

# News from the UK Contingent

by Maj Graham Cable

In the British Army, the ethos of adventurous training, sport and battlefield tours is very important.

The former pits an individual against challenging situations, which are always demanding, often frightening (but always controlled), and frequently in harsh climatic conditions. This not only provides an opportunity for fun, but it also stretches the individual "outside his comfort zone" and promotes teamwork and trust. This is vital preparation for the rigours of rapid deployment and operations.

The latter enables an individual, not just to appreciate an historical occurrence and site, but also to draw lessons from previous military campaigns and apply them to the present. Again, this is very important in our role as staff officers and commanders.

The practice of obliging British Army personnel to partake in adventurous training and battlefield tours is no less true in HQ NRDC-ITA, than it is in any other theatre. Add to this the fact that there are a wealth of sporting and historical opportunities in our host country, and you will find us clocking up many hundreds of kilometres over the next few years.

The UK Contingent at HQ NRDC-ITA has traditionally participated in Contingent skiing during the winter, which for some people has most definitely placed them "outside" their comfort zone. We have also taken part in the annual HQ NRDC-ITA tours, treks and ski opportunities.

From this year, however, a plan has been put in place to formalise a wide range of training opportunities for our Contingent here in Solbiate Olona.

The winter skiing will continue, but will now include the ability to gain qualifications and prepare a team to take part in Exercise EAGLE SNOWMASTER, and if we are good enough, the Italian Army Ski Championships. The culmination of this will be a challenging ski expedition to Norway.

In addition to skiing, the adventurous training and sporting opportunities have been widened to include mountain treks in Italy, sports courses in Germany and sailing around the Italian coast.

This season has kicked off with a "golf skills" course at the British Army Golf Club in Sennelager, Germany. Not very adventurous you may feel, but judging by the number of missed swings and errant shots when the ball and club finally did



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meet, then around 7 of the Contingent's (and wives') comfort zones were again surpassed.

This was followed by a week's worth of treks around the Dolomite mountains in Alto Adige, hosted by our very patient Alpini guide, Lieutenant Colonel Caporello of the RSC. This most definitely was adventurous, given the unseasonably challenging conditions.

The seven UK Contingent participants (although most complained about the cold – another inalienable right of the British soldier), came away with a feeling of achievement and a wealth of memories of beautiful and challenging scenery. The photos tell the story themselves.

An added dimension was the ability to walk in trenches both sides of the World War I front line, along with the wealth of historical detritus still littering the ground.

This proved the perfect build-up to our series of battlefield tours, the first of which was to Asiago. This featured a British brigade fighting the Austro-Hungarian forces in support of the Italian Army in June 1918. The day included a little background reading, followed by briefs and the ability to walk the ground that was fought over so bitterly. The fifteen members of the UK Contingent were fortunate to be accompanied by Colonel Sulig (ACOS G1), an avowed expert in these matters.

The briefs and tour culminated in a visit to the grave of Captain Edward Brittain MC, whose death at Asiago was lamented so poignantly in his sister's famous book "Testament of Youth".

Both the trek in Alto Adige and the battlefield tour have certainly set the scene for the forthcoming year's programme.

The next item on the agenda is a week's tour to the Second World War battlefields of Monte Cassino and Anzio, where Contingent members will present the results of their research into these conflicts. They will also be supported by a professional military historian from the UK's Defence Academy. These will be followed by shorter trips to Solferino and Pavia towards the end of the year.

In all, a busy programme, but one that affords an ability to challenge, stretch and develop the Contingent, whilst providing an opportunity to discover the history, culture and geography of our host country.

