Simon works in the Military on GCHQ's behalf in Iraq

Working as a member of the Military on behalf of GCHQ gave Simon a great insight into the complementary, occasionally competing, demands of both organisations.

Working for a civilian took a little getting used to, and occasionally led to the odd interesting situation, but the quality of the GCHQ staff deployed to operational theatres is unrivalled, and they provided essential support and guidance to the Military in all areas without exception.

Taking delivery of supplies from the UK and arranging its onward safe transportation led to opportunities to explore Iraq by both air and ground. Swooping along the Shatt Al-Arab using evasive flying manoeuvres, low, fast and with stomach-churning tight turns, driving to visit local Iraqi Army units, always being ready to deliver essential items or provide specialist technical advice was all part and parcel of an interesting and varied day's work. A quick dip in the Consulate's pool. An unexpected bonus, at least until they closed it.

The incredible variety of work, projects undertaken, and seemingly impossible problems that were solved by having GCHQ staff embedded in the operational area led to a very satisfying deployment in harsh summer conditions during a time when the situation on the ground was taking a turn for the worst.

But it was not all work; I will never forget the '9 holes of golf' squeezed in very early one morning with the GCHQ staff and others around an ammunition storage area. We shared one golf club between us and the highlight was the 9th hole. To get to it you had to chip the ball over a crashed and bullet-ridden aircraft..! It was not exactly St Andrew's, but it certainly was memorable.

Deployed staff

At the heart of GCHQ's support to the Military are our staff. It is a team effort to gather, analyse, translate and report intelligence, but when it comes to keeping the Military safe in warzones, the delivery of intelligence is often done by a single person.

Putting a Signals Intelligence expert in the field can both improve understanding of what the Military need, whilst protecting the use of intelligence. This is a lesson learned in World War One, and it is still valuable today.

In recent conflicts, GCHQ's men and women have volunteered in numbers to deploy to warzones to help keep the Military safe. 90 GCHQ staff have received the medal for service in Iraq, and 156 for service in Afghanistan.

PUBLISHED

17 March 2016

REVIEWED

25 January 2019

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