

THE MERCIAN REGIMENT

Quarterly Newsletter – Q4 2020



REMEMBRANCE DAY

The past year has been tough for many of us across the country, however we must not forget to honour those who fought for the lives that we live and enjoy today.

While many of us had only the choice of remembering the fallen from our doorsteps this year, our Mercian soldiers travelled across the country to pay respects to the fallen on behalf of the Regiment and the Regimental family.



1 MERCIAN A (GRENADIER) COY

Lt A Phenix-Norman

A (Grenadier) Company deployed to Sennybridge to complete their annual LFTT. The training build-up began with some strongly encouraged bayonet lanes, before testing the soldiers on their individual CQB skills. The live fire progression continued with fire team and section attack lanes designed around the many water features that the ranges had on offer. Before moving onto Platoon level serials, the Company conducted night firing testing the soldiers' abilities to operate in darkness with their section level equipment. The live fire training concluded with the Company conducting Platoon level assaults testing both the soldiering skills and the tactical awareness of the Grenadiers.

The two-week training package culminated in Ex CHAOS GRENADIER, a Company level effort in section cohorts to complete the SCBC Fan Dance route. On completion of the march the Grenadiers had to fix bayonets one more time and conduct a bayonet lane to earn their Grenadier Flash. Each member of the Company who passed received their flash with their own number on it.



1 MERCIAN B (MALTA) COY

Maj PR Marriott

A lot has changed for B (Malta) Company since the previous newsletter. While the Company will still deploy to Estonia in early 2021, our training pathway has changed significantly. Gone are the planned exercises in the UK. In their place, the Company deployed at just five weeks' notice to Sennelager to conduct six weeks of training before Christmas and a further six weeks after Christmas. The immense effort needed to plan, prepare, and then deploy the Company in good order to an overseas location during a pandemic should not be underestimated. I am incredibly grateful to all those who made it happen, but special mention must go to Capt Keenan, WO2 Sumner, WO2 Nicholls, CSgt Poolton and CSgt Crawford. I am sure the Company would have floundered without their diligence.



As I write this, the Company is coming to the end of the first of those six-week training periods. We are now charging towards a redeployment to the UK in time for Christmas leave and I am immensely proud of what the Company has achieved during our time in Germany thus far. Our first four weeks were spent on live firing ranges. It was with great satisfaction that I watched the culmination of this training with Warriors speeding down live firing ranges at night, engaging targets before then debussing dismounts and working as a team to engage and destroy further positions. One would not have been able to tell that so many of the soldiers conducting this activity had arrived in the Battalion or had qualified as vehicle crew only a matter of weeks before. Readers are invited to watch this for themselves via the British Forces Broadcasting Service report. (<https://www.forces.net/news/british-troops-return-sennelager-ranges-germany>)

Our final two weeks were spent training at a bigger scale but on simulators; speaking for the whole Company, I can happily state that it has been a delight to be indoors as the German winter closes in! However, the Company has not limited itself to just military training. Before Germany imposed a version of a lockdown, many of the soldiers were able to visit Paderborn and we have had several soldiers spend days mountain biking, playing touch rugby and competing in intra-Company football.

I believe I speak for the everyone in B (Malta) Company when I say that we are all now looking forward to a relaxed festive period at home before our training ramps up again in the New Year.

1 MERCIAN D (DRAGON) COY

Capt T Margetts

It has been a busy few months for the mighty Dragon Company, with only 5 weeks' notice the company came together to deploy to Sennelager, Germany for training and ranges. Now deploying to Estonia on Operation CABRIT next year, our training had to return to our core skills as an armoured infantry ISTAR company, while simultaneously rerolling the Recce and Mortar platoons to use Warrior instead of CVR(T). All the instructors, stores teams and enablers throughout the company and the platoons came together to grasp the challenge with the dynamism and adaptability that underpins Dragon, deploying to Germany in good order fully ready to get amongst the beginnings of our training for operations in 2021.



There has been a huge variety of training going on both in Germany, and with soldiers out conducting external courses to bring new skills and capabilities back to their platoons. The Recce platoon welcomed new soldiers to the fold as well as fully qualifying on the larger, more powerful Warrior infantry fighting vehicles, new gunners completing their initial gunnery tests in Germany. It was not just Recce training on Warrior, the Anti-Tank platoon have always used them, but still needed to qualify and train new crews in Sennelager, getting maximum value out of the larger, more open ranges that Germany offers. Having already completed their mortar cadre earlier in the year, the Mortar Platoon relished the chance to get even more live-firing in Germany, really embedding those core skills with mortar numbers with mortar ranges in Germany- even welcoming the CO to the range to show him how they conduct their business. The Assault Pioneer platoon have gone from strength to strength – pioneer command courses, chainsaw courses, demolitions training, all while also establishing themselves as the battalion's musicians having played for Commander Field Army in the UK in September.

2 MERCIAN UNIT MOVE - WINTER 2020

Capt S French



The long awaited 2 MERCIAN Unit Move completed at the start of December this year, having originally been planned for the Summer. COVID-19 has disrupted many things for 2 MERCIAN this year, but perhaps the delay to the Unit Move was the most frustrating of all. We now have only a small Christmas leave period planned before we step onto the travelator of CAST, LFTT, Ex ASKARI STORM, PDT and eventually Op TORAL, starting in January. 2021 will be an incredibly busy year for us, but what an opportunity it promises to be.

A huge thanks must go out to our G4 and G1 Teams for the Unit Moves successful completion. Thanks to the hard work, tenacity and diligence of our Soldiers, 2 MERCIAN moved from Cyprus with very few hiccups (not mentioning the leaking roof of the departures lounge in RAF Akrotiri!). Special mention must be paid to our two Welfare Officers during this period, Capt Garcia and Capt Rhodes, and their tireless deputy, CSgt Hirst. Without their endeavour our Families would have had a tough time moving back home through various international Pandemic restrictions. A special mention must also go to Capt Mason, our QM(T) who returned to the UK early to 'run the ship' and bring us all home safely.



Our time in Cyprus has been hugely enjoyable, incredibly challenging, and very varied. During our stint in the sun, we have undertaken an Operational deployment to Afghanistan, deployed three Companies on three different OTXs, conducted AT, played Sport, challenged ourselves tactically on challenging conventional and Public Order exercises: all whilst supporting UK Foreign Policy day in and day out. We have also supported Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief efforts in Lebanon and supported the Cypriot National Guard on multiple occasions. It has tested our metal, but we have learnt a huge amount.

We now take the lessons we have learnt in Cyprus under HQ BFC to the North of England. We will be based in Weeton Barracks, which is currently overcast and cold. It will certainly take some time to get used to UK weather again; I think many of us are already looking forward to the warmth of Kenya. We have resubordinated to 4th Infantry Brigade who are based in Catterick. So far, the help and support from 4X has been outstanding, even though they are busy deploying the Light Dragoons BG to Mali and are themselves deploying to Afghanistan next month. We are excited to be back in a UK based Bde, aligned to operational deployments, but able to take a healthy balance of time at home as well. It is great to finally be here. Though, as always with 2 MERCIAN, we already have our eyes on the next Operation; it is in our DNA.

4 MERCIAN OFFICERS FAREWELL TO LT COL FRASER CUTTLE MBE

Maj N Bradley QGM (Bn 2IC)

Traditionally we like to dine our Commanding Officers out with a 'substantial meal' accompanied by a pint or two! Alas, despite our best intentions, COVID-19 conspired against us. Our initial aspirations for a black-tie dinner were scrapped quite early on in the planning process and we focussed on finding a venue that could host about 20 personnel from different households. That too was swiftly discounted, clearly not a viable option in the current climate.



So, 4 MERCIAN Officers' Mess dined Lt Col Fraser Cuttle out on Sat 30 Oct in Leek Training Area where we conducted Exercise DEPARTING DAGGER, a leadership and navigation training event more commonly known as hill walking. With specific instructions to plan a route that was 'fun, dry and suitable for all abilities; our most senior member (62) as well as our student 2Lts (19), Capt Rich Peacock planned a route that met none of these objectives!

On the day we were met the wrath of Storm Aiden, howling wind and driving rain that were the remnants of Hurricane Zeta! With hoods up and heads down, we began the trek, content in the knowledge that at the halfway point was a pub where we could enjoy a socially distanced pint and some lunch, in the car park if required. On arrival at the pub, drenched and parched, we saw a notice displayed on the locked front door stating, 'closed until further notice due to staff COVID-19 outbreak!'



After wringing out socks and blaming Capt Rich Peacock for his poor organisational skills, we got back onto the route and made our way to the pick-up point. The banter was fierce and opportunity to spend time with each other in a dispersed and safe manner was a real. By the time we had returned to Stoke ARC for a snack and presentations, we had all thoroughly enjoyed the wind-swept experience.

So, Lt Col Fraser Cuttle was bid farewell in a suitable, albeit less traditional way, however, as he explained; "I wouldn't have had it any other way". We thank Lt Col Cuttle for his inspirational leadership and guidance over the last 30 months and wish him the very best of luck in his new role.

4 MERCIAN B (MALTA) COY

Maj R Davies

Despite the pandemic and the restrictions, it imposes the Company is managing to still operate to capacity both out on training in the field and within the ARCs and we are still supporting the Regular Army with troops for deployment. With sensible management training is conducted albeit just with larger gaps between each other and is testing people's imagination which has having a positive impact and the Jnr Comd are having to be more imaginative in their delivery of lessons. We have seen a positive shift in greater numbers of attendance and our recruiting, albeit is mainly virtual is steady.

In the early period of the quarter, we waived off the OC and 3 members of the Company to OP CABRIT on a 12 month mobilisation to support 5 RIFLES on OP CABRIT in ESTONIA and we welcomed back LCpl Pinder who has recently returned from a tour with 4 SCOTS on OP TORAL. Sadly, we said farewell to our PSI CSgt Nicholls who on well-deserved promotion has returned to 1 MERCIAN and we welcomed CSgt Hoe (YORKS) as our new PSI and he hit the ground running by organising a Bn weekend sponsored by the Company at CARWENT in Wales.



As the country entered November thoughts of how we were going to mark Remembrance as we had to fall in line with the national guidelines. The Platoons were still keen to mark the occasion in the most respectful way it could and 2 COAs were drawn up. The Mortar Platoon held a service within the Greek St Armoury and with social distancing the Mortar Platoon along with A Det 207 Fd Hosp held a service and laid a wreath at the memorial at the foot of one of our former Regiments (Cheshire Regt). CSgt Keeble at 1100hrs laid a wreath at a reduced party from the council on Stockport Town hall. Whilst this was happening 5 Platoon attended the ARC to hold a simple service by having the Whitehall ceremony piped into the ARC allowing the troops to be part of the National ceremony in London.

Sadly, we have also said farewell and about to do so to the following members of the Company. Cpl Bird has just transferred out of 5 Platoon to take up a Instructor's post with ATU(N) at Altcar and we are soon to lose the CSM, WO2 Ward who is to transfer to 4 LANCs for a period and we will hopefully see him return in the future as an LE Officer. Finally, we say farewell and wish Cpl Oldham the very best of luck as he has re-joined the Regular Army and accepted a Cpls post within the R Signals.

4 MERCIAN C COY & ASSAULT PIONEER PL

Sgt Andy Grayson

After arriving in post and starting my hand over, it was not long until I was away to attend the Assault Pioneer (AP) Sgt's Course (Cse). New knowledge coming in and overwriting anything that my predecessor, Sgt Chadbourne had told me on the handover or at least that is my excuse, not sure if it will wash!

The course started with the Water Safety Officer (basic) qualification at Chatham and Brompton Barracks. The latter being a very impressive historical barracks, (a lot fancier than all the barracks I have ever been based in!) As a keen shot with a shotgun, I spent most of my time on that part of the course eyeing up all the ducks and wondering if any infantry soldiers ever gets posted here? The qualification, once attained, allows those individuals to remain safe, plan and conduct water activities on water up to a certain category, such as river crossings.

The main part of the AP Sgt's Course was broken down into phases, mobility, counter-mobility, survivability and the Demolitions Safety Officer (DSO) range qualification. In an Infantry context, this allows drawing, writing, digging and maths! The latter subject is one that I have not gone into too much depth in since leaving school, for good reason!



The course differs from the Section Commanders Course. The PI Sgt Course surrounds the facilitation of the Assault Pioneer Training and Operations via planning, stores requirements and advising the OC or CO on Assault Pioneer capabilities through briefings.

The demolitions module was a very interesting part of the course. The course includes practicing live explosive methods of entry (EMOE), BATSIMs and explosive digging. All these subjects are not investigated too much in the infantry context,

although we know they are there, it is rare that an opportunity arises to practise those skills.

My brain was exploding as the technical detail required was heavy going at times being taught and tested in working out how much explosives are required to destroy different types of bridges, obstacles, masonry, timber, stripping and cutting reinforced concrete and concussion charges! The days spent on the demolition ranges were excellent, who wouldn't enjoy a day of blowing stuff up? It was great to put into practise what we'd been taught. It's not very often you get to make such large hole in doors, walls and the ground.

Accompanying me on the course were individuals from 1 and 2 MERCIAN meaning each Battalion in the regiment was represented on the course. A bit of extra pride was that the soldier from 1 MERCIAN received the "Soldier's Soldier" Award, meaning he was voted by the other students as the top student on the course.

4 MERCIAN D (DRAGON) COY

Maj W Rose

During this period D Coy has seen a COVID version of normality return with urban themed weekend training at Swynnerton and Caerwent after a back-to-basics weekend in Sennybridge (where CFA visited); these have been backed up by urban themed Tuesday Drill Nights.



Our six mobilised personnel have all returned safely from their deployments (Cpl Holmes, LCpl O'Rourke, Pte Robinson, Pte Williams and Pte Parkhurst from Op TORAL and Cpl Neal from Op TOSCA) and are currently enjoying a good period of post operational tour leave; on the deployment side, we have had Sgt Tommy Birks mobilise and deploy on Op CABRIT with 5 RIFLES (and indeed he is enjoying it so much he wishes to transfer to the Regular Army); Pte Ross Dawson has also mobilised at extremely short notice to provide clerical support to a COVID Quarantine Facility (QFAC) based at Swynnerton.

LCpls Adams & Britton are busy preparing for the Section Commanders Battle Course in January 2021 and new blood continues to flow in; Ptes Edgington, Latham, Boyes and Payne all completed their Alpha Courses and Pte Leese & Shea completed Bravo whilst Pte Foster completed his AR CIC. OCdt Dulson joined us and we wish him good luck at his upcoming AOSB, whilst Capt Peacock is now formally in the chair as the Coy 2IC.

ARMY RESERVE PRE-COMBAT INFANTRY COURSE TRAINING

Maj B Johnston MBE

Despite recent events related to COVID-19, the Battalion continue to provide fully trained personnel that are resilient and well prepared and able to deploy home and abroad. To enable 4 MERCIAN to meet this demand, we continue to conduct physical training activities for our soldiers. We have adhered to the best medical advice, public health protocols on social distancing and hygiene measures applied wherever practicable to ensure training remains COVID safe.

4 MERCIAN have conduct pre-training for all our recruits before they attend Basic Training (BRAVO) and Army Reserve Combat Infantry Course (ARCIC) in Altcar each month. The pre-training has been designed to provide continuous training for our recruits in order to better prepare them both mentally and physically for the recruit courses. The training also acts as a very effective retention tool and helps the Battalion to nurture the recruits during this difficult time, with course cancelled and backlogs across the recruiting system.



Recruiting is a critical activity to sustain the Battalion, therefore we need to look after the recruits we have in the pipeline. We need help them be the best they can, and this pre-course training has proved to increase recruit's confidence, improve their fieldcraft skills, military knowledge and physical fitness. This has resulted in our soldiers achieving champion recruit in ITC Catterick and on the BRAVO course.

Face to face nurturing and military training remains essential to how we engage and inspire the Mercian Warriors of the future.



24H CHARITY CROSSFIT CHALLENGE

On 7 and 8 November 2020, the RAPTCl for 4 MERCIAN, SSgt Mark 'H' Henshaw, completed a 24 hr CrossFit challenge to raise money for the Royal British Legion and the Mercian Regiment Benevolent Charities.



SSgt M Henshaw

“Having started my career with 2 MERCIAN, the Regiment means a lot to me, so when I took up the post of 4 MERCIAN's RAPTCl, I wrote a workout for each of our fallen Mercian Warriors and displayed them across the Battalion's gymnasiums. I did this so people joining the Battalion could see, read about and remember those who came before them. Then by doing a workout in their honour they were keeping their memory alive in the Regiment.

“This year has been a tough one for many and I know how COVID-19 has impacted on the Royal British Legion and the Mercian Regiment Benevolent Charity donations. I wanted to do something to help, to raise awareness and to give those struggling the chance to do some physical exercise. The original plan was to have Mercians past and present join me for the workouts doing one a day throughout November. However, due to COVID restrictions and lockdown the week before, I decided to do all 30 workouts myself in a 24-hour period with people joining me for support limited to those living in the local area.

“The event was held at Bulwell Arm Reserve Centre and started at 1100hrs on Sat 7 Nov and finishing at 1100hrs on Sun 8 Nov, Remembrance Sunday, in time for the 2 minutes silence. Over the 24 hours, I completed 30 workouts each dedicated to an individual and completed in the order which they lost their lives. Each workout was streamed on Facebook and Instagram. Having known many of the personnel, the workouts were very personal for me and it was a true honour to represent and keep the memory of our fallen very much alive.”

Congratulations and well done to SSgt Henshaw on arranging this amazing tribute and on your impressive feat of physical endurance! Over the weekend a total of £1,028.75 was raised for the two charities.

BAND OF THE MERCIAN REGIMENT

This last quarter of 2020 has seen the Band of the Mercian Regiment taking every opportunity to rehearse individually, in small groups and as a full band, working on new COVID-19 safe marching display moves, and on a challenging and interesting repertoire waiting for the time when public live performances are able to restart.

There has been a focus on career development and training carrying on from training under lockdown with musicians preparing for CEQ 3, 2 and 1 examinations.



Musician Kasjan Kryszczuk has successfully completed his CEQ 3 Aural Exam this October with an incredible score of 90% and has gone on to successfully complete his CEQ 3 – congratulations! For CEQ 3, the programme includes practical musicianship, music theory, aural and marching band.

On training days, the Band have been continuing their work on new COVID-19 safe marching display manoeuvres and have been utilising the extra space needed to socially distance by rehearsing in the drill hall at Wolverhampton.



Remembrance Sunday and Armistice Day 2020 were unusual as they saw Band members at home with their families instead of on parade. Corporal Wendy Robert represented the Band as part of Birmingham City's Act of Remembrance where things had been adapted so that the Act of Remembrance could be streamed from the City's Cathedral, with the service being pre-recorded to minimise contacts. She was in Birmingham at dawn to sound the last post and reveille that was then be used in the broadcast and streamed live across the region.

Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 restrictions there can be no Christmas performances this year.

VETERAN HELP SITES

As the Pandemic continues to impact tremendously on all our lives it is more important that our veterans know how to get help if they find themselves struggling.

If you know one of your veteran friends struggling please encourage them to get help from one of the sites below.

VETERANS GATEWAY

The Veterans Gateway is still operating as normal, you can download their App at Google Play or the Apple App store. Also, you can call them direct on 0808 802 1212 or visit them on their website. <https://www.veteransgateway.org.uk/>

SSAFA

SSAFA are still providing a service to support our veterans, you can call them on 0800 731 4880 or visit them online on their website. You can live web chat with them online via the link on this page. <https://www.ssafa.org.uk/about-us/contact-us>

THE ROYAL BRITISH LEGION

The Royal British Legion continue to provide support, you can call 0808 802 8080 from 8am to 8pm seven days a week. Also visit their website, which also provides a chat online link. <https://www.britishlegion.org.uk/about-us/who-we-are/get-in-touch>

COMBAT STRESS

Combat Stress have a 24hr help line on 0800 138 1619 and on their website. <https://combatstress.org.uk/get-help>

TOGETHERALL-THE BIG WHITE WALL

Should you wish to discuss mental health issues anonymously then The Big White Wall has changed its name to Togetherall. The website could provide you support (note you might need to register). <https://togetherall.com/en-gb/big-white-wall/>

HELP FOR HEROES

Help for Heroes are also providing support for several issues on their website. <https://www.helpforheroes.org.uk/get-support/>

BLESMA

If you have lost a limb in service or have lost the use of limbs, suffered permanent loss of speech, hearing, or sight whilst serving or as a result of service in any branch of Her Majesty's Forces or Auxiliary Forces you may be eligible for Membership to BLESMA.

If you have lost a limb or use of a limb through traumatic incident or sight of an eye other than through service-related causes or if you are of civilian status and have lost a limb or sight of an eye as a result of War Service or enemy action you may be eligible for Membership.

If you want more information, please call 020 8590 1124 Mon to Fri 9am to 5pm or visit their website. <https://blesma.org/>

VETERANS UK

If you require information on Pensions, Medals or the new veterans Rail Card then please visit the Veterans UK website.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/veterans-uk>