



# PJI Canopy Club Association Newsletter Winter 2024

## **Foreword by the President - Gp Capt (Ret'd) Mike Milburn**

A few days before our annual dinner at BZN I submitted the following paragraph for publication as part of my foreword for this Newsletter: many of you know that for several years now, I have been working within the Church of England as a Licensed Lay Minister (a Reader). Well, not too long ago I was at a function where the Bishop of Gloucester (Bishop Rachel Treweek) had been invited to enthuse about an individual who had been a faithful, valued church warden for over 25 years at his local church. But, when everyone was expecting a rousing speech about a fine chap and his long and distinguished service as a church warden, I was shocked (but not surprised) to hear Bishop Rachel tell the audience that allowing someone to serve as a volunteer for over 25 years was not at all laudable, rather it was a disgrace. Firing 'both barrels' she said that if a church or organisation wished to progress (grow), then fresh blood would be needed in key appointments, ideally every 3 years. She said, at the very least, volunteers should move to a different role within the organisation. She therefore encouraged people to volunteer – and not hide – their talents to refresh the organisation continually and, thereby, keep it healthy.

I am delighted to report, therefore, that I have had to withdraw the rest of my (former) foreword because it's simply out of date, confirmed at our AGM when our then Chairman, Glynn Alcock, stood down to make way for the appointment of Dan Hennessy as Chairman. And aren't we blessed to have such fantastic gentlemen as outgoing and incoming Chairmen? So, Glynn, on behalf of the whole of the CCA (and I'm sure ADW), thank you for your dedicated and highly professional work over many years, particularly as Chairman. But more importantly Glynn, we've all (no more so than me) have very much appreciated your friendship and long may it continue. So, Dan, welcome, we all look forward to you continuing your huge commitment to the CCA; I stand ready to assist.

I consider that we continue to have a superb executive (note the President is a non-executive role!) but wonder where the next 'generation' of CCA volunteers will come from. I know that all the current executives serve the CC with distinction and eminently stand on the shoulders of the giants that have preceded them, but this foreword is a reminder that we do need to refresh regularly. In the meantime, please make every effort to attend the events that are organised for our benefit. Recently, I attended an ADW coffee morning and was hugely impressed by the professionalism and sheer wealth of knowledge of the ADW exec and hangar staff. Their presentations were just brilliant. As always, collectively we're understaffed, overtasked but refuse to be beaten or

downhearted. It was great to see the pride in our PJI brevet. (I will never, ever call it a badge!)

### **A note from our outgoing Chairman - Wg Cdr Glynn Allcock**

It was back in 2010 when I first took an official interest in the Canopy Club Association in my capacity as OC ADW. Since then I have remained close to the heart of the committee in one form or another serving as Chair for the last 4 years or more. As I now enter my 43rd year in the RAF and my 38th as a PJI, it is time to hand over the reins to someone new. I have enjoyed the experience immensely working alongside some splendid chaps too numerous to mention; but Chris Heathershaw, Doug Peacock and Glan Evans are to the fore. The Association has had its ups and downs in the last 10 years with attendance at the annual dinner (the key barometer for me in terms of healthiness) dipping. But this year's joint dinner in association with ADW was a great success with a notable number of new PJIs coming out of the woodwork to imbibe and talk nonsense with long lost colleagues. I know you are in good hands under the direction of Dan Hennessy and I look forward to seeing some of you at Swinbrook Beer Calls and next year's reunion which should be even more splendid than this year's.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to you all,

Glynn

### **A welcome from our new Chairman - Sqn Ldr (Ret'd) Dan Hennessy**

Hello One and All,

As the incoming Chairman of our Association, I'd firstly like to thank Glynn for his work over the last few years; there is no doubt that he took over the role at an important time and made a very significant impact on reviving some of our former vigour; thank you Glynn. Additionally, I felt it incumbent upon me to add a piece to this Newsletter, the first since our AGM; but what to say to be of interest? After countless false starts and rejected pieces that frankly bored me let alone what you might have thought of them, I've settled on letting you know about some of my aims for the next two or three years and what I hope we'll be able to achieve together.

A subject that's been on my mind for some time in various guises is what we currently refer to as Welfare. In previous times this largely took the form of sending flowers to wives or whisky to members when they were laid up or in hospital and on very rare occasions (fortunately), acting as the link to large Service charities to support PJIs who'd sustained major, life changing injuries. In more recent times, I've become acutely aware of a need for a very different form of "welfare", which was brilliantly demonstrated recently in the photograph on our Facebook page of Bill Cook, Ray Willis and George Long visiting Henry McDonald. Henry, as you will all be aware, these days is very forgetful and is highly regarded and respected by everyone who's had the pleasure of knowing him. Henry had been planning to attend the Reunion Dinner and unfortunately at the last minute wasn't well enough to do so. However, the visit by three of his close friends went a very long way to making up for that.

Now there's no way that as an Association we can legislate for or facilitate that kind of spontaneous act of friendship but what we can do is to highlight those occasions when it happens and encourage everyone to become conscious of those individuals of whom they know that aren't as mobile or active as they once were and extend the hand of friendship every now and then. I'm unclear, as yet, how we'll achieve it but I am keen to change our approach to "welfare" and turn it into a network of support and friendship that becomes part of the fabric of our Association and is thought about constantly by us all. Additionally, I have plans to try to acquire the funds that will allow us each year to bring to the reunion dinner 4 or 5 of those members who, by reason of mobility or cost (because of distance) or both, would otherwise be prohibited from being part of the event. If any of you have any further thoughts or ideas on this subject I'd very much like to hear from you.

Secondly, and briefly, my other thrust will be in the direction of membership. Events over recent years have led us to a position where what is meant and what is understood by the term member has become rather clouded and confused. As a further consequence the number of individuals registered as members is dwindling. This last point isn't new: we've been conscious of this position since the early 1970's. However, that's not to say we can't address it and potentially reverse the trend. It's a difficult area and I have no illusions that changes in society as well as within life in RAF are ever changing and what we offer as an "old boys club" may no longer be attractive to the young PJI. Nevertheless, I feel strongly that we must do all that we can to prolong the active life of our Association and I'm considering a number ways of how that might be achieved. Once again, I'm open to your thoughts and ideas and would encourage you to please share them with the Committee.

Finally, on behalf of your Executive Committee I'd like to wish you all a very merry Christmas and a happy and healthy New Year.

## **Airborne Delivery Wing Update - OC ADW Wg Cdr Rich Lewis**

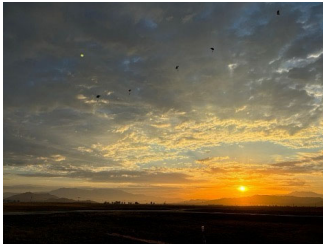
As we rapidly approach the end of 2024, this is a quick update to keep the membership up to date with some highlights of our activity in Airborne Delivery Wing in the last year.

The clearance of static line round low level parachuting from A400M earlier this year provided a timely opportunity to exercise that capability whilst marking the 80th anniversaries of DDay and Arnhem drops during World War 2. In Normandy in June the commemorative drops concluded with a 20-ship international formation including 3 x A400M. At Arnhem in September, a notable feature was the first drop of bespoke poppy low level parachutes manufactured by Irving GQ.



*Formation drop, IRONMIKE DZ, Normandy, 9 Jun 24*

Amongst the usual drumbeat of courses and exercises enabling military parachuting across entitled Front Line Command personnel, we have also continued the press to grow PJI qualification and experience to maximise our contribution to Defence. Additional investment this year has enabled surge in training of junior PJIs, culminating in an exceptionally successful PJI ACE training detachment in September.



*Ex GOLDEN HAWK PJI training  
ACE 2024*



*PJI*

The RAF Falcons had an outstanding 2024 display season, delivering 48 displays including 11 overseas. A season highlight was the Falcons' participation in the Pacific Air Show on the Gold Coast in Australia. Building on relationships renewed during a visit from the CO and RSM of the Australian Defence Force Parachute School to RAF Brize Norton, the team worked with our Australian partners to deliver 2 displays at this major international airshow. The Australian Red Beret's Display Team coach was integrated to the Falcons display, and the team also jumped in a birthday card from the Chief of the Air



Staff to expat World War 2 WRAF veteran Mrs Monica Witts on her 100th birthday.

*RAF Falcons 2024 Display Team at the Pacific Airshow, Australia, 18th August 2024*

We were delighted to open the PTS hangar doors to the PJI Canopy Club Association on 1 November 24 for a heritage evening in remembrance of the 80th anniversary of Op MARKET GARDEN in Arnhem. It was great to see so many familiar faces – many of whom

hadn't been back 'home' for some time – and to bring the serving and retired members together to celebrate our shared history. We've also been glad to welcome Canopy Club coffee morning guests back to Brize on several occasions throughout this year – we'll look forward to more of the same next year.

As we draw toward the end of 2024, we can reflect on another busy, productive and successful year in Airborne Delivery Wing. We were recently honoured to receive Air Officer Commanding 1 Group's 'Wing Excellence Award' for 2024, providing welcome recognition for the quality and professionalism of our people and the output that we continue to deliver for Defence; we'll aim to keep moving forward in 2025.

On behalf of the serving cadre, I'll take this opportunity to wish the Canopy Club membership an enjoyable festive season and a happy, healthy 2025 – all the best to all of you.

Rich Lewis

## **Secretary's notes**

"The King is dead: long live the King." My sincere thanks go to Glynn for his outstanding commitment to and support for the Association in general, and for organising the memorable trip to Arnhem, in particular. But, all good things must come to an end, and I am now looking forward to working with our new Chairman, Dan who, as you can tell, has hit the ground running.

A few dates for your diary:

The next ADW Coffee Morning will take place at 0930 -1230hrs on Thursday 30th January 2025, in HQ ADW. The Coffee Mornings are highly recommended and all retired PJIs are welcome. Please contact WO Martin White [martin.white114@mod.gov.uk](mailto:martin.white114@mod.gov.uk) to express your interest. The dates of other Coffee Mornings will be promulgated when known.

The 60th Anniversary of the Hastings Crash will take place in St Lawrence Church, Toot Baldon, on Sunday 6th July. We are hoping the RAF Falcons parachute display team will put on a display, to mark this auspicious occasion.

By way of encouragement to attend as many Association events as possible, I'd like to share this vignette from the last Beer Call I went to. Mike Westwood, an honorary member who attends most Association functions, was also there. I've known Mike since I first came to No1 PTS in 1985: he was flying the RAFSPA Cessna/Islander at Weston on the Green, at weekends. Over the years, our paths crossed on numerous occasions, both professionally and socially, but at the Beer Call Mike told me when he was 8 or 9, he used to watch the PJIs jumping onto the airfield at RAF Abingdon. He was in the Air Trg Corps at the time and so was allowed to fly in the Hastings aircraft and watch the PJIs jump off the ramp. He told me that he went towards the end of the ramp, to get a better look and didn't have to wear a safety belt!!! Incidentally, he told me the Loadmaster stayed well clear of the ramp while it was open. It is stories like this and meeting former colleagues that keep me coming back to Association events - it's hard to believe but there are still new stories to be heard.

I also attended an ADW Coffee Morning this year, and I echo the sentiments of our President: I was equally impressed with the professionalism and the range and depth of knowledge imparted. Some things have not changed: there are not enough resources to cover the huge array of tasks, but the emphasis is now on free fall parachute training rather than static line parachuting. It is difficult to comprehend the impact this switch in emphasis has had on training the extra manpower required let alone providing the manpower to meet this commitment.

You may be aware that FS (Ret'd) Harry Watts is championing the cause of PJIs who have either died from cancer or have been diagnosed with various cancers and heart and lung related diseases. There is evidence that breathing in aviation exhaust fumes and/or drinking the water at RAF Brize Norton, which might contain PFAS (forever chemicals) causes the onset of particular types of cancer and COPD. If you are concerned you should see your doctor and have your blood checked for PFAS levels. Harry is in contact with a top 100 UK law firm specialising in military matters, Hugh James, and you can either contact Harry or the firm directly, on a NO-WIN-NO-FEE basis. Harry's email is: [hw24499@gmail.com](mailto:hw24499@gmail.com) and the solicitor's details are: Rachel Seddon, Hugh James Team, [Rachel.Seddon@hughjames.com](mailto:Rachel.Seddon@hughjames.com) telephone 0161 388 6520.

It was great to see some familiar and not so familiar faces at the 80th Anniversary Reunion Dinner and AGM this year and long may that continue. For those who didn't attend the AGM, I paraphrased Laurence Binyon's famous poem at the time: we that are left do grow old and age does weary us, in line with our new Chairman's welfare initiative to keep in contact with each other. Incidentally, the AGM Minutes are available on The PJI Canopy Club Association website PJI [www.canopyclub.com](http://www.canopyclub.com). Our Welfare Rep, John Clatworthy ([john.clats@gmail.com](mailto:john.clats@gmail.com)) is standing by ready to provide help or he can put you in touch with the RAF Benevolent Fund, the Royal British Legion or the Soldiers' Sailors' and Airmen's Families Association (SSAFA).

## **PJI Canopy Club Arnhem - 20 Sep**



## **Association Visit to 24**

On the 20th September 2024 17 PJIs, 1 Hercules Pilot, 2 Irvin-GQ Engineers, 6 Paras and 3 guests left Brize Norton in a coach to commemorate the 80th Anniversary of Operation Market Garden at Arnhem. We were accompanied by Howard Lestre, a historical consultant, who was our guide for the 5 days tour. Brian Stevenson also proved to be an authority on the D-Day landings

and Operation Market Garden and he was able to give us a number of informative briefs at selected locations adding poignancy and fascinating detail to the horrendous events that resulted in 'A Bridge Too Far.'

We arrived at our hotel, Arnhem De Buunderkamp at Wolfheze and, for those familiar with the brilliant war film, this was the place where the inmates of a mental institution were released from their accommodation by RAF bombers attempting to subdue the German units in the area. Once in the hotel the beers started flowing and the stories and banter got underway.

Saturday 21st September, 4 days later than the actual airborne assault in 1944, we joined the 180,000 visitors at the Ginkel Heath DZ where 8 NATO countries dropped hundreds of military parachutists from 9 military aircraft.

One stick of parachutists provided an extraordinary display of British ingenuity that highlighted the 80th anniversary of the fateful airborne assault. The Chief of the Defence Staff was No.1 in the stick of 8 poppy coloured LLPs from the RAF A400M. The special parachutes were provided by Irvin-GQ and Dave Jackman, the Irvin-GQ Senior Packer, worked incredibly hard with the MoD Procurement Executive to ensure the Certificate of Airworthiness and other clearance documentation were in place and approved for the drop. This



project was so important to Dave that he insisted he was allowed to go to AFPSU at Letchworth to pack all 8 parachutes – he got a bit of a shock when he found out the CGS, Gen Sir Roly Walker, and a number of other star ranked parachutists were in the stick. As far as we were concerned it was the icing on the cake to be able to drop 8 poppy LLPs, one for each decade of the 80th commemoration. Dave summed it up in his own words - 'Seeing those poppy parachutes dropped over Arnhem was one of the proudest moments of my life.' We were honoured to have Dave with us in Arnhem, to see his project through to the end.



After the drop we had lunch in Oosterbeek followed by wreath laying at the RAF Memorial and then we made our way to the iconic Arnhem bridge where Lt Col John Frost and his men fought valiantly for 4 days, (the plan was to hold the bridge for only 2 days), before they ran out of ammunition and had to surrender. Their incredible story is so well depicted in the film 'A Bridge Too



Far.'

The next day we attended the main Arnhem 80th Anniversary Ceremony and flypast at the Arnhem Airborne Cemetery at Oosterbeek. This was probably



the most sombre yet uplifting event of the 5 days.

We all congregated amongst the war graves at the cemetery, along with thousands of other Dutch, British and EU civilians, serving and ex-servicemen from a number of NATO countries. The actual service, attended by Her Royal Highness the Princess Royal, was the sombre part, but towards the end of the ceremony hundreds of Arnhem Primary School children marched into the cemetery and stood by their allotted war grave with



flowers in their hand. Each child was given the responsibility of looking after a grave for



3 years.

The children tend and place flowers on the grave, and look after 'their soldier' - a truly emotional part of the ceremony. It was an education to witness how the Dutch ensure future generations fully understand what happened during the wars and the importance for them to make sure they are never occupied as their ancestors have been. Regrettably, in Great Britain this is not the case, purely and simply because we were not occupied. As a token of their appreciation for being liberated, almost every house in Oosterbeek flew the Airborne flag of Pegasus and a local football team plays in the sky blue and claret colours as a mark of respect. Here, in Britain, we are lucky if any of our children are taught about the wars.



In the afternoon we visited the Hartenstein Airborne Museum followed by a wreath laying at the 47 Air Despatch Squadron memorial service and then we returned to our hotel for a semi-formal dining in night.



The hotel provided us with a really good meal but the pièce de resistance of the night were the vignettes provided by the 2 Irvin-GQ Engineers. Dave Jackman, along with his father and son, have provided Irvin-GQ with almost 100 years of continuous parachute packing and trials support. Dave is very experienced with the packing of all types of military and civilian parachutes including ejection seat parachutes and aircraft brake

parachutes. It is thanks to Dave that a number of 'vintage' jets are now flying including the Vulcan aircraft.

Dave's vignette gave us the history of the military static line parachute, including those used at OpMarket Garden and the evolution of parachutes leading up to the LLP and LLRP in 1993. He also gave us the background to the 8 poppy parachutes and how they were cleared for use at Arnhem, adding that the LLP designer, the poppy LLP packer and the PJI responsible for introducing the LLP to service were all together on this trip.



Andy Cowley who is known to many PJIs, who worked at Boscombe Down or JATE, provided us with the background to the introduction of the LLP. As the Irvin Senior Parachute Designer, he described the issues they had in the early days and how he eventually achieved and proved the 250ft capability. Andy was the only person in the room who has jumped the LLP from 250ft on two occasions. He was able to point out that when Mark Smith and Wayne Loxton jumped on those sorties, they were the first PJIs since 1955 to parachute without a reserve. More interestingly perhaps, Andy also said that they all had to wear wetsuits just in case things went wrong – it would have been easier to collect up all the bits!

Needless to say, Dave, Andy and their vignettes, were very well received by all, and they have since gained Associate Membership of the Association.

We left Arnhem on the 4th day to return to UK and en-route we stopped to visit the Vught Concentration Camp. This Belgian camp was austere and shocking: it was responsible for the deaths of thousands of local people and for shipping Jewish people eastwards to German concentration camps and inevitable death. Another statistic that came as a surprise was the huge number of Belgium and Netherland men who joined and fought for the German SS Battalions.



We ended the day in the beautiful town of Ypres or Wipers as the British soldiers called it. That night we attended the last post ceremony that takes place every evening at 2000hrs at the Menin Gate Memorial. This monument is both serene and spectacular and there are 54,896 names inscribed on the walls: the remaining 34,984 are inscribed on the Tyne Cot Memorial to the Missing. The service itself was full of emotion, sadness and respect for those boys and men who gave the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom. Our President, Mick Milburn, laid a Canopy Club wreath during the service.



I'm sure all the members of the group will join me in thanking the Canopy Club Committee most sincerely for organising this extraordinary trip, in particular, Glynn Allcock and John Read for juggling with the numerous itinerary changes and keeping control of the finances. It was an exceptional trip that we will all remember for a very, very long time.

I have produced a video of the trip – if anybody has a spare half hour and would like to view the video please let me have your e-mail address and I will e-mail you a link to either download or stream the video. My e-mail address is: [David-stillman@outlook.com](mailto:David-stillman@outlook.com).

## **No 1 PTS, 1943: Honouring "Pippa" Latour Doyle Heroine of the SOE**

Born in South Africa on 8 April 1921, Phyllis "Pippa" Latour was an orphan by the age of 3 years old. Adopted by her French father's cousin, Pippa relocated to England in 1939 to finish her education. In November of 1941 she joined the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) as a flight mechanic for airframes, but things moved on in 1943!! Fluent in French, she was part of a group of about 20 taken away for training.



"It was unusual training – not what I expected, and very hard. It wasn't until after my first round of training that they told me they wanted me to become a member of the SOE. They said I could have three days to think about it. I told them I didn't need three days to make a decision - I'd take the job now." Latour officially joined the Special Operations Executive on 01 November 1943 and was commissioned as an Honorary Section Officer.

According to the New Zealand Army News: "She parachuted into Orne, Normandy on 01 May 1944 from a USAF Liberator bomber, to operate as part of the Scientist circuit, using the codename Genevieve. Pippa worked as a wireless operator with Resistance member Claude de Baissac, or "Denis," who was also a South African, of Mauritian origin, and his sister Lisé de Baissac. Denis had to plug gaps in the SOE's Northern France operations caused by double agents and lay the groundwork for an anticipated Allied landing.

For Pippa's cover story, De Baissac had forged papers showing she had left Paris to study painting. Within days of dropping into France, Latour made contact with London, using a safe house belonging to a doctor, before shifting to de Baissac's farmhouse headquarters. "Word got back to the network that an informer was among the resistance group who collected Pippa and that the Germans had discovered her parachute. Forced to move, Pippa, who by now was working closely with de Baissac's sister Lise, known as "Odile," fled on a bicycle and set up in a barn.

"Small of stature, Latour, who was fluent in French, posed as a teenage girl whose family had moved to the region to escape the Allied bombing. She rode bicycles around the area, selling soap and chatting with German soldiers. When she obtained any military intelligence, she encoded it for transmitting using one-time codes that were hidden on a piece of silk that she used to tie up her hair. At one point, she was brought in for questioning, but the German authorities did not think to examine her hair tie, and she was released."

Following the war, Phyllis married Patrick Doyle, an Australian engineer. The couple relocated to Kenya, then Fiji, Australia, and eventually settling in Auckland New Zealand. Pippa and Patrick had four children.

A highly decorated veteran of World War II, Phyllis Latour Doyle was honoured with the Member of the Order of the British Empire, Croix de Guerre 1939–1945, France and Germany Star, Defence Medal and on 25 November 2014 she was awarded the Légion d'Honneur, France's highest military honour. Pippa passed away on 07 October 2023 at the age of 102 years old.

Lest We Forget.

I was minded to write this as I was privileged to attend the Annual Dinner of the French Resistance Association in Paris as part of a group invited from the Kings Road.

Vic Last

**Ex HOLDFAST – April 1960 – Island of Sylt**

In April of 1960, Nato held an exercise in Northern Germany called "Ex Holdfast" out of Westerland on the Island of Sylt. It was a week long exercise and it rained every single day at some time or the other, and to make things worse, we were under canvas, 3 men to a tent, sleeping on canvas beds so that each day we got out of our sleeping bag's, only to put on damp clothes.

Messing facilities, not in a warm dry mess, but actual field kitchen made up of two large marquees joined together to form the kitchen and mess area. From what I remember, it was a combined Officers' and SNCOs' Mess, with just a small partition separating each messing area.

George Sizeland, Pete Mastin (RIP), and myself were just leaving, when George spotted a large bubble of rainwater in the seam joining the two marquees. He decided in his infinite wisdom to give it a poke, while we stood and watched as it started to travel down the seam until it found a weak spot and cascaded through directly above a table occupied by three SNCOs of 3 Para. They were completely drenched, and we beat a very hasty retreat, followed by some choice expletives about Blue Jobs.

Imagine my shock to find one of those guy's No 1 port stick who I was despatching a couple of days later. Luckily, he failed to recognise me from the previous encounter in the Mess tent. Fast forward about 12 months and I found myself on an Ex with 3 Para and recognised the same SNCO we had drenched, but he was now a CSM. I asked him if he remembered the incident in Germany: he took it in good part and we had a good laugh about it. Luckily he didn't bear a grudge!!

Colin Blythe

## **Exercise Clockwork – Norway**

I was fortunate enough to take part in 8 Clockwork exercises during my time at No 1PTS and RAF Hullavington, but this one was somewhat different. The Training Major for 3 Cdo Bde at the time was Maj Hector Gullen, an ex SAS officer and well known for his leadership during the Iranian Embassy siege. On this particular exercise he asked if the Marines could make an insertion with full kit and skis onto a DZ in the Hardangervidda and then ski to the Vemork heavy water plant near the Rjukan waterfalls in Telemark, as a re-enactment of the sabotage attack that took place in February 1943. This attack was the subject of the film 'The Heroes of Telemark'. A DZ recce had been completed, air clearances obtained and a date and 'P' hour agreed.

The day before the drop Hector approached me and asked if a Norwegian camera crew could fly on the sortie because the Norwegian television service wanted to broadcast the footage during the evening following the insertion. I agreed to ask the aircraft captain to request authority for the passengers from HQ 38 Gp and Hector said he would seek the approval of the MGRM for the exercise and the involvement of the Norwegian camera crew.

On the day of the insertion the aircraft captain told me he had not received a response from HQ 38 Gp, (nothing unusual there), but Hector confirmed he had received the approval of the higher authority, MGRM. After a short discussion and in the knowledge

that MGRM had approved the exercise we decided to proceed with the drop and to have the film crew on board.

Unfortunately, we hit a problem early on in the day. The DZSO and DZWO got airborne in a Navy Sea King helicopter to fly to the DZ to prepare for the drop but, unfortunately, they didn't get very far before a heavy snow storm forced the helicopter to return to Gardermoen.

Now, we had all the players in place, an aircraft that could fly in the inclement weather, (the forecast for the drop zone was good), and the DZ support party in place. It was time for some lateral thinking. The DZSO and I discussed the options and we came up with a plan that was doable but not necessarily in accordance with standard operating procedures – we did a risk assessment and decided to go for it - hey, that's what we were paid for!

The aircraft took off with the troops, DZSO, DZWO and the Norwegian camera crew. We overflew the DZ that was a large frozen lake with a good covering of snow. We could see the ambulance and parachute recovery team in situ and we then implemented 'Plan B'. We did a live run over the DZ and the DZSO, DZWO and their kit were delivered to the DZ by parachute. We did another low run over the DZ to make sure the DZSO and DZWO landed safely and were preparing to set up the DZ for the insertion of the Royal Marines. The aircraft then left the area to practice low level flying through the valleys of the Hardangavidda. After half an hour the aircraft returned to the DZ and dropped the troops in accordance with standard operating procedures. All this activity was enthusiastically being filmed by the Norwegian film crew!

All the parachutists landed safely, they donned their skis and headed off to complete a successful and nostalgic re-enactment of the attack on the heavy water plant. The aircraft returned to Gardermoen and I was back in the hangar when I saw the aircraft captain heading my way, carrying a piece of paper and looking a little agitated. He was not at all happy as he handed me a signal from HQ 38 Gp stating 'YOU ARE NOT, REPEAT, NOT AUTHORISED TO FLY THE NORWEGIAN CAMERA CREW'. I apologised to him and headed off to find Hector Gullen. I found him in the hangar and it was the first time I ever called an Army Major, (and especially an SAS Major), a bastard to his face and I said to him ' –You didn't get approval from MGRM did you? Hector just smiled, winked and said, "Who dares wins, Dave." Lesson learned! However, the Norwegian television service was very happy with the parachuting footage!

I wonder how many other DZSOs/DZWOs have been parachuted in to run a DZ.

Dave Stillman