ParaData – New and Improved

Introduction: Major General A R Freer OBE, Chair Airborne Assault Museum

When the Regiment moved its museum from Aldershot to Duxford in Dec 08 it also introduced a digital archive, ParaData, and, in keeping with our history, this was innovative in respect of a regimental museum and it remains so today. ParaData’s primary purpose is to provide a commemoration and remembrance of those members of The Regiment and Airborne Forces who have died while in service and the encouragement of public recognition of the sacrifice made by such persons. Yet it does so much more. It is simply the Regiment’s digital soul and whilst embracing one of our charitable objects it now enables the Museum to record, in perpetuity, those who have served and their record of service. It is also retrospective and content, whether about individuals or events, can be added to at any time.

However, in order for ParaData to fulfil its purpose it needs the interest and support of not only those who have retired but, importantly, the members of the serving regiment. We have been extremely fortunate with a most generous donation with which to upgrade ParaData’s software. I would ask that you note the Friends Scheme as it is through many small donations towards ParaData that we will be best placed to preserve and project our history in the years to come.

What is ParaData?

ParaData is much more than just the museum website, it is an online archive which brings together the experiences of the men and women of airborne forces and combines them with official records and regimental history. Through looking at extremely rare documents, tracing airborne units and, importantly, the people who served in those units, and their campaigns, ParaData offers a wide variety of things to do and acts as an invaluable resource for everyone who has served in airborne forces. Through the hard work of the museum’s dedicated volunteers and staff the archive has more than quadrupled in size since it was launched nearly 10 years ago and now contains over 40,000 digital records. In 2017, ParaData was visited over 300,000 times, with users viewing over 1.35 million pages of content.

A tour around the new ParaData

New homepage: The new homepage is an easy way to navigate the new site. It has been redesigned with large links so that it is much clearer than previously. After surveying users, we have made the site visually more attractive and easier to navigate. This has been done via imagery based links and a new focus on the clear presentation of original images and documents. We took the decision to divide the website into 5 parts which are explained below.

People: People replaces “Roll Call” on the old website. This is the heart and soul of ParaData. ‘People’ contains the profiles of the men and women who are serving/have served with the Parachute Regiment and Airborne Forces. Currently we have around 4000 profiles on ParaData, which are mainly submitted by veterans or their relatives. The new website makes it exceptionally easy to make a profile, whether it be for yourself if you have served or serving, or for a relative. Each profile contains a biography of the person, a timeline showing rank and unit, the campaigns they took part in and the medals they were awarded. Each profile can also be linked to their units, which as more and more people do, helps connect old friends and comrades and gives them a chance to comment on each other’s profiles. It is much easier to find what you’re looking for now with our new options. You can now choose to view all those who won an award for gallantry. You can also view the people section in a simple list view.

Timeline and Events: Timeline and Events works much the same as on the old ParaData but with a few minor changes. With blocks of dates e.g. 1940-41 we now have all the operations that took place underneath them as well as featured articles about the period. These articles could be focused on an event, an important document or a piece of equipment that helped The Parachute Regiment and Airborne Forces during the period in question.

Units and Organisations: Looking up units could not be easier on the improved version of ParaData. All the units that have made up The Parachute Regiment and Airborne Forces throughout its history are on ParaData. They are laid out in alphabetical order and each unit has a biography, pictorial images of the unit, a list of its commanding officers and any campaigns the unit has been involved in. Once again, it has been redesigned to be clearer and simpler. This will enable the museum’s curatorial team to better present the history of The Parachute Regiment and Airborne Forces online.
**Equipment and Weaponry:** This is a completely new section for ParaData. In this part of the website, you will be able to see all airborne forces' documented equipment and weaponry in 5 simple categories. These are Aircraft, Vehicles, Weapons, Uniforms and Equipment. We hope that with this new system, users will find it easy to view everything from the Airborne Trolley to the Horsa Glider.

**Explore More:** This section of the new website contains everything on ParaData. It is the index of the new ParaData and it gives the user a lot of options. You can find something specific by using the filters and search feature, or use it casually to find out more about the story of The Parachute Regiment and Airborne Forces.

**Friends Scheme (Premium Content):** One of the biggest changes we have made to the new website is the introduction of a Friends of the Museum and ParaData Scheme to access additional premium content. Alongside our regular uploads onto ParaData, there is now the option to donate a small annual fee of £9.99 per year to gain access to thousands of documents, interviews, images and video files. These include every Pegasus Journal from 1946 to 2008, which will be available for Friends to read and search. After launch, this section will be continually updated with fresh content, as will the normal site.

Maintaining and developing this valuable archive for the Regiment and the Airborne Forces community costs the museum around £25,000 a year. The income generated from the ‘Friends Scheme’ will all be used to support ParaData’s running and development costs, allowing us to keep adding more content and telling your story.

Please show your support by contributing to the heritage of The Parachute Regiment and Airborne Forces and becoming a Friend of the Museum and ParaData!

**The Future...**

ParaData is the digital archive for The Parachute Regiment and Airborne Forces but more importantly it is a resource for you. Whether you are serving, a veteran, a relative of someone who served or are just generally interested in the Regiment and Airborne history, we encourage you to use ParaData, as well as guide us in what content you want to see on the digital archive. We have provided the information on campaigns, equipment and units we hold information on. We have also helped countless numbers of people to build their profiles on ParaData. The team at Airborne Assault want this to continue with the upgraded digital archive and hope that you will help shape the history of The Parachute Regiment and Airborne Forces online.

Contact us at enquiries@paradata.org.uk to help build on the success of this great resource.

Sam Stead

Social Media Links

Facebook: Facebook.com/AirborneAssault

Twitter: @AirAssaultMuse

Instagram: @airborne_assault_museum