

# THE MERCIAN REGIMENT

Quarterly Newsletter - Q1 2022

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<https://www.mercianregiment.co.uk/previous-newsletters>*

## BADAJOS AT NOTTINGHAM CASTLE

On April 6th, soldiers from C Company 1 MERCIAN and the Regimental mascot attended Nottingham Castle to commemorate the anniversary of the storming of the Spanish fortress town of Badajoz.

The day saw C Company escort the Lord Mayor of Nottingham to the ceremony from The Council House before the parade commenced.

*“In 1812, Lieutenant James MacPherson and the 45th (Nottinghamshire) Regiment helped to successfully storm the Spanish fortress town of Badajoz; a crucial victory for the English while locked in bitter war against the French.*

*During the battle, Lieutenant James MacPherson was one of the first men to break through onto the castle ramparts. Whilst climbing a ladder up the castle wall, he found himself face-to-face with a French soldier. Before MacPherson could offer any resistance, he was shot, but the musket ball struck a silver button on his waistcoat and glanced off. MacPherson and his colleagues pressed on, and he made his way to the keep. Once there he tore down the French flag and raised his jacket to let his superiors know that the walls had been scaled.”*

# 1 MERCIAN CO FOREWORD

*Lt Col Dean Canham OBE*

1 MERCIAN has stepped off along its path into Exercise IRON STORM, the Army's largest annual UK-based exercise, beginning with an extensive armoured and dismounted live firing range package at Castlemartin Ranges in Wales.

Through May, June and July, comprehensive training of the Battalion's tactical headquarters and crews in Germany, a combined-Arms live firing exercise, and the all-encompassing Final Training Exercise on Salisbury Plain, will position the Battalion perfectly to assume its role 'at Readiness' as part of the Vanguard Armoured Infantry Brigade in the autumn. For obvious reasons, the context of being trained and ready feels very different now than it might have done a few months ago. The Battalion is however well-versed in operating in a NATO context having spent six months in Estonia last year.

C (Kohima) Company has been firmly re-established in the Battalion in the first few months of 2022. Having spent three years as C (Meeanee) Company, focussed on the rehabilitation of soldiers and officers, the Company has relaunched with huge energy and spirit as a company back in the fighting line.

A (Grenadier) Company have spent a period in Germany acting as the opposing force to the Royal Welsh Battlegroup that was going through the training package that sets them up to head to Estonia; by all accounts the Grenadiers gave them more than a straightforward experience!

1 MERCIAN recently hosted the Worshipful Company of Bowyers to the Battalion for a day experiencing life as a MERCIAN soldier. Firing pistols, practising camouflage and concealment, battlefield first aid, and familiarisation with the Warrior AFV, capped off with dinner in the Officers' Mess, lead to a very healthy reciprocal donation to the Mercian Regiment Benevolence Charity.

Work on the amalgamation of the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the Regiment continues apace. Detailed boarding of every soldier's preference was undertaken at RHQ, with the record of proceedings signed at The King's Head in Lichfield – where an antecedent regiment of the Staffordshire Regiment had been raised in 1705. Private Derby accompanied the 1st and 2nd Battalion command teams to the signing!

The vast majority of individuals in the Regiment are now clear on where their next assignment is; 90% of soldiers and officers got their first preference, with 99% getting one of their top-three.

We expect that the vast majority of moves will take place in the summer, with the new 1 MERCIAN stepping off in extremely fine form on 1 September (MERCIAN Formation Day). That will be the start of a month of Regimental activities designed to bond the new Battalion together for the adventures and opportunities that lie ahead.

# 1 MERCIAN A (GRENADEIER) COMPANY

Grenadier Company have had a lively start to the year with a deployment to Sennelager, Germany. Our role was TASK FORCE HANNIBAL, the opposing force for the Royal Welsh Battlegroup on Ex TALLIN DAWN.

This deployment saw Grenadiers tracking out on an armoured exercise at company strength for the first time in two years and as a result posed a significant challenge to all involved.

In the initial phase many Grenadiers industriously supported the Royal Welsh live firing package, whilst some were lucky enough to deploy on Nordic skiing adventure training in the Harz mountains.

Meanwhile the remainder of Grenadier Coy, and our attached supporting elements, prepared for the final exercise – working tirelessly to ready our Warriors and develop our tactical and conceptual abilities, including a section competition led by the Company Sergeant Major.

This paid dividends as Grenadier Coy surpassed our own expectations and those of the Collective Training Group. Our soldiers and commanders showed tactical intellect and an independence of thought which led to Grenadier Coy consistently performing very strongly against a well-resourced Battlegroup.

The Royal Welsh will be better prepared for operations because of the Grenadiers' efforts and application.

Ex TALLINN DAWN has provided a rock-solid foundation for A Coy's future taskings this year on Ex IRON STORM and beyond.

# 1 MERCIAN C (KOHIMA) COMPANY

It has been an exceptional start to the year for the newly re-established C (Kohima) Company. For too long workforce inflow has affected C Company's strength, however that has now changed completely! Kohima has a large proportion of brandnew soldiers straight from Catterick strengthened by the core of Meeanee graduates keen to forge a new subunit and with it the ethos to match.

Since January Kohima has already achieved much; completing low-level Battlecraft exercises and pre-training for readiness to deploy in support of the UK's Police Forces. In addition, every soldier has trained on the sharpshooter rifle and is developing the quality of their basic soldiering skills each week.

Where access to armoured training may have been limited for some other companies, Kohima has embraced dismounted soldiering championed by the new command team CSM WO2 Townsend and Company 2IC Lt Ben Arnold.

Kohima has a point to prove; its reputation is already growing and yet its people are hungry still. Each CO's PT session is a challenge to show what the team has to offer and not just in terms of physical prowess but emotionally how tight the cohesion in the team is already.

The future is bright; the new vehicle Boxer looms in 2023 and C Licences are already beginning to take hold, however first on the horizon lies a light role deployment to Lithuania with Kohima Company, 4 MERCIAN. It is an exciting time to be in the newest Company in the Mercian Regiment, especially with the eagerly awaited inflow from 2 MERCIAN this summer.

The future has, however, started already; shared endeavour across 1, 2 and 4 MERCIAN is already core Kohima business, with the C-Kukri bringing us all together.

## 2 MERCIAN A COMPANY - Ex ASKARI STORM

### *First deployment to Kenya*

*Pte Fearn*

My first experience of Kenya has been positive, it is a whole new experience to me deploying overseas, especially to somewhere like Kenya that has such a different culture and landscape to the UK. Whilst I've been out here my role has mostly been PRT sentry, this has involved helping the RCO's build the range at FOB Twiga in Archers Post Training Area. This has entailed working very closely with the LEC's helping them build up positions, huts and lay out targets.

I've also had plenty of down time which has enabled me to go on two AT trips. I've been to both Rift Valley and Savage Wilderness. These were very enjoyable as I did activity's such as rock climbing, mountain biking, bouldering, archery, gorge jumping, kayaking, Ducking and paddle boarding. My favourite and most enjoyable was gorge jumping as it pushed me outside my comfort zone. I've also been able to get down time in BATUK as with the walk out policy we have been able to experience the real Kenya and see what Nanyuki had to offer. Such as its many pools and hotels, malls and street shops.

### *E Qual course and first experience of supporting LFTT ranges*

*LCpl Lea*

Since arriving in Kenya the LCpl's from A (Grenadier) Coy's main effort has been passing our E Qual validation cadre so that we can help to safety staff for the CALFEX. Our time started doing small lessons in Nyati camp, learning safety angles, the safety to firers ratio, positions we should be in on the ground when being safety and more.

We then shadowed safety from PWRR who were already qualified and had experience so we could see how it's done. This was great because it allowed us to feel comfortable with everything before we did it ourselves. Following this, we then started progressing to get the temporary qual starting with individual fire and manoeuvre, working all the way to Coy attack by night. It was good to get some experience on the ranges before we did safety on the CALFEX.

After the 2 weeks that we spent learning, we travelled up to Archers Post Training Area to get ready to do walkthroughs of the ranges we were on. We learned the positions, where troops might go on the ground, how we thought they may attack the positions and getting used to the area we would be working on to best familiarise ourselves with it. The CALFEX then went live, it was made up of 2 Coys and 3 objectives, lasting around 11 hours. Me and the other Lance corporals all agreed it was good to experience doing something you don't usually do as a LCpl. It was a valuable experience and something which we all thoroughly enjoyed.

## **2 MERCIAN - ASKARI STORM 5/21 – TASK FORCE HANNIBAL TRAINING**

In February 2022 Manoeuvre Group 3 (MG3), constituting mainly Recce and Sniper Pls, deployed to Kenya as part of the Task Force Hannibal Battlegroup. MG3's role within the TFH group is the infamous Jaguar PMC force, a highly motivated fanatic insurgent force utilising guerrilla tactics and unconventional methods of fighting.

Having successfully completed their specialist, and arduous, support weapons cadres only a few months prior, Recce and Sniper Platoons arrived in Kenya battle hardened and ready for a fight.

Following a stint of isolation, MG3 moved straight into BCS training which was designed the specific aim of moving away from conventional tactics and into the "grey zone" of warfare. This would make us a force multiplier on the battlefield.

Additional to this, we have been exploring opportunities to seize an advantage in the cyber, electronic, information space as part of the larger information war campaign.

This is in line with the TFH's mission to adopt the role of a complex and free-thinking enemy.

Ultimately, our goal is to test and stretch the 1 PWRR BG to enable them to draw as many lessons learnt as possible so that they are ready to deploy at short notice to wherever they may be required around the world.

Throughout the exercise, we will harness the full fighting-spirit and ruthless ferocity of the Mercian Regiment.

As the saying goes, "work hard, play hard" and that is exactly what we did when we took the opportunity to conduct Adventurous Training at Savage Wilderness where members of both platoons took days out to climb, abseil, bike and even fish against the beautiful back drop that is Kenya.

Adventurous Training has been an excellent way of building cohesion and confidence amongst the younger members of both platoons.

## 2 MERCIAN - BRITISH PEACE SUPPORT TEAM STAB OPS SHORT-TERM TRAINING TEAM

*Cpl Jamie Mumby - Reconnaissance Platoon – D Coy*

Whilst deployed in Kenya, a Short-Term Training Team (STTT) was assembled through the British Peace Support Team Africa (BPST(A)) to instruct the Kenyan Defence Force (KDF) on Stability Operations and Tactics at the Kenyan School of Infantry. Each instructor was hand-picked for the task to deliver lessons on FOB defence, C-IED, OBUA and first aid, with a focus on counter insurgency. Our aim over the 3 weeks was to prepare the students to deploy as part of the AMISOM contingent in Somalia and provide them with lessons to disseminate to their home units. My role in the team was as lead C-IED instructor. I was very impressed with the student's prior knowledge from real-life operational experience in dealing with IEDs in Somalia and as a result I was able to take the students through a more advanced series of lessons and learn from the Kenyans myself. The instructors and I all had an enjoyable experience teaching and getting to know the Kenyans on the course and believe we made a positive impact to their ability to conduct counter insurgency operations successfully.

**LCpl Donnelly** – I've been teaching C-IED at the Kenyan School of Infantry and as one of the main threats the KDF have in Somalia I have learnt a huge amount from them. The KDF have had a lot of exposure to very complex IED attacks, with a large amount being command pull followed by small arms fire. This is a different tactic to what I experienced in Afghanistan, and I will incorporate this knowledge when I train my section in Battalion.

**Cpl Drayton** – From my experience on the STTT as an OBUA instructor, I found the KDF regiments have a more niche focus in comparison to ourselves. Whereas all British soldiers will have some experience in OBUA, only the KDF Ranger Battalion are taught in the urban environment. However, despite their experience the KDF picked up the skills very quickly and by the end of the week's training were at a very high standard.

**LCpl Ghale ENGRS** – The KDF are excellent soldiers and want to learn, although I was surprised with how much I have picked up from the KDF. Sharing their operational experiences has been an excellent insight into peace keeping missions in North Africa. The KDF are really appreciative of us deploying to their nation to pass on our lessons. I have really enjoyed the experience.

**LCpl Middleton RAMC** – My time on the STTT has been spent covering medical lessons with a specific focus in a counter insurgency environment, looking at how to treat small arms and IED casualties.

I've never experienced a group of students who can retain information as quickly as the KDF, it makes them a pleasure to teach! I also got to experience the Kenyan birthday tradition of having water tipped over my head to bless me for the year and having happy birthday sang to me in Swahili. Definitely a birthday to remember!

## **2 MERCIAN - TEACHING URBAN OPERATIONS**

Corporals Hebb and Hesketh delivered a Short Term Training Team to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, teaching Urban Operations to their National Guard from 9 Jan to 10 Feb.

Having never been to Saudi Arabia before, they arrived enthusiastic and ready to impress, their excellent attitude and teaching styles being commented on by the Brigadier Calder, the Commander of their mission.

Of note, their Saudi students were particularly impressed by their efforts to gain an insight into the Arabic language and Saudi culture; this included one of the Saudi royal family in their cohort of students.

## **2 MERCIAN ADVENTUROUS TRAINING - KENYA**

*Pte Foden, 8 Platoon, C Company*

We attended adventurous training shortly after arriving in Kenya. 8 Platoon went to Rift Valley adventures where we conducted multiple activities such as archery, mountain biking, rock climbing, gorge jumping, abseiling down a waterfall, and learning bush craft with Masai warriors.

All the instructors were warm and welcoming and always happy to help. After the daily activities we relaxed around the fire and enjoy the atmosphere with the instructors and soldiers from other units, such as PWRR. I had a great time and especially enjoyed the rock climbing!



## 4 MERCIAN B (MALTA) COMPANY

*Maj Bowden-Williams (Officer Commanding)*

B Coy have enjoyed a return to the normal battle rhythm of AR life with a focus on MATTs and qualification towards The CO's Certificate of Efficiency. This this may sound mundane but after two years of disrupted service, the new year emphasis on fitness and marksmanship had the rare feeling of routine in these strange times.

B Coy led a training weekend of MATTs training at Altcar Training Area that saw the full return of the Role Fitness Test after various variations throughout lockdown and other restrictions. This weekend training event also saw CO's Coins presented to Pte Hickman-Hymers for his effort in physical fitness, Pte Skidmore for finishing 20th in the Army Cross Country race at Sandhurst and CSgt Hoe for going above and beyond when performing the demanding role of Visiting Officer for a bereaved military family.

On top of the annual MATTs training, the Bn also delivered some excellent urban training in Caerwent Training Area, Wales. B Coy were able to deploy two sections and enjoyed some challenging and relevant training. In the background the coy have run pre-PJNCO Cadre training and this has already seen some success with Pte Baily passing a PJNCO Cadre and LCpl Vogiatz completing the cadre as an instructor.

At the end of March, we welcomed home Capt Matt Styles from his deployment on Op CABRIT in Estonia as SO3 IA&O. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has changed the context and scope of this operational deployment and Capt Styles stepped up and delivered in a number of strategic level Influence serials.

## 4 MERCIAN C (KOHIMA) COMPANY

*Maj Deepe Rawji (Officer Commanding)*

C Company has had a fast-paced 3-month period. On top of training events, we have been churning out individuals to attend exercises with our Regular Army paired Bn, 1 MERCIAN. We have been preparing troops for deployments overseas and have been engaging across the local community.

2Lt Magnus Khan, who hails from London, has been focusing his efforts into the Bn Shooting Team. Magnus is honoured to have been selected as the captain of the team and hopes to emulate the many historical successes of the past. The team has been performing well considering they were given just a month's notice to form. They competed at Pirbright achieving a mid-table placing, beating many Regular Army teams. The competition included ETR shoot offs, variations to the IBSR range and finished with a sprint finish and a falling plates shoot.

The coy also reflected on the Army's pause for Op TEAMWORK this quarter. Many Reservists joined remotely via skype, zoom and conducted face to face discussions at our Army Reserve Centres in Bulwell and Mansfield (home of our Assault Pioneer Platoon). We agreed that the coy was actually in a good place and that communication up and down the chain of command was working well, and training, Adventure Training and operational deployment opportunities are widespread and varied.

We recently improved interoperability with East Midlands University Officer Training Corps (EMUOTC). They have been providing troops to play as opposing forces (OPFOR) on training weekends and we have sent instructors to provide skill-at-arms instruction. Another fantastic way of engaging the potential future of our Reserve and Regular officer cohorts. More recently, we have welcomed Officer Cadets training with us in private soldier roles, to gain experience training within a company ORBAT and enjoying soldiering within tactical scenarios with 4 MERCIAN.

2Lt Jack Poade who hails from Penkridge, Staffordshire, has proved to be a success story from EMUOTC. He joined during the Summer of 2021 and this month has completed the Army Reserve Platoon Commander's Battle Course (PCBC(R)) with a strong pass. He is now looking forward to attending the Range Management Qualification (RMQ) in early April. Standby for Range Conducting Officer taskings Mr Poade! Jack is currently planning an overseas marathon trip for the Bn which is due to commence in November. More information will follow in subsequent articles.

Pte Ward, from Mansfield, complete his PJNCO Cadre in Otterburn with a fantastic performance all round and achieving a competent pass across all disciplines. Pte Ward is now attending joint exercises with 1 MERCIAN and is getting immersed across both Bn's. A great effort and he is certainly making the most of the opportunities open to him.

As training year 21/22 draws to a close, I would like to mention C Coy's Recruitment, Retention and Mentoring Team (RRMT). The team works tirelessly throughout the year and have provided us with some exceptional soldiers who add value every single day. During the last 12 months, we have attested 16 soldiers with 8 completing basic training having attended and passed the Combat Infantry Course (CIC). When we include those who have either re-joined or transferred in from Regular Army or other units, this brings a total of 28 new faces to the coy.

Sgt Orton, who hails from Mansfield, also attended the re-signing of the Armed Forces Covenant with the Bassetlaw District Council. This maintains the Council's leading role in supporting the Armed Forces community, Veterans and Cadet Force Adult Volunteers, across the district. As part of the covenant, the Council assists all members of the Armed Forces Community, past and present in many ways, including through the support of a dedicated Armed Forces Champion.

## 4 MERCIAN D (DRAGON) COMPANY

*Maj Will Rose (Officer Commanding)*

This has been a varied three months for D Coy with MATTs completed at Beckingham and Altcar Training Areas and D Coy sponsoring an Urban training weekend at Caerwent.

The Bn skiing AT Exped included five members of D Coy with Sgt David Noon (from Stoke on Trent), LCpls Anthony Rook (Stone), Daniel Legge (Sandbach), Ptes Ed Foster (Macclesfield) and Harry Lymer (from Dilhorne) completing a 5-day skiing package in breath taking Italian surroundings involving on and off-piste skiing as well as ski touring and a trip to Venice on the way home.

Our Congratulations go to Pte Jo Boote (from Macclesfield) and Pte Dave Brinton (from Winsford) who both passed a PJNCO Cadre. Our QPSI returned to us, and we wish him well as he returns to full fitness.

Meanwhile our thoughts remain with our PSAO who is convalescing at home. We said farewell to LCpl Anthony Rook in March who retired from the Army Reserve aged 55 and having originally joined the Territorial Army in 1988. He has been a stalwart member of D Coy and we wish him well in his next adventure.

### *Ex SAXON ANVIL 11-13 Mar, Caerwent*

*Maj Will Rose and 2Lt Magnus Khan*

The Bn deployed on Fri 11 Mar to Caerwent Trg Area in South Wales for a weekend of Urban focused trg. On Saturday we revised and then honed our skills at clearing rooms and then buildings, practising CQB skills, “stacking up”, using grenades, methods of entry and casevac in an urban environment. All this was focused on a night-time exercise that was to follow.

Uncharacteristically for a March training weekend in Wales, the sun shone and after lunch, further training and an update on events in Ukraine, we went through the full orders process and conducted a night raid on a multi storey compound using night vision, IR cylumes, lasers and the SOPs that we had developed during the day.

The raid was great training; the platoon patrolled to the FRV, Fire Sp moved off into position and on H hr, the GPMGs fired in the lead section as they broke into compound, remaining silent until the last minute.

They cleared rooms which included bobby traps that needed dealing with before destroying the enemy. We “exfilled” promptly and after a debrief, 5 hours sleep, a sausage and egg bap and tried and tested collecting of brass, troops returned to ARCs having enjoyed a great weekend of training.

## 4 MERCIAN HQ (EAGLE) COMPANY

For the first three months of 2022, HQ Coy has been conducting a full day's training on one Saturday each month to enable longer training periods for the troops. On the 26th of Feb, a training day was held at The Shrubbery, Kidderminster, home of the Anti-Tank Platoon. This training was focused around a MAPEX, preparing troops for Exercise IRON WOLF, our Annual Training Event for Training Year 22/23 which is taking place in Lithuania during May.

In the morning, the troops had a revision lesson on BOWMAN radios, set up and fault finding as well as A-H and SCRIM reports. The lessons were delivered by CSgt Newell, CSgt Green and Cpl Harley. After lunch, the troops were deployed into one of two OP locations or in the Ops Room for the MAPEX. During the exercise everyone involved practiced map reading, reporting and the use of correct radio Voice Procedure (VP). The exercise proved that with training and use of the equipment, confidence in VP and use of radios and maps grew. Everyone seemed to enjoy the day and thought they gained valuable experience from it.

### *The Laga Trophy*

*Pte Zachary Whitehouse, Anti-Tank Platoon*

On Tuesday 8th February 2022, I was honoured to be presented with The Laga Trophy by Mrs Elaine Laga, mother of the late Pte Laga after who the award is named.

*Ken Laga was an Army Reservist who served with our antecedent regiment, The West Midlands Regiment. He deployed on Op TELIC in 2003 and was commended for his selfless commitment and actions when he came across a young Afghan boy who was suffering in the cold weather with little clothing. Without a second thought, Pte Laga gave the young boy his own warm kit, ensuring the boy did not continue to suffer. Pte Laga went on to join the Regular Army but was tragically killed in a road traffic accident in 2005 whilst serving in Germany with the Royal Artillery.*

It was decided to resurrect the trophy and present it to the platoon's best recruit or Pte soldier on an annual basis and Mrs Laga takes great comfort in coming into the Army Reserve Centre to present the award.

### *'Meet The Army' – An Engagement Event in Wolverhampton*

*Cpl Bailey Wilbourne-Kay*

At over 150 years old, The Grand Central Station is an iconic venue located within Wolverhampton City Centre, being the main transit way for commuters in and out of the city during its time.

The high historical and cultural importance to the area, made this the perfect location to engage with those individuals who drive that community. These were the employers and key community stakeholders within the West Midlands. Those in attendance included the Mayor of Dudley, Heads of Colleges and other business owners. One attendee who showed a particular interest was Councillor Rizwan Jalil (Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council), who offered his support to what we do now and our future ventures.

4 MERCIAN provided the primary engagement stand for the HQ West Midlands Brigade sponsored event and did not disappoint. With an array of weapon systems, sighting systems and other equipment available to the infantry soldier within a Rifle Platoon on display, all those that visited the stand were impressed. Kidderminster's Anti-Tank Platoon also provided their Javelin Indoor Trainer (IDT). Guests thoroughly enjoyed this element of the stand, noting the quality of equipment and its weight and before long, competitions began to see who the best shot was.

To conclude, this was a successful event and all those in attendance were thoroughly impressed to see the range of capabilities available with 4 MERCIAN.

### *Midlands Army Challenge 2022 (MAC22)*

Midlands Army Challenge 2022 took place from 15th – 18th March at MOD Donnington. The event was run by HQ West Midlands Brigade for groups of young people aged 14-19 from schools and colleges within the area. Young people had an opportunity to engage with soldiers from the Regular Army and Army Reserve gaining personal development in a challenging but safe environment.

As part of MAC22, soldiers from 4 MERCIAN delivered a camouflage and concealment stand. The stand consisted of an introduction to 'why things are seen' delivered by Cpl Harley from HQ Coy ATk PI followed by an opportunity to apply cam cream. Groups were then divided into two teams - Hiders and Spotters.

The Hiders were taken 100m away and had to use the terrain to try and get as close to the Spotters as possible without being seen. The Spotters were equipped with binoculars and their newly acquired knowledge of why things are seen.

Over the course of four days, the stand lessons were delivered to 180 young people and was very well received.

## **4 MERCIAN Ex FROSTED EAGLE 2022 - ADVENTURE TRAINING SKIING EXPED**

4 MERCIAN deployed on Ex FROSTED EAGLE 22 during the period 5th to 12th February 2022. The aim of the exercise was to give all novice skiers an introduction to Alpine Skiing, build on the experience of those intermediate skiers and set the tone for future Adventure Training Expeditions through quality training and a chance to forge working relationships between the current Army Reserve cohort.

This is a short article from Musician Michael Cooper (Band of The Mercian Regiment) from his perspective...

My first Adventure Training exercise with The Mercian Regiment was an enjoyable and memorable experience. Skiing in the Dolomites was something I never thought I would get the opportunity to do, and I am so grateful and glad I made the most of it. I

was in the beginner group, however, the whole group picked it up so quickly that we ended up advancing to the more difficult slopes much faster than usual and had to adapt and learn quickly to keep up. I had been skiing twice before this exercise, but some had never put on skis before and managed to be far more competent than me by the end!

I was presented with the "Fall of the Expedition" award which I couldn't have done without the help of our fantastic instructor! Most evenings we would enjoy some après ski and got to know each other well in a social environment. We also learned about avalanche safety as well as other factors that make a mountain potentially a dangerous terrain. The clear and concise feedback from our instructor, as well as the "can do" attitude of the whole group, made the week fulfilling and exciting and I can't wait to go again should the opportunity arise.

# THE BAND OF THE MERCIAN REGIMENT

*Sgt Wood*

For Military Bands, the start of the year is the time for a new repertoire of music and preparing programmes for the year ahead, so January was an exciting rush of new music to try out.

Taking up the wider opportunities open to them, Musn Cooper and Musn Appleby took part in the regimental AT Skiing Expedition, Ex FROSTED EAGLE, challenging themselves in a totally different way. Meanwhile our CEQ3 trainees took the Musical Performance element of their qualification and are currently awaiting the results, we wish them luck.

St Patrick's Day weekend, on an usually sunny day, saw members of the Band on parade with the Band of the Royal Irish Regiment, complete with traditional sprigs of shamrock in their helmets.

In February, the Director of Music presented Sgt Meryl Fears with her 3rd clasp for her VRSM. This, in conjunction with her previous long service medal, signifies a total 37 years of service in the Army Reserves. A truly outstanding commitment, congratulations Sgt Fears!

A date for the diary: The Band of the Mercian Regiment are in concert at Stoke Minister on 2nd April 2022. Doors open at 7pm and more information can be found on the ABF The Soldier's Charity events webpage.

## MUSEUM OF THE MERCIAN REGIMENT (WFR COLLECTION)

*Jennifer Brookman-Moore, Curator*

At Museum of the Mercian Regiment (WFR Collection) in Nottingham, we have had a busy start to the year. Our Arts Council & AMOT funded interactives have been installed. Thank you to everyone who contributed to the surveys I sent out about your time in the regiment.

The new introductory video is now in the gallery as well as our brand-new touchscreen. Our new video uses photographs from the museum's archive and images from the Regiment, showcasing the regiment's history. The touch screen houses a database of our medal collection with an online version on the way as well for our website. In addition, our touch screen has some games on it that can be played by adults as well as children, again using images from the museum's archive. Thanks for RHQ Mercian for providing the images of the Regiment!

# STOCKPORT BRANCH CRA & MVRA THE MERCIAN REGIMENT ASSOCIATION

*Steven Gregory, Publicity Member*

The Branch is eagerly anticipating a return to normal after the restrictions of the last couple of years.

## *January/February Meetings*

The return of face-to-face gatherings has clearly been welcomed by all, with excellent attendances at both January's and February's meetings. Whilst we value the face-to-face experience, we have continued to invest in more equipment (wires everywhere!) to keep in touch with people who cannot physically make it.

We have had remote participation from local members, as well as attendees from Newcastle upon Tyne and Auckland, New Zealand. Below can be seen The Trustees Room at the Armoury set up for the February meeting.

## *Platinum Jubilee and Meeanee Reunion*

Organised by CRA HQ (all credit to Joe Murphy and his wife Mandy), the event on 19th February at the Roodee Chester was attended by almost 300 ex-Cheshires and partners/guests. The Branch was well represented on two tables. Feedback from the event has been outstanding.

Quite separately, via Facebook groups, the Branch is in contact with an American re-enactment group, The 22nd Regiment of Foot, who also celebrated Meeanee in Clinton, New Jersey!

## *AGM*

The Annual General Meeting of the Branch was held on Friday, 4th March. A well-attended meeting: 28 in attendance, 2 by Zoom and 6 apologies. There was election of officials and some rule tweaks to give greater clarity in some areas, and also to firm up links to antecedent regiments and associations. Below can be seen Stuart MacDonald and Harold Riley receiving Life Memberships from the President, Peter Gresty.

## *Cold War Memories*

During the 'Cold War' the Stockport Express often embedded one of its reporters to the main unit operating out of the TA Centre in Stockport. Over the years the



reporter, Chris Hill, has established long-term relationships with the soldiers and units he has photographed. In fact, Chris remains in contact to this day and is a member of the Branch's Facebook group.

On Thursday, 17h March, we ran a coffee morning for members where Chris, now retired, was kind enough to give a presentation of recollections from our youth via a selection of his reports and photographs. Some good memories were rekindled, and the presentation was very well received by all who attended.

## **STAFFORDSHIRE REGIMENT ASSOCIATION CYCLE CLUB**

*Lee Davies*

On the 26th of March 2022, 4 members of the Staffordshire Regimental Association Cycle Club participated in the Gent – Wevelgem 'In Flanders Field' Cycling sportive.

The day before, we were privileged to participate in the daily remembrance service by laying a wreath at the Menin gate in Ypres.

The amateur sportive event precedes the Professional 'Spring Classic' Race the next day and has several route distances ranging from 42 miles to 140 miles.

We chose the 87 miles but totalled 100 on the day with the ride to and from the event.

The route takes you through the Belgium countryside where our Regimental ancestors fought in WW1. Names and places we have read about, Ypres, Ghulevelt, Passchendaele, Messines Ridge, and Polygon Wood to name a few.

The ride felt like a mixture of a bike race and a history lesson rolled into one. Around every corner was indeed a plot that would be 'forever England'

### **Along the route we stopped at key locations:**

- Kezelberg Cemetery
- Menin Gate
- Lijssenthoek Cemetery
- Hill 63
- Christmas Truce Memorial
- Ploegsteert (Plug Street) memorial to the missing.

The ride also took us up some infamous climbs that over the years have produced dramas on the Pro Race. The toughest was the Kemmelberg a short but extremely steep cobbled climb which not only tests your strength but also your nerve, thankfully we all came out unscathed.

The last section of the ride took us back to Wevelgem with the head wind this time our enemy. The ride completed we did feel a profound sense of satisfaction especially as we had managed to raise almost £800 for the SRA.

Our final act before returning back to 'Blighty' was to visit the Tyne Cot Commentary the largest Commonwealth Grave Cemetery in the world. Walking through row on row of graves does highlight the enormity of the sacrifice paid for 'freedom.'

The whole experience was a mix of emotion both physically and mentally and we have already decided to return next year.

## **VETERANS' GATEWAY**

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

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

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