

THE MERCIAN REGIMENT

Quarterly Newsletter - Q2 2022



CRICH PILGRIMAGE 2022

This year saw the return of the annual Pilgrimage to the Mercian Regiment memorial at Crich. The Pilgrimage had been cancelled for two years prior due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

The Pilgrimage saw the site packed with members of the Regimental family and civic dignitaries. The Pilgrimage also marks the last time that the three Colour Parties will be together prior to the amalgamation of the 1st and 2nd Battalions later in the year.

To see photos of the Pilgrimage, visit:

<https://express.adobe.com/page/woSltzOy78Ems/>

OR

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

1 MERCIAN FOREWORD

The pace and dynamism of life at 1 MERCIAN has stepped back up and the Battalion finds itself both deployed training Ukrainians and just completing the IRON STORM series of training events which lead to us taking on the role of Lead Armoured Battlegroup. Concurrent to both we are also on standby for UK operations. The training of Ukrainians, in Kent for us, is a critical task with a direct impact on the war; thousands of Ukrainian troops will be receiving the very best infantry training we can muster in order to give them the best chance of survival and the skills and confidence to win. We will be on that task for a number of months.

The amalgamation of 1 and 2 MERCIAN continues, with each individual moving into the new 1 MERCIAN now knowing which Company they will join. By the next issue of this newsletter the moves will be complete; the new 1 MERCIAN will be the largest infantry battalion in the Army, the most ready armoured force, and the best trained. Those joining us are hugely welcome. No doubt life in the new 1 MERCIAN will continue to be busy and rewarding!

1 MERCIAN A (GRENADIER) COMPANY CALFEX

Lt Ed Blacker, OC 1 Platoon

In June, A (Grenadier) Company deployed on the second phase of Ex IRON STORM, a Combined Arms Live Firing Exercise (CALFEX) on Castlemartin Ranges. Having spent a month in Castlemartin earlier in the year to get all the firers up to the required standard, and another fortnight in Germany practicing tactics in simulators, Grenadier Company arrived champing at the bit.

The highlight of the exercise was the final mission, IRON STRIKE. Grenadier Company were poised in cover while 155 mm and 81 mm shells from AS90s and our Mortar Platoon fixed the enemy. The KRH followed with 120 mm rounds from their Challenger 2 tanks, which was also the signal for Grenadier Company to start rolling towards the dug-in enemy position. With tons of aggression, the Grenadiers cleared bunker after bunker, smashing it with bursts from the Warrior's cannons and chain guns, and then releasing a section of dismounts to destroy the position. The fleeing enemy were chased down by tanks before the Grenadiers were released again. This time, we had dismounted from our Warriors and were weaving through the cover of the sand dunes to surprise the enemy while they were being suppressed by the tanks firing from our flank.

1 MERCIAN DRAGON COY, SNIPER COMPETITION

In Apr 22, the 1 MERCIAN Sniper Platoon entered three teams, each consisting of one sniper pair, in to the 1 Armd Inf Bde Sniper competition. There was stiff competition between some very experienced teams over a number of disciplines. Despite being an extremely junior team, Cpl Kilby, LCpl Bruton, LCpl Foster, LCpl Lee, LCpl Atkins, and Pte Orchard, finished third overall. They were pipped to second place on the final shoot by a vastly more experienced team but learned a great deal about competition shooting. During the competition the 1 MERCIAN Sniper Platoon also became one of the only teams to bring .338 rifles back online as a capability through some very hard work and perseverance by Sgt Foster.

1 MERCIAN DRAGON COY, ASSAULT PIONEER CONCENTRATION

On the 18 April 22, the 1 MERCIAN Assault Pioneer Platoon deployed to Longmoor Training Area to conduct a Pioneer concentration. They were joined by elements of the 1 YORKS Assault Pioneer Platoon, in an attempt to share new ideas and capabilities with other elements of the Field Army. The training included elements of counter mobility support, through constructing abatis, cratering, railway denial, and improvised charges to target vehicle tracks. It also included mobility support training, with clearance of scattered mine fields, and urban training. On completion of the concentration a distinguished visitors day was attended by the Land Warfare Centre, the Infantry Battle School, Assault Pioneer training leads and several other Field Army units.

1 MERCIAN ARTIC WARFARE INSTRUCTORS COURSE (AWIC)

Capt Jasper Clarke, Intelligence Officer

During the first half of 2022, I and the remaining group of Artic Warfare Instructor candidates that had passed the gruelling 2-week Phase 1 selection, based out of Inverness, Scotland, went forward to the 6 week Phase 2 course in Barduvoss, Norway. Led by Royal Marine Mountain Leaders ('MLs'), the course, as the name suggests, attempts to inculcate the field and survival skills to operate and fight within a Cold Weather (CW) environment, to a level that enables a basic but broad set of skills to be passed on as instructors. On a personal level, having ardently watched the 1980's BBC documentary 'Behind Enemy Lines' as a student prior to service, and having been a lifelong mountaineer, climber and skier, the course had particular resonance and it did not disappoint.

The course delivers a cold weather capability to the British Army by building CW instructor capacity to assist training delivered by MLs across the various CW operational theatres. With Land operations in Eastern Europe sitting firmly within the definition of a CW environment, including Estonia and neighbouring Baltic countries, and the increasingly common interoperability exercises being conducted with

countries such as Norway, Sweden and Finland – there is an increasingly prescient need for the British Army to build organic CW expertise. The skills and cultural mindsets required to operate in the unforgiving Arctic are in many ways an extension to, and enhancement of, core Infantry skills; the environment demands Infantry excellence and the chance to take part in these types of exercises are an excellent opportunity to enhance and expand professional expertise beyond the standard Infantry skill set.

AWIC has been described in some circles as ‘Cold JWIC’ (a cold version of the Jungle Warfare Instructors Course) and there are a surprising number of parallels. A highly specialised arduous light infantry course, based upon a reconnaissance force model, to inculcate the highest standards of fieldcraft, with an emphasis on personal administration. The constant battle to stay hydrated is perhaps less intuitive but quickly makes sense when operating in environments that can drop as low as -30°C , burning through 5-6k calories daily, skiing with heavily-laden bergens and pulling pulks, and lots of digging in snow. All without ready access to liquid water and some unique physiological responses: ‘vasoconstriction’ draws blood from extremities and ejects all unnecessary fluid to reduce the metabolic load to keep warm – experienced as the desire to urinate frequently. Extreme cold environments, unlike their hot counterparts, also suppress the natural thirst response. There is a significant personal kit list, most of which requires spares to be carried, all waterproofed, and the majority carried ‘on the person’ in available pockets; not to mention the skis, snowshoes and associated kit to maintain and service. A substantial team kit list included pulks, tents, stoves, fuel, brushes, spades, axes, radios – the list goes on. Learning to operate effectively with this kit, within this environment, and applying the principles to always keep oneself and the team safe and operationally effective, was a difficult but rewarding challenge.

The course content was broad. From theory and lesson delivery training, encompassing cold weather and cold climate theory, the human body and its reaction to the cold, kit and equipment, clothing and the layering system, mobility training (skiing down, up, and traversing, operating with pulks and snowshoeing), survival training, and operating / fighting in the cold weather environment. Course highlights included astral (star) navigation, survival training – particularly building and occupying snow shelters carrying only a bivvy bag as part of a survival test phase, and of course the cold-water immersion drills as the course rite-of-passage.

There are no secrets to operating in the Arctic; good personal administration, the right kit and equipment, the motivation and discipline to follow procedures, teamwork and an awareness and appreciation of risk. The austere Cold Weather environment is an opportunity to be embraced.

1 MERCIAN Ex IRON STORM 2022, COMBINED SIMULATED TACTICAL TRAINING EXERCISE (CSTTX), SENNELAGER

Capt Jonathan McAloan, 1 MERC RSO

From 25 Apr – 8 May 22, the 1 MERCIAN Battlegroup (BG) deployed to Sennelager, Germany, to conduct Ex IRON STORM CSTTX in the Combined Arms Tactical Training (Germany) (CATT(G)) suite. After a few days of familiarisation in both planning and executing missions from Platoon to Battlegroup level, the assessed mission serials began. This consisted of a progression of three missions based upon both offensive and defensive scenarios with the BG being assessed by the Collective Training Group, the exercise observer mentors, throughout. The scenarios allowed the HQ to build upon the standard they had set on pre-deployment planning exercises, honing their planning skills across 12, 8 and 4 hr planning cycles during the Combined Arms Staff Training (CAST) element of the exercise. Additionally, their command and control was tested during the execution phase.

The sub-units from both 1 MERCIAN and the attached arms also used this opportunity to work together for the first time and build cohesion and interoperability. This was made even better due to the wide array of vehicles that were simulated which further enhanced the realism of the training. Despite a couple of issues with the CATT system resulting in some unexpected pauses to training, the exercise was a great success, and the BG were set up well for the next phases of Ex IRON STORM: the Combined Arms Live Firing Exercise (CALFEX) and Final Test Exercise (FTX), in Castlemartin and Salisbury Plain, respectively.

2 MERCIAN 1XX Operational Shooting Competition

Capt Whimster

In May 2022, a team of 8 firers from 2 MERCIAN travelled to Wathgill Camp to compete in the 1XX Operational Shooting Competition (OSC), running for the first time since 2019. The team had been put through their paces on a 3-week training package, diligently and thoughtfully prepared by Sgt Green.

The team fired in 7 different shoots, over two days, with combined and individual scores offering the opportunity to win medals. The competition was a success, with the 2 MERCIAN team winning silver medals on the 'Unknown Shoot' and placing 5th out of 17 teams; a strong enough score to qualify for the Army OSC at Bisley.

Our thanks go to all those involved in organising the competition, the 2 MERCIAN team that provided real-life support and permanent range teams for the competition and members of the 2 MERCIAN Sniper Platoon for their pre-training and advice throughout.

2 MERCIAN Ex EAGLE ANCESTRY

Between the 13 – 17 June, JNCO's across the Battalion deployed to France on a Battlefield Study (BS). The BS followed the advance of the German forces during WWII. Starting at Sedan, passing through Arras and finishing at Wormhout.

The trip allowed JNCO to practically apply their doctrinal understanding using a historical framework. Given the ongoing events in Ukraine the trip bares even more significance than it may have had a year ago.

The highlight of the trip was the laying of a wreath at Wormhout in honour of the 5 Cheshires' soldiers who were massacred in war-crimes conducted by the SS in May 1940.

2 MERCIAN PTR IN KENYA

Lt Henry Jones

As well as providing the Task Force Hannibal element, 2MERCIAN were also tasked to design and deliver the PWRR CALFEX on Ex ASKARI STORM. Originally scaled for a smaller tasking, a team of six RCOs planned and built three sequential company ranges with a further three simultaneous ranges for support weapons.

Located in the heat of Archer's Post in the Samburu region the team split our time between planning in Nanyuki camp with BATUK and overseeing the build of the ranges in the north. Aided by a fantastic team of Kenyan LECs and dedicated members of the PRT six weeks of build was completed on schedule, utilising over five thousand sandbags.

Of particular note are the Lance Corporals who completed an authorisation cadre to allow them to act as safety supervisors and performed excellently, even with limited experience. A battle-group wide effort to fill in the rest of the safety staff led to a successful night of ranges that culminated the PWRR's LFTT in Kenya.

4 MERCIAN B (MALTA) COMPANY

2Lt Scott Hodgson

Over the last quarter, B (Malta) Company has been extremely busy. Some highlights include the Battalion Training Exercise IRON WOLF in Lithuania, an engagement event with employers across the North-West during Exercise NORTHERN COVENANT, flag raising events held in Chester and Winsford to mark Armed Forces Day, along with recruitment personnel attending the Sefton Trophy rugby competition. Recruiting at B Coy HQ (Widnes) has also seen an increase in local activity, where engagement with Liverpool Career's Office has set the conditions for increased recruiting activity in Warrington.

The company has also bid farewell to the OC, Maj (BW) Bowden-Williams, Coy 2IC, Capt Matt Styles, 2IC Regimental Recruiting and Mentoring Team, WO2 Mike Buckley and PSI, CSgt Jordan Hoe, all after many years of valuable service to B Coy. Their farewell was marked with a company social held at Widnes, which saw veterans from B Coy and current members of all three ARC locations congregate to enjoy a quality evening and show their appreciation for their efforts.

We look forward to providing a recruiting presence at Penketh Carnival, in addition to preparing to take part in the Pilot UK Standby task which will be well supported by B Coy personnel.

4 MERCIAN C (KOHIMA) COMPANY

C Coy have been busy preparing for their ATE in Lithuania and have been ramping up their efforts on FIWAF and CQB drills. Moreover, we have had 4 attestations in the past 3 months and are constantly developing the ever growing coy. This is complemented by 2 CIC passes. We welcome Pte's Wells and Butler who both hail from Nottingham as students. They have come from EMUOTC and are both ready to commit on our training events. This brings the coy established strength to 91%!

Moreover, we have provided SAA instruction to members of the EMUOTC and this is reciprocated with the numbers of soldiers that are transferring across to us. We are almost at double figures this last year!

On the development front, we congratulate WO2 Woodward from Mansfield, on completing the difficult CBRN (I) course, Pte Khan from Nottingham on her strong pass on CMT1 and 2Lt Poade from Penkridge, Staffordshire for completing PCBC (R). Without volunteers willing to become instructors, we would not be able to be as ready for the wider army's deployment requirements!

We also welcome back our most deployable young officer, 2Lt Emile Mackney, who hails from Derby, from Op RESCRIPT where he supported the Scottish Ambulance Service as a PI Comd and stepped up as Liaison Officer North. However, there is no rest for the wicked as we have a section worth of troops ready to deploy on Op UNITY, which is the Commonwealth Games deployment in Birmingham this Summer.

Moving forward, we will be looking forward to committing to more niche deployments, a UK standby tasking in the winter and sponsored events such as CQB training in Corsham Mines with a section level competition ending the training year in March next year!

4 MERCIAN ANNUAL CONTINUOUS TRAINING EXERCISE - Ex IRON WOLF 22

Ex IRON WOLF is the annual FTX for the Lithuania Battlegroups which make up their IRON WOLF Brigade. As part of this exercise, 4 MERCIAN provided a company group, bolstered by members of 9 Platoon, C Coy 1 MERCIAN, to the Battlegroup, in order to give some realistic, interoperability training to the Battlegroup. Also attached were a platoon of Warrior IFV from 1 R WELSH who form part of the eFP Battlegroup based in Estonia.

4 MERCIAN deployed from East Midlands Airport on 6 May after crossing the first Babcock-related transport hurdle, landing in Kaunas and then transferring to Rukla Training Area, where we were accommodated in a very comfortable tented village. The food, depending on who you asked, was either great or occasionally not so great. The pasta carbonara and salmon salad to start was a masterpiece; just a shame it was being served at 0730hrs!

Deployment into the field saw the company initially start as 'red forces' for two days in Vepriai, a Lithuania civilian village which their military had designated as a training area for the duration of the exercise. As far as training went, it was definitely a different experience and one we wouldn't have received in the UK. Troops conducting pairs fire and manoeuvre either side of a man mowing his lawn just wouldn't happen in Wiltshire.

A live civilian population, dogs and vehicles, all added to the sense of realism and was a great introduction to the exercise, culminating in the defence of an old school/college building. From here, troops completed an attack day, moving through

the forests surrounding Vepriai and then went into battle routine in a live quarry, with a number of familiarisation serials attached including Dutch CBRN FUCHS vehicles and AAC Wildcat Helicopter flights. The attack day that followed included a number of minefields which resulted in troops and vehicles having to move around the area and the Coy 2IC's packet doing some recovery serials. The troops went into a final attack against the Norwegian CV90 (Warrior IFV equivalent) and German Leopard 2 Tanks.

Another battle prep day saw the company prepare defensive positions for a 'blue force' attack up a number of lanes. The Dutch enemy was mounted in Boxer AFVs and came forward at pace, making it hard to keep balanced as a light role company. Adding to this, the OC was "surprised" by an enemy sniper team and neutralised. Equally surprised was the Coy 2IC when he got told he was now in charge!

Having seen the remainder of the Battlegroup absorb the enemy's main effort, the coy fell back to rear positions to remain balanced. The attached American JTAC called in some fast air and many were surprised to actually see live jets flying in support, unlike the 'notional' air support they have been used to on other exercises, another piece of training realism that we haven't experienced elsewhere.

After ENDEX was called and post ex admin completed, the coy travelled to the capital city of Vilnius over two days to experience a little of the Lithuanian culture. The trip took in some of the sights of Vilnius, as well as the KGB museum which gave an idea of the Soviet occupation conditions and was a sobering thought as thoughts turned to current events that led to us being in Lithuania in the first place.

The exercise was thoroughly enjoyed by all, the Lithuanians were extremely hospitable, and it has to be said, the weather couldn't have been better either!

4 MERCIAN D (DRAGON) COMPANY

Maj Will Rose, OC

33 members of D Coy were awarded a Certificate of Efficiency in Training Year (TY) 21/22 and we enter TY 22/23 with D Coy on the up. Our PSAO, Capt Steve Condliffe, is now back full time after a period of sick leave and our QPSI is returning to full fitness after his injury and rehabilitation; it is great to see them both back in the ARC. CSgt Mark Harris has been extended as PSI at Burton which is great news for the Machine Gun Pl.

Plans for 2022 are taking shape. We are currently training for the Athens Marathon, AT is booked for Aug (hillwalking in Brecon Beacons) and quad biking is planned for Jul all this on top of our routine military training for our warfighting role.

Our congratulations go to LCpl Daniel Legge from Sandbach who achieved 'Best Shot' on Ex WARSWOR which was an inter-company. Fire team level shooting competition held in Catterick Training Area. Potential Officer development continues with Pte John Hardy from Stoke-on-Trent completing Mod B and Pte Thomas Hulme from Cheadle currently at RMAS completing Mod B, C and D. This takes six weeks and will hopefully then see him commission this summer.

Progression in basic training continues with Pte Thomas Bamber from Stoke-on-Trent passing Mod 3 and Ptes Philip Gell from Chartley) and Jason Walsh from Stoke-on-Trent passing Mod 1.

4 MERCIAN HQ (EAGLE) COMPANY

Maj Brian Johnston MBE, OC

This quarter has seen HQ (Eagle) Company continue to support the Battalion in Apr across several exercises and pre-deployment training including Live Firing Ranges, ACMT, Individual Training and the preparation for deployment on the Battalion's OTX, Ex IRON WOLF which took place in Lithuania over two weeks in May.

HQ Coy personnel also took part in the Armed Forces Day activities in Wolverhampton in Jun working alongside our Regular Army recruiters. This event was attended by over 4000 people and saw the Mayor of Wolverhampton, Lord Lieutenant and local MPs also be in attendance.

HQ Coy has gone from strength to strength over this period, with the Recruiting Team taking part in several key events across the region which has seen us continue to grow our numbers. Some great work by the team headed up by our ReMSO, Sgt Mark Killeen. The everchanging working environment and challenges of recruiting remain within our three ARC locations and during the first quarter of the recruiting year the loss of the Defence Recruiting System for a 10 week period has been unhelpful. However, with the dedication and commitment of the Recruitment Team, attracting, nurturing and supporting candidates and recruits throughout the recruitment and training process, we have seen four new soldiers taken on strength and a further 20 recruits loaded to various phases of CMSR(21) and 10 recruits passing out from their MOD 3 course, a great achievement since the start of this recruiting year. We have had a further three soldiers successfully completed CIC and

with eight forecasted in the coming months, the growing numbers can only bolster the company's capability to continue supporting future operations.

During this period, we have said farewell to the OC, Maj Ian Nellins QGM BEM, who served with the Army Reserves for 5 years after completing 38 years of Regular Army service. During his exemplary career, Maj Nellins has served with distinction in the UK, Iraq, Afghanistan, Northern Ireland, mobilisation on Op RESCRIPT in 2020 and served on numerous overseas exercises around the world. His Post Nominals highlight what has been an incredible military career and we would like to wish Ian and his family all the very best for the future as he now concentrates on his work as a County Councillor in Shropshire and running his pub in Market Drayton.

We also bid farewell to our PASO, Capt Wayne Picken, who served with the company for over a year before moving to the Cadet Training Team. Capt Picken has seen the company through a very difficult time with COVID and helped to implement several changes designed to improve our efficiency in how we now conduct our administrative business. Our thanks and best wishes go to Wayne for his hard work and dedication. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Capt Paul Tyrer on being selected to take over the post of PSAO. Paul has served with the Battalion as RQMS and BCMO following a full Regular career and I wish him all the best in his new role.

Observer/Mentor on Ex IRON WOLF

CSgt Green

The OM team that deployed to Lithuania was made up of four SNCOs, CSgt Harris, CSgt Perryman, Sgt Lightfoot and me. Although I have been Directing Staff on many UK exercises, this was my first experience umpiring on a multi-national exercise.

On our arrival in Lithuania, we had a series of briefings from the Lithuanian Brigade HQ staff which explained how the OM role was expected to function. We were also introduced to our Lithuanian partners, who spoke good English and they remained with us throughout the exercise. Before Ex IW commenced, 4 MERCIAN had a two day shake out exercise which gave all of us the opportunity to become familiar with our role. We were not using the main training area for this exercise and much of it was conducted in a real village in which the residents were going about their normal lives as our 'battles' were being fought around them.

After some time back in our tented camp, Ex IW commenced. We were to be working with soldiers from several NATO countries, including Norway, The Netherlands, Germany, Lithuania and a small contingent of US troops. This gave us the chance to look at foreign Armoured Fighting Vehicles (AFVs) most notably the CV90 and Leopard, their different weapon systems, rations and load carrying

systems, most of which was quite impressive. During the exercise, each force had an attack and defend phase. The training area was flat with sandy soil and was heavily wooded. Some areas were boggy which proved to be ideal for mosquitoes, which caused a few problems. Not every section or platoon had an umpire with them which meant that during contacts we were required to cover a lot of ground at speed in order to be effective in our OM role. Naturally, there were some disagreements about the outcome of engagements, but this was to be expected, no-one likes to be defeated!

The main difference from a personal point of view in performing this role was being able to see the planning and command and control at Battlegroup and Brigade level as we had access to all briefings and Orders Groups. Additionally, because each section, platoon and vehicle had a GPS transponder, we were able to see the day's events being played back on a screen at the end of the day.

Following the exercise, we had a brief visit to the capital city of Vilnius where we were able to visit the KGB museum. It was interesting to learn about the war between the anti-communist Partisans and the KGB. This guerrilla war lasted from 1944 to 1953 and led to the deaths of approximately 20,000 people.

4 MERCIAN HQ (EAGLE) COMPANY UPDATE

Lt Boxall, OC Anti-Tank PI

The first quarter of the year saw HQ (Eagle) Coy focus on build-up training for Ex IRON WOLF, this year's Annual Training Exercise in Lithuania. All troops have been heavily involved in ensuring that their individual soldiering skills were up-to-date and equipment care has been a priority. This has allowed new and experienced soldiers to engage with equipment which we don't often use on a regular basis.

Since Apr, ITR (Individual Training Requirement) has replaced MATTs. ITR focuses more on training than testing, allowing soldiers to improve their skills by practice. This has meant that NCOs can be more flexible with training delivery, based on individual and unit roles. ITR has a specific set of goals each individual and specialist units must achieve which means that training for each of the Army Reserve Centres (ARCs) differs based on their role. In Kidderminster, in addition to our infantry fighting skills, our specialist role is Anti-Tanks and our support weapon system is Javelin.

Jun also saw a successful Bn weekend run by HQ Coy on the ranges, which involved all troops going through their ACMT as well as conducting a fire team level shooting competition.

Ex IRON WOLF from a Javelin Det Commander's Perspective

Cpl Jack Harley

We deployed out on the ground straight into a company defensive position in the village of Veprių. Once there, we were tasked with delaying the Lithuanian Iron Wolf Brigade for 8 hours. We achieved this by denying the Main Supply Route into the village with an Anti-Tank screen using our Javelin and destroying their reconnaissance vehicles as they attempted to gain entry into village. This slowed down their advance for hours, causing the Lithuanian 'enemy' huge issues as they tried to maintain their advance. The following day, we moved into a company attack posture. As a Javelin Detachment, we provided organic fire support for the lead platoon as they advanced through the dense wood block.

The next stage was a company 'advance to contact' where my Javelin Detachment provided flank protection along main roads to deny enemy armour freedom of movement along it. Once again, we achieved this by destroying a Norwegian Leopard 2 Tank Troop and causing them to fall back sooner than they had expected. Later that day, I was attached to a Lithuanian Company Group to assist them in their next objective, working closely with their Company Commander on siting the Javelin Post and assisting them with reconnaissance assets.

Throughout the exercise, I also took time to teach the rifle platoons about the capabilities of the enemy vehicles we faced so they were confident in identifying them and engaging them with NLAWs. Overall, the deployment was extremely worthwhile, showing the other deployed members of the Battalion how we operate as a Javelin Detachment and providing members of the Javelin Platoon with valuable real-life experience.

THE BAND OF THE MERCIAN REGIMENT

On 2 Apr, The Band of the Mercian Regiment, in conjunction with the Army Benevolent Fund, performed a charity concert to a packed Stoke Minister. With bunting flying from the balconies, cadets lining the aisles and an atmospheric setting, the evening was definitely one to remember. The music featured pieces from all eras with something for everyone to get their feet tapping along to.

Our saxophone group have once again been busy providing musical support to Regimental Dinners and events around the area. While duty bugler, Cpl Wendy Robert, has provided the pomp and ceremony for the Lord Lieutenant's Presentations and for Services of Remembrance.

Our congratulations go to the following Band members who have been awarded the Queen's Platinum Jubilee Medal:

- CSgt Lees and SSgt Evans
- Sgt Endean, Sgt Fears and Sgt Wood
- Cpl W Robert and Cpl B Robert.
- LCpls Bailey, Bannister, Hardgrave, Postans and Snood.
- Musicians Cripps, Green and Wykes.

These commemorative medals are awarded for five complete years of efficient service directly prior to 2022 and were presented by Lt Col Rob Spalton, Commanding Officer 4 MERCIAN. As he presented the first batch in Jun, the CO took the opportunity to recognise the commitment it takes to balance a full-time civilian job with the commitment to Reserve Service.

The Band has been training hard for their upcoming appearances at Sonderborg Ringriderfesten in Belgium and for The Shrewsbury Flower Show that together will form their annual training exercise (ATE) this year. After so much disruption caused by the pandemic, we look forward to a return to performing at large events and for some this, will be their first 'massed bands' experience.

MUSEUM OF THE MERCIAN REGIMENT (WFR COLLECTION)

Jennifer Brookman-Moore, Curator

For the past year, we have been working on a medals database of medals held in our museum collection. Previously we have only been able to display a small portion of the collection at any one time, and these are rotated every six months. A selection of the medals we have in store are now available in the gallery at Nottingham Castle, on a touchscreen. We include a photograph of the medals and the soldier if we have it. Coming soon to our website, will be the complete medal collection. It will be searchable online for the first time, making it more accessible than ever before. The project is such a big one and will be an ongoing one for the next year. Watch this space!

Also at the museum we have had two students on placement from the University of Nottingham. They have been scanning in documents held in the archive, ensuring a digital copy for preservation and to enable us to make our archive accessible online as well. This is a long term project that will be up and running as soon as we are able.

THE STAFFORDSHIRE REGIMENTAL ASSOCIATION - CYCLING CLUB

The SRACC travelled to the south of France in Early June to finally ride the iconic Mont Ventoux. At 1909m it is the highest mountain in the region and has the nickname the 'Giant of Provence'. Famous for the Tour De France and a bucket list climb for all cycling enthusiasts.

It is the 2nd Visit to Mont Ventoux for some of the Club which allowed some to attempt different routes from the 'Classic ascent' from Bedoin. The two other routes were from Malaucene & Sault. The Tour had been postponed twice due to Covid 19, so we were glad that finally we could make the trip. The journey was an event, with an average of 16-hour drive for some.

Day 1 was a 'leg loosener' ride of 30 miles with 3000 feet of climbing, taking in the Col De la Chaine and Col De Madeleine, the weather was warm, but it set us up the task ahead. Day 2, 'The Climb' Due to local weather reports of unsettled weather around Mid-Day it was an early start for the riders. Neil Wootton, was the first rider to set off as he, incredibly was attempting to climb all 3 ascents in a day. He completed the task in just over 8 hours, 93 miles and, 14,813ft of climbing. A great achievement.

The mere mortals amongst us set off in two groups, those who had previously climbed the 'Classic' route ascended the Malaucene route whilst the remainder went on to the Bedoin route. Whichever route you take up Ventoux, the climb can take on average 2-3 hours. Once everyone was on the mountain it was just a case of keep pedalling as the climb rarely dips below 8 % gradient and higher for longer periods.

Everyone achieved the goal to get to the top of the Iconic moonscape summit, however there was little time for most to enjoy as the weather had really closed in with rain and extremely high winds. A precarious short decent to the safety of Chalet Reynard & the shelter it gave was most welcome. This was the RV for all the groups so we could descend to Bedoin and back to the accommodation. A special mention to one of our civilian riders Linda Gatehouse, who faced all her worst fears to complete the mission. She showed all the good characteristics of a soldier, endurance, determination & courage.

Day 3, After all the hard work of the day before the entire group deserved a treat & that came in the form of a 48-mile ride of the beautiful Gorge De La Nesque. A steady climb to the top of the Gorge, a short decent into the village of Monieux, where we relaxed with coffee and cake. Then the icing on the top, the amazing sweeping decent of the Gorge stopping only to take in the breath-taking views. In all, the trip was a great success, plenty of laughs, a few tears, but more importantly an opportunity to come together in what has been a difficult, few years. Cogs are already turning for future excursions.

STOCKPORT BRANCH CRA & MVRA THE MERCIAN REGIMENTAL ASSOCIATION

Steven Gregory

April Meeting

The first meeting of Q2 was held on 1st April, the 55th anniversary of the formation of the Mercian Volunteers (initially one battalion, then became two in 1975). It was well attended, with some financial support approved for those attending the Droppin' Well Memorial this year. We celebrated Brian Hartigan's 80th birthday with a glass of port and Mike Walker reflected that it was 38 years to the day that he attended his recruit cadre with fellow Stopfordians Norton, Mather, Ormerod, Bond, Millward, Booth, Wright, Oldham, and Davies; many of whom are still in contact with the Branch to this day. For completeness, he recalled that the CO was Col Scrace and the RSM Paul Mulingani.

Shotgun Shoot

On Sunday, 24th April we held the first of this year's two shoots arranged by Mike Pilkington at Doveridge Shooting Ground (arguably the shotgun equivalent of Bisley). The glorious weather and facilities were enjoyed by seven shooters who tucked into a traditional breakfast followed by a 50-bird shoot under the tutelage of BSAC coach Paul. It was nice to see some new faces, Top Gun went to Adam.

Commanding Officer's Visit

On Tuesday, 3rd May, CO 4 Mercian, Lt. Col. Rob Spalding, visited his troops at The Armoury and very kindly took the time to meet some of the Committee Members and one of the Trustees of St. Julien Barracks (aka ARC / TAC / Drill Hall / Armoury depending on how old you are). We explained the history of the Branch and its evolution through the melding of the associations of the Mercian Volunteers, Cheshire Regiment and Mercian Regiment into today's organisation. This amalgamation was engineered in the hope of providing an established, secure Branch for today's soldiers to join either whilst serving with the Colours or later in their military journey, whenever they are ready.

The conversation was engaging and included 'Future Soldier' and current events in Ukraine, interspersed with the odd ditty from yesteryear. All-in-all a great opportunity to meet the serving soldiers and a thoroughly enjoyable chat with the CO, OC 'B' and

Adjutant. The mortar section drills in the yard brought back some memories for our support weapons vets!

All serving Officers and Soldiers of B Coy 4 Mercian based at Stockport, Widnes and Ellesmere Port are automatically enrolled as members of the Branch and pay no levy.

May Meeting

Another well attended meeting on 6th May; 26 round the table, a number of apologies and Zoom attendees from the local area, Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Auckland, New Zealand. Topics included for the more formal management of Branch property and assets, a proposed trip to the Normandy beaches in September 2023, the Queen's Platinum Jubilee Event, Crich Pilgrimage, visit to Armourgeddon and a rescheduling of 'Ken's Curry Night'.

Jubilee Event

Stockport Branch held an event to mark the Queen's Platinum Jubilee on 3rd June 2022. The event took the form of a parade of standards, followed by toasts and buffet. The standards were marched on to: 'Wha Wad'na Fecht for Charlie' (Cheshire); 'Under the Double Eagle' (Mercian Volunteers); and 'Stand Firm and Strike Hard' (Mercian). Many members and partners were in attendance, as were guests from 'B' Coy 4 Mercian, 'A' Det, 207 Field Hospital (resident unit at the ARC), adult instructors from Stockport ACF, representatives from Stockport Armed Forces Breakfast Club, and the Trustees of St. Julien Barracks.

Walking Group

The Branch has a core group of walkers who have met as often as possible through the pandemic, as far as the rules allowed. Now that spring has sprung there is a more accessible monthly walk organised for as wide participation as possible. The first one was mid-April around Lyme Park and it was great to see a couple of new faces enjoying the scenery. You have to be careful out there though!

Calling Cards

As part of the continued drive to strengthen the Branch, we now have distributed a number of calling cards that can be further dispersed as the opportunity arises. It is bordered by the three colours of the Mercian TRF, which incorporates the cerise and buff of the Cheshire Regiment and also the 'Mercian Blue' of the Mercian Volunteers.

And finally...

Congratulations to the Wolverhampton Branch of the Staffordshire Regimental Association on being awarded the prestigious Queen's Award for Voluntary Service (the MBE for volunteer groups). Well and truly deserved!

WORCESTERSHIRE AND SHERWOOD FORESTERS ASSOCIATION

Worcester Branch

Worcester Branch got their year off to a good start after the two years of restricted duties due to the pandemic. In March, the Branch held their annual dinner at the Berkeley at Spetchley with the principal guest, the Deputy Mayor of Worcester, Cllr Dr Adrian Gregson. The Deputy Mayor, as director of the Worcester City Council WW100 department, worked closely with Worcester Branch during the 2014 and 2018 WWI commemorations. Our other guest was Matt Adams and his wife. Matt has been a fundraiser for Worcester Branch with such projects as the WFR Memorial Bench in Gheluvelt Park Worcester. Matt's latest exploit was a sponsored walk up the Worcestershire Beacon in a suit of armour!

The members of Worcester Branch were glad to be at the Association Reunion on the 28th May 2022 at the new venue of WRFC. The numbers were slightly down from previous years but all members who attended, thoroughly enjoyed themselves. The members commented on the new venue being better, more welcoming and even the prices of the beer and food were cheaper! Topped off with good weather, made for a perfect day. Next year's Reunion will be back to the first Saturday in June as we will not have a Jubilee to compete with!

On the 1st of June the branch were at the Worcestershire Regimental Stone in Gheluvelt Park, Worcester, to mark the 1794 action at sea where the 29th Foot fought as Marines on Lord Howe's Channel Fleet. The branch were joined for the photos at the end of the ceremony by a lady resident of the Haig Homes in the park who served in the Army Bomb Disposal Unit.

On the 4th of June branch members were on Worcester High Street outside the Guildhall on recruiting duties. They were also handing out leaflets to advertise the anniversary of the opening of Gheluvelt Park. They met some interesting people, especially some thespians that were advertising a show called Frozen which was quite apt as it was quite chilly on the High Street.

On Saturday 18th June Worcester City Council and WFRA saw the culmination in a lot of planning in a relatively short space of time, for the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the opening of Gheluvelt Park on 17 June 1922 by the 1st Earl of Ypres, Lord Sir John French, Field Marshal French in WWI. Lt Col Mark Jackson OBE and Chair of Trustees of the Mercian Regiment Worcester and President of Worcester Branch, gave a warm welcome to the Lord Lieutenant Lt Col Patrick

Holcroft LVO OBE and the Great Granddaughter of Lord French, Lady Lucy French OBE, Civic Dignitaries, honoured guests, veterans and quite a few members of the public who braved the rain. After the Service, the Lord Lieutenant and Lady French planted a cherry tree to mark the occasion. Sadly, some of the day had to be cancelled and was cut short by poor weather, although it was commented on that the ceremony marking the occasion was a good success.

MERCIAN VOLUNTEERS REGIMENTAL ASSOCIATION

Branches are beginning to meet once again and take part in outside activities.

The lighting of the Jubilee Beacon on Barr Beacon by the Mayor & Mayoress of Walsall supported by a soldier from The Mercian Regiment. Mrs & Mrs Philip Fairbrace represented the Walsall Branch at the lighting of the Jubilee Beacon on Barr Beacon, Walsall.

Gordon Maycroft planted our Oak Tree at 'The Shrubbery' to celebrate the Queen's Jubilee. A second tree has been given to the Association by the Lord Lieutenant to be planted in the Army Reserve Centre grounds

Members of The Cheshire Regiment Assc, MVRA and the Mercian Regiment Assc celebrated the Jubilee at the Armoury, Stockport.

Mr Peter Hall [Walsall Branch] received his Merit Award from the Chairman, Capt. Mike Pilkington at the AGM on 13th March 2022.

THE SAMARITANS LAUNCHES APP TO SUPPORT UK MILITARY VETERANS' MENTAL HEALTH

Military veterans are set to benefit from a dedicated new mental health app, launched today by Samaritans, to help them deal with the long-term emotional challenges of adjusting to life after the Forces.

The free Samaritans Veterans app comes on the back of joint research the leading suicide prevention charity carried out with the Royal British Legion, which found that veterans wanted to understand more about their emotional wellbeing and to hear from people with similar experiences. Those leaving the military and former Armed Forces personnel can access emotional health and wellbeing information, videos, exercises, podcasts, and create wellbeing to-do-lists in the app to help look after themselves and connect with the veteran community.

The new app is part of a programme at the charity that works with the Ministry of Defence and military charities to support serving personnel in the Armed Forces, veterans and their families, and is funded by a £3.5m LIBOR grant.

Samaritans volunteers provide emotional support to the military community with concerns including mental health, isolation and loneliness, family and relationship problems, and most contacts are from veterans. In April 2020, the first full month of the pandemic lockdown, the charity saw the largest volume of military contacts since Samaritans began to record contacts from the military community in 2018 and 79% were veterans.

Samaritans Veterans App will support veterans to learn ways to manage their emotional responses to situations, deal with the new day-to-day reality and help to identify challenges and develop ways to overcome them. The app also has access to volunteering and peer support by connecting people to the wider veteran community.

The Samaritans Veterans App is available to download (Samaritans Veterans) on your phone from the App Store (iOS) or Google Play (Android) or use the desktop version: <https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/military/samaritans-veterans-app/>