCREA RE	Aug 19 –

Several Officers Commanding have kindly agreed to provide details of their time with 16 Survey/Geographic Support Squadron, which are recorded below: -

**Major (Retired) Tony Keeley RE  
Officer Commanding 16 Survey Support Squadron  
November 1997 - November 1999**



In early 1997 I returned from a two-year tour as a Liaison Officer to the then Defence Mapping Agency in St Louis. I was posted to 42 Survey Engineer Group as SO2 Ops Trg where I expected to have two years in post. However, things did not turn out as expected when the Commander informed me that I was to take over command of 16 Svy Sp Sqn. This news was not received with unalloyed joy as a somewhat long in the tooth major aged 52 years! But as always you just get on with it. Mind you in the same conversation I was also told that I was to take over as PMC the following week, my Ops Captain, Mark Huish, to be the Mess Secretary, all a bit of a turmoil as Lt Col Jeff Parkes and Maj Robin Lewin (OC and 2IC of 16 Svy Sp Sqn) were also PMC and Mess Sec of the Officers' Mess respectively. I was more than happy to take over as PMC, an appointment I had held at Feltham – always avoiding the more onerous mess appointments such as Mess Sec or Treasurer!

Back to the Squadron, this comprised, much as Nick Collins had established, MT, REME, Cooks etc before it assumed a more technical role under Maj Jerry Smith. I cannot recall too much of the detail of 16 Sqn activities as after all we supported! Life was relatively quiet, enlivened by a Group exercise when the complete unit deployed to Germany, it would be the last time this happened. I have to admit that initially the Mess took more of my time than the Squadron. I recall the Sgts to Officers' Mess games night. The Entertainments Member, an Australian Exchange Officer (or possibly Long Look) organised the event which started with all doors to the Mess being locked hence the opposition had to scale ladders on to the roof of the Mess and then they had to jump down into the foyer via a skylight – the fall being broken by thick mats from the gym.



Prior to the event I spoke to the QM about protecting the skylight rim – his response being that I should not go ahead. I ignored his advice, purposely neglecting to inform the Commander and all went well with a hail of Sgts tumbling into the Mess in the rain. The highlight of the evening was jousting, respective PMCs on the backs of Commander and RSM, fortunately the Commander was a rather large individual who ‘took out’ the opposition through weight rather than skill!

Of course a usual feature of unit life was the BFT and a certain Major (who could have doubled for Capt Mannering) asked a few of us to make sure he got round in a good time hence the QM, Lt Col Nick Winder, Robin Lewin and myself ‘beasted’ the said officer to within inches of his life, but he did get round within the time limit! Such behaviour these days would no doubt result in Court Martial. Life was shall we say more robust then, for instance, Pre-Christmas Landrover trailer races through the plantation resulting in numerous spills.

Going back to the Group exercise to Germany, we operated in conjunction with the French and though we were ‘dry’, the French could be easily heard, during convoy moves by the copious clinking of glass bottles. The UK players were 13 Sqn, 14 Sqn and 19 STRE. My role was not onerous, looking after visitors and the said gentleman (him of the Capt Mannering look alike) and myself mooched round camp in our ‘combat cardies’ with little else to do. Capt Mannering did however liven ops briefings with his impersonation of General Patton, much to the amusement of the audience but not necessarily finding great favour with the Commander!

The two years in post passed quickly and both Capt Mannering and myself ended up back at Feltham with our dogs and me once again as PMC for the Mess closure!

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**Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) Neil Marks RE**  
**Officer Commanding 16 Geographic Support Squadron**  
**July 2001 - January 2003**

The eighteen-month period as OC of 16 Geographic Support Squadron was enjoyable, challenging and rewarding, but heavily affected by the events of 9/11, an attack that fundamentally changed the world and influenced much of our activities thereafter. The organisational structure of the Squadron did not change fundamentally, but did see the implementation of the programme to implement the new Data Preparation Cell, within the Field Support Section (FSS), to provide up to date merged datasets of information for operations in a more timely and co-ordinated and consolidated manner.

Operationally we saw an increase in deployments, by individuals from within the Squadron teams. The Air Survey Liaison Section, a sub-unit under Command of 16 Squadron and based at RAF Marham, undertook a successful deployment to Seeb air base in Oman. Working on the ageing Canberra aircraft they were supporting operations over Afghanistan to locate members of Al-Qaeda and to monitor their team actions and modus operandi. The planning that went into each mission was meticulous as the aircraft were working at the limits of their range and capability. It was at this time we saw and experienced the full United States (US) logistical and deployment teams that support operations. On visiting Oman with the Squadron Sergeant Major (SSM), Stuart Batey, we saw first-hand the UK troops living in World War Two-like tents, with primitive air conditioning based on simply opening the side-flap of the tent. This was in stark contrast to the United States deployed personnel, who were just excavating an area for a swimming pool as they stepped out of their fully air-conditioned offices and accommodation!

The Specialist Support Team (SST) also saw a significant up-tick in activities and exercises. This followed a live operation on a vessel in the English Channel, a first having been a land-based capability and entity up until that point. Several exercises followed with various regional police forces with a full-blown activation seeing a deployment to Inverness. The integration of all the UK nuclear, biological, radiological, and chemical accident response team capabilities saw increased demand for our products and technical expertise. That said, it was reported in the local papers that we were working in conjunction with Navy SEAL teams and other specialists whilst in Inverness. The live operation also led to the requirement for all the SST team to undertake Top Rope and Abseiling course and ‘dunker’ training. Led by the Squadron 2IC, Nathan Arnison, all of the teams ‘went under’ in the mock helicopter, which hilariously saw him getting stuck and having to be recovered by the Navy divers. The individual members of the SST also undertook personal projects to enhance and improve every team capability.

This included working with the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE), the providers of new 'ice cream wagon's', new processes and procedures, improved motorbikes and IT equipment working alongside the FFS staff. The impact of these projects was significant, with international and national recognition of the change and improvement they brought to bear, best demonstrated in the award of an MBE to Cpl Rob Raphael.

A full Squadron exercise was also planned and implemented at Tregantle Fort, Torpoint. Every team from the Squadron HQ, the Workshop, the SST, FSS, MT and ASLS and members of the QM's Department all deployed to Plymouth for two weeks. This included use of the ranges, an escape and evasion exercise, survival techniques, adventurous training activities and a final assault on the Fort, led by Potential Geo Technicians in a reversal of command roles and responsibilities. It was a successful and enjoyable period, organised by the Squadron 2IC, who had an overly healthy relationship with pyrotechnics and a desire to create explosions on a large scale at every opportunity.

Under the guidance of the SQMS, Andy Hill, the Potential Geographic Technicians were held within the Squadron in the period between completing the basic engineer training and starting their Class Two courses. A structured programme was followed, which included a number of visits to the Corps Museum to research the Squadron history, much of which is catalogued within the other articles in this series to celebrate the twenty-five years of the Squadron.

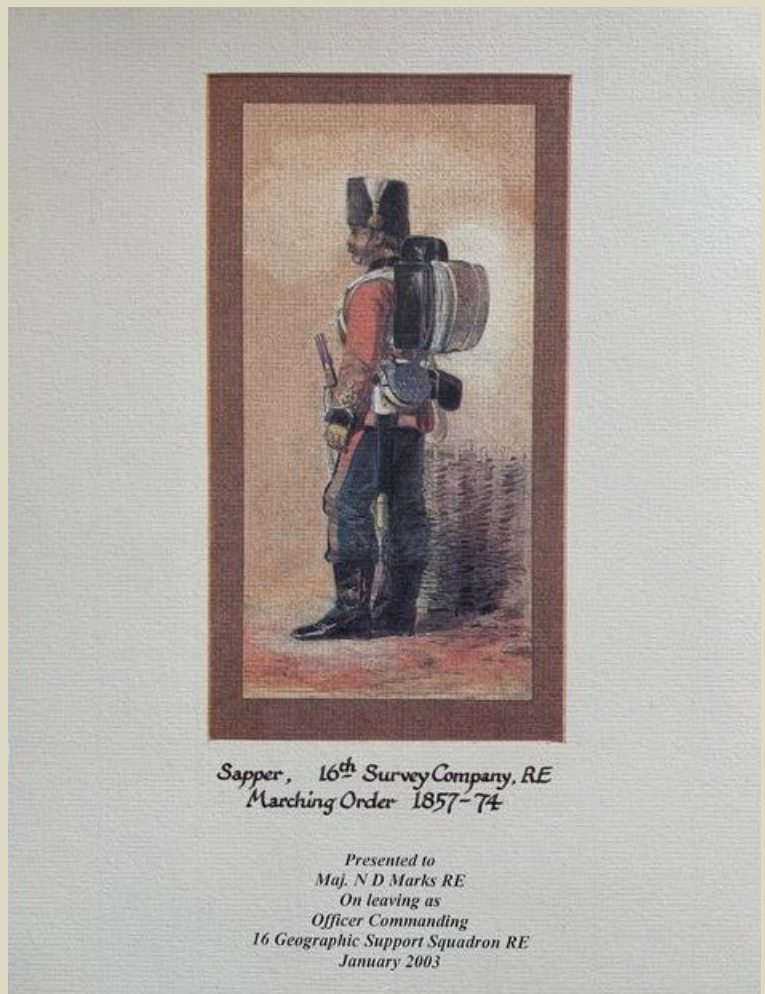
It was their research that found the oldest picture held of a sapper from the original 16<sup>th</sup> Field Squadron. This was reproduced and became the Squadron leaving present reflecting the long and distinguished history within the Corps.

Sadly, within my time as OC we also lost some dear friends and colleagues. The impact of losing Cpl 'Gel' Frain, hit the MT Section hard and the wider Corps and Army, given his considerable talents. The subsequent loss of Nathan 'Arnie' Arnison, although occurring after leaving the Squadron, has also left a hole in the wider Geographic Engineer family, yet both will always be remembered for their significant contributions and character.

The Squadron motto at the time was 'No cuff to tough' and was based on everyone, across the varied disciplines and teams that collectively made up the Squadron, following the basic tenets of communication, understanding and fun. This was borne out in every activity we undertook. This included a non-stop run in teams of two from London to Paris. The team featured on 'South Today' and raised significant funds for the Royal British Legion and a local charity. The whole team running down the Champs Elysée and being hosted by the British Ambassador for breakfast was a highlight, as was the free evening reception from Peter Stringfellow! Our SSM, Dave Campey, has still not forgiven me.

The Squadron also organised and led the battlefield tour to Belgium, which was an excellent cultural experience for many, although certain elements follow the adage of 'what goes on tour stays on tour'. It was also an honour and a privilege to lead the Squadron, as always guided by the SSM, up the High Street in Newbury, as part of the wider Regimental Freedom Parade.

A busy but thoroughly enjoyable eighteen months and one I look back upon with fond memories, pride in our collective achievements and knowing we certainly followed as a Squadron the Corps 'Ubique' motto.





## 16 GEOGRAPHIC SUPPORT SQUADRON RE



*16 Geographic Support Squadron RE  
Led by their Officer Commanding Maj. ND Marks  
Newbury Remembrance Parade  
November 2001*

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### **Major (Retired) Dave Rowlands RE Officer Commanding 16 Geographic Support Squadron August 2004 - September 2006**

10 years after 16 Geographic Support Squadron was reformed, and after many Officers and Soldiers had passed through the Squadron leaving their mark and contributing to its history, I offer this little 'ditty' to add some detail to the period 2004/2006. I include a lovely picture of the Squadron taken pretty much in the same spot where the re-formed Squadron had its first photo taken under the command of Captain Nick Collins in 1995.

I assumed command of the Squadron from Major Charlie Sladden in the summer of 2004. The Squadron Sergeant Major at that time was Warrant Officer Class 2 Al McGrath and the Squadron 2IC was Captain Neil Chapman. All three of us being Ex Chepstow Boys! (Dave 85', Al 84' and Neil 80' intakes). Even our Squadron Quartermaster Sergeant (SSgt 'Si' Sommerville) was Chepstow '86 intake.

The Squadron was still dispersed across Hermitage Station with the mandate to manage the Medical Centre, REME Workshop, Gymnasium, and the Military Transport Green/White fleets. Of course, 16 Geographic Support Squadron also had the mandate for administering the Regimental Headquarters and Geographic Engineer Group staff. 16 Geographic Support Squadron not only had a unique mandate and role, but still comprised a very diverse team of civilian, military and contractor staff as it did on its reformation in 1995.

16 Geographic Support Squadron Headquarter offices still had the best views on station looking out over 'Gods Acres' to the north east. Gods acres, to be more specific, were actually Staff Sergeant 'Nige' Wiscombe's (Senior Instructor Physical Training) soccer and cricket fields where no soldier (or officer!) dare walk without being in PT kit! The Gym staff were at the centre of everything on Hermitage Station with Nige keeping things running whilst LCpl 'Bruno' Green went off to play rugby for the Army team every week.

The three 'Geo' sections in the Squadron continued to play a key role in domestic and expeditionary operations.





# 16 Geographic Support Squadron

42 Engineer Regiment (Geographic)  
Geographic Engineer Group  
June 2005



Mr Pegg, Mr Dawes, LCpl Sparkes, LCpl Dunn, Col Campton, Spr Millan, Sgt Kieras, Sgt Hindle, Cpl Medlock, Cpl Parsons, SSgt Washington, Sgt Powley, Cfn Carwithen, LCpl Loynes, Cfn Calif, LCpl Murphy, Cpl Hodson, Mr Pocock  
Mr Luscombe, Spr Evenill, LCpl Ashcroft, Sgt Kelly, Spr Hartshorne, Cpl Lappin, Spr Wilson, Cpl Jeffery, LCpl Childs, Sgt Fullstone, Cpl Wright, LCpl Davison, Spr Warrington, Sgt Churcher, Mr Campbell, Mr Lawes  
Mr Salvoni, LCpl Green, Cpl Needham, Cpl Duffin, SSgt Hamilton, LCpl Lucas, Cpl Bentham, Sgt Halley, Cpl Daniel, Cpl Hart, Cpl Cheyney, LCpl Anderson, LCpl Maton, LCpl Westrope, Sgt Wilson, Mr Wiscombe, Mr Williams  
Miss Dean, WO2 Barclay, WO2 Benson, Capt Michaud, WO2 McGrath, Maj Rowlands, Capt Chapman, WO2 Buglass, Mrs Nailor, Mrs Allum  
(MFWO) (ADMIS) (OIC FSS) (SSM) (OC) (2IC) (WO FSS)



The Field Support Section (FSS) headed up by Canadian Exchange Officer Captain Yannick Michaud had Warrant Officer Class 2 Mark Buglass as his 2IC at the time. Later Mark Buglass commissioned and commanded the Squadron himself. Captain Michaud went on to be a Colonel and command the Canadian Forces Intelligence Support Group. Field Support Section had all the 'IT Geeks' who provided first class equipment support to the Regiment. Dave Pegg (Retired Warrant Officer Class 2) having his hand in all the technical stuff and teaching the 'young' lads when he wasn't off diving, and of course, being in good health in those years. Captain Michaud was sent to the Falklands to conduct a 'recce' for 4 weeks as a swan song before he returned to Canada that summer and then handed over to Captain Al York.

The Data Management Team headed up by Alex Salvoni with Sgt Dave Fullstone were always at hand to help, they continued to push the envelope and lead with data transformation, management and archiving best practices. I remember their frustration with the fact that data would be returned to Hermitage from far and wide operations on individual CDs that only stored 700Mbs!

Special Survey Team (SST) was commanded by Captain Paul Hammet who handed over to ex Regimental Sergeant Major, Captain 'Dick' Barton in 2005 continued to be 'the' section where everyone wanted to be posted! Being on '4hrs Notice To Move and 12hrs Notice To Move had its disadvantages, however they were outweighed by the operational importance of the section, not to mention spending most of your time in civvies, in hotels, driving high tech rapid response vehicles and of course all the extra money made through claims!

The summer of 2004 saw the Squadron receive its approval to establish the Squadron bar, by autumn 2004 "the Friday afternoon watering hole" for 16 Geographic Support Squadron staff and the wider Regimental Headquarters and Geographic Engineer Group Headquarters was opened. More effort went into that project than any other project in the history of the Squadron! However, it soon became the Squadron's 'home' and many events, meetings, briefings, and promotions, were conducted in that little corner of Hermitage Station where beer was cheap! Even previous Officer Commanding showed up occasionally (hey Nick?). It was also the staging point for many trips to Twickenham and Wembley.



It was in the bar where we entertained the Canadian Delegation who visited from the Mapping and Charting Establishment, Ottawa in the winter of 2004. Four Non-Commissioned Officers headed up by then Sergeant Joe Smidtz collaborated with 16 Squadron Data Management Team to exchange operational data. Squadron bar profits soared that week and many an officer and soldier were chastised by their wives for 'working late' each night!

The one event that clouded the history of 16 Squadron in 2004 was the very tragic death of Corporal Ian Wilson. Corporal Wilson was working in the Quartermaster's Department at the time of his tragic accident, on the notoriously dangerous B4009 driving to Newbury with his wife and very young daughter. His wife was badly injured, but incredibly, their daughter escaped unscathed. 16 Squadron hosted a very sombre memorial service in the Gymnasium where Lieutenant Colonel Mark Burrows, as the Commanding Officer of the Regiment, delivered a fruitful eulogy, perhaps being a little too open and honest at times!

In July 2005, 16 Geographic Support Squadron was tasked with providing support to the multi-agency security forces for the G8 Summit in Gleneagles, Scotland. Major Rowlands and Warrant Officer Class 2 McGrath headed up a small team on site and initiated what is possibly the first domestic, large volume print task, remotely and digitally.

The security perimeter plan for the Gleneagles estate had not been defined and with the imminent arrival of world leaders (Including President George Bush Junior) 16 Squadron saved the day by rapidly producing a small gridded imagery product with the location of all the security points and emailed it to Defence Geographic Centre at Feltham for the production of 6000 copies that were printed and shipped back to Scotland within 24 hours. Over 1200 police officers used the 16 Squadron product as part of their shift changes.



Lieutenant Colonel Rupert Dash took command of the Regiment in summer 2005. Lieutenant Colonel Dash spent many hours in 16 Squadron lines playing with the systems and 'messing' around with the data management teams. Hiding behind the simplex door locks where the adjutant couldn't find him!



I have wonderful, positive memories of my time commanding 16 Geographic Support Squadron. The diversity of the Squadron team was very special. Their loyalty, friendship and comradeship were second to none. My favourite activity was 'walking the lines' with Squadron Sergeant Major Andy Hill on Friday afternoons. Drinking tea in the Gym, the MT and the REME hangers as we went about our way. Listening to stories, jokes and of course the occasional whine or complaint from the most junior of soldiers who were learning the ropes. I can still taste the grease on the REME tea mug as I type this.....:)

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**Major (Retired) Tish Gauci RE**  
**Officer Commanding 16 Geographic Support Squadron**  
**September 2006 - May 2008**

I would like to start off by thanking Major (Retd) Nick Collins, the first OC of what was then 16 Survey Support Squadron for contacting previous OCs to put together the history of this fine Squadron in its first 25 years. My initial recollection of the Squadron was is one of being incredibly busy, a diverse organisation with many different cap-badges and civilians working within it, but a special organisation and a happy place to work.

I assumed command of 16 Squadron from Major Dave Rowlands in August 2004, just before he emigrated to Canada. The Squadron 2IC at the time was Captain Neil Chapman; he was later replaced by Captain Stu Fairnington, who I handed over to for a few months towards the end of my 2 year posting as I went on maternity leave to have our second child. I was grateful to be supported by two very talented SSMs, Warrant Officer Class 2 Tiny Simmonds and then Si New.

Remembering what the Squadron was up to 12/14 years ago has been challenging; I left the Army in 2012 so have been somewhat reliant on information found in my military boxes stashed in the loft – I knew I had kept all that 'stuff' for a reason!! The Squadron was of course based at Hermitage although significant planning had already started for the Regiment's move to RAF Wyton. On paper, the Squadron was the largest in the Regiment, although was always undermanned.

At the time of command, the Squadron was still heavily supporting Afghanistan and Iraq. The Field Support Section, commanded by Captain Al York, and later Jim Danks, was at the time responsible for the management and maintenance of over 280 systems. It was the era of DATAMAN, and the effectiveness of FSS support was being eroded, brought on by the unbelievable pace of new system builds. As a result of these new builds, between June 2006 and December 2007, the number of systems that the FSS was responsible grew by 27% - no mean feat for such a small team! It is worth noting that the TACISYS programme to support JAGO was also run and managed by Dave Pegg.

The Specialist Support Team (SST) was as active as ever; commanded initially by Capt Dick Barton and later by Capt Julian Mitchell (the only other DE officer in the Squadron and who deployed to Afghanistan a few months after arriving). This bespoke team of 12 was responsible for providing geographic support to Military and Government Agencies who supported the Counter Terrorist CBRN threat and the Nuclear Accident Response Organisation with the UK. The team were invariably on exercise, such as Ex Hot Sands and for me, exercising at Gold Command was a new and fascinating challenge.

The Geographic Support Team (GST) was managed by Alex Salvoni whose role was to maintain and develop the operational capability of the Geographic Support Team. This was set up to manage the collation, preparation, and dissemination of digital geographic data in response to tasking from Regimental Ops. A significant amount of time was spent coordinating support to the Op HERRICK dataset, but my main memory is one of constantly running out of data space: by the time a requirement for data storage was looked at, the space requested was already obsolete. I remember that the team at the time had 6 TB of data storage space and had requested 12 TB, which at the time was seen as excessive!

The Commanding Officer at the time was Lt Col Rupert Dash – a fitness and in particular, cycling fanatic who was later to leave the Army and emigrate to New Zealand. 16 Squadron supported his Tour de France expedition, from providing MT support on the trip to the REME personnel making bike racks to be able to transport the bikes out to France. I have never done so many 10 mile runs and Regimental PT sessions! The Regimental infantry-based Exercises also come to mind as I, and many others had to re-familiarise ourselves with infantry tactics, assault courses and sleeping under a basher!

During my tenure, BOWMAN (the Army's new tactical communications system) was being implemented across the Army, something that those from the REME Wksps were particularly involved in providing support to the specialist equipment, and also involved in providing training as part of the Regiment's commitments to the BOWMAN project.

Recollections of the Squadron are one of constant change, and it seemed that hardly a Friday went by without saying goodbye to another member of the Squadron in the bar, the envy of the rest of the Station, and of course congratulating someone on promotion. The Squadron did manage a number of range and AT camps: Tenby and coast-steering in particular sticks to mind in September 2007; we shared the camp with the unit with which HRH Prince William served which of course to the Squadron just meant extra guard duties! Other Exercises included Fougasse Rising and Fougasse Ride.



*Sgt Paul Hurst with Major Tish Gauci*

So many years on and 10 years out of the army, my detailed memory of what the Squadron achieved during this time is rather thin, but I hope I have built a picture of a thriving, busy organization. It was one which was always rather stretched, particularly supporting 2 major operations but one which was thriving and where people enjoyed working, whether doing close survey work in SST, the civilian drivers, building and maintaining the huge number of Geo systems deployed far and wide, or running the JNCO cadre and being responsible for the potential geographic technicians. I was very lucky to work with such talented individuals who have gone on to have very successful careers and for which I am very grateful. And finally, here is to the future of 16 Geographic Support Squadron, in whatever format it takes, and more female officers being selected for its command!



**Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) Stuart Fairnington RE**  
**Officer Commanding 16 Geographic Support Squadron**  
**May 2008 - August 2008**

As 2IC, 16 Geo Sp Sqn, for the four-month period, May – Aug 2008, between the departure of Maj Tish Gauci and the arrival of Maj Andy Swain, I had the honour of covering the OC post.

16 Geo Sp Sqn was an eclectic mix of sections and teams that, whilst conducting unique tasks and providing essential support to other Regimental sub-units and the RE(Geo) elements across Defence, gelled together well to make the Sqn a thoroughly enjoyable and interesting place to work. An advantage of the strong leadership within each section/team and their relatively autonomous nature, and the well-established (i.e. old in the tooth) headquarters team, was that a gap in sub-unit leadership, such as the OC, caused minimal disruption.

I remember the three-month period as being fairly uneventful and Maj Andy Swain was able to inherit a sub-unit in reasonably good order (although, this is my completely biased opinion!).

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**Lieutenant Colonel Andy Swain RE**  
**Officer Commanding 16 Geographic Support Squadron**  
**August 2008 - September 2010**

Officer Commanding 16 Geographic Support Squadron was a fantastic job I look back on with fondness. Manned with skilled and experienced officers and soldiers who focus on disparate troop/dept responsibilities it was a challenge to maintain cohesion but never morale. 16 Sqn's mix of cap badges and focussed activities made it competitive for professional pride and created a fun-loving, energetic, and proactive place to work.

Alongside its ongoing support responsibilities, the Sqn also had to evolve. SST was threatened with being removed from the UK SJC force when 2IC SJC was convinced a US black box technology could replace SST. Needing evidence to defend its place we sent our most experienced operators to the US to take part in trials and exercises using the kit and comparing it to the SST capability. The team returned not only with evidence to prove the limitations of the US tech solution but a range of procedures and additional techniques that were used to professionalise the SST capability and enhance its capability. SST's place as a key capability within SJC was assured.

GST also evolved and after establishing the need to enhance the support to troops deployed on HERRICK, the team sprouted a new capability, the Geospatial Analysis Support Cell (GASC), in order to advise on analytical process, provide coding and workflows and conduct analytical work in support of heavier taskings. GASC added yet another capability to the Sqn's powerful set of support functions.

In summer 09, the Sqn ran the Regt JNCO Cadre at Browndown Camp, Portsmouth and called in some favours on the final exercise to have a beach landing and fort assault.

It was also a period when the Regt did a lot together. We had two Regt training exercises each year. One was in Sep 08 just after my arrival, a full-on infantry exercise, crossing a typically miserable Dartmoor in sections made up of all ranks from Spr to Maj. It was a tough exercise but a good one to get to know the Sqn personalities up close. I seem to remember Sergeant Major Si New having to monitor Sgt 'wide boy' Richardson as radio op; the SPTI trying to avoid the headset messing up his hair...

The Regimental technical exercises were where the Sqn could really showcase its skills. SST had to deal with booby trapped house's, while the REME and MT Dets practised vehicle recovery drills, FST had to set up and maintain training LANs in the field while GST furnished the data, MT would bring in vehicles for familiarisation training, the QMs and Chef depts would do their thing and SHQ would escort visitors around site to show off the troop activities.

Squadron Comd is all about doing the right thing and I remember the choices made over maximising the number of Sections in the Regimental Section Competition to maximise the training value rather than field a single perfect team in pursuit of a win. And the harder choice to deal with unfit for duty, providing the opportunity for recovery but ultimately to dismiss soldiers.

The Sqn always enjoyed adventurous training and we followed a winning formula in the Lake District of kayaking, mountain biking, hiking and via feratta. The Sqn also established a series of Regt fitness competitions. Modelled on the “Superstars” show of the 80s including a bench press, a painful jerry can carry and the power bag Land Rover load.

Other team building activities included an interesting MACC task on an estate near Dumfries. The Sqn built a raised walkway and bridge to designs, and with resource, organised by our erstwhile SQMS, SSgt ‘Slobs’ Hamilton.

Alongside the good times, there were the sad. I lost my friend Nathan Arnison on 1 Aug 09. Cpl Scott Davies died not long after leaving the Sqn and WO2 Peter ‘Ginge’ Cukic lost his long fight with illness.

The Sqn took part in the Freedom of Newbury Parade in summer 2010 where it seemed the whole of Newbury came out to show their support on a warm July morning.

16 Sqn is a unique command, each department has a core function that it applies in support of the Regt, of deployed troops, of the garrison and of UK ops. It is also staffed with a more mature team, professional and focused on their troop tasks but loyal team members of Sqn activities. I remember fondly, many an evening in the Sqn bar and enjoyed the banter and comradery across cap badge and team, but my favourite memory of the squadron is a tug of war competition at the end of Ex FOUGASSE RETURNS where every team member was a different rank and represented almost every department, all pulling together to defeat the enemy ... 13 Sqn.

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**Major (Retired) Andy Williams RE**  
**Officer Commanding 16 Geographic Support Squadron**  
**December 2010 - November 2012**

Where is the least bad place to shoot down a plane over London? A Memoir of 16 Sqn 2010-2012.

Under Op Entirety the Army had only one mission - the war in Afghanistan. 16 Sqn was committed to that mission every bit as much as 13 and 14, we just had a bunch of other priority one tasks that needed to be done at the same time.

At this time, the Squadron consisted of: The REME LAD, MT, Signals, SST, FSS, GST, GASC and OISG Tp. Approximately 100 Military and 20 civilian staff.

### **The London Riots**

Most of 16 Sqn work for someone else which gives the OC a bit of head space to come up with good ideas. So, after two weeks in the Dominican Republic where the news had mostly been about looting and burning in Tottenham, I was full of them. Steve Day from SST may have been in the wrong place at the wrong time, but he took up the challenge and produced an outstanding analysis that resulted in an invitation to Scotland Yard to brief the DAC level in the Met Police. A combination of background human terrain mapping, live geolocation of social media and basic terrain analysis could have led to the Met protecting the right branch of Boots instead of the one that got trashed. Mass urban disorder is an increasingly likely scenario in the UK and overseas operations, I hope someone has taken this work on so Geo can better advise commanders of the future.

### **Libya**

A classic Friday afternoon phone call, this time it was Mitch at HQ DSF. The Non-combatant evacuation operation (NEO) of UK personnel from a collapsing Libya was being coordinated by the Foreign Office. The coordination centre in Whitehall was manned by volunteer civil servants, who were unable to identify the locations that UK Entitled Persons (EP) were calling from. If special forces were to conduct recovery missions, then they would need to know where to go. After a quick call to the CO, who was halfway up the M6, I sent some of SST under Dave White to help out. It was a tense few weeks, but we managed to extract Dave from the hotel, by which time he had trained and produced crib sheets for the phone operators meaning that the location of EPs could be accurately plotted. OISG troop were also heavily involved in maintaining the UK intelligence picture in Libya, a part of Corporal Harris’ role was explaining formation tactics to the civilian analysts.



## **Fuel Tanker Driver's Strike**

We were spending a lot of time in Army Headquarters as part of the Olympic build up. When the strike was imminent it made sense that we got involved, and we had just had training from OS on using the Integrated Transport Network dataset with network analyst extension. The task was to see if Standing Joint Command had enough temporary fuel stations to supply the country. Today, the service area solver on ArcGIS Online takes seconds. Then, on a laptop, it was taking about two hours to assess the catchment of a single facility. SST worked round the clock in shifts to get the answer, whilst still maintaining high readiness for other tasking. Despite the effort we weren't very popular when we proved the plan didn't work, but thankfully the strike was averted.

## **London 2012 Olympics**

For a very brief time the Olympics became the top priority, thanks mostly to G4S. For the Squadron, they were a constant throughout the two years.

Coordination. Typically, prescient, Colonel John Kedar had organised a multi-agency mapping co-production working group. The role was to make sure that OS production schedules were aligned with plans coming out from the London Organising Committee (LOCOG), and the data fed into various blue light, defence, and intelligence units. For SST and GST, it was a constant battle to keep up to date. The challenge for the OC was to stop Military units asking for 1:1 scale mapping because they could, and the OS people were too polite to say no.

Route Planning. The entire road network in London was adjusted to provide high speed corridors for athletes and officials. A new network dataset was released and thankfully we now had experience of loading and using the standard set. Lance Corporals Goodwin and Green were put into HQ London District for 6 months of logistic planning and free theatre tickets.

Training. GASC and SST ran the Regimental exercise that year on a theme of UK operations, one of the outputs being an atlas of maps for emergencies. The book was picked up by OS who had created a role for themselves as the geo cell to the Cabinet Office. The book was useful to them, but we still had to provide Lance Corporal Sharp into COBRA to show them how to use it.

Emergency response plans. We had been asked by the National Olympic Command Centre if we could provide a fail-safe in case of power failure or loss of GPS. They wanted a set of hard copy plans that allowed them to command and control any emergency. With only one weekend to produce the plans, a team from 13 Sqn under Sgt Leach was called in to georeference the internal floor plans for all the venues and overlay onto an OS Base.

Air defence. Missiles on the roofs of blocks of flats made the news. What didn't was the role of OISG troop working with Air Command in the siting of the units. Having moved from Sergeant Major to Troop Commander, Chris Sharpe and team produced a series of plans showing the coverage of the missile system against targets at different heights. The plans were made using viewsheds and a DEM of 1m lidar, they proved to be very accurate by a group who were invited to 'red team' the coverage.

Shoot/Don't Shoot. Suppose we faced a 9/11 scenario and actually shot down the plane, then what? There is a very difficult moral question about shooting down a plane inside the M25 and the most densely populated part of the UK. We tried to turn that question into a map algebra problem and create a consequence surface based on weighted themes. Physical, quantifiable themes such as Population density by day/by night and secondary detonations, were combined with subjective factors such as national pride and international confidence. The result will never see the light of day, but I can say that the process I learned in Afghanistan and practiced during the Olympics has tremendous utility when you have to make 'a' decision.

Writing this article having been a civvie for 5 years, I'm incredibly proud to have been part of 16 Squadron's history. In the real world there is never a right answer, there is only using imagination, building consensus, and doing the best you can. I know I'll never work with such a good bunch of people again.

**Major (Retired) Dave R Brand RE**  
**Officer Commanding 16 Geographic Support Squadron**  
**November 2012 - March 2013**

I joined 16 Geographic Support Squadron at Hermitage Station in November 2012 and assumed appointment as Officer Commanding (OC) until the arrival of Major Andy Rudd in April 2013. My short time as OC saw continuation of a significant transitional period for the Squadron and its four troops.

The Field Support Troop (FST), led by Capt John Rigby, was completing the testing and trial phase of the new Field Deployable GEOINT (FDG) system to achieve Initial Operating Capability (IOC). FDG delivered a data centric, GEOINT management, discovery, dissemination, and exploitation capability. The Troop SNCOs, WO2 Tony Willett, SSgt Oliver Gomez, and SSgt Aaron Ashcroft, managed the configuration of FDG systems for roll-out across all Royal Engineer (Geographic) units in the wider Army. FST continued to provide technical support, datasets, and capability development for Operation HERRICK.

The Special Support Team (SST) led by Capt Adam Morley completed two UK exercises over Spring 2013, developing geospatial skills in support of the UK Chemical, Biological, Radioactive Nuclear and Explosive (CBRN-E) response. The SSM, WO2 Andy Sargeant, and I were able to visit one of the exercises and see the wide-ranging skillsets and expertise employed by the Troop in its support to the UK counter terrorism services.

Pathfinder Troop was also seeing a significant amount of change. The Troop Headquarters had just moved to Wyton Station Pathfinder Building from RAF Brampton and was continuing to provide geospatial analysis support to the Joint Forces Intelligence Group (JFIG). Geographic technicians were also deployed across wider Defence Intelligence providing geospatial analysis in support of the wider intelligence community. Pathfinder Troop Commander, WO1 Chris Sharpe, and I visited all geospatial analysis cells as part our work to realign resource for the delivery of the Troop's support to Defence Intelligence. It was evident in our visits the outstanding work being generated by the soldiers of Pathfinder Troop in support of the intelligence community.

Echelon Troop headed by Quartermaster (Technical) Captain Dave Humphreys, was central to planning for the Regiment's move from Hermitage to Wyton. The Troop was focussed on ensuring that the new build for the Regiment was fit for purpose in terms of the Regiment's technical equipment and vehicle fleet.

In preparation for the Squadron's move in late 2013, the Squadron Headquarters, along with Troop Commanders, visited Wyton to plan the Squadrons' move into the new accommodation. Echelon Troop also took over and integrated the new Tactical Information and Geospatial Intelligence Systems (TIGAS), a two-person geospatial tactical working environment fitted onto a MOWAG Duro 6x6 vehicle. As part of the upgrade, the Squadron also received Tactical Map Deployment Points (TMDP) and Forward Map Distribution Point (FMDP) vehicle systems.



*Fig 1. TIGAS with FDG system housed on a MOWAG 6x6 chassis.*

The most enjoyable part of being in 16 Geographic Support Squadron for me was getting to know and work closely with the soldiers. Seeing the commendations by other unit's commanders for the soldiers' geospatial analysis in support of real-time operations was particularly rewarding and true testament to the high calibre and expertise of the Squadron's personnel.



I valued immensely the working relationship with the SSM, WO2 Andy Sargeant, and whether on exercise, overseeing squadron output, or delivering new geospatial capability, everyone in the Squadron was a pleasure to work alongside.

My tenure as OC was topped off by a brilliant unit multi-activity adventurous training expedition to Lancashire and the Lake District coordinated by the QMSI SSgt Stuart Riggott. For a disparate unit with troops and geospatial cells providing a full breadth of geospatial support to Defence, it was great to see everyone come together and enjoy being part of a such a strong spirited and proud Squadron.

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**Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) Mark Buglass RE**  
**Officer Commanding 16 Geographic Support Squadron**  
**June 2015 - February 2017**

I was surprised as any when I was selected for promotion to Major and Sub-Unit Command within 4 weeks of each other at the end of 2014. When I was told I was going to be OC 16 Geo Sp Sqn I was delighted and honoured to follow in the footsteps of previous great OCs. I took over from Andy Rudd in June 2015.



16 Geo Sp Sqn is unique in terms of establishment and troops all with their own unique skillsets and missions. The makeup of the Sqn for my tenure was Field Support Troop, Special Support Team, Echelon Troop and OISG Troop later to be known as Pathfinder Troop. It was apparent from day one that the Sqn was stacked with SNCOs, WOs and Officers with very few JNCOs, which meant that it was paramount that I got to know everyone in the Sqn as quickly as possible, as I would be writing on the majority of their appraisals.

I made this my priority and it also meant that I was out of the office the majority of the time seeing the Sqn in action. As I had just come from RCMO I knew the importance of writing an appraisal that was a true reflection on what the soldier or officer had achieved in their reporting year and more importantly define their potential for future promotions. For me it was all about looking them in the eye when they were not selected for promotion and telling them why. If you don't know the people who work for you, you cannot do that.

In terms of work Field Support Troop were planning, resourcing, and delivering the next iteration of field deployable IT systems and peripherals, a never-ending task. The remainder of the Troop concentrated on keeping the aging deployed IT functioning until the new systems were ready. The Special Support Team cut their own detail as usual and there is not a lot I can add in this article for obvious reasons. OISG Troop changed their name to Pathfinder Troop and were predominantly housed in Pathfinder Building at Wyton, however they did have soldiers at GCHQ, RAF Marham and Digby. Echelon Tp were getting used to their purpose-built servicing bay and workshops. Their main headache was TIGAS (Tactical Information & Geospatial Analysis System) and trying to get it fit to use and later on trying to keep it on the road, not very successfully! I think during my tenure the only time we managed to get TIGAS out the door was on the back of a low-loader or towing it. It was not the fault of the technicians as there were no spare parts in the system to fix it.

There were the usual military exercises with the main ones supported by the Sqn being Ex ARRCADÉ GLOBE, Regimental and Sqn exercises. It was not all work; we did have some Adventure Training. I challenged the Sqn to do the Coast to Coast, starting in St Bees Head on the west coast and walking Wainwright's route to Robin Hood's Bay on the east coast. Any normal person would take 14 days to do the 192 miles, my challenge was to do it in 7 days!!! Which was achieved with very sore feet and heavy legs.



*I think this was after Day 1!!!*



*The number of steps I did that week!!*



*Finished*

There was also the obligatory skiing trip to Stubai, Austria. If you have not been it is basically a glacier that takes about 30 minutes in a cable car to reach. The skiing for the week was good with the après ski in the banana bar a welcome site after 8 hours skiing a day.



*Selfies were obviously the in thing!!!!*



*The wife (Paula) and I.*

I managed to squeeze in 9 months as President of the Mess Committee and attended all the mess functions during that period, the highlight being the Summer Ball.



*The African Dancers*

I had a great team that kept me on the straight and narrow, some of the personalities (I think!!) were: Captains: Dom Andrew, Jamie Dullaghan, Joe Bass, Kev Brixton, Andy Sargeant, Lucy Wyatt, Will Burt and Johnny Farminer. SSMS: Paul Duffin and Mike Shaw. SQMS: Stu Riggott and Geoff McGrail.



The picture on the left is the new presentation piece that SSM Mike Shaw brought in just as I was leaving. The other picture is the leaving presentation I received. The top picture is how many Sqn members we could fit in the Welfare Facility (2 extremely well modified ISO containers – SSM Paul Duffin’s pet project). The other picture is the Sqn in front of the 5 bay Medium Girder Bridge we borrowed to practice for the RE Games. I had a fantastic time as OC and was one of the highlights of my 36-year career. My time as OC was cut short as I was assigned to Regimental Second in Command a few months before my 24 months tenure was up. The Sqn 2IC, Capt Lucy Wyatt took the helm for 5 months before handing over to Maj Ric Tearle in July 2017.





**Major Ric Tearle RE**  
**Officer Commanding 16 Geographic Support Squadron**  
**July 2017 - Jul 2019**

Returning to the UK after two years in the USA on an exchange post, I took over Command of 16 Geographic Support Squadron in July 2017. My first time in the Regiment meant meeting a lot of new faces although I was lucky enough to be working for my previous desk officer as CO and a Troop Commanders' Course buddy in Officer Commanding 13 Geographic Squadron. The responsibility of command was quite a shock after just looking after myself for a few years!

The technical workhorses of the Squadron were the specialist sections in Field Support Troop. Field Support Section maintained their impressive global support role whilst at the same time undertaking the final delivery of a project to replace all our deployable IT equipment. This huge undertaking was made to look seamless due to the competence and commitment of the team at the helm with support from across the Regiment. Meanwhile the Geographic Support Team forged ever improving links with the wider elements of the newly formed National Centre for Geospatial Intelligence (NCGI). This facilitated better and quicker provision of quality data to the analysts and technicians not just across the Regiment but over the wider community. The third section, the Cap Dev team, were worked hard to innovate, evaluate, and demonstrate a variety of novel technologies. In particular they supported the response to devastating hurricanes in the Caribbean with a reduced classification system with internet connectivity which used the ArcGIS Online system enabling the production and sharing of data with partners and other agencies supporting the response.

Meanwhile the niche role of the Special Support Team was maintained through regular training and further improved through introducing new capabilities. Improved LiDAR, 360° cameras and most notably new Remotely Piloted Aerial Systems. These new techniques proved hugely effective with the team being the perfect place to trial their use. The opportunity to test them in anger was provided during several tasks supporting a variety of different customers across Defence including the Novichok incident in Salisbury. As with other elements of the Squadron synergies were exploited with other specialist teams across NCGI and relationships built to work more closely and share expertise. Ultimately these improvements saw the team being used more frequently justifying the time spent on papers.

Whilst mostly classified, the work of Pathfinder Troop was some of the most interesting and advanced analysis conducted across the Squadron and perhaps even the Geo community. Working closely with a variety of other specialists and organisations the reputation of the analysts across the Troop grew to the extent they became invaluable to the teams they worked with. Not only did they conduct complex analysis but also trained non-geo analysts to conduct basic analysis providing a real force multiplier from our limited resource.



*2019 – Soldier Development Package to prepare Sappers for promotion and develop JNCOs.*

Lastly but no means least is Support Troop. The drivers, signallers and vehicle mechanics were literally the linchpin of the Regiment. The small troop had a huge responsibility to maintain the often-temperamental fleet of specialist Geo vehicles. The tiny signals det also had the challenge of upgrading our radio system one of the first units to go through the process the team did excellently paving the way and ironing out issues along the way.



*2019 – Ex FOUGASSE BLIZZARD the Regimental Ski Expedition. A break in a day's touring.*

On reflection the various elements of the Squadron all did a huge amount in the two years I had the privilege to command it. It amazes me to think that all this was achieved over a period where the Regiment hosted the Sapper Games (and won the MGB build!), delivered a live field firing package, were awarded the freedom of St Ives and of course multiple adventurous training expeditions. No wonder the 24 months went past in a flash. I certainly cannot take credit for all of the above –It was down to the amazing work of all the Officers' and Soldiers of the Squadron who not only made it hugely successful but also an enjoyable place to work. My job was easy – just foster the ethos and atmosphere across the team and everything else fell into place. Thanks to all in the mighty 16th.



*2018 –16 Geographic Support Squadron being inspected at the Freedom of St Ives Parade.*



**Major George McCrea RE**  
**Officer Commanding 16 Geographic Support Squadron**  
**August 2019 to date**

As Officer Commanding of 16 Geographic Squadron, I was fortunate to have a letter passed to me by the Commanding Officer of 42 Engineer Regiment (Geographic), from Nick Collins to highlight the fact that 25 years ago this month the Squadron re-joined the line.

In that time there have been many occasions where the individuals, small teams or the whole Squadron has supported the needs of the Nation. I do not feel in any way qualified to talk about the first 22.5 years, but what I will try to do is shed some light on what the Squadron has achieved in the last 2.5 years. This may provide the carrot to any of my auspicious predecessors to fill in the gaps...

The current manning liability for the Squadron is 135 personnel. This is made up of the 4 Troops/Teams, the Quartermaster's Department, and Regimental Headquarters. So, as it was in 1995, an eclectic grouping if ever there was one. As often happens with the military, as the sand never endingly falls through the hourglass, there have been amalgamations, centralisations additions and removals from Nick's original ORBAT from 1995.

The 4 Troops/Teams that make up the bulk of the strength are: Field Support Troop; Specialist Support Team; Pathfinder Troop and Echelon Troop. Each of these provides a unique skill set to Squadron, Regiment, RE Geo as a whole; in some ways the very manifestation of Ubique. It would be invidious to try and list what they all do suffice to say that without one the others would find it hard to operate. It is not only an internal co-dependency that exists, more importantly it is the co-dependency that RE Geo as a whole, has on the elements of the Squadron that makes it such an interesting organisation made up of military personnel, civil servants, and contractors.



*Figure 1. The Health Secretary briefs using a map produced by the Geo Team in SJC(UK)  
(Image: PA, sourced from Express Online dated 4 May 2020)*

We are still lucky enough to have the Quartermaster and his Department work with us in the Squadron and along with Regimental Headquarters, this is where the majority of the attached arms are, including Royal Logistical Corps Chefs and Logistical Specialists, Adjutant General Corps Clerks, the Royal Army Physical Training Corps Instructor and a Royal Army Medical Corps Combat Medical Technician.

It was all these wider elements that came together to help deliver the Sapper Games in the Summer of 2019. A huge logistical challenge that saw the Regiment's main effort as the delivery of the Games but with the onus on 16 Geo Sp Sqn and the specialist within it: the chefs delivered magnificent meals on a great scale; the QM's Dept planned the infrastructure and dealt with the 'facilities management' for the event; Ech Tp provided the ME(Cbt) Class I to lead the MGOB team to victory in the show piece event so 42 Engr Regt (Geo) became proud champions in that most combat engineer focused event; and finally the Commanding Officer, as part of the Sqn!!, was part of the band that serenaded the crowd for the evening's entertainment! A 'whole force effort' if ever there was one.

Switching more to operations, it is in the last 6 months that the full panoply of capabilities of the Squadron have been fully tested; Operation RESCRIPT has seen Defence mobilise to support the National effort in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. Intrinsic to the understanding and decision-making support at all levels from Ministers in Central Government to recces teams on the ground have been elements of 16 Geographic Support Squadron. Figure 1 shows a simple product made by the team down at Standing Joint Command (United Kingdom) Headquarters used by the Health Secretary for a Daily Briefing.

The Secretary of State would not have been able to brief from this product without a 'whole-force' approach from the Squadron, and wider Regiment. Echelon Troop were responsible for providing the vehicles and drivers to get the team down to SJC(UK), not the easiest of tasks at the height of lockdown when keeping socially distanced. Prior to departure, Field Support Troop provided the basic data pack to the deploying soldiers on systems that they had recently upgraded. Those deploying would come under the command of the Pathfinder Troop Commander and be ably supported by the Specialist Support Team back at Roy Lines. A somewhat simplistic way to outline the collective involvement of all elements of the Squadron, but it again harks back to this idea of co-dependency.

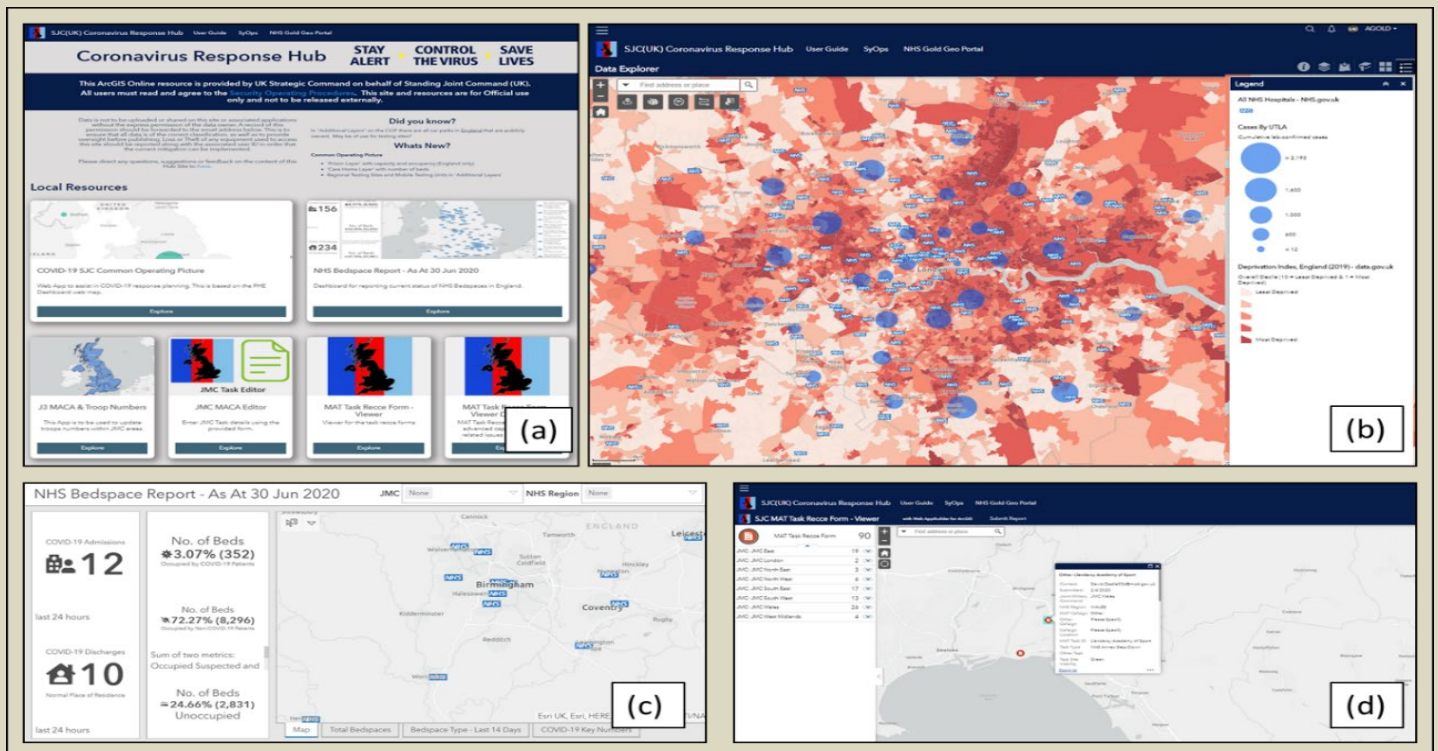


Figure 2. (a) The welcome page for the NCGI AGOL Hub. The welcome page has a user guide and explanation and is the interface which hosts several web applications and maps. (b) the SJC Common Operating Picture which hosts authoritative datasets for planners. Pictured is COVID confirmed cases per Upper Tier Local Authority and the English Index of Multiple Deprivation. (c) NHS Bed space Report which visualises NHS Hospitals bed space occupancy, admission, and discharges in near real-time (d) Military Assessment Team recces reports uploaded onto AGOL in real-time through the PED App Survey123. (Image: Taken from Parker 2020 RE Journal Article. Crown Copyright 2020)



This most recent deployment has gone a long way to highlighting how Geo has moved with the technological times, most notably in the IT and internet services sector. An idea that gained immediate traction from the highest military levels was that of a COVID-19 dashboard. There were already many about, but we needed to produce one that was our own. This drive for a separate dashboard was not born of any self-interest, rather from the fact that for the first time the military was having to wrestle with the idea of Big Data on an operation. Thus, the COVID-19 Dashboard; Figure 2 above shows the splash page of the ArcGIS Online Dashboard that was created.

This dashboard is the largest ever single occurrence of a Common Operating Picture provided by the military and is an exemplar of collaborative understanding pan-Government Department. Designed in RAF Wyton, delivered in Aldershot, harnessing the power of PEDs and web-based services and exploiting the great intellect and ingenuity of JNCOs, SNCOs, WO and Officers alike from the Squadron, this was an enormous achievement as Figure 3 points to.

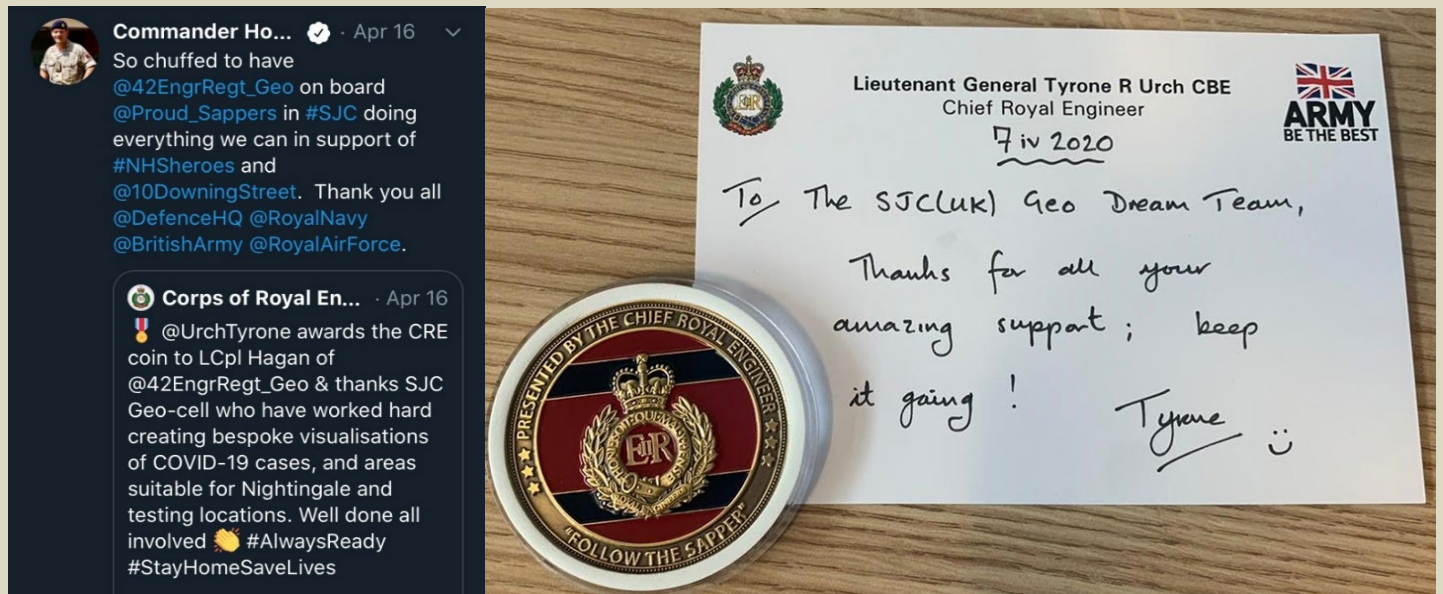


Figure 3. Notable recognition for work from Commander Standing Joint Command (United Kingdom) and the Chief Royal Engineer! (Image: taken from @UrchTyrone Twitter)

As mentioned earlier, the Troops/Teams are dependent upon each other but also work independently in their specialist areas. Specialist Support Team provides support to the UK's chemical, biological, radioactive, nuclear, and explosive (CBRN-e) response forces. Their bespoke skills were put to use in March 2018 in Salisbury during Operation MORLOP, the military participation to the poisoning. Given that the Squadron reformed as a Survey Support Squadron, and noting the silver piece of the surveyor that Nick mentioned, I think it must be quite pleasing to all that one of the most high profile incidents to happen in the UK recently had a huge level of military survey to support it. Utilising modern technology to its fullest, Specialist Support Team used a wide array of survey skills to complete their various tasks; this was the first instance of a remotely piloted aerial system (RPAS) being used for survey tasks on a live operation. With the various payloads the RPAS was able to carry, the team were able to provide the police and other agencies great fidelity of the situation on the ground at both a micro and macro level without needlessly putting troops at risk. Using laser scanners, the team were also able to provide high quality scans, that were both precise and accurate, of various areas of interest. In these small tactical actions, the team were able to have a very tangible operational effect.

This again points to the new and evolving ways of providing decision support and situational understanding that elements of the Squadron are leading the way on. At an individual level, there have been numerous instances of members of the Squadron making a difference: whether it is the Geo JNCO seconded to the Cabinet Office and creating daily briefs for the PM; the REME VM keeping the fleet of vehicles running to enable wider Regimental deployments; or the RAPTC SSI improving the physical and mental well-being of the Regiment as we return from Working From Home after COVID-19 Lockdown. These are only a few examples of the individual effort, but I think it important to highlight and remind that the Squadron's responsibilities are broad and varied.

Whether it be as a Squadron, Troop/Team or individual, the last 2.5 years in some way may reflect the 25 years of the Squadron; deployments in support of the Nation, being at the leading edge of technological development or supporting the Regiment in its commitments. But if I were to pick out the key point it is the co-dependency.

None of these specific instances would have been possible without the support of other elements, and I think this strikes at the heart of it. I would not have been able to give this small update if it wasn't for Nick Collins and all those names who sit between us both on the OC's Board, but more importantly, we depend upon you to remind us of our history as we try to create new history.

When the national situation allows, we hope to celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> Birthday with due aplomb, but until then, thank you for reading and all the best in these testing times.

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*(The History of 16 Geographic Support Squadron RE has been researched and compiled by Nick Collins ([nickellns7@aol.com](mailto:nickellns7@aol.com)) & Noel Grimmett ([noel@burwells1.co.uk](mailto:noel@burwells1.co.uk)) in October 2020).*  
*(Should anyone spot any errors, omissions or wishes to suggest amendments please contact us at the above email addresses)*  
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**THE MILITARY SURVEY (GEOGRAPHIC) BRANCH**  
**A member of the**  
**ROYAL ENGINEERS ASSOCIATION**  
**WHEN WAS THE BRANCH FORMED?**

The Branch was formed in 1999 as a direct result of the success of the major reunion of military and civilian staff held in 1997 to mark the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of (the then) Military Survey. It was decided that there was a requirement for an organisation to act as a focus for all former military and civilian members of Military Survey and so a National Military Survey Branch of the REA was formed. The Branch title was changed to REA Military Survey (Geographic) Branch in Autumn 2004.

**BRANCH ACTIVITIES**

The Branch is not intended to replace the many small reunions of specific groups of former surveyors, that currently take place, but to act as the focus for all those who have served with Military Survey or Geographic Engineers. With that in mind, the functions of the Branch are limited to an annual meeting/reunion, occasional technical visits, identifying any welfare cases to the appropriate authority and maintaining a database of members details. In addition, a newsletter is published quarterly. The AGM and reunion are usually held on a Friday in April with a major event every third year. The venue for these functions is often Denison Barracks Hermitage.

The Branch website has an Historical Section which contains approximately 7,000 digital images all relating in some way to the history of Military Survey between the years 1827 and 2020. This library was collected and compiled by Alan Gordon between 1991 and 2019 initially to illustrate a proposed history of 42 Survey Engineer Regiment (see below). The library comprises a system of nested folders with each image a single file held in one of the folders. Very few may be held in more than one folder. Images are stored in the folder that best reflects the primary reason for its inclusion in the library. The archive is maintained by the webmaster Dave Johnson and the Branch website can be accessed through - <http://www.militarysurvey.org.uk/> The Branch also has a FaceBook Group page at – [Mil Svy Geo Branch REA](#) – all are welcome to join.

**MEMBERSHIP**

All men and women who have served or are serving with Military Survey, Geographic Engineers, or the Defence Geographic Centre, whether or not they were, or are, surveyors/geographic by trade are eligible for membership. The Branch is one of the largest in the Association having over 400 members and is truly International. The Committee is very keen to welcome serving members as they represent the future success of the Branch.



# MILITARY SURVEY (GEOGRAPHIC) Branch

A Part of ROYAL ENGINEERS ASSOCIATION  
 ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP (REA/NON-REA\*) DETAILS

Mr/Mrs/Miss\*      Initials       Surname

Address       Known Name

\*REA Membership Category: Full/Life/  
 Associate/Over 70\*/non-member (strike through those  
 not applicable if known)

Professional Qualifications

Email       Tel:

Service No.       D.O.B.

Serving or Current or Retired Rank/Grade      Trade/Technical Specialty  
 Retired\*      

Induction Course      Start Service Date       End Service Date   
 Details

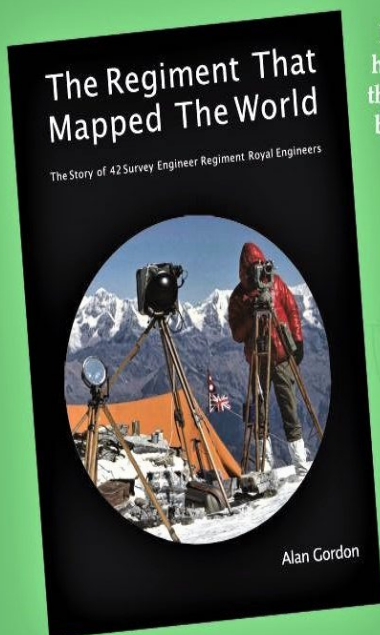
Army Survey Course       Decorations  
 Boy Service Group         
 Basic/Intro Course

Main Unit Postings/Departments:	Location	Date from	Date to

**Under no circumstances will details from the membership database be released to non-members. Details of members not agreeing to its release will be held solely for branch record purposes.**

I agree/do not agree\* to the release of this data to other branch members: .....  
 \* indicates to delete as applicable

## The story of a unique British regiment 42 Survey Engineer Regiment Royal Engineers



For those interested in military history, surveying, mapping and the everyday life of a soldier, this book offers all of this and more.

The book spans from post war chaos withdrawal from Empire, Middle East turmoil through to the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland and cruise missile deployment.

During its 37 year life the Regiment surveyed and mapped across the world: the deserts of the Middle East, islands in the Caribbean and Pacific, the Mediterranean, the Himalayas, the Americas, Australia and Europe.

It takes map making from hand drawing to GPS and automated cartography.

It is as much about the people who served as about the surveying and mapping.

300 x 210 mm with 240 pages lavishly illustrated with photographs mainly donated by former surveyors and extracts from the maps they produced.

## New Publication

For all those who are interested in military history and in particular the history of the Corps of Royal Engineers then 'The Regiment that Mapped the World' is a book to be read.

After ten years of research and writing Alan Gordon has finished the story of 42 Survey Engineer Regiment Royal Engineers.

The book will be published early in 2021 as a limited edition. There will be an opportunity to pre-order.

Details will be placed on various military web sites and in publications. All members of the DSA and REA Survey (Geographic) Branch will individually be sent the details.

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**All donations to the Historic Photo Archive should be made through Dave Johnson the Branch Webmaster.**

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