

# THE MERCIAN REGIMENT

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER - Q4 2021



# 1 MERCIAN COMMANDING OFFICER'S FOREWORD

*Lt Col Dean Canham OBE*

The MERCIAN Regiment is at a huge point of change and will evolve again over the next 12 months to emerge again as one of the British Army's fiercest and most capable units. The amalgamation of the 1st and 2nd Battalions is underway; whilst we would all have preferred 2 MERCIAN remaining in the order of battle, the new 1 MERCIAN will be firmly established by September 2022 and striking out onto new challenges. There is the rebalancing of some officers and soldiers around the rest of the Infantry which needs to take place first – and is the Regimental priority.

Concurrently, through this summer, 1 MERCIAN have been selected as the lead unit to conduct Exercise IRON STORM – the Army's premier armoured exercise – on Salisbury Plain, with a complete live firing progression and the full range of supporting Arms. The importance of demonstrating the British Army's armoured fighting power at this particular moment, with international tensions high on and close to NATO's flanks, cannot be underestimated.

The new 1 MERCIAN will launch in the late summer of 2022, at full strength and poised to begin the process of becoming the Army's first unit to adopt the BOXER vehicle. The Warrior has been central to the soul of the MERCIAN Regiment for decades and will be missed by many, but the prestige and opportunities of being the first unit onto its replacement is a fantastic win for us.

In the short-term then, there is an important period of ensuring every Regular member of the Regiment is found the right place in the new 1 MERCIAN or the wider Infantry. The medium-term move onto BOXER will see the Battalion lead the way up the Army's modernisation path. And then the Battalion's long-term future looks exceptionally positive, with a summer tour in Estonia (Summer 2025) and two years in Cyprus (at some point between 2026 and 2032) already pencilled in as well as a wide range of other tasks before and in-between. The new 1 MERCIAN's future is bright.

# 1 MERCIAN HOMECOMING PARADE 2021

*Capt Jasper Clarke, Intelligence Officer*

In Nov 21, the 1st Battalion recognised their return from Op CABRIT with a homecoming parade and remembrance service.

The event had several aims; to spread awareness that 1 MERCIAN were back and ready for UK duties; to formally thank the families and close friends of all those that deployed – recognising their support and patience during the 10 month period that the deployment entailed; and to use the opportunity to inform as wide an audience as possible on what the Battalion had achieved during the deployment – particularly the home counties that make up our recruiting pool and many of our soldier's local communities.

As with any homecoming, it was also important to conduct remembrance; honouring the fallen of previous tours, many of whom retain links to the Battalion through serving colleagues or family.

To mark the occasion and give it its due prominence, a wide range of media outlets were invited and representatives from Army Media, Forces News, and BFBS (Forces Radio) attended in person.

As well as observing the parade, they had the opportunity to interview the Commanding Officer, WO2 Mark Sumner (A Coy CSM), and Cpl Andrew Bagshaw. The day also received coverage from NATO partners in Europe, underlining to the Bn the importance of the role they had just completed – one which is particularly relevant in light of ongoing developments in and around Ukraine at present.

The parade was sombre and reflective at points, but had a clear sense of professional pride as spectators observed medals and commendations being awarded in front of the assembled press. The Bn completed the day alongside the invited families and spectators at the Bn fireworks display, planned, helpfully, to coincide with UK fireworks night.

Op CABRIT is not without its challenges, but as the CO summed up during his interview the deployment remains invaluable:

*“It was a fantastic opportunity. We got to conduct something that is pretty rare; six months working with soldiers from a range of units and nationalities, conducting everything from the lowest level of training right up to Brigade level of operations in an armoured context.”*



# 1 MERCIAN DRAGON COMPANY IN SUPPORT OF STAR-STUDDDED ICAP CHARITY DAY EVENT

*CSgt Frank Scotts, Mortar Platoon 2IC*

'ICAP' operates at the heart of global wholesale over-the-counter and exchange traded markets in the City of London. ICAP are active across all major financial, energy and commodities asset classes, where their brokers match buyers and sellers facilitating price discovery, the flow of liquidity, execution and risk management. For one day a year ICAP donate all revenues and commissions towards positively changing the lives of thousands of people less fortunate around the world.

On the 9th December 2022, elements of Dragon Company, including the Corps of Drums, Recce, Snipers, Javelin and Mortars, supported the event with demonstrations and public engagement. Soldiers of Dragon Company engaged with the workers of ICAP and had the chance to demonstrate the capabilities of the ISTAR group to a number of global celebrities such as Hollywood actor Simon Pegg, England Football Manager Gareth Southgate, Academy Award winner Olivia Coleman, comedy star Keith Lemon and many more.

The Charity Day was a huge success. With the efforts of our Dragon Company soldiers, celebrities, customers, staff and suppliers, a fantastic £3.6million was raised in 2021 bringing the total amount over 29 years to approximately £155million. The Mercian Benevolent Fund received a donation of £5000 for the 1 Mercian support to the event.

# 1 MERCIAN AT THE INFANTRY NORDIC SKIING COMPETITION

*Capt Adam Keenen, B Coy 2IC*

1 MERCIAN began the Nordic season in Pirbright in mid-November with five of the eight skiers complete novices. The UK training camp consisted of roller-skiing, basic biathlon marksmanship and some physical training to prepare our soldiers for the on-snow challenges ahead. After a successful development camp, the team left for Sweden to begin transitioning what they had learnt in the UK, on the Nordic Ski circuits of Idre Fjall. After a challenging few weeks on tough terrain, used by the International Biathlon Union for its races, the team were race ready.

It was a tremendous effort from our soldiers, finishing 3rd of 28 teams in the 7.5km Biathlon Relay and 5th in the Individual 15km Classic of 16 teams comprising 124 individual skiers. It is worth noting 1 MERCIAN is still one of the most junior teams in the Infantry with only three previous seasons of experience between the team. We have two skiers in the team that have performed outstandingly. They are both highly likely to be given the opportunity to train throughout 2022 with the GB Development Team in the hope they will compete at the Olympic Games in the near future.

Pte Reed finished 4th of 112 skiers in the Biathlon Relay event, only missing one of 10 targets on the range, the second-best shooting of the entire camp. He then finished 14th of 124 skiers in the Individual Classic. For only his second season, and second time on snow in any manner, this is an outstanding achievement which has earned him a place on the GB Olympic Development Team.

Pte Sutton, in only his first season and first time on snow finished in the top 10% in the Biathlon relay, and 19th of 124 skiers in the Individual Classic. Pte Sutton gained first place in both disciplines in his category (Youth Novice) and has been put forward as a nomination to join the GB Olympic Development Team. It is almost certain he will gain a place.

1 MERC finished 4th in the Infantry Championships in Sweden and therefore gained one of five spots (six with a wildcard granted to the Infantry) to progress to the final stages of the Nordic Season. However, due

to CV19 the Divisional Championships in Serre Chavelier, France and Army Championships in Ruhpolding, Germany were cancelled. We look ahead with promise to the 22/23 season, with our hopes to podium at the Infantry Championships. Our future is bright within this sport.



# 2 MERCIAN BOXING

*Pte Sveikutis, Recce Platoon*

Under the DRAGON Coy Boxing coach, LCpl Sheridan, training for the Inter-Coy Boxing began in Oct 21. I used this opportunity to quit drinking alcohol and smoking, and I was determined to work hard towards getting fit and getting a victory in the ring for my Company.

In late Oct 21, we received our dental gum shields and began technical sparring. Initially, I was nervous about the prospect of being embarrassed in the ring, but the team ethos and positive energy we developed as a Dragon Coy cohort created an environment where I felt myself improving significantly with each training session.

As fight night drew closer, we began to increase the intensity of the sparring and this culminated in an inter-Coy sparring session for the coaches to ensure bouts were evenly matched. I felt very nervous prior this session, and ultimately, I feel that I didn't perform very well. However, I felt proud that I was making progress and I was determined to continue training hard to get a win on fight night.

By this point, we were training 3 times a day. Generally, this consisted of a morning run, high intensity interval training or footwork after lunch, and in the evening some technical sparring or pad work with the coach. In addition, LCpl (Coach) Sheridan would ensure we each individually took care of our bodies in the evenings with stretching and hot baths.

On the morning of fight night, we attended our final medicals and was officially weighed in. For the remainder of the day, we rested and waited. The waiting was the most difficult part of the entire process, as nerves and excitement grew throughout the day. It was worth it however, as the ring walk was a huge buzz and the atmosphere in the gym was incredible. For the next 9 minutes I gave everything I could in the ring, but ultimately the decision went to my opponent on points. After the boxing night, we were invited to the Sergeants' and Warrant Officer's Mess for food and celebratory drinks.

I am immensely proud of having represented my Company in the Boxing Night. My fitness has improved significantly, and I believe it takes a lot of courage and determination to step in the ring. I would recommend it to any Soldier.



# 2 MERCIAN C (KOHIMA) COMPANY

*Pte Walton*

To end 2021, C (Kohima) Coy organised a Mountain Biking AT trip to Inverness. Myself and 10 other soldiers from the Coy drove up on the Sunday 21 Nov 2021, ready to start on the Monday. The trip was organised for beginners and would get us the Mountain Biking Foundation (MBF) qualification.

We spent the week riding in the Cairngorms; planning routes, improving our navigation and learning how to carry out basic maintenance of our bikes. I found the week really pushed me outside of my comfort zone and tested me mentally and physically. Despite this I really enjoyed myself, this is something that I will continue and work towards getting the Mountain Biking Leader Training (MBT) qualification.



# 2 MERCIAN EARL OF CHESTER COMPETITION

*Cpl Drayton*

The Earl of Chester Competition aims to figure out which is the best Company in the Battalion. We competed in a series of events from Xbox gaming, to inter Company Boxing. Events were scored, and the points added up to decided 1st place.

The 2 best events were the boxing and the section competition. The section competition consisted of a patrol lane with multiple stations and concluded in a stretcher carry through the river on camp. The stations called on me as a section commander to apply both my military knowledge but also made me think creatively and deal with complicated problems like recusing an injured person from a Landover which had stuck a mine field.

The boxing was one of the best nights of the year. Each Companies fighter boxed 3, 3-minute bouts in a ring in front of the whole Battalion. They had been training hard for 12 weeks and really showed the 2Mercian fighting spirit.

Overall B company came out on top and are the 20/21 Champion Company. It's great to be recognised by the Battalion for our arduous work this year and sets us up in a great position to defeat the PWRR when we return to Kenya.

# DRAGON COY SUPPORT WEAPONS CADRES

*CSgt D White, 2IC Recce & Sgt J Kane, Recce Pl Sgt*

Following the stand down from Op TORAL, Dragon Company moved quickly to achieve support weapons cadres for all its Platoons. Dry and Live training was conducted all over the UK from Barry Budden to Dartmoor. It was a brilliant opportunity to train new members of the Platoons as well as dual qualifying many members of Dragon Company. This is especially important with the upcoming amalgamation of the 2nd Battalion.

The Sniper and Reconnaissance platoons both took advantage of a short notice opportunities to work with other Infantry units, including 2 SCOTS and 1 YORKS on a Brigade level Sniper operators' course and a Reconnaissance patrolman's course. This was a very positive experience that exposed soldiers to the wider infantry and understanding of how different units conduct training.

After the 10 week training period came to a close Dragon Company had successfully qualified 54 soldiers and welcomed 13 new members. It offered a depth of experience but also added to their military qualifications. This provided great preparation for deploying to KENYA but also many going for Ranger selection.



# 4 MERCIAN B (MALTA) COMPANY

*Maj MK Bowden-Williams, OC*

As the summer days gave way to autumnal showers, B Coy deployed soldiers onto an annual training with 7 RIFLES highlighting the strong working relationship between units within 20 Armoured Brigade Combat Team. They enjoyed the LFTT package laid on at Lydd and Hythe during dates that had been booked as time off from civilian employment to attend what was due to be an OTX in Croatia. Those that could amend time off were able to attend the Bn's Annual Training Exercise SAXON LANCE. For B Coy, this meant attending the Mortar Cadre or competing on the Cambrian Patrol Team.

B Coy proudly saw Pte Watts and Pte Harrison complete the Cambrian Patrol earning a Silver Medal, ably administrated by Sgt Wood in support. The Mortar PI completed another excellent Mortar Cadre and again prepared a section capable of deploying in support of operations. The Mortar PI continues to set high standards and received high praise from the 2 MERCIAN SNCOs supporting the cadre for their professionalism and capability.

A highlight for all in was the return of Remembrance Sunday after the COVID restrictions last year. Parades in Ellesmere Port, Widnes, Runcorn and Stockport were well attended.

B Coy has also had to say goodbye to 2Lt Aril Pandya as he moved back home to London and transferred to the LONDONS, 2Lt Alex Wilson who is currently enjoying the commissioning course at Sandhurst and throughout we have continued to deliver operational effect as is the purpose of our existence. The OC finally returned from Estonia along with WO2 Mike Buckley, LCpl Ben Turner, LCpl Jake Sanderson, Pte Paul Goldsmith, Pte Patrick Stafford, Pte Neil Kirby, Pte Richard Stanley. LCpl Adam Pinder returned from Afghanistan after his tour with 4 SCOTS and Pte Goldsmith has mobilised again on Op RESCRIPT to assist the Ambulance Service in Scotland.

For the 3rd Christmas in a row B Coy will have someone deployed with Coy 2IC, Capt Matt Styles, in Estonia with the RTR. We look forward to 2022 with an overseas deployment to Lithuania and the prospect of more operational opportunities.

# 4 MERCIAN C (KOHIMA) COMPANY

*Capt BC Athow-Frost, 2IC C Coy*

With the challenge of covid and travel restrictions, it proved impossible to deploy reservists to Croatia to exercise without a mandatory quarantine period therefore, regrettably, the OTX was switched to a UK based Annual Training Event. Undeterred, C Coy personnel participated in an already existing support weapons cadre and were able to become proficient on a support weapon system. This produced a fantastic training opportunity for all personnel to practice not only their primary role, but to learn new skills working alongside seasoned support weapons operators from B, D and HQ Coys.

Soldiers became proficient in either the Sharpshooter Rifle, GPMG, 81mm Mortar or Javelin Anti-Tank weapon and were given the opportunity to operate these weapon systems in tactical scenarios as well as conducting live firing (with the exception of Javelin missiles which were not available to us on this occasion).

## *Remembrance*

Soldiers and Officers from C Coy attended Remembrance around Nottinghamshire this year in support of their local communities and parishes. Those who weren't attending their local Remembrance service joined with the rest of C Company in Mansfield to lay wreaths and quietly reflect on those who came before us and made the final sacrifice.

## *Ex SNOW EAGLE*

The company deployed to Swynnerton Training Area for a Patrols competition exercise in December with patrols attending a series of stands around the training area, navigating and moving tactically between them to achieve a goal set by the Directing Staff. Stands ranged from Command Tasks to Medical CASEVACs and tested patrols on basics section level skills as well as navigation, medical, CBRN and physical fitness.

## Op RESCRIPT

*2Lt Emile Mackney (Platoon Commander)*

Operation RESCRIPT has seen an increased number of reservists deploy on tasks providing military aid to civilian authorities. The latest deployment saw personnel from 4 MERCIAN deploy to the central belt of Scotland in support of Mobile Testing Units (MTU). Personnel were deployed across Edinburgh and Glasgow in fire teams providing an increase manning to a stretched Scottish Ambulance Service. This MACA task allowed deployed reservists to give back to communities and make a real difference to the national effort.

As the requirement for MTUs waned many chose to demobilise, however, there were a few who decided to continue by assisting Joint Military Command Scotland in the role of ambulance driver. Reservists have now been attached to 7RLC and are deployed across Scotland covering driver shortages. Personally, I currently oversee and provide a liaison to the Scottish Ambulance Service across Grampian, Highlands and Islands regions. This is a hugely rewarding role and allows me to see the civilian management side of public services and the mental health aspect of welfare in command. The soldiers enjoy the experience responding to emergency calls which can range from elderly falls to cardiac arrests and spend their shifts assisting patients and gaining in depth knowledge of advanced first aid from experienced paramedics and technicians.



# 4 MERCIAN D (DRAGON) COMPANY

*Maj W Rose, OC*

This has been another varied and busy period for D (Dragon) Coy. The Bn's Support Weapon Cadre at Warcop saw Sgt Ash McGraw (D Coy PSI Stoke) deliver a challenging Sharpshooter Cadre and CSgt Mark Harris (D Coy PSI Burton) putting the Machine Gun PI through their paces. LCpl Declan O'Rourke (from Northwich) and LCpl Tim Robinson (from Derby) achieved the recognition as top gun team throughout a very challenging and competitive cadre.

The OC, Maj Will Rose (from Newcastle-under-Lyme), was mobilised and deployed to Scotland on an Op RESCRIPT MACA task leading a Tri-Service sub-unit tasked with delivering PCR testing. More arduously, LCpl Danny Britton (from Nantwich) and LCpl Josh Grant (from Crewe) attended and passed the Section Commander's Battle Course whilst Sgt David Noon (from Burton Upon Trent) completed Machine Gun Platoon Commander's Course.

Our best wishes go to CSgt Derek Roberts and Capt Steve Condliffe, our long standing QPSI and PSAO who are recovering convalescing at home and our thanks go to the Coy 2IC (Capt Rich Peacock from Stoke) and in particular to the CSM (WO2 Paul Spilsbury from Stoke) who have managed to keep the company administration running in the absence of the OC, PSAO and QPSI. If we didn't already appreciate all that these stalwarts do day to day, we certainly do now and we wish them a full and speedy recovery.

# 4 MERCIAN HQ (EAGLE) COMPANY

This period has been dominated by participation in as well as provided the real-life support for the Bn Annual Training Event in Warcop and Remembrance Sunday Parades in Wolverhampton and Walsall. Some Adventure Training in November proved a popular activity as we strive to ensure our 'offer' 4 MERCIAN Reservists remains interesting, varied, challenging and most importantly, enjoyable.

## *Adventure Training – Bouldering*

*Pte Freddie Dugdale*

On 23 November, we enjoyed a parade night away from the ARC, bouldering at Vertical Limit in Worcester. The group was very much of mixed ability and included several experienced climbers as well as others experiencing a bouldering wall for the first time.

The area we were climbing was split up into a few sections. Firstly, there was a wall that leans outward, which was easy to climb and allowed people to get to grips with the basics. Then an intermediate wall, which was vertical, provided more of a challenge. Finally, a tougher wall that leans inwards which was the most demanding as you were unable to stand on your legs and had to rely on upper body strength to stay on the wall.

For the more daring members of the group, there was a section with a steep overhang that led to a horizontal ceiling, like a cliff edge. By the end of the evening, it had become a competition to try and scale this area of the wall, with members of the group taking it in turns to go further and further before ending up falling off and landing on the crash mats below, while the rest of the group watched on and gave encouragement. While none of us managed to reach the top, a few got close. The event was a great success with everyone enjoying the experience.



# THE BAND OF THE MERCIAN REGIMENT

*Sgt Wood*

Remembrance, Christmas audience singing, and training successes – it's been a packed quarter for The Band of the Mercian Regiment.

Remembrance week saw Cpl Wendy Robert sound the bugle calls at Hall of Memory in Birmingham, followed on the Sunday by the Band on parade in central Birmingham. This act of community remembrance in Birmingham City centre brought together civilian, veteran and service personnel from all over the area for a service, laying of wreaths and parade around the Cathedral Square and past the saluting dias. It was great to be back on parade and performing with marching troops and spectators.

In December, the picturesque surroundings of St Michael & All Angels, Tettenhall was the backdrop for our Christmas concert. With everything from 'The Polar Express' to 'In the Bleak Mid-Winter', it was sprinkled with audience carol singing competitions, enthusiastic carolling and mince pies. The concert supported The Army Benevolent Fund, The Soldiers' Charity and the St. Michael's Church charity, and definitely set the Christmas season off with a bang. A follow up concert is planned for the summer.

Well done to Musician Laura Morris who, in October, completed her Common Military Syllabus 21 (Reserve) Basic Training Mod 2. She will now progress onto her trade training to be a musician.



# STOCKPORT BRANCH CRA & MVRA THE MERCIAN REGIMENTAL ASSOCIATION

*Steven Gregory, Publicity Member*

We continue to be active and are determined to make the most of our freedoms of action.

## *Stockport Mayoral Service 3/10/21*

On Sunday, 3rd October, a small contingent represented The Branch at The Mayor of Stockport's Service to pray for his year in office. Union and CRA Standards were paraded. The mayor, Adrian Nottingham, was clearly much appreciative of the support.

## *RAF Cosford 16/10/21*

Members and their families enjoyed a fully subsidised visit to RAF Cosford Museum, between Telford and Wolverhampton. The weather held fine for all to enjoy some really interesting exhibits in a well-run facility.

## *East Cheshire Reunion*

On the evening of 30th October, 110 former Comrades in Arms enjoyed the much anticipated 74th Occasion of the East Cheshire Reunion, held at St. Julien Barracks, Greek Street, Stockport. We were pleased to welcome Colonel Bob Stewart DSO MP as Presiding Officer, who gave a heartfelt speech about loss and the importance of Remembrance.

The evening followed its well-established routine of an Act of Remembrance, Cheshire Hotpot Supper, updates on the Mercian Regiment, followed by general reunion stuff (drinking, mingling, etc). Music was provided by Bollington Brass Band and it was great to hear 'Wha Wadna Fecht for Charlie' played live again after last year's much-reduced

ceremony due to the limitations imposed by Covid. In addition to the free pint included within the ticket price was a Cheshire Regiment pot to put it in as a 'thank you' to those who continue to support the event, which is believed to be one of the longest running military reunions in existence. Make a note in your diaries for the 75th running on Saturday 29th October 2022!

## L/Cpl Bagshaw Avenue

L/Cpl Steven Bagshaw of the 1st Bn, 22nd (Cheshire) Regiment was one of 17 (11 soldiers, 6 civilians) who lost their lives in the 'Droppin Well' bombing, perpetrated by the INLA in Ballykelly on the evening of 6th December 1982. (Colonel Stewart mentioned above was the Incident Commander). Tintwistle Council have honoured Steven's memory by naming an avenue for him. Branch standard bearers paraded the Main CRA Standard and the Branch CRA Standard to pay respects at the unveiling ceremony on 13th November 2021.

## *Remembrance Sunday 7/11/21*

Remembrance Sunday was recognised by Branch Members attending the Stockport parade and service. Unfortunately, due to restrictions imposed by adherence to Covid safety measures, the post-parade get-together was slightly more muted than previous years. Fingers crossed for a return to normality for 2022!

## *Ladies' Dinner Night 3/12/21*

Friday December 3rd saw Branch Members hosting some of their ladies to a dinner night, the ladies sat, the gentlemen served and good night was had by all.

# **WORCESTERSHIRE & SHERWOOD FORESTERS REGIMENTAL ASSOCIATION**

## *WFRA REUNION 2022*

Due to the Queen's Jubilee weekend, the WFRA 2022 reunion will now be held on Saturday 28 May. It will be held at the new venue of the Worcester RFC, which is opposite Sixways. More information will be disseminated to the Association, nearer the time.

## *FINAL FAREWELL FOR FRANK INNISS*

As we have published in previous newsletters, 4 Mercian have been treating Frank Innis with a monthly leaving surprise to mark his departure after many years of loyal service. This cumulated with Frank's leaving meal in December where he was joined by his family and work colleagues and was presented with gifts. We thank Frank for his friendship and service and wish him a very happy retirement.

## *WORCESTER BRANCH WFRA*

At the WFR Association AGM in November, John Walters, the Worcester Branch Parade Marshal was awarded an Association Merit Award for outstanding service to the Association and Worcester Branch. John collected his Citation at the Worcester Branch December meeting. The meeting also saw the annual President's Raffle raise £78. for the ABF.

# 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 [here](#).