

Storybook Soldiers News



From the Management Team – Summer 2013 – Issue No. 3

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Storybook Soldiers is now in its sixth year producing story CDs for the children of deploying soldiers and we are very pleased to report that the scheme is as popular as ever.



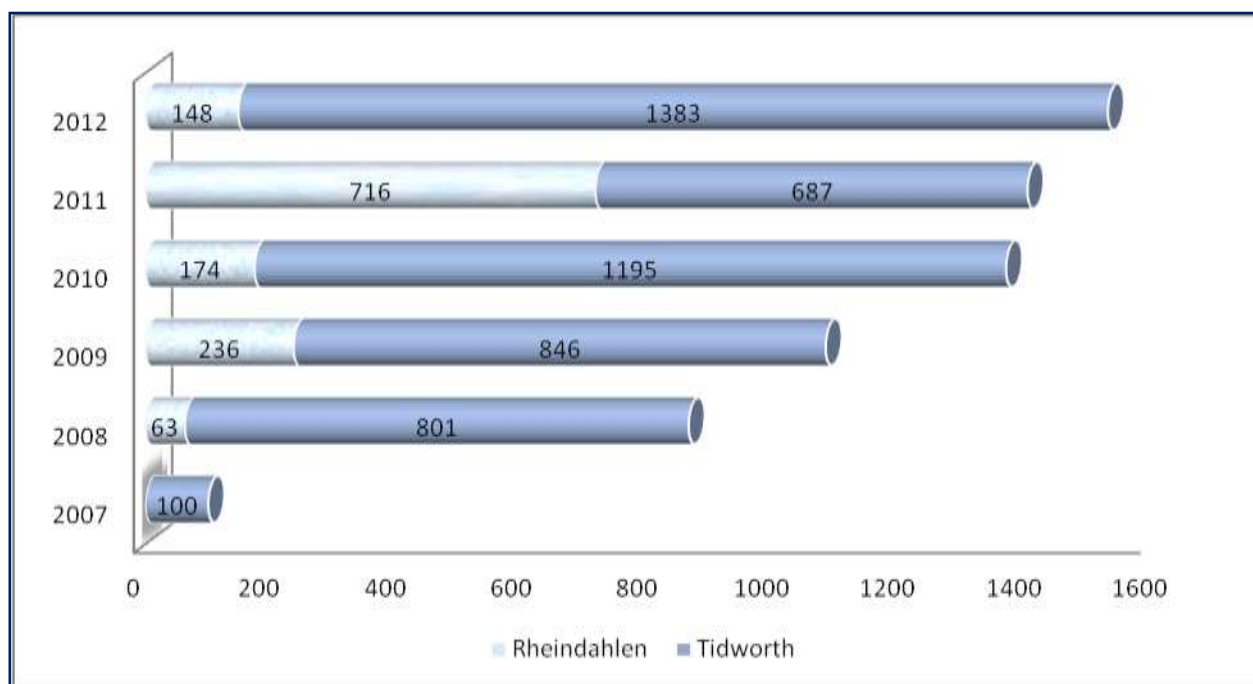
In the Office

Jen Russell and Jane Mans keep the Storybook Soldiers office in Tidworth running smoothly and efficiently, as well as editing a good number of stories in their own time too. They are always happy to receive enquiries from people wanting to take part in the scheme, whether it is soldiers about to deploy who want to record stories for their children or Units wanting to be able to offer our services to their soldiers.



A Few Numbers

Numbers continue to rise and in 2012, Storybook Soldiers produced 1531 story disks. This brings the total since we began to almost 6,500 stories, representing almost 20,000 hours of voluntary work by our editors. Recordings continue to come in thick and fast in 2013, keeping us all busy.



Annual Production 2007 - 2012

Just as in 2011 when one of the Brigades which went to Afghanistan deployed from Germany, (shown by an increase in the stories edited in Rheindahlen), in 2012 the Brigades deployed from Bulford and Catterick, which explains the swing back towards UK-based editing. Our editors in Germany were, however, ready to step in to help us when needed.

Looking forwards to the planned drawdown of troops from Afghanistan from 2014 onwards, we expect that this will have an impact on the number of recordings which we receive, although this is difficult to predict. We have always prided ourselves in our flexibility and this will be well tested as the pattern of deployments changes over the coming months.

Editors

The skill and effort of our dedicated team of editors are fundamental to the success of what we do. Our editors are volunteers who all come from the military community and give their time freely to produce story disks for families just like their own, spending on average around 3 hours editing each one.

All our editors receive specialist training from the Management Team. We held two Editing Courses in 2012, enabling five new editors to join the team.

Recording Centres

It is thanks to everyone in our Recording Centres that so many soldiers are able to take part in Storybook Soldiers. Recording Centres are usually located in unit welfare offices, but sometimes in libraries – if you want to record a story, get in touch with us to find out where the nearest Centre is.

Recording Centres can start recording as soon as they have received Recorder Training from the Management Team in Tidworth. When recordings are made before soldiers deploy, they are generally of better sound quality (because it is not terribly easy to find a quiet location to do recording in Afghanistan!); in addition, the sooner the recording is made, the sooner families receive their stories, meaning that they have the benefit of it for longer.

Nevertheless, it is not always possible for soldiers to make their recordings before they deploy and so they – and we - are grateful to everyone in Theatre, including the staff in the Theatre Education Centre in Camp Bastion, who volunteer to record for us, on top of their already-heavy workload.



Storybook Soldiers in Germany



Soldiers in Germany continue to be able to benefit from the service which Storybook Soldiers offers to all deploying soldiers, wherever they are based.

Carol Yates (picture left) and Jayne Bowen have run Storybook Soldiers in Germany for five years. However, over the past few months, a reorganisation of the Army Library and Information Service in Germany has been taking place, culminating in the closure of Library Headquarters in Rheindahlen where our Storybook Soldiers Germany office used to be located. The closure of Library Headquarters, together with the retirement

of our Administrator, Jayne Bowen, has led to the repatriation of the Storybook Soldiers' Rheindahlen office to the UK.

On the ground in Germany, soldiers will see no change in the way the scheme operates. It will still be very easy for them to record stories for their children at one of our Recording Centres, just as before. The only difference is that from now on, all our Recording Centres, all over the Forces world, will send their recordings to the Management Team in Tidworth, from where all editing will be coordinated. With the majority of soldiers involved in the next two HERRICK tours due to deploy from Germany, we expect our Recording Centres in Germany to be busy – we are already starting to receive recordings from them!

Before she left Germany at the end of June 2013, Jayne Bowen (picture right) worked very hard to set up several new Recording Centres for us, mainly in Hohne and Sennelager. We are very grateful to her for her conscientious and dedicated work. As a small 'thank you' she received a model of our Storybook Soldiers Bear as a souvenir of the years she spent with us and for all the stories she edited in that time. We wish her good luck for the future back in the UK.



Anyone wishing to make a recording for their children, or to set up a Recording Centre in their Unit, please get in touch with Storybook Soldiers in Tidworth, either by phone or email – details at the end of this letter.

Sponsors

We continue to be very grateful to our sponsors, The Annington Trust, ABF - The Soldiers' Charity and The Army Central Fund, for their continuing support.

We were delighted to welcome Colonel (Retd) Robin Eccles from the Army Central Fund who came to visit us in December 2012. He was very interested to learn more about Storybook Soldiers and meet the Management Team. He is pictured here with Kirsty.



Julia Donaldson

Kirsty and Rosemary were lucky enough to meet Author and Children's Laureate, Julia Donaldson, at the Edinburgh Fringe last year. Over 30% of the stories we edit are stories written by Julia Donaldson, so she is a particular hero of ours !

The Storybook Alliance

We continue to operate as part of the Storybook Alliance, with our Recording Centre in Camp Bastion available to members of the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force, (Storybook Waves and Storybook Wings). We in turn have received recordings made by the RAF in the Falkland Islands.

Impact on Forces' families

Our story disks are produced at no cost to the serving soldier or his family. Over the years, we have noticed that their thank-yous follow similar themes :

- ✚ **Whole family appeal** : The project is targeted mainly at very young children, but it appears that older (even teenage) children, as well as the parent left at home, enjoy hearing the reader's voice too.
- ✚ **Reassurance** : the familiarity of the absent parent's voice reading a story calms small children and helps them settle at bedtime; the parent at home feels that they have not been left entirely on their own looking after the children.
- ✚ **The presence of the deployed parent in the household** is kept 'alive' by the sound of their voice being heard regularly – even for the family pets : one letter we received told us how, when their disk was first played, the family dog went racing around the house looking for the owner of the voice! Small children sometimes talk to their absent parent as their voice comes out of the CD player.
- ✚ **An emotional experience** : for the reader when making the recording and their family when the story disk arrives. Letters speak of wonderful, "priceless" and "fabulous" expressions on children's faces at the moment of realisation that it is their parent's voice coming out of the CD player, of surprise, joy, amazement, laughter and happy tears : "We will cherish and listen to it every day until my husband returns in 6 months" and "I had no idea how moving such a simple thing could be".
- ✚ **Family reintegration** : Young children, including those unborn when the soldier first deployed, remain or become familiar with the voice on the story disk so that when the missing family member returns home, they are not such a stranger to their children.
- ✚ **Buy the book** : If the story on the disk is not already a firm favourite, it definitely very soon will be - many letters tell us that, "We're going to go out to buy the book now!"
- ✚ **Reading to children** : We like to think that our project has encouraged soldiers to continue to read to their children when they return, but we have no way of capturing this information.
- ✚ **A family treasure** : A story lasts longer than just the 6 months of the deployment, ultimately becoming a permanent reminder of a much-loved voice.
- ✚ **Thanks** : the one constant theme which is repeated in every letter is the families' gratitude to everyone who has played a part in making it possible for them to receive such a special gift.



If you would like to record a story or would like more information about becoming a Storybook Soldiers Editor, please get in touch with the Management Team in Tidworth : 01980 – 650515 or email storybooksoldiers@hotmail.co.uk