

**Headquarters (Multi National Division) South East
British Forces Post Office 641**

PRESS INFORMATION CENTRE

Telephone 00870 600 322 756

00870763 665 814

Mobile: 00965 9113350

Email: picbasrah@defencemediops.co.uk

5 August 2003

DURHAM LADS TAKE OVER SADDAM'S PALACE

Four soldiers from Durham on operations in Iraq have found themselves working together at one of the country's most notorious landmarks – Saddam Hussein's palace in Basrah.

They serve in the same corps, the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, and were deployed to Iraq six weeks ago as part of Catterick-based 19 Mechanized Brigade.

The four are: Major Dave Nichol, 46, an equipment support specialist; Class 2 Warrant Officer Mick Cox, 35, a weapons expert attached to the 1st Battalion of the King's Regiment; Class 2 Warrant Officer John Henry, 37, attached to the 1st Battalion of the Queen's Lancashire Regiment; and Staff Sergeant Vince Hagan, 34, who is serving with 209 Signal Squadron.

"We never imagined we'd all end up working together in one of Saddam's palaces," said Major Nichol, who grew up in Esh Winning and was educated at what was Waterhouses Secondary Modern. He has been in the Army for 30 years and served everywhere from the Falkland Islands to Hong Kong. WO2 (Artificer Quartermaster Sgt) Cox grew up in Bearpark, Durham, and went to school at Deerness Valley Comprehensive. He has served in Belize, the Middle East and Canada.

WO2 (Artificer Quartermaster Sgt) Henry was raised in Witton Gilbert and went to Fyndoune Comprehensive in Sacriston. He has served in Bosnia, the Gulf, Northern Ireland and the Falklands. SSgt Hagan is a former pupil of St Bedes Comprehensive in Peterlee and lives in Esh Winning. This is his second tour in Iraq and he has also served in Canada, Northern Ireland and Germany – where he witnessed the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

The presidential palace complex in Basrah consists of a series of mansions situated alongside the Shatt al Arab river. "It's not quite what people might think," laughs Major Nichol. "It was never actually finished and it's the only palace I've heard of where the inhabitants have to use portaloos!"

Ends

For further information, contact Captain Dennis Abbott, Media Operations, HQ 19 Mech Bde, Op Telic 2, BFPO 647. Tel: 00 965 911 3396.

Picture attached, shows from left: Staff Sgt Vince Hagan, Major Dave Nichol, WO2 (AQMS) Mick Cox and WO2 (AQMS) John Henry.

Photograph: Captain Dennis Abbott