



Many older members of the RMHS may puzzle over the background and history of modern units in the Corps of 2007. Here is the background and role of one which had its origins in 43 Commando Royal Marines

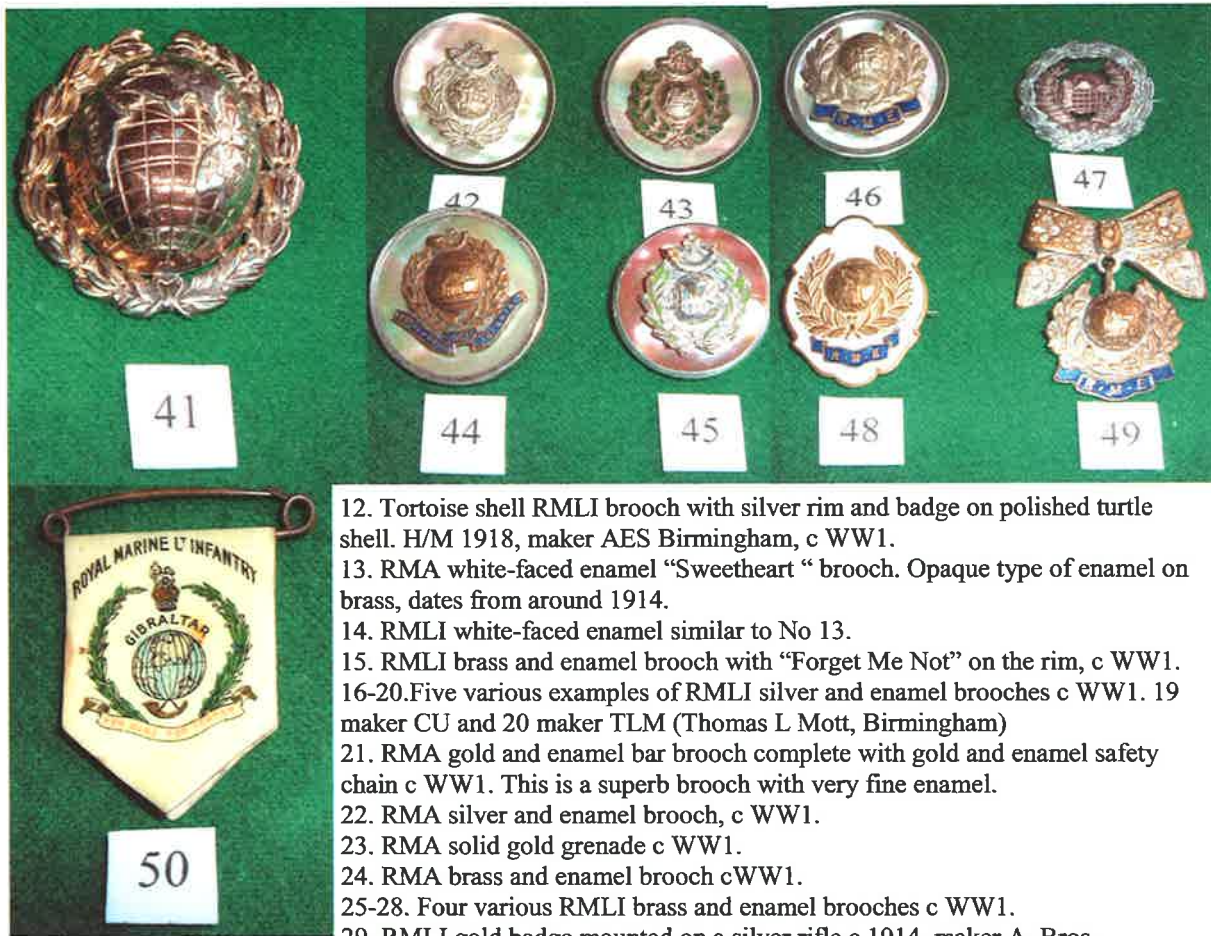
Fleet Protection Group, Royal Marines

The Fleet Protection Group Royal Marines' most recent ancestor was Comacchio Group Royal Marines. But how was the name of Comacchio chosen? Was there a precedent? The answer to the latter is 'Yes'.

When 41 Commando RM disbanded in Malta in 1977, a Company Group was retained in Malta and renamed 'Salerno' Company, the name being taken from the Commando's Memorable Date from World War 2. This consisted of a normal rifle company with a support troop of Mortars, Wombats, Assault Engineers and Surveillance. There was also a Headquarters element about 60 strong, mainly drivers, signallers and clerks. About two months after the main unit of 41 Commando arrived back in UK, the whole unit was rebriefed but the naming precedent had been set for the future. However Salerno Company did not disband until they returned from Malta on 30th March 1979 when they were the last British troops to leave the fortress after 180 almost continuous years service.

Therefore when 43 Commando disbanded in the UK in 1979, it retained what was initially called 'R' Company. Later that year it was announced that Comacchio Company, named after the World War 2 Memorable Date of 43 (RM) Commando, would be formed in May 1980. Lake Comacchio was where Corporal Tom Hunter was posthumously awarded his VC. The first Officer Commanding was Major Chris Hickinbotham who was appointed to join on 7th January 1980. Thus the precedent of naming independent units was continued.

At the time of its formation, four of the original five commando units were in operation, 40, 41, 42 and 45. It might have seemed logical to call the new company '43 Commando Royal Marines' but as it would not be able to deploy for world-wide operations it was felt it could not be classified as a commando unit. It was therefore decided that the new company would take on many of 43 Commando's old traditions, including its red and gold colour lanyard.



12. Tortoise shell RMLI brooch with silver rim and badge on polished turtle shell. H/M 1918, maker AES Birmingham, c WW1.
13. RMA white-faced enamel "Sweetheart" brooch. Opaque type of enamel on brass, dates from around 1914.
14. RMLI white-faced enamel similar to No 13.
15. RMLI brass and enamel brooch with "Forget Me Not" on the rim, c WW1.
- 16-20. Five various examples of RMLI silver and enamel brooches c WW1. 19 maker CU and 20 maker TLM (Thomas L Mott, Birmingham)
21. RMA gold and enamel bar brooch complete with gold and enamel safety chain c WW1. This is a superb brooch with very fine enamel.
22. RMA silver and enamel brooch, c WW1.
23. RMA solid gold grenade c WW1.
24. RMA brass and enamel brooch c WW1.
- 25-28. Four various RMLI brass and enamel brooches c WW1.
29. RMLI gold badge mounted on a silver rifle c 1914, maker A. Bros. (Ahronsberg Bros, Birmingham.)
30. RMLI gold badge on silver laurel wreath, c WW1.
31. RMLI gold badge on a silver wishbone, c WW1.
32. RMLI badge in 9 carat gold on a gold bar, c WW1.
33. Smaller RMLI badge in 9 carat gold on a gold bar, c WW1.
34. Globe and Laurel in gold on a gold b, maker JG (JR Gaunt, Birmingham) c WW1. This brooch could be worn for RMLI RM Engineers, RM Labour Corps and RM Submarine Miners.
35. Smaller silver globe and gold laurel wreath on a gold bar, maker Page, Plymouth. Could also be used for other Units as No34
- 36-37. Two similar RMLI silver and enamel bar brooches c 1920. Note bugle below laurel wreath.
38. RMLI brass and enamel horseshoe brooch c 1920 (The words "Good Luck" were added to horseshoes during the latter half of WW1)
39. RMLI gilt and enamel horseshoe brooch, c1920. Again these brooches have bugles which dates them prior to 1923.
40. RMLI brass button in a pendant style with a picture of a Marine fitted to the reverse, c WW1.
41. RMLI Officers silver globe from a helmet plate professionally mounted on a silvered laurel wreath by a jeweller with the rear covered and a pin fixed.
- 42-45. Four RMLI base metal badges on mother of pearl with silver rims, c WW1.
46. Royal Marines Engineers mother of pearl disc with silver rim. Marked on rear "Real Silver Rim", c WW1.
47. Gold globe with RME at base on a silver wreath, marked Sterling, c WW1.
48. White faced enamel brooch with RME. on scroll, c WW1.
49. White metal pendant bow brooch with RME on enamel scroll at base, c WW1.
50. Celluloid RMLI brooch on base metal pin, c WW1. This could have been a badge that was sold to raise funds for comforts for troops serving at the front.

Comacchio Company Royal Marines became operational at RM Condor, Arbroath on 1 May 1980 and came under the command of Commandant General Royal Marines (CGRM) in London. It was responsible for the protection of nuclear weapons in static sites and in transit and also for the provision of reaction forces to counter terrorist incidents on offshore installations or ships at sea.

The Early Years

After a study directed by CGRM it was concluded that Comacchio Company Royal Marines would benefit from an uplift in manpower. The increase, which totalled 8 x Officers, 1 x WO1, 1 x WO2, 12 x SNCOs and 135 x Corporals and Marines resulted in a revised organisation of Comacchio Company Royal Marines with an overall complement of 424. These increases were implemented by 1 April 1982 and were to be reviewed one year later.

With the increase of manpower and in the interest of consistency it was decided that the existing 8 rifle troops would be split into two separate companies. Each company would assume the responsibility for one of the specific tasks of Comacchio Company. Once again resurrecting its links with 43 Commando, O and P Royal Marines Companies were chosen. It was decided that O Company would be responsible for the OILSAFE operations, and P Company would be responsible for the protection of the UK's nuclear deterrent. It was felt that the manpower would be split evenly between the two tasks but it quickly became evident that the majority of the manpower would be required for the nuclear protection duties.

With the proposed formation of the two new companies within Comacchio Company, it was decided that the name of Comacchio Company should be changed to Comacchio Group Royal Marines with effect from 1 November 1983 with two separate companies O and P. Lieutenant Colonel Andy Letchford MBE became the first CO.

It is known that the OILSAFE operations continued and expanded to cover maritime counter terrorist (MCT) tasks worldwide. This involved counter-terrorist operations against ships as well as oil and gas installations. In its wider role, the MCT force undertook exercises worldwide including Norway, USA and Cyprus and matured into a most effective and respected organisation. Live operations were conducted/supported although the classification of this article precludes further detail.

Continued Development

The nuclear protection role of the Group continued to develop but on 28 July 1987, Comacchio Group Royal Marines lost the MCT mission. Following a study into the centralisation of the Royal Marines Maritime Counter Terrorist (MCT) forces, approval was given for elements of Comacchio Group Royal Marines to move from Royal Marines Condor to Royal Marines Poole and form part of the Special Boat Squadron (SBS); sub units of the SBS, which was then renamed Special Boat Service, were called squadrons and existing SB sections were called troops. M Squadron was formed and was responsible for the MCT tasks formerly carried out by O Company of Comacchio Group Royal Marines. From this date onwards, Comacchio Group ceased to have any MCT responsibility but retained its main task of safe-guarding Britain's nuclear deterrent. The Director Special Forces became responsible for the SBS.

1 September 1992 saw a dramatic change in the size and shape of Comacchio Group Royal Marines. Previously each company had consisted of 2 troops without a company commander. Now each company had a company commander, CSM and 4 rifle troops. The Group had also expanded from 2 to 3 companies, R Company being the latest addition.

The Group continued to carry out a varied and interesting training cycle in addition to meeting the operational requirement at RN Armament Depots at Coulport and Faslane. This included the

on-going programme of biannual exchange visits with the USMC Security Force Battalion (Ex *Tartan Eagle*) and exercising in the West Indies with the Regional Security System forces (Ex *Tradewinds*).

Creation of FPGRM

In March 2001 Comacchio Group RM was renamed the Fleet Protection Group Royal Marines but they retained the lanyards and traditions of 43 Commando. This reflected the new diversity of the Group's activities and the relocation of the Group from RM Condor, Arbroath to HMNB Clyde. A structure of O, P and R Rifle Squadrons and HQ Squadron was also adopted.

Current Standing

In March 2004 the Group undertook a number of changes to reflect its evolving role which saw P Squadron renamed as S Squadron. In April 2004 the Group completed a further manning uplift to 533 personnel to enable the maintenance of these additional tasks.

Roles and Tasks of FPGRM

The Group is required to fill a number of roles:

Security of Nuclear Weapons - The Group provides military support for the Final Denial of access to nuclear weapons in HM Naval Base Faslane, at the Royal Naval Armament Depot at Coulport and in transit. The duty squadron provides a number of Reaction Forces at various notices to move in order to support the static guarding undertaken by the Ministry of Defence Police. This is a complex task that requires a thorough understanding of Rules of Engagement, accurate weapon handling and good CQB skills. This role is becoming more demanding as new weapons; skills and tasks are being introduced.

Only a proportion of squadron manpower is deployed at any one time, with the remainder taking leave, courses or training. When not on duty, the squadron conducts field firing, mountain training and other sub-unit training. It is also liable to be deployed on exercises such as Ex Trade Winds (in the Caribbean), to take part in November Ceremonies at the Cenotaph in London, or conduct cross-training with the USMC

during the biannual Ex Tartan Eagle.



Joint Support Unit (JSU) Northwood - The Group provides a detachment for the physical security of key parts of the Northwood Headquarters, near London. The detachment is formed from manpower provided by O and R squadrons with marines becoming eligible to serve at Northwood once they have completed a minimum of 6 months in FPGRM.

Fleet Standby Rifle Troop (FSRT) - The Group provides a number of teams to conduct tasks in support of the Royal Navy worldwide. All the teams receive specialist training and equipment and are held at high readiness for deployment. Many of the teams are specifically trained in non-compliant boarding skills. Those wishing to join an FSRT team are required to serve an apprenticeship in FPGRM and to be specifically recommended as suitable for this highly demanding and rewarding role.