

Scratchings

Journal of the Pen & Sword Club

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Editor Mike Peters



CONGRATULATIONS to Pen & Sword Club stalwart Lieutenant Colonel Lesley Wilde, second from left, who received a special award at the annual military dinner of the Company of Communicators 1st week. Lesley, who served with Media Operations Group (Volunteers) and has been a leading light in military communications for many years, received the award from Admiral Lord West of Spithead, the Lord Mayor Elect Vincent Keaveny and the Master, Colonel Deborah Oliver.

Court Assistant Colonel Rosie Stone wrote and read the citation which praised Lesley for her achievements and dedication to military media operations and for her support to the Company as a Freeman. The Pen & Sword Club is closely affiliated with the Company of Communicators.

Lesley: a talented military communicator

Lesley, who in addition to running her own public relations company, recently completed a truly impressive career as a talented and committed military media communicator, said Rosie Stone.

Lesley joined the Army in 1982 as an officer in the Women's Royal Army Corps and after an initial job in Guildford training new recruits she was stationed in Germany for several years with the Royal Artillery and the Royal Engineers before completing a tour as Garrison Adjutant

Lesley transferred from regular to reserve service, putting her acquired media skills to good use in the Territorial Army's Public Information Officer (TAPIO) pool, which then became the Media Operations Group. During her years of dedicated service, she has led exercises in places as far afield as the Falkland Islands and Oman.

She has helped tell the story of many historic events — including escorting some of the first media into Kuwait during Gulf War One in 1991, standing on the beaches in Normandy on the 70th Anniversary, to this year laying to rest HRH Prince Phillip during the challenges of Covid 19 constraints.

Lesley has taught defence personnel across the world and provided quality training in media operations on exercises in Cyprus, Poland, South Africa, Malaysia, Singapore, and Gibraltar to name a few. In Gulf War 2 she stepped up to command the Media Ops Group from her role as 21C while the CO deployed to Qatar. Lesley's leadership skills have never faltered through all her work at Army HQ, PJHQ, Force Troops Command and HQ UKLF.



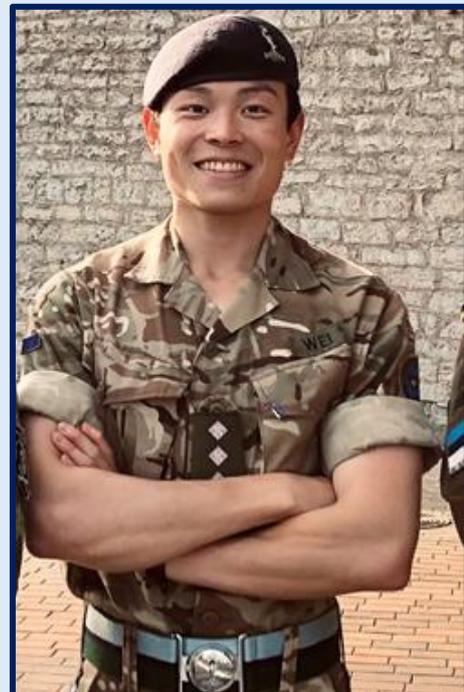
Ranny wins new award for operational communication

The first recipient of the Company's new award of Operational Communicator of the Year was Captain Ranny Wei who was nominated by Oliver Omar, of Permanent Joint HQ Media Cell. Ranny was sponsored to attend the dinner by Mark Laity, Director of the StratCom Academy.

Ranny serves with 71 City of London Signals Regiment and in civilian life is a commercial banking relationship manager with HSBC. As a young Reservist, Ranny volunteered for his first military deployment last year as an S03 to support the UK team in Estonia. Despite limited media experience he stepped up to a more senior role in support of his team. He provided consistent and competent media output, even agreeing to an extension which took his tour of duty well beyond the usual six months.

He faced a challenging work environment, demonstrating exceptional leadership when dealing with incidents, and effectively protected the UK's reputation during moments of crisis.

Despite the challenges of COVID, he improved the range of digital channels and coordinated several single service and defence communications campaigns including the successful 'Clap for Carers' output which achieved UK national media coverage from Estonia.



His work with Estonian and multi-national colleagues on media initiatives has significantly boosted the public standing of both the UK military and NATO across the wider Baltic region. Since returning from Estonia, Ranny has moved to Army HQ and is now working on operational support and advising on mobilised Reserves.

Task Force Communicator wins RN award

The Royal Navy Military Communicator of the Year was nominated by Commander Sam Hearn who heads the navy's Media Operations Specialist unit and was sponsored to attend the dinner by Matt West.

The winner was Lieutenant Commander Jeremy Olver, ministerial speechwriter, and Royal Navy reservist in recognition of his significant contributions to the Carrier Strike Group 21 international communications campaign throughout the past year.



Royal Naval Officer behind the First Sea Lord.

Jeremy embarked on HMS Queen Elizabeth in September 2020, launching straight into six weeks of exercises with NATO partners in the North Atlantic. Coupled with the challenge of learning his way around the 65,000-tonne aircraft carrier, he also quickly integrated with the battle staff, the ship's company, aircraft squadrons from the Fleet Air Arm, the RAF, and the US Marines.

At sea, Jeremy was the focal point for all media activity leading a dispersed team of media specialists. His tasks included internal communications - daily media monitoring and weekly CSG media situation reports — and external comms where he helped achieve an exponential increase in the Commander Strike Group's Twitter following from 2,500 in September 2020 to a staggering 18,000 by August 2021, making him the most followed

He led all the major media facilities to deliver complex messaging for both domestic and international audiences. These facilities included visits by the Queen, the Prime Minister, and the Secretary General of NATO. Jeremy also planned and delivered a series of high profile and time-consuming media engagements in Sicily and Cyprus.

Jeremy combined his skills as a media operations officer and his civilian experience as a speech writer and press officer with an instinct for news and storytelling, to create a visually compelling narrative for the Group.

Army Prize goes to Danielle

The Army Military Communicator of the Year was nominated by Colonel Dominic Coombes of Army Media & Communications and sponsored to attend the dinner by Mr Ed McMahon Turner of the Company of Communicators. The winner was Lieutenant Danielle Simmonds, a Royal Artillery officer currently based at the Army Foundation College in Harrogate. In 2020 she deployed at three days' notice to be the Media Communications Officer for 8th Engineer Brigade conducting the critical COVID 'whole town' testing pilot in Liverpool.

As a junior officer, with very little experience she proved to be an exceptional asset to the Brigade. She approached the task with enthusiasm and energy in tackling such a largescale UK operation. Some 2,000 soldiers were deployed on the first such operation of its type in the Western hemisphere attracting significant domestic and international attention.

Lieutenant Simmonds delivered with precision and at a speed that would have left many more experienced media officers far behind. Her coordination of other Unit Communications Officers, Headquarters Staff and the Media was carefully handled. She managed a relentless volume of concurrent work strands at pace, with clarity and accuracy, remaining calm and positive despite the pressure, long hours, and no days off for six weeks.

As well as the overwhelming amount of media coverage she achieved, her work in helping to monitor significant mis and disinformation from anti-testing protestors and Covid deniers contributed to maintaining a positive narrative. She understood the delicate balance required in striking the right tone in telling the story of the Army's role in the operation without overstepping and creating potential friction with the lead agencies — the NHS and Liverpool City Council - ensuring harmony was maintained.



Following the operation, Lieutenant Simmonds added longer term value by delivering an insightful presentation for other communicators on her role in the operation to the Unit Communications Officers Network, which will be an invaluable resource for those filling similar roles in future

Stuart transforms RAF digital channels.

The Royal Air Force Military Communicator of the Year Award was nominated by Alanah Donnell, Head of RAF Engagement & Communications and the winner was sponsored to attend the dinner by Jeremy Greaves, Airbus Interim Head of UK Public Affairs.

Squadron Leader Stuart Smith led on transformation of the Royal Air Force digital channels over the last year. This included 'The Inside Air' podcast where he assisted the delivery team by creating the right conditions and ensuring support from RAF senior leadership.

The podcast has smashed its annual targets within the first three months of launch, a direct result of his leadership.

Concurrently, Stuart has personally championed a step-change in the development of the RAF website, better integrating it with Twitter and delivering new interactive experiences to reflect the modern multi-domain RAF brand.

In order to achieve this success Stuart improved training for the hundreds of practitioners across the 'Whole Force' in not just how to use social media effectively, but also how to be more strategic in using these channels to achieve an effect.



He developed a new training module and rolled it out to the widest possible media and communications community, which strengthened their capability and created a stronger network of practitioners.

His toughest task was inheriting a Social Media review of over 500 RAF social media accounts and turning it into a strategic review. This resulted in reducing, merging, and shifting accounts to different channels leading to some difficult conversations with certain individuals about how they use their personal and professional identities online!

As a result of this work, however, he built a network of practitioners across the RAF that was used to deliver a controlled and appropriate response to the funeral arrangements for Prince Philip earlier this year including a full 'black out' to ensure that formal sequences of mourning protocol were followed across defence.

RAF digital was singled out by the MoD director of comms for exemplary work at this time. All of this has been achieved in addition to his day job at a time when his team's resourcing (which should be Stuart +3) was at times limited to just himself!

Special award for civil defence communicators



A special commendation for the Civil Servant Military Communicator of the Year was introduced this year. The winner, Mike Reader, Interim Head of RAF Communications, was nominated by Alanah Donnell, the RAF's Head of Engagement and Communications. Mike was sponsored to attend the dinner by Lord Mayor Elect Vincent Keaveny.

The Company's awards often go to those who have worked on high-profile media campaigns. The last year has been a critical time for those involved in supporting our 'Whole Force' through a year of unprecedented challenges. Mike led on a variety of well recognised and successful campaigns during the year.

He coordinated a cross-department team on the RAF COVID-19 Internal Communications campaign from the outset of the pandemic, creating a bespoke RAF hub for personnel on both the RAF intranet and website. As government communications around the pandemic have evolved in 2021, so has the RAF campaign, where Mike shifted the focus of the team to encouraging personnel

(both military and civilian) to have their vaccinations and myth-busting in general about the virus.

Throughout the campaign Mike kept the interests of RAF personnel at heart, engaging with senior leaders and crafting a narrative which ensured that messaging was delivered in a manner best fitting the audience that was being targeted.

The internal success of regular video messages from the Chief of the Air Staff surpassed any previous video content seen in the Service. He enabled the adoption of a regular 'Whole Force' dial-in, led by the Chief and supported by other Senior Leaders

Early on in the pandemic, on what should have been a nationally celebrated event, Mike again took the lead on another cross-department team in coordinating and delivering content for VE Day 75. The success of the day was widely recognised, with the RAF achieving a high profile on many national television channels

Mike has proved to be a communications natural with integrity at his core, who has been a great mentor to all of Air Media & Comms and delivered over and above to provide the best communications possible to the Whole Force

BFBS presenter Casey wins special recognition award with RAF Media Reserves

The Company of Communicators also made a special award to BFBS presenter Flying Officer Amy Casey of RAF Media Reserves who applied her extensive media experience and expertise to a raft of taskings in support of the RAF, defence engagement and communications.

With the stand up of Space Command at HQ Air Command, Casey completed the demanding introductory RAF Space Awareness course to equip herself with enough knowledge to assist Air Media & Communications and Space Command with a range of communications projects. This also put Casey in a position to offer bespoke training to 7644 Squadron personnel on this vital new capability.

Amy also led a small production team to plan, script and record all of the interviews, addresses and musical audio components for a BBC Radio 4 Remembrance Day special programme marking 100 years of the RAF College Cranwell.

She then worked with the BBC programme producer to create the unique “Radio 4 Sunday Service” programme which transmitted on Remembrance Sunday morning. A first for the RAF and the BBC.

In late December Casey stood forward to assist SJC and was instrumental in delivering the reassurance strategy to assist stranded long-distance lorry drivers in Kent during the period when cross Channel transport was halted.

Lieutenant Colonel Lorna Ward who was in charge of the work wrote: “Amy did a fantastic job gathering, editing, and releasing multiple radio interviews which were perfectly targeted to our local and regional audiences to inform and reassure about the military presence in the community, as well as inform at a national level. She hit the ground running and showed initiative and huge enthusiasm.”

Since then, Amy has played an important role in the RAF’s InsideAir Podcast team. This is a bi-weekly podcast produced exclusively for the RAF by RAF Media Reserves and it provides listeners with a unique, behind the scenes insight into the world of aviation through the RAF.

Main features cover diverse RAF related topics from combat air today, air mobility, space, artificial intelligence and apprenticeships to a Reserves special for Armed Forces Week and a forward look to the RAF of 2040. Contributions feature the full gamut of RAF personnel from Chief of the Air Staff and the Senior Leadership Team to new personnel in basic training.

Amy is part of the small production team which saw InsideAir launch at the beginning of 2021, with over 10,000 downloads in the first four weeks and, charting in the top three percent of all Apple podcasts globally.

InsideAir reached number one in the UK technology podcast charts. By beginning of April, it had been downloaded more than 30,000 times and since its launch InsideAir has remained in the top 100 Apple podcasts for technology, extraordinary for a new production from a non-mainstream publisher.

Alongside all of this Casey has not missed a beat in her busy full time civilian job as a producer and presenter with BFBS. A remarkable year for this energetic, charismatic, and talented RAF Reserves communicator who was only commissioned into the RAuxAF in 2019.



Top Table Guests



Top table guests at the annual military dinner of the Company of Communicators. The Pen & Sword Club was well represented at the event and its members also featured among the award winners and those who nominated or sponsored the recipients. In the week since the event the event, winners Squadron Leader Stuart Smith, Captain Ranny Wei, Lt Danielle Simmonds and Mike Reader have joined the Club on invitation. Commander Olver, the Royal Navy award winner has been a member for a number of years.

At centre is Master of the Company, Deborah Oliver who has long standing connection with military media operations and The Pen. Also in the picture is Club President, Hugh Colver and Executive Vice President Mike Peters. Missing from this picture is Rosie Stone, who is a member of the club's executive council.