

THE MERCIAN REGIMENT

Quarterly Newsletter – Q3 2020



1 MERCIAN UPDATE

Lt Col Dean Canham OBE

As I take command of 1 MERCIAN, the Battalion is pivoting toward a new task. In 2021 we will now deploy to Estonia on Operation CABRIT 8; our mission – to form the heart of the UK's contribution to NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP) in Eastern Europe, reinforcing our allies there and facing up to aggression and intimidation in the region.

This is a departure from the original plan to deploy some of the Battalion to Afghanistan to help secure Kabul, instead seeing us switched onto the Army's main effort and forming up in strength as an all-arms battlegroup – welcoming French and British tanks, guns from the Royal Artillery, and Royal Engineers.

We are returning at pace and scale to our core role as an armoured infantry battalion and stepping off on the best training progression the Army currently has to offer. I am honoured to be the Commanding Officer and already could not be prouder of the excellent team I have inherited, for which I am grateful to my predecessor Lt Col Ned Kelly.



It has been humbling to see the soldiers and officers take the short-notice news of an operational switch-fire in their stride and apply themselves to preparations in earnest. Our training for Operation CABRIT requires us to deploy to Germany from the middle of October until Christmas to conduct vital training, and again in the New Year for integration with our wider battlegroup. We will then travel to Estonia for the 6-month tour, gathering momentum as we travel across Europe to occupy our base at Tapa, between Tallinn and the Russian border.

I do not underestimate the challenge of this extended time away from home for our soldiers and their families, but we cannot deploy to NATO's eastern flank, to guard against possible confrontation, with anything less than the most thorough preparation and training.

This is a vital operation to secure the UK's interests, home and abroad, demonstrating our commitment to the collective security of NATO and Europe. I have no doubt that the professionalism and leadership from our soldiers and officers will shine throughout this demanding period, as they seize every opportunity to strive for excellence and demonstrate for all to see what it really means to be a Mercian.

1 MERCIAN A (GRENADIER) COY

2Lt Ali Wasir

It has been a fantastic period of training for the Grenadier company. After some well-deserved summer leave, we hit the ground running with demanding and interesting training. This started at the lowest level, training room clearance using the inflatable walls and simunition in the Quartermaster's sheds on camp, going right back to basics and refreshing the drills that must be muscle memory for an infantry soldier.

We then took this progression to Corsham Mines, conducting exercises in tunnel clearance in a challenging and novel environment. Letting the Corporals take charge of the training has been crucial, imparting their knowledge and building cohesion in their small teams that will ultimately decide any battle.

The highlight of this training was Exercise ALGEA GRENADIER at Caerwent training area in Wales, where a punishing programme tested the soldiers with more complex scenarios. This included fighting in woods and forests, trench clearance, CBRN building clearance, counter IED drills, CASEVACs, defence of a FOB, recce patrols and more simunition training, to name but a few of the serials.

This all culminated with a final attack: a company level strike operation onto an urban objective, and physically arduous CASEVAC serial, then defending against an enemy counter-attack. Interesting and robust training that sees the Grenadiers well prepared and ready for whatever challenges the coming months bring!



1 MERCIAN B (MALTA) COY

Maj Marriott

Despite the best efforts of COVID-19, this has been a busy and successful period for B (Malta) Company. Following an enormous effort by WO2 MacPherson, CSgt Goodwin and their teams, the Company provided the bulk of the Battalion's Warriors at the annual live firing concentration in Castlemartin in July. A particular highlight saw Cpl Kelsall, LCpl Hannam and Pte Green take the prize for the top crew in the Battalion at this event; an achievement that was acknowledged by Brig Paddy Ginn, Commander 20 Brigade, during his visit to the Battalion in early August.

The Company has also managed to find other ways to deliver demanding and rewarding training. Individual training on the Company vehicle fleet has continued at pace, several members of the Company have participated in various career courses and WO2 Sumner led from the front by organising and then participating in a static-line parachuting course in Upavon in late July. Following a well-deserved summer leave period, the Company is now back in camp and is looking forward to a series of exercises that will set the Company in good stead to deploy to Estonia in early 2021.



Cpl Kelsall receiving the award for best crew from Commander 20X

1 MERCIAN D (DRAGON) COY MORTAR PL

Lt Sam Richards

In September, Dragon Company's men of iron, the mortar platoon, deployed to the Brecon Beacons to conduct their mortar numbers' cadre. The numbers' cadre is to qualify new soldiers to the mortar platoon on their weapon system, the L16 81mm mortar, in the three roles of a detachment, the number 1, 2 and 3. Over three weeks the soldiers first learn the drills of each role, building up to their weapon handling test, then deploy on a confirmation exercise learning how to set up the mortar lines tactically in the field, then begin their ranges: firing hundreds of live rounds to earn their qualification. This is all conducted in arduous conditions, 'manpacking' the mortar equipment can see soldiers carrying loads of 50-60kg each over rough terrain.



After months of frustration with previous cadres having to be delayed due to COVID, the soldiers were raring to go. The platoon is fully manned, with many having recently arrived from their training at ITC Catterick and enthusiastic to get to grips with a technical trade as the battalion's most powerful fire support asset. The focus of the cadre was the rapid manoeuvre and deployment of the mortar lines, getting in, firing, and moving off before the enemy can ever locate us and return fire. To achieve this with the heavy equipment, everyone had to get amongst Sgt Rai's suitably uncompromising PT programme which involved hills, carrying kit up hills, and then more hills. This was all conducted alongside the technical and theory lessons which the soldiers applied themselves to with complete determination and professionalism to prepare themselves for the live ranges. A hugely tough and successful cadre, and the 100% pass rate a credit to all the soldiers and instructors.

2 MERCIAN - IMPRESSIONS AS A NEW SUBALTERN

2Lt Park



With Sandhurst and Brecon as a recent memory, the promise of “Battalion life” had finally become a reality when I arrived in Cyprus in August 2020. My first challenge was adapting to the near forty-degree heat in the height of summer that made weekend trips to the beach a pleasure, but also made wearing uniform in the office a sweaty ordeal. I was instantly given responsibility to plan and deliver an LFTT package on Pyla ranges for my platoon. This presented a steep learning curve; however, I was supported by my platoon Sergeant and fellow officers in the mess which allowed me to develop quickly. This week away from camp was an ideal opportunity to spend time with my new platoon; learning who the soldiers are and about their experience living on island.

The strong county line identity amongst the soldiers and officers at Battalion was instantly noticeable. Having grown up in Nottingham, I was made to feel even more

connected to the Battalion as I had something in common with a lot of the lads and could relate to the areas in which we all grew up in the UK. There was also a healthy amount of rib poking banter between all ranks as we battled to decide who had grown up in the best town and city in the Midlands. I stand by my argument that Nottingham is far better than “Derbados”.

I am proud to lead a platoon of soldiers in A “Grenadier” Company and earned the right to wear my Grenadier flash following competing in the annual section competition for the Grenadier trophy. Being a member of the winning section made this achievement even better and cemented all new members of the company as part of the overarching ethos.

I found the officers mess in Cyprus to be lively, with some members always looking to organise social events on weekends. With Paphos, Aya Napa and countless beach bars in Limassol on our doorstep there is a plethora of locations to choose from for “a few beers”.

Overall, my first impressions as a new subaltern in 2 Mercian have been surprising, challenging and extremely positive. Choosing a regiment at Sandhurst can be a daunting process and it is a reassuring feeling to arrive at Battalion and almost instantly know that you have made the right choice. I look forward to exercising in Kenya and then deploying on OP TORAL at the end of 2021.



2 MERCIAN C (KOHIMA) COY Ex EAGLES UNREST

Sgt Ross



During the COVID pandemic, C Company completed Exercise EAGLES UNREST, which is a mandatory, externally validated, CT2 level Public Order Exercise during the hot month of July in Cyprus.

Having been a PL SGT in the Company for over 18 months, I have seen the utmost professionalism and soldiering ability from everyone in this Company and there were no worries going into the exercise. The Company was missing key personalities including the Coy 2IC and both platoon commanders, however, this was not a stumbling block for the soldiers who performed to the highest standards as expected and outshone previous units who had completed the exercise. Due to the hot temperature in Episkopi, which is where the 2 Mercian are based, the exercise was conducted in the beautiful mountainous village of Troodos. The mountain range stretches across most of the western side of Cyprus and is home to the highest point in Cyprus, which is called Mount Olympus which has an impressive elevation of 1,952m.

RAF Troodos is a small camp that is predominantly used for Adventure Training which offers great mountain biking and hill walking. Having spent 2 months in Troodos as Force Protection PL SGT around the same time the year before, I knew that this would be a good time for the soldiers to firstly enjoy the beautiful scenery, as well as the lower temperatures which were in the low 20's.



However, the soldiers also knew Exercise EAGLES UNREST was a critical output for the Coy and was not to be taken lightly. Thankfully majority of the Company had completed a public order exercise before and had the experience to bring the new soldiers on and in line with the high standards that were expected. The week started off with kit issue and basic practical/theory lessons to get the platoons back up to scratch. As the days progressed the platoons started getting tested at platoon CT1 level scenarios and included force on force between the platoons. As expected, both platoons wanted glory and it normally ended in some heated encounters, but this prepared us physically and mentally for the battle ahead which was a CT2 level exercise against a determined adversary.

On the final day it was the Coy time to shine, and shine we did, getting “greens” on all scenarios and impressing all involved. The company deserved all the praise as they gave 100% and literally put their bodies on the line to protect each other and to fly the flag of Kohima Coy.

4 MERCIAN CO FOREWORD

Lt Col FGB Cuttle MBE



This has been another busy reporting period for 4 MERCIAN as we attempt to accommodate the constraints of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic whilst enhancing our collective war-fighting competence, lethality and deployability.

Using the Army's Project PHOENIX direction and Force Health Protection Instructions as guidance, in early August we managed to bring soldiers back into Army Reserve Centres to conduct socially distanced training on mid-week training nights, complemented with virtual, online training.

It was a real pleasure to then welcome back to Wolseley House, the new Commander 20th Armoured Infantry Brigade, Brigadier Paddy Ginn (late MERCIAN), who paid us the honour of being the first unit he visited as Commander.

As we have learned to live with COVID-19, we have also managed to conduct our first field training exercise taking soldiers to Sennybridge, South Wales on 11 – 18 September where we conducted Battle Craft Syllabus (BCS) 'force on force' training

followed by a 5-day Transition to and Live Fire Tactical Training (TLFTT) range package.

During this training, the Commander Field Army, Lt Gen Ivan Jones CB, who had not visited an Army Reserve unit before, paid us a visit where he spoke to Reservists in their harbour locations, discussing how he sees the soft, people skills that Reservists possess, add real value on operations in addition to our warfighting capabilities.

Our focus remains to support operations and following demobilisation from Op RESCRIPT, the MOD's response to COVID-19, 4 MERCIAN has continued to deploy 30 personnel on 7 different tasks, including to Afghanistan and Estonia; we are looking forward to imminently receiving back 8 personnel on completion of their 6-month Op TORAL deployment.

We continue to work hard to instil a warfighting mindset in our people through imaginative and demanding training whilst ensuring our personnel remain deployable, resilient and robust. The professional manner by which our MERCIAN soldiers have continued to proudly acquit themselves throughout this difficult period has been truly remarkable.

4 MERCIAN B (MALTA) COY



Even though the nation is coming back from a long sleep with lockdown, there was a misunderstanding that things would return to normal in a steady flight. Things could not be further from the truth. The bulk of the company were coming out of Post Op leave following demobilisation from a very successful Op RESCRIPT working in Cumbria. For five members of the company however, as soon as they had demobilised, the OC and four personnel immediately mobilised again and joined 5 RIFLES on a what is effectively a 12-month mobilisation with a 6-month deployment on Op CABRIT.

The permanent staff have been working up plans to enable the Reservists to return to training as the ARCs were awoken from their lockdown malaise. This brought about some practical challenges in line with the guidelines and measures were introduced to ensure that the ARC was a COVID safe environment to enable our personnel to start training on Drill Nights and weekend training events, the first of which was Exercise VIKING SLAYER which was designed to bring together all of the lessons delivered virtually and remotely over the last quarter.

A complete overhaul of the classroom layout has been necessary to ensure social distancing, and although this has greatly reduced the space to train, using the Drill Hall has reduced the impact and moving an overhead projector screens into the Drill Hall has increased capacity to cater for any well attended training event at the ARCs in Widnes and Stockport.

After completing some online training, which included the new Force Health Protection measures in place, the company were invited to attend a one day training event in August, designed to cover return to work briefings and how Reservists would operate in the 'new normal' created by the virus. This included familiarization of the new one-way systems in place and discussion about how training would be delivered in the future. This was then followed by a social event, including a BBQ, to allow those attending to catch up in person having been limited to Zoom-enabled computer screens for so long.

The company has also been able to enable six new recruits attend an extended BRAVO course and we have also welcomed two new subalterns into the company, 2Lt Aiden Roberts and 2Lt Alex Wilson, both of whom have just completed their commissioning courses at RMAS. Our congratulations go to 2Lt Wilson who was presented with the coveted 'McRoberts Sword' awarded to the best Officer Cadet on each commissioning course.



4 MERCIAN C (KOHIMA) COY

Maj Gaz Dixon

This quarter saw C (Kohima) Company begin its return to 'normal' warfighting training following mobilisation on Operation RESCRIPT – the military assistance to the Civil Authorities – during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Constant change keeps us fresh and honed, and we welcomed two newly commissioned officers (2Lts Khan and Mackney) and a number of steely eyed warriors out of the Combat Infantry Course at Catterick. We also said our farewells to PSI, CSgt Chadbourne, who left us after 4 years to return to 2 MERCIAN on promotion, we wish him well in his new appointment.

Sgt Grayson from the Yorkshire Regiment joins us as his replacement in the Assault Pioneer Platoon over at Mansfield. With a growing energy across the company, 10 of our soldiers deployed across the world on three different operations (Ops TOSCA, TORAL and CABRIT), reinforcing our belief that C (Kohima) Company is the place to be!

COMMISSIONING INTO THE MERCIAN REGIMENT

2Lt Emile Mackney

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the whole of society and no more so than the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst. It is a measure of the flexibility and adaptability of the Army that training on Commissioning Course 202 continued, largely uninterrupted. Having had no previous military experience, I personally felt a little overwhelmed conducting Modules A+B compared to my peers, who all seemed to have gained some experience from having been in the University Officer Training Corps (UOTC) environment. The socially distanced nature of the course made it harder to receive help, however through many late nights and the occasional undetected nap during lectures, the platoon (family bubble) came closer together and developed as one cohesive team. The completion of MATTs and several exercises involving deliberate attacks, ambushes and a raid onto a Forward Operating Base, made every individual in the company a more well-rounded individual, in a civilian and military context.

A personal highlight of the course was the company attack on to Caesar's Camp in Aldershot. By the end of the four-day exercise, the platoons were working in harmony and had secured the vital ground. This was the point that I felt everything began to click into place.

Confined to camp except for excursions to Barossa on a Battlefield Study and Aldershot Training Areas, the eight week course drew to a close for 91 Officer Cadets with a modified commissioning parade taking place in MTP on Old College Square in front of the Inspecting Officer, Maj Gen S J Potter QVRM TD VR. 64 officers were commissioned into the various UOTCs with a further 21 commissioning into Army Reserve Units together with five from the Cayman Islands and one from Bermuda.

BACK TO A NEW NORMALITY

2Lt Jacob Stone



Exercise KOHIMA PEAK was a single day Adventure Training exercise held in the Peak District. As a mountaineering event, the aim was to get soldiers back into training post-lockdown and first deliver the Return to Work brief to ensure that soldiers are ready to operate in line within Force Health Protection Measures. The exercise provided a steady re-introduction to a key infantry skill, Navigation, but in a relaxed environment, in order to build confidence and low-level skills ready for a fire-team level navigational exercise later in the year.

Qualified instructors took groups round Mam Tor near the Hope Valley, while giving the more junior members of the company the opportunity to navigate legs of the journey, with mentoring from a paired JNCO.

Personnel performed extremely well, starting from simple route selection and finding large features, before increasing the difficulty to Micro-Navigation, the ability to find specific smaller features, culminating in a challenge to lead the team to an exact altitude with no assistance or specific features to work off, using pacing and other techniques that had been taught throughout the day. My congratulations to Pte Council for getting to within one metre of the target, the closest of the day!

Overall, the exercise was a success, getting soldiers back into training, building low level skills in preparation for future events and battalion training, and increasing soldiers confidence not only in navigation, but training within the COVID-19 environment. As a company, we are now looking toward a future team event in the same area using more military navigational skills in order to exploit these successes and develop our skills further.

EXERCISE MIDNIGHT HACKLE

2Lt Magnus Khan

Soldiers from across C (KOHIMA) Company joined other members of 4 MERCIAN at a 5RRF hosted Exercise MIDNIGHT HACKLE in August. This promised to be a unique experience for many – beginning on Salisbury Plain the troops would transition to subterranean warfighting deep beneath Bath's countryside. The first phase involved the completion of MATTS including an ACMT and 9mm ranges – a steady start, which gave the two newly formed platoons time to bond before deployment to the field.

Kit prepared, weapons checked and comms working as well as ever, we were dropped off on the area – our objective: to defeat a well-supplied enemy with the upper hand. Three nights in the field demonstrated application of skills such as recess and ambushes, but it was our final company attack onto an enemy compound that would be the biggest test. H-Hour came and as my platoon provided suppression, 2 PI made their break-in. The urban complexity of the compound slowed progress, but we soon gained a foothold and, as the sun rose over our backs, the objective was secured.

It was with high spirits then, that we deployed for the final phase of the exercise. Instructed by members of the Royal Gibraltar Regiment, both platoons developed cave and tunnel clearance skills. Use of simunition in the CQB environment certainly demonstrated the need for teamwork and aggression in urban operations. The culmination of our exercise was a company level attack through a large part of the underground complex – a highly impressive demonstration of the capability and professionalism of the Army Reserve.

SILENT SWOOPING EAGLES

2Lt Ben St Clair-Gray

Pte McRoberts and I were lucky enough to attend the ATG's first summer of Gliding Foundation (GFN) courses. From the very start the entire cohort had caught the bug, exhilarated by the sport. It was a strange start to the course, as the two Mercian soldiers were directed to tape the crease where the wings joined the fuselage but were quickly reassured that this was only to smooth the airflow!

After that, we were immediately in the cockpit with the gliders connected to a winch that catapulted the airframe into the air. It was explained that in order to maximise the launch rate, syndicates had to work as teams, retrieving gliders to their start points and connecting the winch cable to the aircraft's underbelly. Over the course of the week, we were taught about the principles of flight and basic controls. As our confidence and capability improved, we also practiced landing the aircraft, doing it ourselves by the end of the week. The course concluded with our instructors conducting aerobatic manoeuvres, demonstrating the full reach of the gliders.

Gliding is expanding into a major Army sport: the service has already won the last inter-services championships. ATG also intend to increase the sport's accessibility, with attendance on the course coming with a year's full membership to the Wyvern Gliding Club and its associate clubs, as well as free gliding until students reach solo standard.



4 MERCIAN D (DRAGON) COY

A summer of two halves for D Coy which saw roughly half of our personnel mobilised on Op RESCRIPT at very short notice and spending three months delivering testing in the North West of England. Almost 50% of the coy were unable to mobilise due to the 'Key Worker' status of their civilian employment including those employed with BT Open Reach, United Utilities or indeed as a Farmer (OC takes a bow!).

Cpl Sam Holmes, LCpl Declan O'Rourke, Pte Tim Robinson, Pte Edward Williams and Pte Matt Parkhurst remain deployed on Op TORAL with 4 SCOTS and Pte Williams has enjoyed the experience so much that he is transferring to the Regular Army and joining 4 SCOTS! Simultaneously, Cpl Michael Neal has been deployed on Op TOSCA with 7 RIFLES and we offer our warmest congratulations to him and his partner as they became parents for the first time on 1 July; Cpl Neal managed to return to UK for a period of paternity leave. Sgt Tommy Birks has completed his build up training following his mobilisation on Op CABRIT and has just deployed on a 6 month tour of duty with 5 RIFLES. He also managed to squeeze in getting married during his build up training and our congratulation go to him and his new wife.

CSgt Mark Harris arrived, replacing CSgt Rich Shaw as our Machine Gun Platoon PSI in Burton and we bid farewell WO2 (CSM) Simon Coulson after his 5 years in appointment as D Coy CSM. We also say farewell to Cpl Wayne Dyche who has moved into a role at BHQ, while our warm congratulations go to CSgt 'Spugger' Spilsbury, who has been selected for promotion to WO2 and assumes the appointment of CSM; we hope to fill the now vacant CQMS(V) role internally, so there is potential for more promotions in the coming months!

Op TORAL 10

Cpl Sam Holmes

Pre-Deployment Training (PDT) started for the 4 SCOTS Battlegroup in February 2020, with eight members of 4 MERCIAN joining "The Highlanders" in their preparation for deployment on Op TORAL 10. Six Mercian Warriors were attached to B Coy with the other two being attached to D Coy. Getting launched straight into training, we headed up to live firing ranges at Kirkcudbright where the package brought us up to the theatre entry standard. The next major PDT event was a 2-week Mission Rehearsal Exercise (MRX) held at Caerwent Training Area, where they have built a mini version of Kabul for personnel to train in. During this period, we conducted similar tasks to what we could expect to do in Afghanistan, roles and

scenarios including Base Defence, Quick Reaction Force and Force Protection were all rehearsed and tested. All Mercian soldiers managed to fully immerse into their platoons and multiples seamlessly.

With deployment getting closer, the lads enjoyed 2 weeks of pre-tour leave, however, things were about to change - COVID-19! Everyone deploying now had to isolate before deploying for two weeks. Our job role on Op TORAL was now being revisited due to the pandemic and no one knew what the next 6 months might hold. Isolation complete, D Coy deployed first, landing in Kabul in early April. Our home for the duration of the deployment would be the New Kabul Compound (NKC) located just outside the 'Green Zone. Once settled in, we went straight into the job at hand with our first rotation being QRF with the requirement to react to anything within the city and provide security and assistance where needed.

During the next 5 months we would do a rotation of QRF and Base Defence and when not committed to these tasks we had the chance to participate in training with the American EOD teams who gave us a greater insight into the Modus Operandi preferred by the insurgents operating within the city. Our US Allies medics also took us through a weeklong intensive course, enhancing our ability to help and assist in the event we need to respond to a mass casualty situation.

The operational experience gained by all of the Mercian soldiers that deployed on Op TORAL 10 has been priceless. The ability of our personnel to blend into a regular Battalion ORBAT and operate side by side with our Regular counterparts, highlights our utility, deployability and professionalism.



4 MERCIAN HQ (EAGLE) COY

2Lt Hugh Murdoch



Following the disruption to normal work life, HQ Coy personnel returned to training with Exercise MIDNIGHT HACKLE, a 5 RRF led field training exercise, followed by Exercise VIKING SLAYER, two exercises that offered Reservists the opportunities to conduct hands on training after a period of lockdown and dispersed virtual training.

Pte Andrew Killeen was one of the soldiers who deployed on Ex MIDNIGHT HACKLE and he writes: *"In the first phase of the exercise, I had a familiarisation with the Warrior IFV, conducted an ACMT and completed a Glock 17 shooting practice.*

Phase 2 saw us deploy onto Salisbury Plain where we undertook recce patrols, ambushes and a final OBUA attack. For Phase 3 we moved to Corsham Mines to conduct subterranean training with blank ammo and simunition. We were joined by members of the Royal Gibraltar Regiment, who taught tunnel clearance and the handlers from RAVC, who brought both protection and sniffer dogs. The final platoon attacks were all done in total darkness using HMNVIS which created a challenging but all-round awesome experience”.

Ex VIKING SLAYER was a Battalion training event that saw members of the company deploy to Sennybridge to conduct a 2 day FIWAF package before moving onto a live fire package. The FIWAF package involved recce patrols, orders preparation and delivery lessons and platoon attacks. During the morning of the first day, Commander Field Army visited the Battalion. He was shown around each platoon harbour and had an opportunity to watch the training as well as have a very honest discussion with reserve soldiers. CFA praised 4 MERCIAN personnel for their success on Op RESCRIPT and spoke about the usefulness of reserve units that think differently to a regular Battalion. When speaking about the future of the Reserves, CFA spoke about how Reserves bring in the added soft skills from their civilian employment, such as social service workers being able to interact with the public in a way that Regular soldiers would be unable to. Following on from the visit, 2 PI conducted their attack first, departing from the harbour as the sun began to go down. As the light went from daylight to dark, there was the added challenge of switching to night vision mid firefight. 1 PI conducted their attack at dusk, with the same challenge in reverse. Both platoons attacked a wood block that provided useful training at every level, from soldiers moving through forests to commanders controlling soldiers hidden in branches.

The second phase of the exercise saw a live fire package with an ACMT, moving target range, sharpshooter range and culminated in a day and night section in defence range with sharpshooters and GPMGs. The section in defence range allowed junior commanders to practice giving target indications and fire control orders. The night range was illuminated by flares from the PSIs and illum from a nearby artillery regiment. The night range also had the added challenge of using night vision equipment to effectively hit the targets up to a range of 300 metres. Each range during the live fire phase provided many in attendance with a first-time experience, with new weapon systems and interesting ranges that stood out from the usual static ACMT range practices.

4 MERCIAN COMMANDER FIELD ARMY VISIT



4 MERCIAN personnel deployed across the 'infamous' cattle grid in Brecon on 11 September marking the start of Ex VIKING SLAYER and were greeted by surprisingly mild weather as we made camp at Farm 16. This was the first Battalion field training exercise since March due to COVID-19 restrictions and the aim was to welcome soldiers back into our busy readiness cycle. The exercise consisted of two phases. Phase One (11 – 13 Sep) was a demanding Battlecraft Syllabus (BCS) force on force package and Phase Two (14 – 18 Sep) was a Transition to and Live Fire Tactical Training (TLFTT) range package.

Phase One was designed to consolidate the many lessons that were delivered via dispersed means during lockdown. It consisted of a 'force on force' training package which practiced low level skills such as harbour selection and occupation, clearance patrols, orders, recce patrolling, model building, fieldcraft and navigation. The exercise concluded with a deliberate operation which fused all of these activities together in a FIBUA environment.

The exercise held special significance as it was the first time that the Commander Field Army (CFA), Lt Gen Ivan Jones CB, visited an Army Reserve Unit, and although he was interested in understanding what the Army Reserves bring to the Field Army, first and foremost he was keen to meet our Reservists. After landing by helicopter, he and the Field Army Command Sergeant Major were handed a mug of tea and briefed on the exercise concept by D (Dragon) Coy PSI, Sgt Mills. He was

then introduced to OC D Coy, Maj Will Rose, who took him to the platoon harbour locations to meet reservists who were receiving orders.

Here CFA explored the idea of virtual training, an idea where individuals could log on to a platform at home or in an ARC and conduct decision making, tactical training from the comfort of the indoors. It's fair to say that it received a mixed response from our Reservists. He was then taken to see 2 PI at their harbour location where there was a mixture of activity taking place including recce contact drill rehearsals. Here, when asked what he saw the future of the Reserves being, CFA said that he sees the Reserves offering the Regular Army niche skills. He wants the Reserves to be out and out professionals in key areas like support weapons, so that in time they can be plugged into a Regular unit and become the SME. He also stated that he sees the Reserves offering the softer skills that the Regular soldier struggle to offer. When LCpl Josh Grant from Stoke said claimed that his skill set based around social care and therefore irrelevant to the Regular Army, CFA was keen to explain how these particular 'soft skills' made him essential to most operations. CFA went on to explain that LCpl Grant's inter-personal skills would see as the ideal choice as a Section Commander in the forthcoming Op NEWCOMBE deployment as the ability to talk to women and children and make a connection to them would be second nature, allowing him to offer the Field Army 'the bayonet and a kind ear'.

Having shared a *boil in the bag* lunch meal with the 4 MERCIAN command team, CFA departed approximately 90minutes later than he had planned, leaving the Bn HQ staff to reflect on a successful visit.



BAND OF THE MERCIAN REGIMENT

CSgt Jake Lees (Band PSI)



This quarter has seen the resuming of face to face training, which was perfectly timed to enable The Band of the Mercian Regiment's ATE (Annual Training Exercise) to go ahead as planned. The ATE was held at Holcombe Moor Camp surrounded by incredible countryside and with enough space to incorporate the necessary strict new regulations needed to stay safe whilst training. Although there had been much individual remote training during lockdown, nothing quite beats the feeling of being back playing as a Band, so there were a lot of smiles alongside the hard work of rediscovering and fine tuning the full band sound, and getting a challenging repertoire ready for when public performances resume.

As part of the new social distancing guidelines, there are different marching manoeuvres to master so that the Musicians can stay safely 2m apart while performing displays. The Band took full advantage of the space on the square at Holcombe to practice these new moves and the time to incorporate some new marches into their marching repertoire. There has also been time for the small groups within the Band to practice, working on new music in readiness for performing again, and for new modern ensembles to experiment and discover what is possible. There were also Continuous Professional Development opportunities across the ranks, and lots of time for individual development, lessons, and preparation for upcoming Army Music Qualifications.

Whilst away on camp, the Band also took up the opportunity to trial different ways to develop their sound, and a key element of this has been using technology to record sections of pieces in different locations, and to listen back to and critique their performance. They have also engaged with a challenging recording project for VJ Day, which can be viewed on social media platforms. This saw the Band recording both inside and out on the hill side – taking full advantage of the weather and

inspiring scenery, and using a range of recording equipment and set ups. This has provided insight into the work that goes on behind the scenes to ensure a recording is of the correct standard to be used, while simultaneously allowing individuals to “hear” how their sound contributes to the overall sound of the Band. This use of technology as a training tool and a performance tool is one will be developed as part of further training.

However, the Annual Training Exercise (ATE) for a Reserve Musician isn't just about playing music - there are lots of opportunities for new experiences and to find different ways to develop the teamwork and relationships that enhance the sound of a band. As part of this, members of the Band were pushed well and truly out of their comfort zone as they navigated their way around a high ropes course, leaping off platforms into cargo nets and zipping across the lake on zip wires. For some members of the Band, it was definitely a '*face your fears*' situation, but through the support, coaching and encouragement of the other band members, they faced every challenge with a true determination to succeed, and at the end there was a real sense of elation, and pride in what they had achieved together.

Post ATE, regular training has now resumed for the Band, and although the new safety measures mean that practice is in the drill hall rather than the practice room, it is good to be back and looking forward to future performances when the COVID-19 situation allows. At present, due to the ongoing and changing safety measures, there are no confirmed dates for upcoming public performances before Christmas.



MERCIAN REGIMENTAL ASSOCIATION (STOCKPORT)

Peter Marsh



The Annual General Meeting in March signified the coming together of the three Stockport Associations (Cheshire Regiment, Mercian Volunteers and Mercian Regiment) under the Mercian Regimental Association banner. To celebrate, all members are to be issued with a Branch polo shirt that puts us all under the Mercian badge *#strongertogether*.

COVID-19 has played its part in attempting to disrupt operations. Nonetheless, we have striven to adapt and overcome by use of technology for meetings. At the time of writing, we have had one socially distanced meeting (with more to follow!) at Stockport ARC, many thanks to Capt. Leslie Oldham, the PSAO, for proactively accommodating us. This first meeting was superbly augmented by free beer (yes, honestly) and a boxed buffet.

During the pandemic the Committee have been proactively reaching out to members via telephone for welfare checks and the Branch Standard has been present to pay respects when required. Particular thanks for this to Derek Sykes, who has also received a Lord Lieutenant's Certificate for his welfare work for the Cheshire Regiment Association over the years. Derek continues his sterling contribution under the MRA banner.

We have a number of walkers in our midst who meet (observing COVID guidelines) regularly. Whilst some meet casually, there is now a monthly walk offered to all members with various options available to accommodate different levels of mobility. The first walk was very enjoyable; the weather was kind along the Middlewood Way and we walked at a rate of one pint per mile!



WFRA NEWS

During lockdown, whilst the branches have missed meeting up, they have stayed in touch by zoom, emails and phone calls and have attended, where possible, funerals and events such as VE Day and VJ Day commemorations.

In August, on behalf of the Association, Brigadier (Retired) Edward Wilkinson sent a card to the Princess Royal, HRH Princess Anne for her 70th birthday. The Princess Royal was the Colonel in Chief of the Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters and sent her thanks for the kind gesture.



The Princess Royal appreciated your kind thoughts sent on the occasion of her 70th Birthday, and sends you her thanks and best wishes for the future.

Chesterfield Branch

On 6 September, Chesterfield Branch handed over 10 benches to Crich. Andy Bullock, a branch member, was instrumental in the fundraising for the benches and for this and his other sterling work for both Crich and The Mercian Regiment, he was awarded a Certificate of Commendation by the Colonel of the Regiment.

Derby Branch

Despite the restrictions imposed due to Covid 19 the Derby Branch WFRA continues to “soldier on”. We are keeping in regular contact with all via emails, post, and telephone, ensuring all members are kept fully up to date on news, and we thank those who produce the newsletters that keep us informed of what is occurring within the regiment. We are pleased to report our members have not been affected by the virus, and sincerely hope this continues to be the case. Like all other Branches we have suffered with having to cancel all our events and meetings. We look forward to the day, whenever that may be, when things get back to normal. Our thanks and congratulations are extended to Andrew Bullock and the Chesterfield Branch on their providing ten new benches at the Crich Memorial site. We send our best wishes to those serving in the Mercian Regiment and all other Branches and Associations within the regimental family.

Dudley Branch

Throughout this pandemic Dudley have kept in touch with each other on a regular basis, and those with computers have been sent jokes to give us a smile in such strange times. “Goody Bags”, together with a copy of our annual accounts sheet and yearly report, were distributed to all members. Something to read whilst partaking of a little drink! In August the branch managed to organise its first meeting since lockdown, which was the delayed AGM. Whilst it was different due to face coverings, sanitizer and wipes, all were very pleased to see each other again, and a free drink went down very well. Throughout, members have been representing the branch at funerals and have laid wreaths for VE and VJ day. Dudley branch send their good wishes to all members from other branches and hope all are safe and well.

Worcester Branch

Worcester Branch have remained active by attending events, although all have been scaled down due to C-19 restrictions:

On the 75th anniversary of VJ Day, branch members attended the Guildhall and war memorial at Worcester Cathedral to pay their respects. On 26th August, a miniature black pear tree was planted in Gheluvelt park near the Worcestershire Regimental Stone in memory of Maurice Smith, late of the Worcestershire Regiment and the Royal Artillery. He was also secretary of Worcester Branch 2011 - 2019. His wife's uncle died of bayonet wounds received at the battle of Gheluvelt so Maurice took a keen interest in the park and the parades and ceremonies held there including the sourcing, siting and inscription on the Malvern granite memorial stone near the memorial archway entrance to the park. Maurice's interest saw him involved with the running of the park representing Worcester Branch on the Gheluvelt Park

Stakeholders Committee. He was highly thought of by the parks committee hence they wanted a tree planted in his memory. Maurice's family attended the ceremony placing spades of soil around the bedding of the tree; they were very pleased to be involved in the event. Following this, the branch held their annual service to commemorate actions of the 1st Bn Worcestershire Regiment at Vernon, France 1944 crossing the river Seine, where in the 43rd Wessex Division they were the spearhead of the Allied push into north west France. The town of Vernon also holds a remembrance service on this date, laying flowers on the Allied graves. Those attending also remembered the 2nd and 7th Bn's of the Regiment in Burma 1944-45 and the 1st Bn in the Malay Emergency 1950-53 and laid a wreath at the WFR Memorial Bench.



MERCIAN TARTAN

The Mercian Regiment has an official Tartan! Ties, bow ties, scarves and wraps in Regimental colours; a British made product from a company that supports UK Armed Forces Charities.

The products can be ordered from www.theministryoftartan.co.uk.

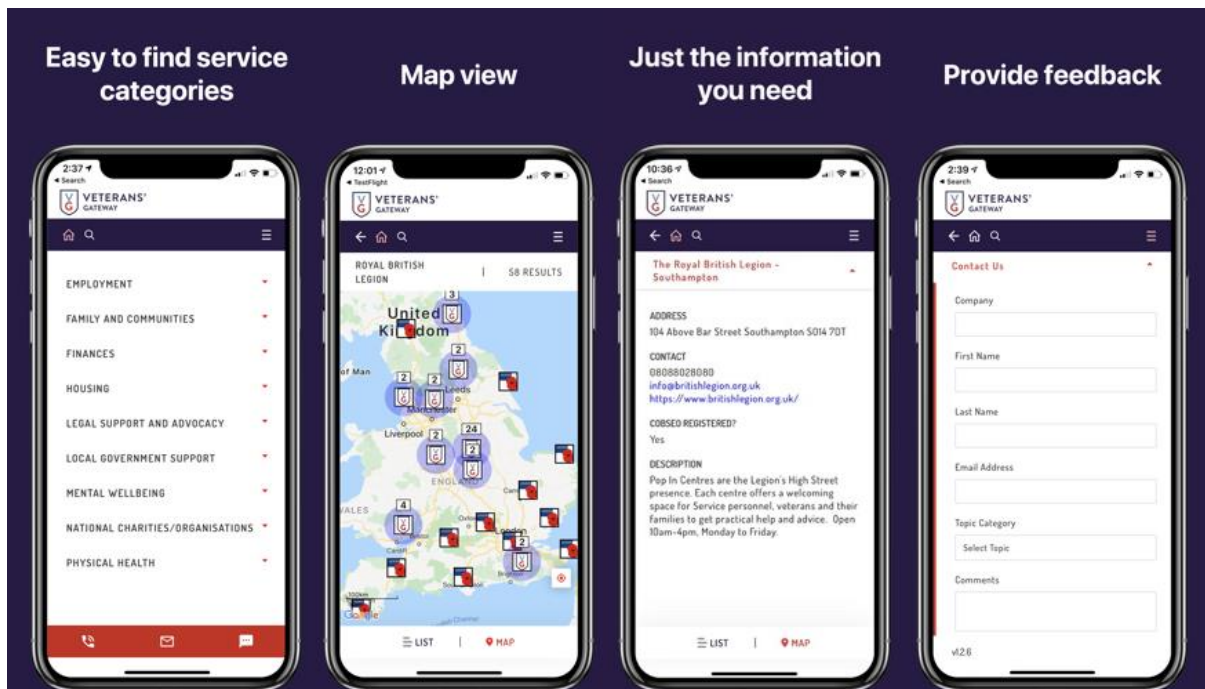


VETERANS' GATEWAY

Veterans' Gateway, a 24-hour point of contact for veterans' support, has launched a new app enabling any ex-Service personnel who are in need to get help from the palm of their hands. It is available for free download on Google Play (Android devices) and the Apple App Store (Apple devices).

Using a smartphone or tablet, the Veterans' Gateway app helps veterans find organisations within their local area to help with issues such as finances, housing, employment, relationship, physical and mental health.

The directory, which is intuitive and easy to use, groups all NHS facilities across the country, and over 2,000 charitable organisations, allowing veterans and their families to access local support.



WANTED

Does anyone have a Mercian buff jumper (size large/extra large) and a side hat for sale? Please contact Maj Tony Calunniato XO 4 Mercian on tony.calunniato765@mod.gov.uk