

21 Gibraltar Battery Association 10th Annual Reunion and Dedication of their
Association Standard in Gibraltar 28th Sept -1st Oct 2007

By Chris Morgan

In 1997, I approached the then Battery Commander of 21 (Gibraltar 1779-83)AD Battery, Major Toby Hardin, and asked if I could arrange a visit of a few former members to their base at Thorney Island. During the visit it was suggested that we might try and hold a battery reunion. With the support of the BSM Clive Hunt and BQMS Tony Keefe we managed to invite nearly 250 former and serving members to our first reunion. Such was the success and interest shown it was decided that we form a 21Gibraltar Battery Association.

In September 2007 we celebrated our 10th Annual Reunion and were able to dedicate our own Association Standard. With Gibraltar as our battle honour there was only one place we could hold such an event - Gibraltar itself. Being the secretary and having suggested the possible venue for our 10th reunion I was given the age old quote ' you suggested it, you sort it out'!

In January 2007 I wrote to Mr Albert Poggio, OBE, the Gibraltar Governments Representative in the UK. A meeting was arranged and a suggested programme for the proposed week end. I was genuinely surprised at the enthusiasm shown by Mr Poggio at the idea of a reunion and dedication of our new Association Standard in Gibraltar. He offered to host a reception for the Association and include a complementary tour of the Rock. It was suggested that I write to the Governor, HE General Sir Robert Faulton, and ask for permission to use the Kings Chapel for the dedication service. This was duly agreed.

Next we wanted, if operational commitments allowed, to have members of the serving battery attend the reunion week end. With this in mind I arranged to meet the BC, Major Simon Thomas, and his enthusiastic response meant that he would make sure the battery would be represented.

At this point I made contact with the Royal Gibraltar Regiment. Historically the Gunners have played a major part in Gibraltar's past, and there are very strong ties to the Royal Regiment. The new RSM, WO1 Gerald Fitzgerald, was due to take up his post in July, and until he arrived I was given a great deal of support by the second -in-command Major Mario Alman.

By August we had a full programme arranged and all we had to do was to finalise numbers.

On Thursday 27th September the BC, BSM WO2 Simon Jones, and eight members of the serving battery arrived along with the Association 'advance party'(committee members)! . An 'O' group took place that evening in the Elliott Hotel bar, and as usual, took until the early hours of the morning to discuss all relevant matters!!!

Friday morning was spent with the Padre, Michael H, at the Kings Chapel rehearsing

the dedication service for our new standard on the Sunday. During the day many members arrived, many flying into Malaga and driving down to Gibraltar. Curly Goodwin flew in from his home in Teneriffe and Bob Giles drove down from his home in Spain. We were particularly pleased to have Chris Ricketts, Paul Goldsborough and friends fly down from Menden, to join in the reunion.

As is normal on our annual reunions we always meet in the bar area on the Friday night to 'get acclimatised' and get as many 'I remember when' stories told as possible, that's after trying to recognise everyone. We were very pleased that our President Major General Brian Davies was able to join us as was Lt Col Ian Vere Nicholl, General Secretary of the RACF/RAA. The bar was full but the England Rugby Match did distract members for a short while. The BSM made sure all the lads were there and we all had a most memorable night!

Saturday morning was free and at lunchtime the Association was invited to a reception in the Gibraltar Regimental Veterans Club, hosted by Mr Poggio and the Gibraltar Government. The Chairman of the Veterans Club, Mr Willie Chamberlan, very kindly informed us that it was a 'free bar'!! Among invited guests were the Chief of Staff Col J Lyne-Perkis (RA), Lt Col Ian Vere Nicholl, RSM Fitzgerald, Sgt Avez. The Mayor of Gibraltar 'dropped in' for a quick chat and to welcome us all to Gibraltar. We enjoyed a very nice buffet lunch and at this point Willie Chamberlan presented the Association with a plaque. Maj Gen Davies replied on behalf of the Battery/Association thanking Mr Poggio and the Veterans Club for their kind hospitality. Lunch was followed by a complimentary tour of the Rock.

Halfway down the Rock the BC and the lads from 21 changed into 'running gear' and held out the 'collecting tin' for their sponsored charity back in UK. They ran down the Rock, and just for good measure ran back up and like the Grand Old Duke of York, ran back down to the hotel, where soft, cold drinks were eagerly consumed!

The Reunion Party took place on the Saturday evening at the Elliott Hotel in the 8th floor lounge with some spectacular views of Gibraltar. Our guests for the evening were Col Lyne-Purkis and Lt Col Vere Nicholl. As a mark of appreciation for everything they had done we had great pleasure in inviting RSM Gerald Fitzgerald and Sgt Kerion Avez and their wives. Like most reunions the first hour went rather quietly, then after the buffet the evening was no stop fun, music and dance. Former BSM Steve Bell, was on hand to make sure that everyone climbed 'the Sunshine Mountain' and that we all performed some rather unusual movements to 'Uncle Abraham'!! During the evening the BSM passed around the collecting tin, and from the monies raised from the raffle the Association donated an extra £100. At this point the serving members were seen to be playing a game with a burnt cork. Never being one to stay back our President joined in the game and very soon was covered in black spots. Although the function finished at midnight many members and guests went on to enjoy the more boisterous entertainment in the Casement Square bars!

The reunion is always important but this weekend the main event was to be the dedication of our own Association Standard. Two years previously I had suggested we might try and raise enough funding for an association Standard. We started fundraising and due to the generosity of one member of the Association we raised the required funds in less than a year!

A Standard has always been, and will be the focal point of any Regiment, Battery Association, Branch. Ours was to be no exception, designed on the Battery Flag, it was indeed a proud moment for the Association when WO2 Steve Buck (CVHQ) carried the Standard up to the altar escorted by a member of 21 (Gibraltar 1779-83)AD Bty on one side and a member of the Royal Gibraltar Regiment on the other, thus making the continuous link between Gibraltar, the serving battery and the Association. The reverend Michael H RN(retd) conducted the service in the absence of the Command Padre, Peter Scott. Michael gave a wonderful sermon and it was indeed a very proud, and slightly emotional moment when the Standard was unfurled, dedicated and then laid upon the alter. Maj Gen Davies, Col Lyne-Purkis and Maj Thomas all kindly agreed to do the readings during the service.

We were very honoured that the Commander British Forces, Gibraltar, Commodore Parr, RN kindly agreed to attend the dedication service. We were also pleased to welcome Lt Col John Perez, CO, RG to the service. Unfortunately Col Perez had been unable to attend any other events due to previous engagements. Other guests include the Deputy Commissioner of Police and Capt (retd)Solomon Levy, formerly of the Gibraltar Defence Regiment, who still holds the record for firing the number of Royal Salutes on the Rock, 175!! Capt Levy is also President of the local RBL Branch. We also had representatives from 50 , 27 and 47 Regiments.

After the service the Kings chapel congregation provide us all with light refreshments and this gave the CBF, a chance to talk with everyone.

Sunday afternoon was a very informal time with long lunches enjoyed by everyone. The Gibraltar Regiment arranged for members to have a guided tour of the tunnels inside the Rock by WO2 Pete Jackson. There are 32 miles of tunnels inside the Rock of Gibraltar including main roads, storage bunkers, workshops, hospitals, accommodation, giant generators. WO2 Jackson is responsible for safety within all the tunnels!

The Tunnel Tour finished the official reunion weekend. Some members stayed on for a few days in Gibraltar, others spent a week in Southern Spain and one or two decided to stay up in the Mountain ranges around Rhonda in Southern Spain, mountain walking will never be the same!!!

The success of this weekend is due to many people and I would like to mention in particular Mr Albert Poggio, WO1 (RSM) Fitzgerald, ,Sgt Avez and Mr Willie Chamberlan and the Chaplin and members of the Kings Chapel.The staff of the Elliott Hotel. Capt Allan Solly, Membership Secretary RAA. Maj Simon Thoams, WO2 Simon Jones, and the lads from 21. Finally members of the Association for supporting us for the past ten years.

If anyone wants information on a visit/reunion in Gibraltar or any information about how we set up the Association or membership details please contact me, Chris Morgan on 01748-830645 or chrismorgan222@hotmail.com web site www.21bty.org.co.uk