

Royal Marines Garelochhead Camp 2006 Report

On arriving at Garelochhead, Scotland I didn't know what to expect, except that I was about to spend two weeks with the Royal Marines, which sounds daunting enough!

The first day saw us waking at 5.40am to be ready for P.T. (Physical Training) at 6am for 45mins before breakfast, a morning event that continued for several days! After breakfast we were taken to the training area where we covered a lot of material we already knew, with the introduction of the SA80 A2 rifles that we would be using throughout the course at the camp. The evening involved us undertaking the roles of a 'mob' and assisting with riot control training for ship personnel at HMNB Clyde!

The second day saw the introduction of OBUA (Operations in Built Up Areas) and CQB's (Close Quarter Battle's), two topics that I had only barely touched on in the past, as well as Section Attacks and Giving Orders. All I can say is that storming a building with full automatic rifles is as much fun as it sounds, especially with smoke grenades and thunder flashes being used in the process!!

Survival was the topic for day three with stances on trapping, shelters, water and fire as well as how to skin and cook a rabbit! However on our way back to the camp, all of us were happily talking about what we were looking forward to on return to the camp (mostly the idea of a warm shower, food and bed!) when the "4-tonner" truck stopped and we were ordered to get out. What followed was a check to make sure we had no warm clothes on and nothing but survival tins and water bottles for each person. Then we were put into teams of 4 and told that we would be spending the night in the forest, and that we had to make the shelters and fires ourselves with only what we could find!

Two hours later our shelter was ready and a further 15mins saw our fire ready, all that was left was the need for firewood and food for the night! Each team was given two rabbits to prepare and cook along with some potatoes and stock cubes, no luxuries like we had been getting back at the camp!

The staff had been leading us to believe that we would be spending 36 hours like this, but thankfully the next morning, the 18 of us, sleep deprived (we had to take it in turns to keep the fire going) and cold were taken back to camp. Later that morning we were taught a little unarmed combat and the afternoon saw us going to the range for live firing, while those waiting were given talks on signals/radios and model making.

Day five was the beginning of the 48-hour exercise. We began with an amphibious assault or insertion by Rigid Raiders, followed by cliff scaling! Then we moved off as a troop of three sections into a troop patrol with three troop attacks on enemy positions. This included recon patrols and fighting patrols as well as obstacle crossing during the day! The end of the day involved the troop moving into a troop patrol harbour from where sentries were posted and recon patrols.

The next day of the exercise involved harbour routines and patrols around the training area, with one being ambushed!! That evening I was informed that I was being given the responsibility of Troop Commander (roles within the troop and sections had been rotated throughout the exercise till this point) for the remainder of exercise. It involved moving the whole troop to a new harbour location to begin with and ensuring the location was suitable. Then at around 9pm I was briefed that I would be leading the three section commanders and myself for a recon patrol at 11pm in order to plan an attack on a building. We got back at about midnight and while the section commanders got some sleep after making a model of the area and building we were attacking, I stayed awake going over my plans until I had to wake

the troop at around 4am! This led to me giving a troop briefing on the orders for the attack, which was to take place at 6am.

Once we were in position, I called in the (simulated) mortar fire, while two sections (including myself) moved through the small wood behind the house, with another providing covering fire from one flank. When I decided the time was right, I called for a section to storm and take the building while the others moved to secure the area just beyond. Once the attack had been completed we were informed that the exercise was now over and that we would be taken back to the camp. Any relief for some rest was however short-lived as we were told to face the admin 'frenzy' of rifle cleaning, which took us five and a half hours, to kit cleaning to be ready for inspection and handing back to the stores.

Day 8 was the beginning of the adventure-training phase of the camp and saw us taking part in the Glen Nevis Phil Guy Memorial Race of 10km followed by a visit to the Commando Memorial site, the Commando Memorial Museum and Fort William.

Day 9 involved half of the troop going kayaking while the rest and myself went mountain walking along the Aonach Eagach Ridge. Not being one for heights I found this both an anxious yet rewarding experience, especially one particular place where we had to traverse across a rock wall, with a 900m drop without being attached to the rock but only each other!!

On day 10 the two groups swapped with the walkers going to a different location while we went kayaking, which was a fun way to (almost) end the camp with a 2-3m drop off a pier into the sea!

The final day started with us going to a Careers lecture at the Fleet Protection Group Royal Marines headquarters in HMNB Clyde. Later followed a visit to HMS Blyth, a naval mine-seeker, with a tour of the ship and an explanation of its role in the navy. Then even later in the afternoon, we were given passes to go aboard one of the four Trident submarines, the HMS Vanguard, with a tour of the vessel and a lot of questions involving the answer; "I cannot answer that"!!

Finally came the camp BBQ and awards ceremony with awards such as Best Marines Spirit amongst others. For me it was a great way to end the camp, especially receiving the award of Top Cadet 2006 for the whole camp!

C/Sgt Sanderson