

THE MERCIAN REGIMENT

Quarterly Newsletter – Q2 2020



A MESSAGE FROM THE COLONEL OF THE REGIMENT

Major General Ian Cave CB

On what would have been the 97th Crich Pilgrimage, I hope, whilst you can't physically be at the Memorial site, that you can find the time to reflect on what the Pilgrimage means to you.

For some that will be a personal reflection on those who remember their loved ones, whilst for others it may mean a time of contemplation about their own service and for all those who served before them. And for others, it may mean a mixture of these and a sadness that, for this year at least, they cannot reunite with their friends and comrades.

We may be living in unprecedented times with rules and guidelines that are restrictive and unpalatable however I hope we can all take some time today, in our homes or in a quiet place of reflection, to remember all those that have paid the ultimate sacrifice over the years especially to those for whom the memorial is dedicated; The Sherwood Foresters, The Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters and the Mercian Regiment, and also remember those of our antecedent regiments: The Cheshire Regiment and The Staffordshire Regiment.

This year marks the 75th Anniversary of the end of World War 2. On May 8, 1945, VE Day, the war in Europe came to an end. As the news of Germany's surrender reached the rest of the world, joyous crowds gathered to celebrate in the streets, clutching newspapers that declared Victory in Europe. And subsequently, VJ Day 15 August 1945, when Imperial Japan surrendered, in effect bringing the war to an end.

I think our Sovereign's words are particularly pertinent today – a day when many of us would have all been on a hillside in Derbyshire to pay our respects and take a moment to reflect and remember all those that had gone before us.

So I remind you of Her Majesty's words: *"Today it may seem hard that we cannot mark this special anniversary as we would wish. Instead we remember from our homes and our doorsteps. But our streets are not empty; they are filled with the love and the care that we have for each other. And when I look at our country today, and see what we are willing to do to protect and support one another, I say with pride that we are still a nation those brave soldiers, sailors and airmen would recognise and admire."*

97TH ANNUAL PILGRIMAGE TO THE CRICH MEMORIAL

Ms Cindy Clark, Assistant Regimental Secretary

For the first time in nearly a century, the Crich Pilgrimage had to be cancelled due to the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic.

Over the weekend, the Regimental Secretary laid a wreath at the Regimental Memorial Crich on behalf of the Mercian Regiment. Some veterans also visited to lay a wreath, whilst soldiers of 2 Mercian also paid their own tribute in Cyprus. Others, including many Civic Dignitaries who would have been at the Pilgrimage, paid their own tributes at home.



1 MERCIAN UPDATE

Capt T E Prettyjohn, Intelligence Officer

During an unprecedented period from April, the way that the soldiers and officers of 1 MERCIAN have risen to the challenge of conducting good training while dispersed, working from home, or returning for essential training has been humbling. Everything from Company dispersed half-marathon competitions for A and B Companies, through to the constant battle fought by the training wing to continue the provision of vital driving courses in a safe and responsible manner. As June comes to a close, the battalion has been returning in larger numbers to conduct range packages, with the enforcement of new working practices to ensure we can conduct large scale training while still protecting the health of our soldiers and their families.

Thanks to the determination and effort displayed, at every rank, it is clear that battalion has been returning from lockdown not just more motivated than ever, but with dynamic new ideas about how to train and maximise our potential, whatever the circumstances. Now begins the long build-up to deployment to Kabul in 2021, with new vehicles and skills to learn, while never compromising on our readiness as the heart of England's armoured infantry war-fighters as part of the UK's Vanguard Armoured Infantry Brigade.



1 MERCIAN TRAINING WING

Capt P D Dyson, Training Officer

The beating heart of an armoured infantry battalion is its Training Wing - supplying the fighting companies with all the vehicle drivers, gunners and commanders they need to function and deploy. This year WO2 Smith and CSgt Geoghegan faced the added challenge of having to integrate the training for the wheeled Foxhound vehicle into an already busy schedule. Used in Afghanistan, training large numbers of Foxhound drivers and commanders is vital to the battalion's deployment and cannot be done overnight.

To have let this slip as we entered lockdown could have had severe consequences, so Sgt Cooper and his team of instructors had to find a way to continue, tirelessly re-designing their training with robust controls and risk assessments to ensure they could still train soldiers safely.



Through all this, since April they have managed to qualify: 12 new Foxhound drivers, 12 Foxhound commanders, 4 Panther drivers and 4 Panther commanders, alongside 4 new Bulldog drivers and Category H (tracked vehicle) licenses. Their efforts mean the battalion is still well on track for deployment to Afghanistan next year, and has paved the way in showing best practice for how to bring soldiers back to training in a safe and responsible manner.

1 MERCIAN A (GRENADEIER) COMPANY

2Lt A Wass, OC 3 Platoon

While some small numbers of soldiers were returning to camp to conduct vital training over the past few months, the majority were working from home. This presented a real challenge: how do we keep our soldiers learning and engaged, keep their skills up, and not let this time go to waste?

This presented some fantastic opportunities to let soldiers deliver lessons themselves over video. A particularly important one being LCpl Kelly delivering a gripping brief to mark the 10 year anniversary of a ferocious battle in Helmand on Op Herrick 12, where his section commander and 2IC had been killed (Cpl Terry Webster and LCpl Alan Cochran), and how he as a young private soldier had no option but to step and lead. It also meant an opportunity to experiment with what could be achieved with training online, trialling everything from tactical lessons and wargaming on interactive mapping, section attack lessons with videos and panoramic photos, to an A (Grenadier) Company half-marathon with every soldier logging their time on Strava (no cheating despite the best efforts of some!).



2 MERCIAN OP KIPION

Lt Nicholson

2020 has been a busy year for A 'Grenadier' Coy. Following an intense Overseas Training Exercise developing the Jordanian Armed Forces Infantry, 1 PI were deployed to the UK Naval Support Facility, Bahrain, on Op KIPION following their return from Jordan in mid-February.

It wasn't long before COVID-19 reared its ugly head, pervading every aspect of operational life. Nonetheless, 1 PI went above and beyond, supporting personnel at the Deployed Operational Base, feeding for the relief of ships' crews and offering Real-Life Support for those in quarantine, all while providing an effective Force Protection.



1 PI with HMS Ledbury Crew following Exercise Grenadier Hunt

1 PI didn't let COVID-19 dominate every aspect of their deployment, the platoon worked hard to develop inter-operability between Shore Side and Naval Force Protection. Ex Grenadier Hunt sought to improve the force protection measures

currently in place. The two-day exercise involved a number of serials for 1 PI and HMS Ledbury to contend with, including: unauthorised access to the facility, Improvised Explosive Devices, Close Quarter Battle on a vessel, mass casualty scenarios and Fire Response. The exercise proved a success and the platoon found themselves on Royal Navy News, recognition unfamiliar to a group of 'Pongo Landlubbers'.

1 PI have worked tirelessly on their protracted deployment. They have remained positive whilst fighting COVID-19 and dealing with the oppressive Bahraini heat, in addition to ensuring the safety and security of the facility and the personnel that work within.



2 MERCIAN DRAGON COMPANY VANGUARD COMPANY TRAINING

Maj Reynolds

DRAGON Coy 2 MERCIAN have spent the last year gearing towards the resurrection of the VANGAURD Coy in time for Ex ASKARI STORM in the 20/21 training year. In addition to routine taskings on both Op TIMBERN and the Regional Standby Battalion – the Support Weapons Company have started to focus on creating fully manned Platoons which hold that war fighting capability, aiming to deliver success across the Battlefield.

Amidst Brexit and the ramp of COVID, March 2020 saw the men of DRAGON Company deploy to Warcop to conduct their annual Support Weapon Cadres. All six Platoons deployed onto individual 4-week training programmes in which the specialist capabilities were drilled and honed to ensure qualifications throughout.

Training was diverse; Assault Pioneers built bridges and blew doors off, the Mortar platoon spent two weeks live firing bombs, the Recce and Anti-Tank Platoon observed and prohibited enemy activity from the safety of their observation posts, the Machine Gun platoon established their gun line amongst the ever descending Yorkshire clag - and the Sniper Platoon continued to practice being not seen and not heard. This was then culminated with an imaginative and exciting Live Fire final Exercise in which all capabilities were brought together to establish DRAGON Company as the battle winning asset.

All in all, a fantastic and opportune training package for the Support Weapon Company. The Soldiers and Officers did 2 MERCIAN and BFC proud – laying a foundation which could be built upon ready for KENYA.

2 MERCIAN Ex AETOS MARCH

2Lt Butt

The 2nd Battalion, the Mercian Regiment, were due to move from their current posting in Cyprus to their new home at Weeton Barracks, Lancashire, in the summer of 2020. However, as the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded in the early months of this year, their unit move is now delayed until the end of the year.

Wanting to do their bit to help the heroes of the NHS and military community, the soldiers and officers of B (Malta) Company, in true light infantry style, set themselves the challenge of tabbing the distance from Cyprus to their eventual new home in the UK; a mammoth 3500km.



A TAB (Tactical Advance to Battle), is a staple of life in the infantry. It involves the soldier moving across land at speed carrying weight, in this case 20kg a man. The collective accumulation of distance up to the target 3500km required each man from B (Malta) Company to cover the equivalent distance of a marathon and a half each.

The distance was not the only challenge; AETOS MARCH coincided with a heatwave on island, with sweltering daytime temperatures verging close to the 40°C

mark. As such the company had to avoid the sun by marching in the evening or early hours of the morning.



B (Malta) Company completed the feat over a 9-day period, raising £4,000 for the NHS, The Soldier's Charity ABF and The Mercian Benevolent Charity. At an awards ceremony after the challenge, Cpl Rory Martin claimed Gold, having covered a remarkable 180 miles.

4 MERCIAN CO's FOREWORD

Lt Col FGB Cuttle MBE

During this Quarter, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we have all witnessed the unprecedented lockdown measures and restrictions that have significantly affected our personal and professional lives. Operation RESCRIPT, the MOD's part in the UK Government's response to control the pandemic, began to gain traction in late March during the time that 4 MERCIAN were undertaking Exercise WARHAMMER, our annual live firing and tactical training camp.

As our men and women were training for warfighting operations in line with our primary mission within 20th Armoured Infantry Brigade (The Iron Fist), planning was taking place to mobilise Reservists at short notice to deploy on Military Aid to the Civilian Authorities taskings. Eventually our role as a COVID Support Force was confirmed, which saw 125 personnel operating in support of Cumbria and Lancashire authorities.

As I write this, following the testing of over 17,500 civilians, our people are preparing to hand over their responsibilities and although a return to civilian employment remains full of uncertainty, further opportunities exist for our men and women to deploy with our Regular Army colleagues on operations and exercises around the world.

It is humbling to see how our people, supported by their families and civilian employers, have adapted to all that we have asked of them, despite the significant pressures and uncertainties placed on them. I sincerely thank all of our families and employers for their unwavering support in assisting us in demonstrating the utility, readiness and adaptability of the modern Army Reservist.

Stand Firm, Strike Hard – and stay safe!

4 MERCIAN COVID SUPPORT FORCE 30

Maj M K Bowden-Williams

As the reality of the Coronavirus pandemic came to light, 4 MERCIAN were conducting Exercise WARHAMMER 20, a live firing concentration in Warcop, Cumbria. As the Governments of the western world struggled to come to terms with the reality of enforcing a lockdown in a modern democracy, it became apparent that a general mobilisation the likes of which had not been seen since WW2 was becoming a reality. 4 MERCIAN being on the front foot, quickly organised a pre-deployment camp to prepare soldiers for mobilisation in response to what had now been named the COVID-19 crisis.

This camp was conducted in glorious weather at Altcar, Merseyside, and involved the completion of all MATTs as well as mission-specific training on what was considered to be the most likely tasks. Orders were received in early April directing 4 MERCIAN to form a COVID Support Force sub-unit (CSF SU) and deploy to Cumbria ready to deliver Military Aid to the Civilian Authority (MACA) on orders. A platoon and HQ elements were deployed forward to Halton Training Camp, Lancaster, with the remainder, 144 soldiers, dispersed and held in reserve. 4 MERCIAN CSF SU also provided a Military Liaison Officer (MLO), Maj Bowden-Williams, to integrate into the team at the Cumbrian Local Resilience Forum and to feed information back into the CSF SU.



The situation initially looked very grave for the nation as the death rate continued to rise. As the NHS quickly established increased capacity across all sectors, 4 MERCIAN were poised to assist despite still being unaware of what task they would be doing. The UK Government quickly identified the need for a large-scale testing facility network across the country. Initially the CSF SU were tasked to train and

support Deloitte, the civilian company contracted to deliver testing across the nation, in the setting up of testing sites. Whilst the CSF was not required to assist in the testing, it became apparent that the testing network being put in place wasn't going to be enough to support communities that are geographically spread or isolated. Then came the Government's implementation of Mobile Testing Units (MTUs) across the nation.

The CSF SU were trained and equipped to deliver MTUs which were deployed across Cumbria; delivering mobile testing to ensure that the county were able to understand the number of cases and spread of the disease, essential to the resilience and counter measures for the county to implement. This task very rapidly grew in scope and size as 3 x MTUs were needed to deliver testing daily across the county. As the situation changed and the virus caused considerable problems in the Care Sector, the CSF SU were additionally tasked to establish a Regional Care Home Response Team (RCR) to deliver and collect tests from care homes. The RCR was led by the Director of Music, Capt Ian Johnston, who identified an opportunity to bring joy and relief of suffering to the residents and care home staff by playing music when the team collected the test kits; much to the appreciation of all.



As the situation began to stabilise across the nation the CSF SU gained more tasks: 6x MTUs in a wider area of operations, which also incorporated Lancashire. Just as the CSF got to its busiest period of operations the order was received to de-mobilise at the 3-month point. Somewhat surprised and disappointed, 4 MERCIAN has proved itself in the midst of an international crisis. They showed the ability to switch from warfighting preparations and live firing training, to mobilising on a MACA in support of the Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and then back to warfighting, with mobilisations on Op CABRIT immediately post the CSF SU mobilisation. 4 MERCIAN leave the operation with a reputation for professionalism, and an exceptional attitude that sees the opportunity in every problem and across the counties of Cumbria and Lancashire; a real feeling of fondness and thanks towards the Mercian Regiment.

4 MERCIAN QM'S DEPARTMENT

Maj Brian Johnston MBE QM(V)

It seems that recently most articles in Regimental periodicals start with the line "*This has been an extremely demanding period for the department...*", and I am afraid this article is no exception. For the past six months 4 MERCIAN's QM's Dept has been very busy concentrating on planning and training for Ex WARHAMMER: the Battalion's 2-week Live Firing and Tactical Training package held at Warcop in late March. This saw an all reservist G4 team plan and conduct the complete G4 support package forward mounted in Warcop Camp.

Ex WARHAMMER had not ended when we got the Warning Order for mobilisation on Op RESCRIPT in support of the UK Government's reaction to the COVID-19 outbreak. Our task was to provide Military Aid to the Civil Authorities (MACA) and we were to provide Mobile Testing Units (MTUs), deliver tests to care homes, as well as manning testing sites across Cumbria and Lancashire.

With an area of responsibility of over 4,000 square miles, much of our work fell far outside the scope of our usual military tasks. The QM's Dept was heavily focused on ensuring that the Battalion deployed on a sound logistical footing, whilst at the same time dealing with a myriad of routine Real-Life Support issues. I would like to say it was all plain sailing from the start, but as with all operational deployments, this was never going to be the case. Op RESCRIPT involved long working days and fast changing G4 planning which the department managed to deliver whilst maintaining a strong sense of humour throughout, vital when working in such a close-knit team. The three-month mobilisation brought with it many challenges, however I am delighted to say that all objectives were met with our soldiers equipped with all that they needed to deliver their mission safely.

Finally, it is with some sadness that we must bid farewell to our Regular Quartermaster, Major Dave (Trapper) Travis, who moves on in July to be OC HQ Coy in 2 LANCS. Trapper has been an inspirational QM during this latest time with 4 MERCIAN having previously served with us as a SPSI. We will all miss his leadership and guidance and all wish him well in his new post.

BAND OF THE MERCIAN REGIMENT

This quarter has seen the Band of the Mercian Regiment in lockdown with some personnel deployed as part of the Covid Support Force – but this has not stopped the music!

C/Sgt Marc Wheeler, IC Band recruiting, and the Director of Music, Major Ian Johnson, were deployed on Op RESCRIPT as part of the Army's Military Aid to Civilian Authorities programme. They were employed as a 'Regional Care Home Response' team (RCR), this was a two-man team, delivering and collecting COVID-19 testing kits to care homes across the north-west region. They would drop off the kits in the morning, return to base for lunch, and then collect kits in the afternoon. The days were long, especially as some of the care homes were some considerable distance from each other. They would often not get back to Halton until 1900 hours and then needed to go through the decontamination process. This process went on each day during deployment, however music is always needed!



As part of building relations, keeping the army in the public eye and generally trying to bring some cheer to the elderly residents in the care homes, who had been isolating and social distancing, so had not had any entertainment or stimulus since

lockdown had started, they seized the opportunity to provide some musical entertainment. In homes where it was possible to play in a garden or similar with social distancing, the DOM would play his keyboards and C/Sgt Wheeler would keep time by way of tapping away on the Cajon. This is a box-shaped percussion instrument, that is far more portable than a full drum kit. This proved to be an excellent way of bringing some music and cheer with minimal disruption to the care home. The objective of bringing a little cheer and light hearted entertainment in these difficult times was well and truly achieved. Indeed, some of the carers and nurses reported that their residents had not been so animated and happy for a long time!

C/Sgt Jake Lees, the Band PSI, was deployed as a Mobile Testing Unit Commander. He was also based at Halton Camp. His team formed part of the COVID Support Force that delivered the capability to conduct COVID-19 testing across the North West Area of Operations. This vast area included all of Cumbria and North Lancashire. He is proud to report that his team set a record by achieving the most tests in one day, amounting to over 20% of all the tests done by the Mercian COVID Support Force. During this time he, like the DOM and C/Sgt Wheeler, found opportunities for music, including playing at Halton Camp BBQ.

Since lockdown began and physical parading ceased, the Band like so many other units has embraced technology and adapted to meet the new challenges this raises. CEQ lessons have moved online, with face to face and video progress diaries enabling the delivery of training to continue. Unfortunately due to the lag on video software it isn't possible to hold a full virtual band rehearsal, but in the extra time available due to no parading meant that some of our musicians now had time to experiment with new technology resulting in mixes, and the beginnings of a band virtual recording project. The PT on zoom has also become a firm favourite with Band personnel!

As you can see the Band is keen to get going again together in person rather than virtually, and although it has been saddening, but understandable, to see annual events such as Stoke and Buxton Tattoos cancelled, it has not stopped the music or the enthusiasm from happening across our region.

Looking forward, at present all public engagements until September are cancelled.

MUSEUMS FROM HOME - MUSEUM OF THE MERCIAN REGIMENT (WFR COLLECTION)

Jennifer Bookman-Moore, Curator & Archivist

Since lockdown came into effect, the museum has still been operating from home and the occasional visit to the office within RHQ Nottingham. It should be noted that RHQ Nottingham is closed at the moment and we are not open to visitors because of the current situation.

On better news, I have been busy packing up the items that are going to be redisplayed within our gallery in Nottingham Castle. I have been working closely with the team at the Castle, which is imperative for the coming months. Lockdown has meant that I have been able to make sure the collection is packed up ready for moving and enable me to focus on it fully.

When lockdown was announced, we stopped receiving Family History Enquiries. They have now started to slowly come back in, which is important as we charge for the time that it takes to research and is one of our only sources of income. Should you wish to donate to the museum then get in touch with me via: curator@stand-firm-strike-hard.org.uk.

At the moment, we aren't able to let volunteers come in, but I am looking at getting them involved in work from their homes. Probably the first time that this has been done. But these times we now find ourselves in are making museums think differently about how they work now and potentially in the future.

Stay safe and best wishes to all!

THE MERCIAN REGIMENT MUSEUM (WORCESTERSHIRE)

Dr John Paddock

These are unprecedented and difficult times for us all. The Worcestershire Soldier Gallery was closed to the public on the 22nd March 2020, in accordance with Government coronavirus guidance. It is not clear when the City Museum will reopen to the public but, it is unlikely to be before July! Likewise, Dancox House has been closed since the beginning of the Government lockdown and all our volunteers have been stood down. It is probable that it will also be July, at the earliest, before we can resume working from there and even then access will be socially distanced, phased and time limited.

Meanwhile the work of the museum goes on: The Curator is working from home, the WW2 project team are doing transcription work remotely and Joe Devereux has been helping with WW1 enquiries. The Museum's website is being regularly updated, please take a look! Any feedback would be welcomed by emailing us [via: museummercian@btconnect.com](mailto:museummercian@btconnect.com). With the generous assistance of the ACE/V&A Purchase Grant Fund and the Friends of the Mercian Regiment Museum we have recently acquired the medals of Captain (Quartermaster) A. H. Cooper, Worcestershire Regiment, who during the course of the War was wounded. Besides earning a brace of '*mentions in despatches*' and his decoration, the only Regimental appointment to the Order of the British Empire for the Middle East.



Arthur Harry Cooper, a native of Smethwick, Staffordshire, was born on 9 September 1901 and enlisted in the Worcestershire Regiment in 1920. Commissioned Lieutenant (Quartermaster) on 1 September 1938, he served with the 1st Battalion in Palestine and played key role in preparing the unit for the Second World War, as recalled in Birdwood's *The Worcestershire Regiment, 1922-50*:

'Wadi Halfa was reached at 0100hrs on 3 September [1939]. Once again a long-suffering Quartermaster [Cooper] was called on to cope with a sudden situation, for information was received that two companies were to be dropped at Atbara and this entailed re-sorting out all the barrack equipment and furniture. Accordingly, on 4th September 'B' and 'C' Companies remained at Atbara under the command of Major Knight. This officer had stayed on to bring on the heavy baggage, which was three days behind; for in the peculiar conditions at the time the Battalion was still in a hybrid state of war preparation on a peace-time scale.'

Serving with acclaim throughout the campaign, Cooper finished it with a wound suffered on 16 March 1941 to go with a brace of 'mentions' (London Gazette 15 September 1939 & 1 April 1941, refers) and his M.B.E. - one of only 19 such awards to the Regiment for the Second World War.

Captain Cooper's medals comprising: The Most Excellent Order of the British Empire, M.B.E. (Military); General Service 1918-62, 1 clasp, Palestine; 1939-45 Star; Africa Star; Defence and War Medals 1939-45, with M.I.D. oak leaf.

M.B.E. London Gazette 14 April 1942. The original recommendation - for an O.B.E. - states:

'This Officer has been Quartermaster, 1st Bn. The Worcestershire Regiment almost continuously since his force commission as a Quartermaster in August 1938, after 19 years' service in the ranks. He accompanied the Battalion to Palestine in September 1938, served in that campaign until the outbreak of the present war, and was Mentioned in Despatches for his valuable services. After the outbreak of war, in addition to his duties as Battalion Quartermaster, he performed the duties of a Camp Adjutant and Quartermaster for over a year at Gebeit (Sudan) and was again Mentioned in Despatches for exceptional zeal and ability. For a short time, he was Staff Captain to the 9th Indian Infantry Brigade at Gallabat (Sudan), but rejoined the Battalion as Quartermaster at Gedarf before it took the field in January 1941.

He served throughout the campaign in East Africa, being present at the actions at Gogni, Tauda, Barentu and Keren, where he was wounded, but rejoined in time for the final battle at Amba Alagi. He has since accompanied the Battalion to Egypt and is serving as Quartermaster at the present time.

Throughout these three years of active service, 2. Lieut. Cooper's efficiency and devotion to duty have been of the highest order. His knowledge and capability under difficult conditions of supply and replacement of stores has been outstanding, and it is due to his care and qualities that the administration of this Unit has been maintained at the best possible standard at all times.'

Cooper was posted 'dangerously ill' on 24 August 1942 whilst in South Africa, but died on 31 August, being buried in the Johannesburg (West Park) Cemetery, South Africa, aged 40.

ASSOCIATION NEWS

Anyone wishing to join any association branch is asked to contact the Assistant Regimental Secretary via: communications@mercianregiment.co.uk with their details and which branch they would like to join.

CHESTERFIELD BRANCH - WFRA

John Johnson, Chair

Since the COVID-19 pandemic started, whilst usual business is quieter, we have still kept in touch with our members and associates by telephone, emails and monthly updates, using information from WFRA Executive Newsletters, Derbyshire Veterans and Government COVID-19 updates. We have even been able to pick up a new postal member in Colchester.

Sadly we lost both Jack and Margaret Parrott within weeks of each other. Jack served in the Sherwood Foresters and later transferred to the Royal Service Corps. They will both be greatly missed by the branch and their family. The branch was proud to have been represented at Jack's funeral by the Secretary and Standard Bearer.

So many events have been cancelled and we believe this will be the normal actions for several months to come so have made the decision to cancel our Alma Dinner for September.

Chesterfield Branch WFRA send their best wishes and support to the Regimental Soldiers and their families wherever they are and hope they all stay safe and well.



ROYAL HOSPITAL CHELSEA FOUNDERS DAY PARADE 2020

Lt Col (Retd) P A TEMMINCK

The historic Founder's Day Parade is the most important event of the Royal Hospital Chelsea's normally busy events schedule. Founder's Day, also known as Oak Apple Day, is always held on a date close to 29th May – the birthday of Charles II and the date of his restoration as King in 1660. The Oak reference commemorates the escape of the future King Charles II after the Battle of Worcester (1651) when he hid in an oak tree to avoid capture by the Parliamentary forces, and is expressed through all Chelsea Pensioners wearing oak leaves on their famous scarlet uniforms. The event has taken place almost every year since the Royal Hospital opened in 1692.

This year was very different. Shortly after the start of the Coronavirus pandemic the Hospital made the difficult decision to cancel the Parade. However, after much planning and consideration it was decided to continue with the strong tradition of celebrating the Royal Hospital's Founder – Charles II. The Parade went ahead on Thursday 4th June 2020, albeit in a scaled-back and quiet fashion and the Pensioners participating were socially distanced to ensure no-one was put at risk. Only 35 Pensioners participated in this year's Parade with the rest in their regular order 'blues' uniform watching safely from windows overlooking Figure Court - where the Parade is held. One of our Chelsea Pensioners, WO2 John, took part in the Parade and stated that he was '*honoured to represent all of our Regiments*'.



VETERANS AND SERVING PERSONNEL WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

In the past year there has been an increase in veterans and serving soldiers taking their own life due mental health issues linked to traumatic incidents, the lockdown due to COVID-19 has only exacerbated these issues. Here are some symptoms you may recognise if you've had traumatic experiences:

- Work-related or relationship problems
- Feeling numb and empty
- Feeling suicidal
- Self-harm and self-destructive tendencies
- Avoidance of people and places
- Panic attacks/anxiety/depression/mood swings
- Feeling isolated
- Frequent periods of withdrawal into oneself
- Nightmares/flashbacks/insomnia
- Anger or aggressive behaviour
- Feeling distrustful and suspicious/blaming others
- Misuse of alcohol/drugs/gambling and/or food
- Seeking out high-risk/dangerous pursuits

Often the symptoms are spotted by your family or close friends. Serving soldiers should speak in confidence to their Unit Welfare Officer, Padre or the Medical Officer. For veterans, please get in touch with your local NHS Doctor. If you are having difficulty or you are having a tough time, there are a number of specialist civilian/military charity organisations to help you tackle the past and help you to take on the future.

Please contact:

- Military Mental Health Helpline Tel: 0800 3234444 (Open 24hrs) (Serving Personnel only)
- Combat Stress Tel: 0800 1381619 <http://www.combatstress.org.uk/>
- Forces line Tel: 0800 3214880 (Open 24hrs)
- Help For Heroes Hidden Wounds Tel: 0808 2020144 (Open 9am to 5pm Mon to Fri)
- Big White Wall (Mental Health) (Anonymous web support only) <http://www.bigwhitewall.com/>
- The Samaritans Tel: 116 123 (Open 24hrs) jo@samaritans.org

Do not forget to seek help from your local NHS provider and Doctor.

VETERANS AND SERVING PERSONNEL WHO FIND THEMSELVES IN HARDSHIP

Serving soldiers who find themselves in hardship should contact their Unit Welfare Officer. Veterans should contact one of the following organisations for help. Be aware they will usually need to send out a Case Worker to interview you so that they can properly assess your needs:

- SSAFA Forces Help Tel: 0800 7314880 (9am to 5:30pm)
<http://www.ssafa.org.uk/>
- The Royal British Legion Tel: 0808 8028080 (8am to 8pm)
<http://www.britishlegion.org.uk/>

MEDALS AND PENSIONS

For veterans requiring assistance with military pensions or medal issues, all enquires are to go through Veterans UK.

- Veterans UK Tel: 0808 1914218 (Medals/Pensions) (8am to 5pm Mon to Fri) <http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/veterans-uk>