

# THE MERCIAN REGIMENT

## Quarterly Newsletter - Q3 2021

### 1 MERCIAN - THE COMMANDING OFFICER'S OVERVIEW

*Lt Col D Canham OBE*

As the 1 MERCIAN Battlegroup returns from operations in Estonia, we can reflect on an extremely demanding but successful 6-month deployment, which was preceded by an intense 6 months build-up training.

Ultimately the Battlegroup achieved everything it was tasked to: deterring aggression against Estonia; standing ready to fight to defend NATO's north eastern flank; reassuring Estonians on the UK's commitment; demonstrating the bond between NATO allies; and developing individuals and teams along the way.

I am extremely proud of the hard work of those who deployed forward, those stoically supporting from the rear, and the families of both who allow us to do so with the vigour and endurance that is required.

As the Battlegroup disperses and the Battalion takes some well-earned leave, we can look back proudly on our achievements and now also start to look forward to the changes and new challenges ahead.'

## **1 MERCIAN BATTLEGROUP PROVE NATO READINESS CAPABILITIES IN NORTH EAST ESTONIA THROUGH Ex DRAGON'S DEMONSTRATE**

*Capt J Clarke, 1 MERCIAN Intelligence Officer*

Dragon Coy, 1 MERCIAN battlegroup, demonstrated NATO readiness capabilities as part of their role as the enhanced Forward Presence Estonia Battlegroup (eFP(E) BG) a NATO battlegroup in the 1st Estonian Brigade, in July 21. This short 'readiness' exercise (also known as a 'SNAPEX'), saw a fictitious scenario activating the eFP BG to deploy at short notice (6hrs notice to move) to find and destroy an enemy recce screen and command node over 150km away.

Capt Clarke, 1 MERC IO, said: "The exercise scenario was entirely fictitious, however it was designed to be a plausible scenario encompassing some of the real life Estonian physical and human terrain that the troops have been exposed to, and training for, as part of Op CABRIT. Part of the exercise objective was to enable the troops to visualise what a real-life activation of the (e)FP BG could look and feel like".

The force operated under a joint UK-French HQ, with a French company in LECLERC tanks and VBCI wheeled vehicle platforms, and utilising Dragon Company's specialist 'find' capabilities delivered by its Reconnaissance, Anti-Tank and Sniper Platoons, to first find and fix the enemy, with the French Coy acting as the main assault force. The 1 MERCIAN Assault Pioneer Platoon was integrated into the French Company, providing explosive method of entry to the urban village objective.

Aside from the additional complexity of operating alongside NATO peers in a highly integrated manner, the move was conducted entirely by road in the Warrior Infantry Fighting Vehicle, and the speed and distance travelled in a single push, was a robust test of the platform's reliability and the level and quality of its maintenance by their crews. The exercise was a success. Reaction time was very fast, ultimately confirming the (e)FP BG capability to provide a rapid reaction force to an unexpected enemy incursion into Estonian territory, a NATO member state country. A realistic enemy force was provided by the Mortar Platoon and the Estonian Defence League's BTR-80, a Soviet era armoured vehicle.

Maj Williams, OC Dragon Coy, said: "The whole Company did extremely well, it was testament to each vehicle's crew that the level of maintenance and equipment care enabled the vast majority of vehicles to travel over 150 km in under 5 hrs, which if I'm honest was a bit of an unknown, as the platforms had not been used for such a task for several months. The specialist platoons within Dragon Company demonstrated their proficiency by providing an effective advanced screen and fix of the enemy,

whilst seamlessly integrating with their French counterparts to deliver the desired effect."

Pte Smith said: "I really enjoyed operating with the French; their LECLERC tank is an impressive platform, and we found that our armies share many similarities in terms of how we operate. We were pleased to be able to show our comrades how we do business and demonstrate that we can operate effectively together."

Background Image: Dragon Coy with French counterparts at the completion of the exercise.

## **1 MERCIAN Ex FURIOUS WOLF (AN AIR-LAND INTEGRATION, PAN-BALTIC, DCGS-VISITED EXERCISE)**

*Maj P Marriot, OC B Coy*

On the 6th of July, B (Malta) Company hosted Lt Gen Tickell KBE, the Deputy Chief of the General Staff, for a demonstration of what the Company and the other attached sub-units had been getting up to while we have been on operations in Estonia. Lt Gen Tickell's programme saw him coming out to the training area in the early afternoon, thus giving B Company the morning to run through several dress rehearsals. After a number of planning sessions in camp, the rehearsals for a visit of a 3\* general went exactly as rehearsals ought to...dreadfully. The Royal Engineer's TROJAN vehicle broke down so catastrophically that initial reports were that the crew were 'swimming in oil'.

Given that the demonstration was based around an obstacle crossing, the loss of an armoured vehicle designed to affect such a crossing was a pretty significant issue...and one that could not exactly be glossed over as Lt Gen Tickell was himself a Royal Engineer and just might have noticed if his own troops were missing. Once a suitable work around had been found (thank God for TERRIER), the Warriors of B Company decided to one up the antics of the Engineers by getting one of our vehicles so bogged in on just the other side of the obstacle that the tracks had all but disappeared and a full recovery operation had to be launched. Then, once the Warrior had been extracted from the Estonian gloom, the whole thing became practically biblical on the final rehearsal when a swarm of bees slowly made their way through, but fortunately did not settle on, the VIP viewing area.

My French counterpart assured me in a suitably laconic and Gallic fashion that the morning's various catastrophes were a good sign. And he was correct. The actual demonstration ran without a hitch. The French squadron put in a textbook overwatch force and called in simulated British artillery fire on a joint net. The Engineers affected a good breach and Lt Fossey's Warriors charged through at the very second that the Engineer countdown finished. Finally, Badger Squadron from the Royal Tank Regiment had Lt Gen Tickell piloting one of their unmanned aerial drones at just the right time to capture Lt Larkin's troop charging through the breach as the breakout force and destroying what enemy remained. The demonstration complete and the General satisfied, the Company retired for refreshments, a chat with the General and confirmation of his promotion from LCpl to Cpl for Cpl Jarram.

## **1 MERCIAN INTER-OPERABILITY WITH THE FRENCH: INSIGHTS INTO A 6-MONTH Op TOUR WITH AN ATTACHED Fr ARMoured COY**

*Lt A Watson, French Liaison Officer*

As Liaison Officer embedded with a French Company during Op Cabrit 08, I had several functions: Act as translator between the British and French HQ's, advise both on the abilities and applied uses of each other's warfighting capability and build relationships with the French to aid effective cooperation. Language skills play an important role in interoperability. The ability to speak a language well increases productivity and understanding of the overall mission. I found the average level of English amongst the French Coy was superior to that of French in the British Army. Furthermore, their desire to improve their linguistic ability outweighs ours.

Advising either HQ on the other's warfighting capability proved difficult because of differences in training and doctrine. The French Army has no purely dismounted infantry. Doctrine is based around armour and therefore is dictated by the terrain in which armour can operate. This caused difficulties when trying to persuade the French Coy to adopt our infantry tactics. We should make doctrinal diversity a virtue when operating alongside allies. Building personal relationships is the easy part. Maintaining relationships is more difficult. Different cultures and identities can clash more often than they mesh. Finding similarities on which to build a strong foundation and acknowledging differences that make each unique allow for allies to thrive together.

## 2 MERCIAN COMMEMORATES THE BATTLE OF ALMA WITH SERVICE ON BLACKPOOL BEACH

*Capt Luke Breen*

2 MERCIAN took the opportunity to commemorate the Battle of Alma with an arduous Physical Training session and Drumhead Service on Thursby Home beach, Blackpool.

2nd Battalion, The Mercian Regiment deployed to Thursby Home beach on Monday 20 Sep to commemorate the Battle of Alma with a series of beach-based events.

The Blackpool-based Battalion kicked off the events with an arduous Beach PT session consisting of a 'gun run', combat conditioning, and partner carries. This involved the soldiers carrying various heavy objects, including a 100kg log, and practising hand-to-hand combat in the sand.

After a quick breakfast snack, the Battalion formed up in front of the drums for the Drumhead Service. Led by Padre North, 2 MERCIAN remembered the actions of the 95th (Derbyshire) Regiment at the Battle of Alma, during the Crimean War.

During the Battle, the Colour Party suffered immense casualties with almost every Officer and NCO sustaining severe injuries. As momentum was lost and confusion set in, the Colours were seized by Pte Keenan marched forward towards the Imperial Russian lines. This provided a rallying point for the 95th (Derbyshire) Regiment who were able to reorganise and defeat the enemy within the Great Redoubt.

Consequently, to remember the actions of Pte Keenan, a Private soldier is chosen from across the Battalion to have the honour of carrying the Queen's Colour. This year's honour fell to Pte Green from C (KOHIMA) Company. During an exercise in Kenya, earlier in the year, Pte Green was recognised by both the Chain of Command and the exercise staff for his professionalism, aptitude, and ability.

The Service concluded with the presentation of well-deserved medals and commendations to various members of the Battalion, as well as a moving performance from the 2 MERCIAN Fijian choir.

Lieutenant Colonel Grover MBE, Commanding Officer 2 MERCIAN remarked: "Today was something different for our soldiers. It was an opportunity not only to remember our Regimental history, but also to build mental resilience and team cohesion through

some arduous PT [Physical Training]. Also, it was great to see so many of the local community coming up to the soldiers to talk to them and ask about the events.”

## **2 MERCIAN, Ex MERCIAN POTTER**

*CSgt Rich Joynes*

Soldiers from across 2 MERCIAN conducted a stretcher carry around the Potteries 'Arf Marathon on Sunday 26th Sept. A 12x man team, drawn from Stoke-on-Trent, carried the 80kg stretcher over the 13.1mile route.

For those who know the route well will tell you the route is not the easiest, especially Anchor Rd in Longton and Milton Rd in Sneyd, and not for the faint hearted.

By doing this the team showed grit and determination to complete the course. All this was to raise money and awareness for the Mercian Benevolent Fund and the Hubb foundation (A local charity supporting young families).

Stoke-on-Trent has great Military ties to the MERCIAN Regiment and historic ties to one it's antecedent units, the Staffordshire Regiment. Soldiers from the Potteries include LSgt J Baskeyfield VC, who's statue still stands tall in Festival Park. His story from WW2 on Operation Market Garden is a fine example of Courage and Selfless commitment, that MERCIAN Soldiers aspire to today.

The team smashed the route and came in on time at 2hrs 29mins 45secs. Total raised was £5189.

## **2 MERCIAN NORTH COAST 500 MOTORCYCLING EXPEDITION**

*Lt Fergus Whimster*

In August 2021, a small group of motorcyclists from The Second Battalion set off from Weeton Barracks to spend 6 days riding one of the most beautiful roads that the mainland UK has to offer; the North Coast 500. 500 miles of narrow, winding, Scottish coastal tarmac that weaves elegantly through mountains, lochs and seaside villages.

The group stopped at several noteworthy sights along the way; John O'Groats, Stirling Bridge (site of the William Wallace's renowned battle in 1297), Loch Ness, Glen Coe and not least Fort George, where we were hosted by a generous and hospitable 3 SCOTS, to whom we offer sincere gratitude. Alas, no monster was seen at the famous Loch, but perhaps an even rarer sighting occurred; some Scottish sunshine.

Bookending these picturesque coastal roads was the long slog of rainy, grey motorway miles between the Scottish border and Weeton, helpfully accompanied on the return leg by the onset of the petrol shortage. Despite this, and some minor mechanical issues throughout the trip (worn breaks, stretched chains and a flat tyre), the group nonetheless completed the journey in good time and, remarkably, without falling out with each other.

#### **4 MERCIAN B (MALTA) COY**

*Maj Bowden-Williams*

As the nation returned to something resembling normality post lockdown, B (Malta) Coy has seen a return to training and a battle rhythm more in keeping to what we are used to. Significantly, this last period has seen something of an epoch change with the retirement of Capt Robbie Davies MBE as our PSAO. His 43 years of exemplary Regular and Reserve (FTRS) service came to an end as he retired after 9 years as B Coy PSAO. As one old soldier marched off into the sunset, a familiar face returned with Capt David "Trapper" Travis arriving on his retirement from Regular service to take up the PSAO role. A former SPSI and QM at 4 MERCIAN, Trapper finished his Regular Army career as a Maj commanding HQ (HELLES) Coy at 1 LANCS.

2Lt Alex Wilson left us to start the Regular Commissioning Course at RMAS and 2Lt Aril Pandya transferred to the LONDONS on completion of his studies. Luckily not everyone is departing and we saw Ptes Kirby, Stafford and Stanley return from Op CABRIT having mobilised to deploy with 1 MERCIAN. A highly successful tour in which Ptes Kirby and Stafford passed the PJNCO cadre and all three performed well in the Regular Armoured Infantry Coy on NATO's eastern flank. As they returned, our Coy 2IC, Capt Matt Styles, has mobilised to deploy on Op CABRIT with 1 RTR giving the company a continuous presence on Op CABRIT for over 24 months. We look forward to Ex SAXON LANCE, the Bn's a Live Firing Annual Training Exercise next month where members of the coy will conduct DCC and Mortar Live Firing practices.

#### **4 MERCIAN C COY - Ex SAXON SCABBARD**

*2Lt Emile Mackney*

Exercise SAXON SCABBARD saw 4 MERCIAN personnel exercising their range and BCS skills alongside 7 RIFLES demonstrating how AR units within 20 (AI) Bde can work together. With a wider focus on MATTs, all those who attended this Annual Training Exercise gained their annual Certificate of Efficiency as well as taking part in a fantastic range package consisting of IBSR, GPMG ACMT and Section in Defence shoots.

After a 'painful' trip down the M6 and M5 motorways, we arrived at St Martin's Plain Camp and quickly settled into our accommodation. After a sword/bayonet and Sjt/Sgt transition, we were made very welcome by the 7 RIFLES exercising company.



The Individual Battle Shooting Range (IBSR) allowed all to demonstrate and hone their individual fire manoeuvre skills with Pte Henderson who hails from Codnor in Derbyshire and Pte Draper from Stalybridge, Manchester receiving the best scores for both speed and skills, providing an accurate rate of fire on the advance and withdrawal - sweaty and out of breath is the only way to finish this range!

The GPMG range was a great hit amongst the exercising troops as almost half had not had the opportunity to fire the weapon system before. It is worth mentioning that I was unsuccessful in my first attempt at passing the GPMG ACMT only due to the cocking handle breaking...honest!

4 MERCIAN and 7 RIFLES have again proved to work well together and we hope to be able to welcome them onto our exercises in the near future.

#### **4 MERCAIN Ex PROMETHEUS GRENADIER**

In May, 2Lt Ben St Clair-Gray, who hails from London and LCpl Pete Edelsten from Wakefield, jumped at the chance to attend Ex PROMETHEUS GRENADIER, a 1 MERCIAN, two-week exercise that allowed our Reservists to work closely alongside our Regular paired Battalion personnel.

In the first week, we deployed to Tregantle Fort in Cornwall, a small training area known for its sloping sea ranges. Here, the officers and soldiers practiced the basic skills and drills of rural operations, practicing contact drills, ambushes and deliberate attacks. This culminated in a victorious company attack on the Fort itself, launched at dawn which saw the soldiers fighting through the objective for several hours.

After a quick one day reset, we deployed to Longmoor Training Area to occupy a FOB. This was a fast-paced week which saw the civilian population, of which 4 MERCIAN contributed a four-man team, become increasingly hostile. As a result, the soldiers quickly had to transition from soft posture patrolling to requiring CEFO to deal with insurgent shoot-and-scoot tactics attacks on the FOB.

The two weeks of Ex PROMETHEUS GRENADIER represented not just valuable and diverse training, but also demonstrated the utility of Reserve and Regular soldiers operating together.

## 4 MERCIAN POWERLIFTING

*Cpl Rob Clark*

After months of lock-down and much anticipation, the Army Powerlifting Union (APU) hosted this year's Army Full Power and Single Lifts powerlifting competition on 14 July 21. The aim of the day was for the APU to select a team for the Inter-Services Competition taking place in October.

The event ran incredibly smoothly, with a significantly higher turnout than last year, likely due, in no small part, to the months of home training and sweating away in garage gyms across the UK during the lockdown period. The results of this year's training were evident on the day with many lifters achieving new personal records.

In 2019, this competition was my first in powerlifting. From there, I have been fortunate enough to have qualified for the National Championships held in Edinburgh under the British Drug Free Powerlifting Association (BDFPA). In 2020, I entered the Army Full Power again, winning my class (82.5Kg) in the deadlift.

This year was slightly different. Having transitioned from the BDFPA to the (still-tested) Amateur British Powerlifting Union (ABPU), I managed to qualify for the European Championships, which were held in August in Manchester, representing Team GB. As this was only three weeks after this year's Army competition, my coach and I chose to only enter the deadlift event. I was told not to 'max out', as this would ruin the final few weeks of what has been a very heavy prep leading into the Euros.

On the day I pulled a relatively steady 250 kilograms to secure a class win, in addition to best male deadlift overall. As I write this, my final heavy lifts are completed and now I have a week to rest and have some active recovery. This involves some light accessory movements and plenty of core work. In addition, a week of heavy carb-loading (Dominoes) and sleep will round this prep off ready for Manchester.

Having competed for two years now, this is my first competition at this (international) level. I have a total in mind, but other than that I'm just looking forward to the experience. Next year's goal is to qualify for the Worlds!

Whilst military gyms across the land were shut for the majority of these lockdowns, the chain of command here at C Company, 4 MERCIAN were incredibly supportive during this prep, even loaning me the use of the gym's squat rack so I could carry on squatting twice a week in my garage. I am grateful for their continued support.

#### 4 MERCIAN D (DRAGON) COY

*Maj Will Rose*

Another busy 3 months for D Coy; we conducted field training in Catterick (FIWAF, night recce patrols and advance to contact), adventure training in the Yorkshire Dales and Rifle ACMTs / pistol shooting / MATTs at Kingsbury Ranges. LCpl Ross Dawson from Stoke on Trent has remained mobilised at Bassingbourn establishing RTMC and Pte Andrew Bradley from Hitchen, Hertfordshire has returned after 6 months on Op CABRIT where he was mobilised and deployed with 1 MERCIAN. Best of luck goes to LCpl Josh Grant from Crewe who is currently on the Section Commander's Battle Course and a well done goes to Pte Harry Lymer from Stoke on Trent who completed his Annual Continuous Training exercise with 7 RIFLES.

Our congratulations go to WO2 (CSM) Paul Spilsbury from Stoke on Trent who substantiated in rank and Cpl Michael Neal from Swadlincote, Derbyshire who received a bar to his Volunteer Reserve Service Medal (VRSM) having now served as a Reservist for 22 years. We welcomed in Sgt Ash McGraw from 2 MERCIAN who originates from Stoke on Trent who assume the role of PSI at Hanley Army Reserve Centre.

The recruiting pipeline continues to flow: Pte George Nash from Newcastle U Lyme, Pte Antony Short, Pte James Kennett both from Derby, Pte Matthew Bowden from Stoke on Trent and Pte Jack Wall from Walsall have all completed Mod 1 of their training. Pte Tom Samways from Newcastle Under Lyme completed Mod 3 and Pte Spencer Latham from Stoke on Trent completed Pre-CIC with Pte John Hardy currently at ITC Catterick completing the Combat Infantry Course (R).

In August, the company deployed to the Yorkshire Dales for a weekend of hill walking and cohesion. Capt Rich Peacock from Stoke was in charge and navigated his way through all the necessary paperwork and land clearances to permit the training activity. WO2 Paul Spilsbury did a superb job at managing the civilian bunkhouse accommodation and ensuring it was Covid compliant and we were very fortunate to have the Bn Master Chef with us, SSgt Gaz Preece from Stoke, who produced an excellent barbeque on the Saturday night, we are very grateful to him and his band of assistants for feeding us so well over the weekend.

On the Saturday, we covered over 15km of undulating ground in good weather with a total ascent of 900m with our Mountains Leaders (Cpl Sam Holmes from Chellaston and Sgt Carl Taylor MC from Mansfield mentoring us). Everyone had a chance to navigate and the great visibility allowed navigation and judging distance lessons to be

delivered on the go. After breakfast and handing back accommodation on Sunday, we made our way back to Stoke and Burton ready to enjoy the end of summer. The food and accommodation was funded by grants from The Bilston and Lichfield Trust and West Midlands RFCA to whom we are very grateful.

#### 4 MERCIAN HQ (EAGLE) COY

*Maj Brian Johnston MBE*

This quarter has seen HQ Company continue to support the Battalion across several exercises including Live Firing Ranges and MATTS. It has also seen us conduct Adventure Trg at Bala Lake in Wales where members of the coy enjoyed activities such as raft building, canoeing, climbing and abseiling. Our Reservists have also provided support to 1 MERCIAN acting as CIVPOP which was thoroughly enjoyed and a great experience for the younger members of the coy some of whom were experiencing working alongside our Regular colleagues for the first time.

With some of the COVID – 19 restrictions easing, we have seen the opening of events in our area. We took part in the Armed Forces Day in Wolverhampton alongside our Regular Recruiters, this event had over 4000 people attend it over the weekend including the Mayor of Wolverhampton, Lord Lieutenant and local MPs, all taking the opportunity to speak to our soldiers whilst visiting the weapons display stand. The Recruiting Team also took part in a 'Blue Light' event in Kidderminster. Both of these face to face events allowed us to re-engage with the public at last.

The coy has also been able to focus of career courses, with officers, SNCOs and JNCOs attending PCBC, PSBC and SCBC respectively. We have also had several soldiers attend and pass a PJNCO cadre.

Looking to the near future, the QM's, MT, CIS and Med teams are finalising plans to deliver G4 and Real Life support the Bn Annual Training Exercise which is based on Sp Wpns Cadres in Warcop following the cancellation of our planned trip to Croatia. This includes HQ Company's own Anti-Tank Platoon running a cadre.

During this period we have said farewell to WO2 (RQMS) Kev Pratt who enlisted into the Army Reserves in November 1984 and has served for over 37 years. During his exemplary career, he has served with distinction, mobilising on Op TELIC in Iraq in 2006 and on Op RESCRIPT in 2020. He has also served on numerous overseas

exercises in Africa and across Europe. We would like to wish Kev and his family all the very best for the future.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate WO2 Paul Bywater on assuming the appointment of RQMS (R). Paul served as CSM HQ Coy for 6 years and I would like to thank him for all his hard work and dedication during that time. I would also like to congratulate WO2 Stephen Banks on his promotion to WO2 and appointment as CSM HQ Coy.

#### **4 MERCIAN REGIMENTAL SERGEANT MAJOR – CHANGING OF THE GUARD!**

In September, the Battalion bid farewell to WO1 (RSM) Paul Kitching who retires from the Army on 8 October having enjoyed an exemplary 22-year military career. A proud Yorkshireman, we wish Mr Kitching and his family all the very best of luck in civilian street as he builds his new business up. We have no doubt he will make a successful transition and enjoy life as a 'Veteran'.

We also welcome WO1 (RSM) Lee Shields MBE who assume the role of Regimental Sergeant Major. Mr Shields comes to us from the Support Weapons School (SWS) in Warminster where he has recently handed over the RQMS appointment. We look forward to getting to know the new RSM as he deploys with us on our Annual Continuous Training Exercise in Warcop during October where his experience gained at SWS will be welcome as we deliver Mortar and Anti-Tank Cadres on Exercise SAXON LANCE alongside GPMG(SF) and Sharpshooter Rifle Cadres.

## **BAND OF THE MERCIAN REGIMENT**

*Adventure, pomp and ceremony, and a step towards back to normal!*

*CSgt Jake Lees, PSI*

During August, The Band of The Mercian Regiment enjoyed participating in an Adventure Training Weekend with HQ Coy 4 MERCIAN where they experienced a range of activities designed to push them out of their comfort zone. Sliding down waterfalls, jumping into pools, raft making competitions, raft racing and orienteering were the activities enjoyed over the weekend. Lots of challenging and testing teamwork meant a fantastic weekend was had by all who agreed that they had certainly faced challenges which were very different to those normally faced by musicians!

On 12 September, we were proud to represent the regiment and provide the musical support at the official unveiling of a spectacular new memorial to commemorate The Battle of Saragarhi which took place on that day in 1897. The Band provided reflective music at key points during the memorial ceremony which combined music, prayer and national anthems. Commissioned by Guru Nanak Gurdwara in Wednesfield and created by local sculpture Luke Perry, the 3 metre tall sculpture commemorates the Battle of Saragarhi where 21 Sikh soldiers from 36th Sikh Regiment of the British Indian Army fought to the death defending an outpost which was surrounded and under attack by 10000 Afghan tribesmen.

With events such as mess dinners now beginning to return to agendas, the Band's Saxophone Quartets have been extremely busy this quarter with performances all around the area. Their unique sound and variety of style makes them a popular choice for dinners and other events, as regimental life begins to return to normal. The new contemporary small group has had its first performance which was well received, and they look forward to their next engagement.

The full Band is currently rehearsing hard for upcoming remembrance events.

## **DERBYSHIRE ACF ANNUAL CAMP**

*SSI L Chadwick*

After missing last year's annual camp due to the Covid 19 pandemic, over 170 cadets from Derbyshire ACF attended their annual residential camp at Bodney, Norfolk on the STANTA training area. Cadets took part in various activities and lessons. Cadets carried out a navigation exercise to arrive at their harbour area, before setting up bashas before the rain came.

All cadets were taught lessons in harbour drills, patrolling, shelter building and fire and movement before completing their field exercises. In the evening, the senior cadets completed a battlefield exercise including the use of pyrotechnics, whilst this happened, the younger cadets were able to watch this happen also as it was a brilliant experience for them.

Cadets also had the opportunity to take part in adventurous training activities such as paddleboarding, kayaking, archery, target paintball and taking part on the air rifle range. This was a great day for the cadets, who perhaps spent more time in the water than on it!

A huge thank you to the 73 Cadet Force Adult Volunteers who without, wouldn't have made this annual camp happen.

## **DERBYSHIRE ACF - COUNTY SHOOTING TO SUCCESS**

*SSI L Chadwick*

On 18th-19th September, cadets from Derbyshire ACF Competed in the Beckingham 'Regional Cadet Bisley', which saw teams from across the ACF, CCF and Sea Cadet Corps competing in the shoulder target rifle competition at 300, 500 and 600 metres.

For many this was the first time competing at this level, and 3 out of the 4 of Derbyshire's team had never fired the L81A2 Rifle before this weekend.

Cadets Lily Stewart and Sgt Millie Stanton from Enwall detachment, along with Cpl Ronnie Elliott and Grace Edwards from Long Eaton detachment, made up an all girl

team to represent the County. All 4 cadets performed exceptionally throughout, dominating the competition from the off growing stronger with each shoot.

Cadet Lily Stewart fired an outstanding score of 97 out of a possible 105 over the 3 distances, with Cdt Ronnie Elliott finishing 3rd overall with a strong 81 with just V bulls separating 2nd and 3rd place.

In the end the team finished in first place, clear of 2nd by over 70 points.

Derbyshire have now secured a place in the National Tri-Service Final, which will be shot at Bisley over the October Half Term.



## **MUSEUM OF THE MERCIAN REGIMENT (WFR COLLECTION) UPDATE**

*Jennifer Brookman-Moore, Museum Curator*

The past year has been an interesting one for everyone, as you can imagine reinstalling an exhibition under COVID has not been easy. After completely dismantling the display cases, these were rebuilt in the first half of 2021. Then came the objects in April/May, which had to be moved from Foresters House to Nottingham Castle. And finally, we were able to start the work on the gallery, making sure all the objects were hung and placed correctly in the display cases. It might not sound like a big job, but all care and attention is given to the objects to make sure their stories shine through and they are kept safe whilst on display. The gallery reopened on June 21st to the public. Members of the Regiment can visit and receive discounted entry to Nottingham Castle.

Now for the thank yous: C Coy 4 Mercian in their help, they assisted with moving the objects/ gallery accoutrements onto site and then helped with the removal too. Thank you to the RST who were called upon time after time to help the Curator with heavy lifting. We couldn't have done it without you!

As a side project, we have been fortunate to be awarded a grant from the Arts Council and the Army Museum Ogilby Trust for Interactive/ AV elements to be added to the gallery. We are creating a visual 2-minute video for the visitors to the gallery. The video is going to be using photographs from the archive showcasing the history of the Regiment for the Notts & Derbys area.

Now we need your help! We would like input from any soldiers or veterans. It wouldn't require going on camera but just attending a focus group in which we get your views/ experiences of your time in the Army.

To take part then please send us an E-Mail to [curator@stand-firm-strike-hard.org.uk](mailto:curator@stand-firm-strike-hard.org.uk), or phone 0115 9465415 extension 5219 for more details.

## **NOTTINGHAM CASTLE – COMPLIMENTARY ENTRY FOR SERVING MERCIAN SOLDIERS AND WFRA MEMBERS**

The Trust that now runs Nottingham Castle, is kindly offering complimentary entry for serving Mercian soldiers and WFRA members. This is to visit the Castle and grounds and the Museum of The Mercian Regiment. Please note that extra charges for Experiences and Tours are not included.

## **SERVING MERCIAN SOLDIERS**

Any Mercian soldier wishing to visit the Castle, is asked to contact the Assistant Regimental Secretary with the date and time they wish to visit and the number of people in the party.

## **WFRA MEMBERS**

Members are asked to email [bookings@nottinghamcastle.org.uk](mailto:bookings@nottinghamcastle.org.uk) with the date and time they wish to visit and the number of people in the party. On arrival, only the member will need to show the confirmation of receipt of the email and their membership card. If anyone requires a WFRA membership card they are advised to contact the Membership Secretary, Gary Crosby at [wfr.association@stand-firm-strike-hard.org.uk](mailto:wfr.association@stand-firm-strike-hard.org.uk)

More details about Nottingham Castle and the Museum of the Mercian Regiment can be found at [www.nottinghamcastle.org.uk](http://www.nottinghamcastle.org.uk)

## **STOCKPORT BRANCH CRA & MVRA THE MERCIAN REGIMENTAL ASSOCIATION**

*Steven Gregory, Publicity Member*

After the restrictions over the last 18 months, the Branch has now been able to embark on its programme of events going forward:

### **Canoeing**

The sunny Saturday morning of 21st July saw 20 members, including some RAMC personnel from 207 Field Hospital, gathering at Burnage Rugby Club for a canoeing expedition down the Mersey. Following the safety brief and issue of paddles and life vests the six canoes entered the water.

The target destination was Jackson's Boat public house, which was achieved after a couple of hours paddling; a distance of eight miles. As the water level was lower than normal, we experienced a few white-water areas and everybody ended the trip wet. The damp on the outside was satisfyingly matched with damp on the inside with a couple of post-paddle pints.

### **AGM**

The 2021 AGM, postponed from March took place at St Julien Barracks (ARC) Stockport on the evening of Friday 6th August. Twenty-eight members were in attendance, including two via Zoom. A very productive meeting was held with re-election of the existing Committee and a number of value-adding changes to the Rules were adopted. It was great to be back 'home' in the Drill Hall! Partners were invited to the after-meeting social and buffet.

### **Museum & NMA**

Twenty-eight members and partners enjoyed a fully subsidised day out to the Mercian Regiment Museum at Lichfield with a donation made to the Museum from Branch funds. We were broken down into groups and guided around the trench system, historic military vehicles and general exhibits. This was followed by a short journey to the NMA where members were left to enjoy and reflect as they saw fit.

### **MVRA Picnic**

The annual picnic of the Mercian Volunteers' Regimental Association was held on the 5th of September. The Branch provided transport to the event and a good number of members and partners attended. The weather was great and, after the short parade and service a very high-quality picnic was enjoyed by all.

## **Mons**

Transport was provided by the Branch on 19th September for a small contingent to be present at the ceremony to honour the actions of 1st Battalion 22nd (Cheshire) Regiment during the retreat from Mons in 1914.

## **Relatives' Event**

Though during lockdown, the Committee have done their best to keep in touch with the widows and relatives of members now in higher formation, it has obviously been difficult to afford any face-to-face support. In recognition of this and to bring them back into the fold, the Branch, via our Welfare Officers Derek Sykes and Peter Williams, hosted an afternoon at St Julien Barracks on Saturday 25th September. It comprised of a talk about the Association, its history and aims and an afternoon tea. Relatives were given a tour around the Drill Hall which will have been dear to the hearts of their loved ones. The main benefit of the occasion was to reinforce links back to the Branch post-covid.

## **Shotgun Shoot**

The Branch has traditionally held a couple of shotgun shoots per year, held at Doveridge Shooting Ground (a world-class facility). Clearly this has not been possible of late, but that has now been rectified on Sunday 26th September, with Mike Pilkington arranging for a coached shoot for 13 attendees from the Branch. The weather was good and a good day was had by all. All were rusty due to the covid-induced lack of opportunity, so let's hope we can get back to running this twice per annum!

## **East Cheshire Reunion**

Don't forget the diary date of 30th October for the 74th occasion of the East Cheshire Reunion at Stockport ARC.

## **WORCESTERSHIRE AND SHERWOOD FORESTERS REGIMENTAL ASSOCIATION UPDATES**

*Cindy Clark, Assistant Regimental Secretary*

### **LONG SERVICE ADVENTURE GIFTS**

Following on from the last newsletter, Frank Innis, ex WFR and now a Civil Servant with 4 Mercian, has continued to enjoy his monthly pre-retirement adventures

For August, Frank was treated to a roast dinner at the local garden centre at RAF Cosford

For September, Frank enjoyed being waited on by the military community at a curry lunch. This followed after Sunday 10 September when soldiers from 4 Mercian along with those from 210 Bty 103 RA, paraded through Wednesfield with the local Sikh community to celebrate the unveiling of their Sikh Solider statue.

### **THE SHERWOOD FORESTERS OFFICERS' CLUB**

The Sherwood Foresters Officers' Club met for a delayed Badajoz Lunch on 24th September 2021 at The White Hart Hotel in Salisbury.

Delay was as a result of two previous attempts to hold the 20th Annual Reunion having both been cancelled because of Covid.

A total of 28 officers and wives attended the lunch, Lt Col R J Stockton OBE Presiding. In his address, Lt Col Stockton highlighted that diminishing numbers affected the viability of lunches though everyone was keen to meet for a delayed Alma Day Lunch in December and a further Badajoz Day Lunch in the Army and Navy Club in London in April 2022.

There were toasts to Her Majesty The Queen, The Regiment and Absent Friends and a Loyal Message to HM The Queen and her gracious reply were read out.

### **Derby Branch WFRA**

The pandemic continues to affect our events and although we know that some Branches are beginning to get back to some semblance of normality, we here at Derby

continue to "play it safe" and have not yet held a meeting. There are no plans as yet as to when we will resume meetings.

We are keeping in contact via email, telephone and post and ensure members updated on all events. We have been fortunate to recruit three new members, and welcome them to our merry band.

The Standards and Branch members attended a funeral for a former member of the 5th Foresters. The family were extremely pleased to see our presence and expressed their thanks.

We send best wishes to all and look forward to the day when we will meet again.

## MERCIAN VOLUNTEERS REGIMENTAL ASSOCIATION

*Lt Col (Retd) T Angel TD*

On behalf of the President, Chairman, MVRA NMA Organising committee and myself, we would like to thank everyone who attended the MVRA NMA service and parade. It was good to see the level of attendance after what had been a long shutdown imposed by Covid 19.

We would especially like to thank the Standard Bearers and members from the MRA and Antecedent Associations who supported the event. Having excellent weather, the Tenbury Town Band and the Regimental Mascot definitely enhanced the day.

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank the branches and individuals who contributed to Lt Col Tony Scott and Lt Col Keith Jeavons presentations. Col Keith passes on his thanks to all MVRA members for the engraved rose bowl which was very much appreciated. The presentation to Col Tony will be arranged in the near future. Once again, we thank all those, from all associations, families and friends who attended the day.

As the 'Lock down' slowly disappears branches are beginning to hold meetings once again, attendance at meetings has been very encouraging and are quickly returning to their normal levels.

We welcome Major General A. Horley CBE RAMC Ret as our President. Major General Horley served with B Company, I Mercian V, as a platoon Cmdr. before embarking on his medical career in the Regular Army.

We look forward to the future once again and plans are being put into place for the rest of the year and next year.

## THE ROYAL HOSPITAL CHELSEA

Regimental Headquarters has had several personnel getting in touch asking “How do I become a Chelsea Pensioner?” To be eligible for admission, a candidate must be a former non-commissioned officer or soldier of the British Army who is:

- Over 65 years or of State Pension age (whichever is higher)
- Either in receipt of an Army Service Pension or War Disability Pension which you would be required to surrender upon entry to the Royal Hospital OR if you do not receive an Army Pension you would be required to make a weekly financial contribution (payable by Standing Order) towards your living costs. This contribution will be based on an assessment of affordability completed during the application process. Please note if you are in receipt of an Army Service Pension and/or War Disability Pension you may also be required to make a top-up contribution (also based on an assessment of affordability)
- Free of any financial obligation to support a spouse or family
- To be able to live independently in the sheltered accommodation (Long Wards) – the Royal Hospital Chelsea is unable to accept direct entries to the nursing wards

More information can be found by visiting: <https://www.chelsea-pensioners.co.uk/eligibility-how-apply>