

UK LIAISON TEAM  
24 MEU  
FOB KALSU  
IRAQ

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## PRESS RELEASE

### NAVAL RESERVIST PROVIDES MEDIA SUPPORT TO THE BLACK WATCH IN IRAQ

Lieutenant Cdr Richard Walters RNR has been an essential member of the UK Liaison Team based at the Forward Operating Base Kalsu, home of the 24<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit in Iraq, approximately 20 KM to the South East of Camp Dogwood, the base of the Black Watch Battle Group. A member of the Media Relations Specialisation of the Royal Navy Reserve he was sent to central Iraq to assist in the handling of the media and ensure that the historic and controversial deployment was well represented to the World by providing both UK and American journalists with a full perspective on the integrated operations of the Black Watch and the Marines of the 24th MEU.

Richard has overseen the organisation of the embedded media in Iraq from the pre-deployment media Briefings at the Ministry of Defence to seeing the arrival of the media in Iraq and will help organise their return to the UK in December. In Iraq his roles have varied from a military spokesman, background briefer, travel agent, to primary school teacher when dealing with the varied and sometimes strange demands from the press. 'I have been in a privileged position where I have been able to place the Black Watch re-deployment in perspective, and fully understand the requirement for their mission to Babil province. At first there was reluctance for the UK media to grasp the importance of the bigger picture, preferring to concentrate on political ramifications, but eventually we got there and I feel that as a result there will be a greater understanding of the complexity that is Iraq.' He continued, 'I have been very lucky to work with some great journalists over the last month and although we have at times been unable to satisfy all their requests, we have at least had fun.'

'This short tour has been fascinating. Working with the US Marines has been exciting and a pleasure. They have bent over backwards to see to our every need and I have been amazed by their spirit and determination to get the task done. I could not have been with a more positive unit and the British can certainly learn from their example, particularly when dealing with the media.'

Richard was mobilized to the Permanent Joint Head Quarters (PJHQ) back in February of 2003 and is coming to the end of his 2 year stint. 'Having dealt with Iraqi issues for the best part of 22 months, from the pre-war stages up to the point of democracy has been a busy but rewarding experience. I left the regular Navy back in December 2000 and joined the Royal Navy Reserves as I felt I ought to give something back to the Service that had looked after me. I was rather surprised that my

calling came so soon, but what an unforgettable couple of years!' he exclaimed whilst describing his experiences. His tour with the 24th MEU has been his second to Iraq having spent 4 months last year at the Press Information Centre in Basrah.

In his brief brush with industry, Richard has been a Telecoms and IT Consultant working with MCI and Schlumberger. 'The RNR is full of talented people and the services help to channel that experience and refine the skills relevant to industry. The RNR has made me a much broader candidate when applying for jobs and has given me extra skills that civilian courses cannot cover. As a Naval Officer, walking the streets of Safwan with a pistol in one hand and shaking hands with another, was an alien concept, but one of many that has tested my metal over my mobilised period. I am now a lot more confident to handle strange situations and adjust to change. I thought I had experienced most things in life before I came to Iraq but who knows where the Navy will invite me next.'

In December Richard will demobilise and become a civilian once again. 'I am looking forward to a well deserved holiday.' he said when discussing his plans for the future. 'I have decided to take a career break and train to become a skiing instructor. After the heat in Iraq I have the desire to see snow, lots of snow, and I can think of no better way to clear my mind and get away from it all before returning to Oxford to seek work.'

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. Lt Cdr Walters is 34 and lives in Oxford. His parents John and Claire live in Sherborne, Dorset where Richard was brought up. He plays cricket for Oxford Rescue CC.
2. Images:
  - (1) Lt Cdr Walters with a Puma Helicopter from RAF Benson
  - (2) Lt Cdr Walters
  - (3) The Press Team. L to R. Capt Nevers USMC, Staff Sgt Espinosa USMC, Sgt Bathon USMC, Lt Cdr Walters RNR, Cpl Beavers USMC
3. Local Papers:- Sherborne:Western Gazette. Oxford: Oxford Times, Oxford Star.
4. His RNR unit is HMS PRESIDENT (London).
3. For further details please contact the Press Information Centre at Basrah at [picbasrah@defencemediops.co.uk](mailto:picbasrah@defencemediops.co.uk) or Lt Cdr Walters at [dickie\\_walters@hotmail.com](mailto:dickie_walters@hotmail.com).