



The Royal Engineers Association Radio Branch

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Notes of the REA Radio Branch Development Meeting held on 1st August 2017 at Command Support Branch, REWW, Gibraltar Barracks

Present:

Command Support Branch

Capt J Woolley RE
Sgt S Walker
L/Cpl S Marshall

REA Branch

Mr TG Milne
Mr S Dixon REA Branch Secretary

Apologies: Mr R MacDonald REA Branch President

Aim

The aim of the meeting is to gain *working level* approval and sign off of the branch development plan, before proceeding to submit an application for funding.

Item 1 - Presentation. Opening Address - Mr S Dixon.

Four copies of the draft development plan were circulated for discussion.

About this Plan

A brief was given as to the content.

Where we are now

By studying the relationship between the REA branch and Command Support Branch it has been seen that all our heritage and assets have been hived off and split by various reconfigurations.

Branch Experience

In the past, when the corps was at its peak of human resources, there was a good connection between professional development and the trade and there were several radio and electronics clubs around the corps run by our tradesmen. These were used both for welfare (Fun, Leisure) and professional development (Learning). One ex RE I know opened a radio and electronics club in BFPO 30 in 1982. He was a senior NCO, Regimental Signals Instructor interested in computers and radio. Eventually this learning led to a job in CIS as a project manager and then a job as a civilian computer systems manager, IT and Radio

Systems Project Manager. He took his cue from his seniors and peers who also gave *their* spare time. Also in this REA branch there are an electronic system designer who worked on the IT for HMS Queen Elizabeth II and an electronic engineer who worked for BFBS as a transmission engineer. All peers from the same period. They all took the same line while serving, to work toward their second careers and life after service and each has a personal story about how this positively affected their lives.

About the Plan

Our plan sets out what might have been had the assets and support we had then, been continuously developed. It modernises the current facility at the centre, which is currently minimal and obsolete. It sets out how to develop the branch to grow, and to benefit the corps as a whole. (It was acknowledged that the corps invests in NVQ's which provide transferable skills at resettlement time, thanks, Sgt Walker).

Reason Why

The reason why we are doing this is the corps commanders set regimental objectives. Among these objectives for the REA are to embody a whole life concept and to look to welfare to foster esprit de corps across sappers of *all age groups*. This mirrors a national agenda covering health, well-being, industry, security etc. CPD is about preparing for life to come. If you don't prepare and look after your welfare, it suggests, after the forces, life can be difficult, leading to poverty and poor physical and mental health.

Annual Programme - objectives

The branch is not sufficiently sized or organised well enough to be able to hold an annual reunion as yet (but the command support annual symposium dinner is an excellent platform that might change this (as is refocussing the branch at Minley to take advantage of the REA Minley weekend).

Where we want to be

Because of the above, our aim is to develop into an organisation with an objective that sets the example for self-teaching and professional development, and health and wellbeing both during and after service life.

Our plan is to use our skills to showcase to others, both in the community and the corps, that our trade and professional and amateur skills can have positive outcomes for sappers - especially in later years. It draws on the technical challenges and fun elements of amateur radio, computing and electronics to encourage projects, teaching, learning and positive lifestyles to instil confidence at various points in life.

Reading the Plan

The attached plan was read by those present. It is an outline plan.

Concluding the session: Any questions or amendments?

Item 2 - Discussion

A number of topics were discussed as follows:

Uptake and Demand

There was scepticism about the uptake of a hobby like amateur radio at various levels of signals training and corps life. SD said that the Radio Branch was broader than it is made out to be via amateur radio which is 45% of the branch - a large special interest group and amateur radio is an excellent self-training tool. The branch plan is to cater for all interests by following the annual events calendar of the REA to encourage sappers of all minds and viewpoints to become active members. The new assets in the plan would support this and benefit the corps. In answer to a point Sgt Walker made about uptake of hobbies by young soldiers the branch understands there is an optimum age group where the human mind turns to more serious pursuits, whereas younger soldiers don't immediately see a hobby as overriding social needs. In later years hobbies are as important as having a job, creating social opportunities etc.

Benefits

The radio branch is setting its aim at increasing its visibility and promoting electronic hobbies as a way to counter loneliness, be active and maintain physical and mental health. Capt Woolley said the aim to promote mental health was timely due to a number of recent suicides.

Presence

Sgt Walker said if it is to be a joint venture between the REA and CSB, the REA Radio Branch needs to engage people directly and show a presence, as people pass through CSB on courses.

Integration

Mr Dixon volunteered to develop a single or half period presentation provided the CSB could give it the time slot in the course program. (even a movie or video clip would help but ours (REA) were developed in the fifties). Action SD\JW. In the interim the branch will hold regular development meetings which will increase its presence and highlight veterans affairs.

Membership

It was asked if anyone could join the REA Branch and Mr Dixon explained that he gets applications and enquiries from REA Members, Serving regular and volunteer soldiers and various people with connections to the corps which are welcome in line with the corps requirements. (The main criteria are an interest in electronic communications and membership or an interest in a branch of the corps.) People don't have to be REA members to join us. If people join the branch then they are encouraged to take up REA Membership.

Branch Assets - Website

The branch web site is designed to attract people into the trade and the REA Branch providing continuity across the age groups and showcase the trade. It has several facets which can be developed. In the plan, it is designed to be used to promote CSB and in-unit activity such as course winners, and photographs and facilitate skills such as creative writing.

Bid for Funding

The proposed solution is high quality, would it not be better to set our sights lower? The proposed solution is an estimate at present. It can be scaled but results will vary. If it gets the quality solution it requires through its bid for funding it will be seen to be at the cutting

edge of digital technology which it needs to make its approach attractive. Technology will be used to gather information about locations and display these via the web for example. The branch needs to set a pertinent technological challenge as well as highlighting the entry level through training and education. (The hobby has many facets compatible with learning about information security and information management etc.)

Information about the branch and its activities

The website itself also provides information about electronic hobbies and how to get started. It also has a learning slant because cyber skills are needed to run it. Mr Dixon hopes eventually to find younger people who are interested enough to take this on as a system manager and develop it, under tuition. It is about communications which we believe is the ultimate aim of the regimental signals instructor.

If people are interested in amateur radio how do they get started?

Today, at entry level, this is a cheap digital hobby with many facets. Two such examples were discussed. One is a website called [hack green](#) which is a radio receiver on the internet built in a cold war secret nuclear bunker. It provides a sensitive short wave receiver free to listen to. [Also how to use a USB Stick \(to convert a computer TV adapter\) as a shortwave receiver for about £12.](#) See here for a [link to our CEI](#) All these topics are covered in our bulletins and people can contribute - often via Social Media. (One of our members uses the internet to listen to our weekly radio net in this way.)

How would the amateur radio station, proposed to be established at the school be presented?

Mr Dixon said his initial thoughts were to keep it locked in a glass doored electronics cabinet and remotely access it via a PC, with a display nearby showing what was going on, i.e. who was operating it and what countries were being worked via an electronic log. This fits in with space requirements and provides a neat project for a technology expert to(s). The main aim would be as stated in the plan. It can be put where people can see it but not touch it in order to attract interest and comply with licensing. Qualified people can use a computer to access it for operating it etc.

Branch Radio Net

What area is covered, do you have overseas members?

Our net is UK Wide and covers the low countries at present. Our members are mainly in UK but we have members in Canada and Florida. Mr Milne said that the branch welcomes people listening to its radio net, it has followers who like to listen to it as well as join in.

To emphasise, the radio branch isn't wholly focused on amateur radio as a hobby. Its members have a track record of success in encouraging self-training and personal development in Computing and Sgt Walker, for example would meet people in the branch who had that interest since the eighties and who had been employed in the trade both in the corps and out.

Costs\Value for Money

Mr Milne expressed concern about the cost of the solution proposed and the money being asked for. Mr Dixon said he had no doubts value for money would be achieved and benefits realised but crewing it might be difficult initially. Once people saw the quality of the solution they would want to get involved - part of the aim is to make this happen, re-invigorate inactive members and give them opportunities to develop digital skills.

Plan

Currently the plan is an aspirational bid, which needs more detailed plans to implement. It is reasonably challenging and requires a number of skills to complete. Thought must be given to management, budget and timescales. He said there are enough events in the REA Calendar to make it worthwhile as a vehicle to advertise the REA commitment to the corps health and welfare and benevolence. Sgt Walker said it could give us a presence at Regimental open days.

Mr Dixon agreed that and said that this was in scope, as were radio related expeditions to activate the corps presence out in the community, making and recording radio contacts with communities around the world.

Membership Numbers and Demand

In answer to a question about the numbers of people currently interested Mr Dixon pointed to Appendix 1 of the plan to show how many people were interested in the branch via social media and said when he posts articles on the web they get between 150 and 250 hits. Several times the number of registered members. This proves a following is growing. The aim is to convert these followers into active members in a controlled manner supported by the integration of REA Radio with CSB.

Training and Education

Mr Milne volunteered to take up a role in promoting amateur radio for self-training at the CSB through training and education. Sgt Walker said he thought the syllabus had links with the courses at the CSB but would need access to some [instructional material](#) to identify the appropriate modules. Whether or not people were interested in taking this exam during training was a moot point. Mr Dixon said in the radio branch there are at least three members who did just that and he thought there were more. We seem to have lost information about who actually did this - so can't re-engage them directly. Mr Milne said the usual way to enter such a hobby was to take the exam through a local radio club. He pointed out that Farnborough has a local radio club and he would facilitate contact with them, and also obtain some promotional material. It was noted the barracks was within the RSGB's Southern region. but in any event the design of the address to courses needs to be up to date.

Item 3 - Requirements, Next Steps:

(Our requirements are set out at appendix 2.) Mr Dixon to Capt Woolley, when you have had time to review the plan and answer your own questions, please could you brief major Gurung and both sign to approve it letting me have the front cover back?

When I return a copy of the front sheet signed by all parties, could you then please consider forwarding the plan up the chain of command via RHQ? I will forward it to HQ REA and REA SE District simultaneously.

AOB

Next Meeting: One month to Six Weeks TBC (Action SD).

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