

Salisbury Plain hosts largest military exercise in ten years

Six thousand soldiers and 300 armoured vehicles from units from the 7th Armoured Brigade (the Desert Rats) have taken part in their final training exercise – the largest on Salisbury Plain in ten years – before heading off to Afghanistan.

One of the final brigades to deploy in a combat role, Germany-based 7th Armoured Brigade put its soldiers, from all three services, through vigorous paces this month as it prepares for the drawdown of British troops from Helmand Province.

The tour itself will be like no other, with soldiers deploying for about eight months instead of the usual six. One of the primary roles of the tour is to bring home equipment from Afghanistan.

Brigadier James Woodham OBE MC spoke about how the Afghan forces are fully in the lead and how part of the Brigade's role will be to close down the forward operating bases and redeploy equipment back to the UK and Germany.

Operation Herrick 19 runs from September 2013 until June 2014 with the initial 6,000 soldiers being reduced to 5,200 by the end of this year.

Salisbury Plain Training Area is maintained by the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO), which delivers the Training Service, enabling Defence training users to live, work, train and deploy at home and overseas.

Commenting on the exercise Lieutenant Colonel Mark Hiskett, Principal Training Safety Officer, DIO Ops Training South West, said:

"DIO's priority is to support our Armed Forces as they prepare for operations. The size and nature of the Plain means that it offers excellent training facilities, ideal conditions and the perfect backdrop for large scale exercises such as these."

At over 38,000 hectares (94,000 acres) Salisbury Plain is the UK's largest training area and offers first-class and diverse training facilities to enable the British Army to meet its training requirements to prepare for operations worldwide.

Ends

Further information:

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DIO website: www.gov.uk/dio

Notes to Editors

1. The Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) is part of the MOD. We are responsible for managing and maintaining land and properties, as well as providing related support services, to meet the current and future needs of the MOD and personnel at home and abroad, and to support current operations.
2. Our work includes providing, supporting and improving: operational units; single living and service family accommodation; training areas and historic military sites. DIO actively manages these and supporting services, such as soft facilities management and guarding, to ensure the needs of Defence are met, value for money is achieved, heritage protected and environmental goals achieved.
3. Picture captions – please credit 'Crown copyright/MOD 2013':
 - 161-03- Soldiers of D Company 4 SCOTS clearing a landing site for a Chinook helicopter
 - 161-05 – Chinook helicopter lifting 105mm gun
 - 161-06 - Apache helicopter in over watch
 - 161-08 - Military working dogs in action