

THE MERCIAN REGIMENT

Quarterly Newsletter - Q2 2023

CRICH CENTENARY

This year marks 100 years since the very first Pilgrimage to the Crich Memorial Tower in 1923. The annual Pilgrimage to the Crich Memorial Tower is a cherished tradition for The Mercian Regiment that brings together all members of The Regimental Family to pay their respects to the fallen and to honour their memory.

CRICH CENTENARY - MEMORIAL GARDEN OPENING

Monday 19 June 2023 saw the official opening of the Memorial Garden at Crich. An idea that came about many years ago began to take fruition in 2018 with the Freemasons Derbyshire funding and landscaping an area of unused garden.

The Provincial Grandmaster spoke on behalf of the Freemasons, followed by Lt Col David Dawber DL, representing the Colonel of the Regiment. The Lord Lieutenant of Derbyshire, accompanied by the High Sheriff of Derbyshire, officially opened the garden.

In attendance were members of the Freemasons, LCpl Derby XXXII, Crich Trustees and members of RHQ. Crich means so much to so many and this includes many who did not serve in The Mercian Regiment or its antecedents. Some served in other arms and some, not at all. The Memorial Garden offers a place of quiet contemplation, for all, to remember loved ones.

The Mercian Regiment gives its sincere thanks to the Freemasons of Derbyshire for making the garden possible.

Blessing for the Crich Memorial Garden

Great Architect of the Universe, Creator of the eternal round. We call down your blessing on this garden; dedicated to the memory of the members of the Sherwood Foresters Regiment, The Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters Regiment, The Mercian Regiment and its founder Regiments of Cheshire and Staffordshire.

Let this garden be a place of comfort to the bereaved, a place of quiet to those who remember, a place of meeting to friends, and an inspiration for the future.

Bless us all as we gather here, and give us your strength to Stand Firm in the face of adversity and to Strike Hard against the forces of evil.

And may the Lord bless us and keep us, May the Lord make his face to shine upon us and be gracious unto us. May the Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon us, and give us peace, now and forever more. Amen

CRICH CENTENARY - Ex EAGLES PILGRIMAGE - RUNNING FROM BULFORD TO CRICH FOR THE 100TH ANNUAL PILGRIMAGE

Over a 3-day period prior to the Crich Pilgrimage, a team of runners from 1st Battalion collectively ran the 150-mile journey from their current base in Bulford to the Crich Memorial.

The team arrived just in time at Crich for the 100th annual Pilgrimage, in memory of those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice for The Mercian Regiment and its' antecedents.

Those who took part ran half-marathons, full marathons, and even ultra-marathons; with some opting to run the entire 150-mile distance!

All monies raised went to The Mercian Regiment Benevolent Charity. You can show your support to their initiative by visiting their fundraising page.

<https://www.justgiving.com/team/eagles-pilgrimage>

CRICH CENTENARY - FUNDRAISING

Two new initiatives have been launched to raise much needed funds for the Crich Memorial site. All profits will go directly to the site to help preserve its heritage and ensure its longevity.

Friends of Crich Memorial

We are asking for a minimum, yearly donation of £10 to help maintain the site. For a limited time only, those that donate will receive a complimentary Centenary Tea-Towel.

Memorial Plaques

Crematorium grade, memorial plaques are available for purchase, to be placed in the Memorial Garden on site. These plaques can be in memory of anyone that served in The Mercian Regiment and all of its antecedents or for anyone that had a connection or affinity to the site.

Further details on both can be obtained from the Assistant Regimental Secretary (Nottingham). cindy.clark247@mod.gov.uk

1 MERCIAN COMMANDING OFFICER'S FOREWORD

Lt Col G Brown

Time has flown since I wrote my previous foreword for this newsletter. The 1st Battalion certainly hasn't stood still. In the intervening months, elements of the battalion have been deployed to Texas on a Corps-level simulation exercise called Ex WARFIGHTER, have deployed to Germany on various exercises and support tasks, have conducted live firing in Pembrokeshire to maintain our core skills and competencies, have marched as part of the coronation procession of H.R.H. King Charles III (along with our kin in the 4th Battalion), have deployed to Sweden on a large-scale multinational training event, and have supported Armed Forces Day events around the country. Aspiring JNCOs have been attending a cadre in Otterburn and individuals continue to train to make our battalion as lethal as possible.

It's not just pure military activity that we have been up to. Our boxers have fought in the 12 Armoured Brigade Combat Team finals, our footballers have competed in the Infantry competition and have qualified for the final in July. Our rugby players have played in the annual Sephton Trophy match against the Duke of Lancaster's Regiment. Our AGC(SPS) Det have hosted the Festival of Sports. The battalion hosted the British Army Warrior Fitness festival – the list goes on.

It remains true that we are busy. The whole army is busy and we are playing our part. But that comes at a cost – on our time, our relationships and our life outside of the army. I remain supremely grateful to all of our soldiers and our families for your hard work, your support and your dedication.

Stand Firm, Strike Hard!

1 MERCIAN Ex AURORA 23 – B (MALTA) COMPANY

Maj T Onion

After spending a cold January in Lulworth, Snowdonia and Leek, and a freezing February to March in Germany, B (Malta) Company, at this point practically conditioned to cold weather operations, were sent north to Sweden. This deployment would see the company deploy WARRIOR via sea to participate in Exercise AURORA 23. This exercise, run by the Swedish Armed Forces saw over 26,000 military personnel from 14 nations work together across air, land, sea, space and cyber domains. Whilst some RAF punters were flying Typhoons, and HMS Albion with a bunch of boot necks aboard were bobbing around in the Baltic Sea, soldiers from 1 MERCIAN were at the tip of the spear as the UK's land component contribution.

On arrival in Sweden, we were met by our Swedish Liaison Officer Fredrik, who had looked after us throughout the planning process. By the time of our arrival he was already proudly sporting a Mercian flag in his office. We were then whisked off to EKSJO, where we were able to consolidate, receive our vehicles (which had been shipped by sea) and do some low-level training in the woods and forests.

Several days later, the Finnish JAEGER Battalion we would be working with arrived. The Fins were equipped with PATRIA 360 vehicles (not unlike the BOXER we expect in the future), a no-nonsense professional attitude and a great sense of humour. As part of this Battalion, we would operate within a Swedish Brigade – a great and potent mix of our Scandinavian allies/partners.

The exercise itself was varied – from working with various forms of Swedish bridging, to slugging our way through the thick forests of KOSTA (where apparently there are almost as many hastily laid minefields as there are trees) and working with both Swedish and Danish Heavy Equipment Transporters (HETs) to conduct operational level moves of armour.

B (Malta) Company adapted quickly to the various scenarios and environments we were thrown into. And we all certainly gained the most from the final day of the exercise. 6 Platoon's screen was effective (even if that was in part because their destruction alerted us to the Danish company's approach). Cpl Stead stood FIRM and killed multiple CV90s and LEOPARD 2s with NLAW. 5 Platoon's delaying positions were outstanding in terms of camouflage and concealment – LCpl Followell's vehicle was so hidden that the Danish simply bypassed him, and he then hit them in the rear. And 4 Platoon did an excellent job when, as the Reserve, they were committed to the left-hand flank of the company and

LCpl Morris and Pte Adams destroyed the remaining CV90 which LCpl Followell hadn't quite managed to hit.

The sum of this was that B (Malta) Company, with the venerable WARRIOR and NLAW, killed 14 Danish CV90 Infantry Fighting Vehicles and 4 Danish LEOPARD 2 Main Battle Tanks. This was for the loss of 5 WARRIORS.

Just imagine what we could achieve if let loose against Russian BMPs and T80s....

In all seriousness, the timelines that B (Malta) Company and 1 MERCIAN enablers met in terms of return from Germany and deployment to Sweden, with all the preparation required, was impressive. They demonstrated the 1st Battalion's readiness and our ability to go and fight wherever and whenever the King requires.

1 MERCIAN Op GOLDEN ORB – THE CORONATION OF KING CHARLES III

Maj S Broadhurst

A marching detachment of three officers and 24 other ranks, from across both the 1st Battalion and the 4th Battalion, had the honour of taking part in the coronation procession of HRH King Charles III on 6 May 23. The prestige and significance of this occasion for us regimentally was heightened by our close ties to the former Prince of Wales as our Colonel in Chief. The thoroughness of preparation for the parade itself cannot be overstated. A gruelling ten-day build-up of bespoke rehearsals, including learning a newly invented drill movement, and an overnight dress rehearsal in the eerily silent capital, prepared us for the day itself.

The troops clocked up over 20km on some days, in unseasonably hot conditions, whilst staving off blisters from breaking in their new drill boots. The hard work was more than worth it. The contingent travelled to London via coach and train and marched with heads held high in the refreshingly damp conditions. High praise is due to the entire marching contingent, some of whom have been in the Army less than 3 years and will now qualify for the coronation medal via their hard work and dedication to this event.

1 MERCIAN Ex WARFIGHTER 23-4

Maj J Coutts

1 MERCIAN deployed 33 personnel on Ex WARFIGHTER 23-4 to Fort Hood, Texas, USA in March 2023. The purpose of this exercise was to train 3rd (UK) Division HQ alongside two US Divisional HQ's under a US Corps command. In all, over 1000 British troops deployed on the exercise with many more supporting from the UK. The bulk of the 1 MERCIAN personnel, including the core of Battalion HQ were playing the role of 12 Armoured Brigade Combat Team (ABCT) in a computer simulated environment, aiming to provide a live battle picture to the Divisional HQ as the scenario unfolded. This meant that the two 12 person teams (Day and Night shifts) were representing a combined arms fighting force of over 5000 personnel and close to 1000 vehicles (tanks, infantry fighting vehicles, engineering, artillery, airborne drones and wheeled trucks). Due to the complexity of this task, over half of the month and a half deployment was spent preparing and training on the systems being used to simulate the tactical activity.

A few individuals from the Battalion were also drafted in to fill roles in the Divisional HQ itself, acting as watchkeepers, liaison officers, planners and battle staff. This brought with it the delights of CBRN suits, air raid warnings, and living in an austere field HQ spread amongst tents and a concrete urban operations training village on the Fort Hood range area.

As is often the way, the most memorable aspect of an overseas deployed exercise such as this was the altered way of life. Troops were accommodated in a repurposed US battalion 'Motor Pool' compound, split between vehicle hangars festooned with oil and lube hoses and bins of spare parts, and huge 100-person circus tents. Ablutions were festival style, mobile portacabin affairs complete with piped 24/7 country music radio and food was provided in another hangar cooked by military chefs in a field kitchen tent. The troops quickly adapted to their unfamiliar surroundings and, once it was established that Uber drivers could pick people up from anywhere on camp, were able to get out and explore Texas a little.

Team "ACES" in 12 ABCT delivered well on the final exercise phase with some members seemingly undaunted by making the jump from section and platoon level operations to corps level in a matter of weeks. While declarations of transient battlefield 'victory' are no longer in vogue in such exercises, the aim of thoroughly testing and stretching HQ 3rd (UK) Division and operating hand in hand at every level with our US partners was thoroughly achieved.

4 MERCIAN - CO FOREWORD

Lt Col C Whitting

Through our daily smartphone newsfeeds, which are often interrupted by Time Hops of previously captured events, to the more traditional act of reading the Regimental Journal, we are all constantly presented with evidence that the ancient Greek philosopher, Heraclitus really was on to something when he theorised that “There is nothing permanent except change.” It is the same man who has also been attributed with the saying that “no man ever steps in the same river twice” and as Infanteers, who have all I am sure stepped in the same rivers many times (X-Range, Brecon still sends shivers down my spine), one must look for the true meaning of his thinking – that the world is constantly in flux, always ‘becoming’, never ‘being.’ This is true for us all, and it is true for the 4th Battalion, who after the last round of Journal entries have been both party and witness to a huge amount of change, from which we all continue to grow and evolve.

This foreword to the 4th Battalion’s activity over the past twelve months is my first, having taken over from Lt Col Rob Spalton at the end of April this year. It is therefore of the utmost importance to start by thanking Lt Col Rob for his hard work, his leadership, and personally, for his friendship and support, which has steered the 4th Battalion on a course for success and has allowed me to step into the role of Commanding Officer with ease.

Casting an eye over the last year, it is clear that the soldiers and officers of the battalion have grasped many of the opportunities that a career in the Army Reserve has to offer. In the pages that follow, you will read a small selection of articles covering several topics including unit training, Op INTERFLEX, Op GOLDEN ORB, and sporting activity. I do not wish to provide a precis to these, instead I commend you to read and enjoy this small, but colourful snapshot of battalion life. By placing the responsibility for writing the battalion’s recent history with the soldiers and officers who physically took part in the activities they have written on, I am presented with the freedom to look to the future, to people and events.

Firstly, to people. By the time the next journal is published 4 MERCIAN will have said goodbye to our current RSM, WO1 Lee Shields MBE, who retires this summer after 24 years of loyal service to both the Yorkshire Regiment and most recently the Mercian Regiment. Mr Shields will be handing over to WO1 Lee Fowles who will be coming across from the 1st Battalion, where he has been serving as RQMS (Tech). Maj Max Sones has been with the Battalion since March 2020, first as Adjutant and currently as XO. Maj Sones will be leaving in early autumn en-route to ICSC(L) and a period of well-deserved respite from the unrelenting pace of regimental duty. Maj Martyn Chatterley will be taking over the role of XO having come from an overseas posting with

far more days of sunshine than that of Wolverhampton. The unit owes both Maj Sones and RSM Shields a true debt of gratitude for their tireless work and dedication. I wish them every success for the future as they take on new challenges and I look forward to working alongside RSM Fowles and Major Chatterley over the coming months. The Battalion has recently welcomed some new additions to the team. Firstly, our Adjutant, Capt Dave Sidwell has moved across from the Infantry Training Battalion, Catterick. He stepped into a post that had been gapped for some months following Capt Niall Donnan's early departure for a posting at Brecon. Also, 4th Battalion has a new BCMO, WO1 Mark Eldred and a new Training Officer Capt Nick Olive who are making great progress in their respective areas. The churn of appointments across the battalion continues apace such that they cannot all be captured here. Rather, it is fitting to say that the new battalion headquarters team reflects the permanent nature of change that brings with it myriad opportunities for new and different activity, which is part of the adventure that the Army offers.

Predicting the future is always dangerous, but without looking ahead, you will certainly end up getting lost. Life for 4 MERCIAN as part of 12 Armoured Brigade Combat Team is always going to be busy and the next twelve months for 4 MERCIAN look like they will as busy as ever. The battalion expects to see a continued drive to generate personnel for operational commitments and training events. Internal activities include the Bn's Annual Training Event, which is due to take place in Oct in preparation for the battalion's overseas training exercise as part of Op LINOTYPER in summer 2024. Ops and training will continue to be interspersed with sport, adventurous training, and some more unique undertakings; I am particularly looking forward to reading about Maj Sone's forthcoming weekend visit on board and at sea with HMS Albion as part of the Regiment's continuing affiliation with the ship and her crew. All of this will take place whilst preparing to reorganise the Bn into a Future Soldier 3 Company Light Role Bn, which will provide great opportunities for greater partnership with the 1st Battalion.

I look forward to all that awaits the 4th Battalion and the challenges that will unfold over the coming year. No matter where the unit is, or which river it is stepping in, the inevitability of change will be ever present and the unit will seize the opportunities that such change offers.

4 MERCIAN B (MALTA) COMPANY - GOLDEN ORB - THE KING'S CORONATION

Pte Rynhart

When I was originally told I had been selected to represent 4 Mercian as part of the Mercian contingent, I was both excited and apprehensive at the thought of the event's size, scale, and importance. Not only was I one of the 5 people chosen from my battalion to be a part of the marching contingent, but we were taking part in an event which hadn't been seen in 70 years.

When we first arrived in Bulford, we were quickly integrated with members of 1 and 2 Mercian and told we were no longer representing individual Battalions as Regulars or Reservists, but instead, we would unite under one name: The Mercian Regiment. Once integrated we went straight into rehearsals for an inspection by the Colonel commanding the infantry contingents of the parade. This was difficult as the timings and the movements were new to me, for example, changing arms on the move as this was something I have never done before, but would be vital for the coronation. With the help and encouragement of the drill instructors, myself and the other members of the contingent improved quickly.

The next step was an overnight rehearsal in London, which was when the pressure of having an audience first hit as, no matter what time it was in London there were eyes on us and as we marched it gave us a hint of the pride, and excitement that we would feel on the day.

The morning of the coronation I remember walking off the platforms and into the train station, and being overwhelmed by the crowd of people waiting to support us. As we began marching the size of the crowds was incredible; getting bigger and bigger as we moved through the city. Once we reached The Mall the hardest part of the parade was just to stay focused and not be distracted by the cheering crowds or television cameras. I specifically remember hearing "GO Mercians!" and not being able to hold back a smile from the pride I was feeling. For me, the best part of the day was the royal salute in the palace gardens. Knowing I was almost through the parade, with no mistakes, and being the first member of my family to ever step foot inside the gates of Buckingham Palace, gave me an amazing sense of achievement and pride. Standing with representatives from every section of the British Armed Forces and the Commonwealth, united in our duty and support of the Crown was an incredibly exhilarating moment and experience which we will undoubtedly never forget.

4 MERCIAN C (KOHIMA) COMPANY - URBAN TRAINING WITH EAST MIDLANDS UOTC

Capt J Longmate, PSAO C Company

The links between 4 MERCIAN and East Midlands University Officer Training Corp (EMUOTC) were strengthened this week 29th March 2023.

Major Lloyd Watts MERCIAN Officer Commanding Alma Company EMUOTC), and formerly of C Company 4 MERCIAN brought his Officer Cadets to use the Urban Training Facility located at Bulwell ARC. This was a great opportunity for those cadets to practise their Urban Techniques before deploying in July to Gibraltar on their annual exercise.

C Company was led up by CSgt Lloyd who assisted in the delivery of the training by facilitating the use of our indoor weaponry. The weaponry allowed the Officer Cadets to fully experience an urban environment. This provided a vital insight to the complexities they will face when they deploy to Gibraltar and exercise in the tunnels and caves of Gibraltar Rock.

The evening was completed with presentations to the Officer Cadets and social gathering in the newly refurbished C Company Bar.

4 MERCIAN C (KOHIMA) COMPANY - Ex WELSH EPIC MOUNTAIN BIKING 2023

2Lt Payne

Exercise Welsh EPIC is the annual training camp run by the Army Cycling Union (ACU) that aims to develop the skills and fitness of attendees prior to the start of the race season. The camp (Based out of Capel Curig) focusses on either Mountain Bike or Road Cycling and is taken by the Army Team Riders and other highly qualified and experienced instructors within the service. It is a fantastic opportunity to develop skills in preparation for the years racing. For the duration of the 10 days, I was riding with the Enduro team riders at some of the best locations in mid-Wales for riding.

The first day was a ride straight out of the camp onto the Glydr Mawr trail to warm up before hitting some more challenging 'off piste' trails that surrounded the forest in the afternoon. The Instruction provided to us was top-notch with noticeable improvement across all members of the group. The following day was spent at Antur Stiniog Bike Park where we were treated to an uplift day. This enabled us to focus more on our descending skills and less on the burning of sore legs! Across the next few days, we returned back to some of the harder trails around the local area, hitting steep chutes in Betws-y-Coed, endless mud, and slippery roots at Machynlleth, and made a return to Glydr Mawr's rocky trails.

Our Highlight was a day at the Atherton's Dyfi Bike Park – riding some of the best trails in the UK including the fast flow of the new 'Lovely Dyfi' and the rough unrelenting rocks of 'Racetrack'. All in all I managed to ride nearly every trail there twice. I benefited from the week's coaching as I got clean runs down tracks I had walked on previous visits to the park. The final day was an early rise as we climbed mount Snowdon with our bikes to snap a quick photograph at the top before plummeting back down a fantastic descent to Llanberis for a well earned coffee and cake. It was great to see such a wide representation from the Army attending – every regiment and corps was represented, and it was a great networking and social opportunity, especially when meeting fellow members of the Infantry enduro Team before our participation in the British National Enduro Series (BNES) later this year.

Overall, the Exercise was a resounding success for everyone attending and especially myself. I was awarded an ACU coin and 'Most improved' over the week. It provided a springboard for the start of the season and hopefully will contribute to successes on behalf of the Battalion in the coming months.

4 MERCIAN C (KOHIMA) COMPANY - BRITISH NATIONAL XC SERIES - ROUND 2 - MARGAM PARK (WALES)

2Lt James Payne

I was selected for the Army Cross Country (XC) Mountain Bike team. I was to represent them in round 2 of the National Cross Country Race series in Wales.

This event marked my first race at a National Level, racing for the Army XC Mountain Bike Team (MTB) at Margam Park in South Wales. Wearing new kit from Endura and Smith Optics (team sponsors), the team were greeted by glorious sunshine, and smooth flowing trails.

The course was certainly vertical – with a huge climb to the start that served to separate the pack in the race, and was certainly a burner by lap 4! The descents were fast and flowing with a noticeable lack of technical features which came as a surprise. The highlight being a refreshing run through a stream to cool off mid-lap. The speed of the race came as a surprise, and physical effort was needed to stick with the main pack. I finished a respectable 24th in my Category.

I was very happy with my position for my first race at this level but it's clear to me now; I need to improve on some aspects of racing. It is the marginal gains in the physical or technical details that will be my focus to compete at the highest level of the sport. My aim for this year is to improve in each race hopefully beating my last position by at least one place per race.

4 MERCIAN - OPERATIONS AND TRAINING FROM D (DRAGON) COMPANY

Operations and training has been the theme for the last 3 months at D (Dragon) Company. There are now five mobilised on Op INTERFLEX training Ukrainian Armed Forces and WO2 Paul Spilsbury from Stoke on Trent remains on Op ILKANE covering the Border Force Industrial Action.

D Company sponsored the Bn field training weekend at Catterick and the Company refamiliarized themselves with Section Attacks, occupying a harbour and infilling/ exfilling carrying Bergans.

This was a good shakeout after the previous "in camp" weekend at Nesscliffe conducting a round robin of Navigation, C-IED, BLS, and CBRN stands. June will see D Company off to Beckingham to conduct Urban trg.

Congratulations to Pte Iaon Nullis from Crewe who achieved Top Student on CIC. This period also saw CSgt Mark Harris extend as the PSI at Burton and Maj Will Rose from Newcastle Under Lyme handover command of D Company to Maj Rich Peacock from Stoke on Trent.

4 MERCIAN HQ (EAGLE) COMPANY FAMILIES DAY

CSgt Green, AT PL Sgt

On Saturday 3rd June, HQ Coy held an open day for soldier's families to give them an insight on what we do during training events and to show some of the equipment we use. The OC, Maj Johnston, opened the event by thanking the families for their continued support for the soldiers. C/Sgt Green then gave a brief history of the Glorious 1st June and its relevance to the Mercian Regiment of Today.

The soldiers' families were then invited to enjoy the stands that had been set up for them. At the front of the building there was a vehicle display with an SV and a Land Rover as well as an inflatable assault course. Both of which were popular with younger children. Inside the main building we had a weapons display which included a Javelin and a set of Virtus. The indoor range was in use as a BB experience which proved to be very popular. Food and refreshments were provided and the weather was on our side throughout the day.

4 MERCIAN HQ (EAGLE) COMPANY TRAINING DAY - Ex DISMOUNTED EAGLE

Lt Boxall

HQ (EAGLE) Coy has been running Company level Saturday training days ever two months to increase cohesion, provide unusual training and enable learning for all Coy members. On Saturday 29th April 2023, 2Lt Charlie Hubbard organised a training day which included, DCCT (Dismounted Close Combat Trainer), Audio tests and a visit to Cosford RAF museum.

DCCT gave us all an opportunity to improve our marksmanship skills as well as put all soldiers in pressure situations, where they had to use their judgement to correctly react in each given scenario. This is a great exercise, one that all soldiers learn from and that later will be applied in a field environment.

Whilst one group was on the DCCT range, the other group was conducting their two-year audio test, a must to ensure the health of each soldier, as well as visiting Cosford RAF museum. This gave the troops an opportunity to understand the last 100 years the evolution of aircraft, other fighting vehicles and how history has driven the innovation of our all our forces.

The training day was a great success and achieved the training objectives as well as gave us an opportunity to spend more time as a Coy.

4 MERCIAN HQ (EAGLE) COMPANY - REFLECTIONS ON MY TIME IN TRAINING

Pte Cook

I have thoroughly enjoyed my time with 4 Mercian and the Reserve Army training program. During my Phase One training (Mod 1, 2, and 3), I had the opportunity to travel to Exeter, Donnington, and Grantham. The progressive nature of the Phase One training equipped me with the necessary skills for the Combat Infantry Course (CIC). From learning the basics of drill and weapon handling to live firing and living in the field, the training was both interesting and fun. The knowledgeable training teams and diverse group of people from different cap badges made for a memorable experience, and I formed lasting friendships while preparing for Phase Two training.

The Phase Two training for infantry, the Combat Infantry Course (CIC), was an incredibly rewarding experience. It was an honour to be at Catterick, where the best infanteer's in the world are trained and steeped in history. From Section and Platoon Attacks to Urban Combat and Bayonet lanes, the course was comprehensive and enjoyable. I highly recommend joining the Reserve Infantry to anyone looking for a thrilling and fulfilling opportunity.

I made the most of my time with 4 Mercian between Phase One and Phase Two training, and the Battalion's ethos and support were excellent. They supported me in my civilian life while providing me with the opportunities to pursue soldiering, as well as other social aspects and adventure training. If you are considering joining the Army, I urge you to do it. The Reserves offer a brilliant and enjoyable opportunity.

4 MERCIAN HQ (EAGLE) COMPANY - LEARNING FROM THE ARMY OPEN SQUASH TOURNAMENT

After I was given a leaflet for the Army open squash tournament, I impulsively decided to enter. I had not played squash in 5 years, but I nonetheless brushed the cobwebs off my squash rackets and headed to Aldershot. The night before the tournament was to start I headed to the gym to try and remember how to actually play. I approached the gym receptionist and asked her if I could use a squash court. 'What right now, seriously?' was her response, clearly just walking up and asking to use a court was not standard practice. After this interaction I was directed to the courts and told court 4 was free. I nervously served the ball against the wall, only for it to bounce back pathetically and roll away from me. It was at this moment I realised I was going to have to work hard to win any games over the next 3 days.

The following morning was my first game. Each match is played best of 5 games, with each game being first to 11 points. My first opponent was from the RTR and seemed delighted when I told him I hadn't played in a while. He told me he had come second last month in the beginner's tournament. After beating me 3-0 he gave me some advice on how to improve my shots, ensuring to send them straight down the side as fast as possible. My next two games went the same way. After each loss I was given some advice and spent as much time as I could on empty courts practising my serves, long shots and short shots. I finally managed a win on the last day against a QDG Officer who I managed to beat 3-0.

Overall I enjoyed the tournament, it was exciting to watch high level squash players playing ridiculously close matches. My main takeaway was that the only way to improve is to play more games against higher level players and learn from them. My advice to anyone that is interested in playing squash for the Army is to follow Army Squash on their social media and enter any tournaments that spring up. All levels are welcome, and the only way to improve is to play.

4 MERCIAN HQ (EAGLE) COMPANY - CHAPLAIN

Gregory Platten

In January 2022 I joined the Royal Army Chaplains' Department, having past their initial selection and training, and posted to the 4th Battalion, the Mercian Regiment. Other than experience with OTC at University, this has been my first experience of serving with the army, and with the reserves. The experience so far has been very positive. The year has been a learning curve for sure, but made really pleasant and enjoyable thanks to the positivity, and sheer dedication of those among whom I have come to serve. The welcome has been warm, and I've been particularly grateful to those who have helped me to work out the best way to offer ministry within the unique context of reserved service.

It's good to serve with the Mercian Regiment, as my civilian occupation is as a Canon (cathedral priest) at Lichfield Cathedral. The Regimental Chapel to the Stafford's is now regarded as one of the spiritual homes of the regiment, and many of the colours of the Mercian Regiment and its antecedents hang there.

Basing myself with Eagle (HQ) Company at Wolverhampton, I try and make most Tuesdays and, gradually, I am touring around the other ARCs. I've been on most the training weekends in the past year, and have met many of our number from across our wide geographical spread. Alongside bedding into the unit, I am required to undertake Commissioning Course Short at Sandhurst within my first two years of service. As I write this, I am about to head off for the final module.

Like every part of the army, the Chaplains' Department must innovate, and adapt in order to serve the modern army. With this in mind, and with the leadership of the Chaplain General, the Chaplains' role remains to 'care for the army's people.' That care is offered though delivering pastoral care, providing spiritual support, and offering moral guidance to all within the chain of command. Operating outside that chain of command, I have found myself offering traditional pastoral care, but also teaching values and standards, as well, of course, as the more traditional, ceremonial work, for example at Crich.

It is a great privilege to work with such a group of talented, motivated, and committed people, with such a wide variety of backgrounds, occupations and trades. My goal in the coming year is to visit all the sub units as often as is possible, continue to get to know the people for whom I have been called to care.

THE BAND OF THE MERCIAN REGIMENT

The months are becoming busier for the Band of the Mercian Regiment as the build-up to the Summer Season begins. With concerts, trips abroad and preparations for their up-coming ATX, it's been action-packed with plenty to get involved in.

The King's Coronation celebrations encompassed locations around the Commonwealth and the world. The saxophone quartet were in Tunis, Tunisia, to take part in events there. Their first engagement was at the UK Ambassador's residence for the official celebrations for the Coronation where they provided musical entertainment for his Cocktail party. They also visited the American Cooperative School of Tunis where they worked with the school band, and also played at the rededication of the memorial of the Fourth Indian Troop in St George's Church, which was attended by the Ambassadors of India, Britain and Pakistan.

The final engagement was at the US Ambassador's residence. This was part of the 80th anniversary commemoration events and was to remember the American soldiers who formed part of the Allied Forces within the North African Campaign. The group were involved in some spectacular, poignant and inspiring events during their time in Tunis and returned home having worked hard and been proud of their contribution to making these events memorable and special for all involved.

In May, music spilled out from the Festival Drayton Centre as the Band delighted locals from Market Drayton with an evening of entertainment – a delightful alternative to the Eurovision finals! With traditional pieces such as Rossini's 'The Thievish Magpie' to the more modern 'Broadway Showstoppers Overture', there was something to delight all members of the audience.

The evening was a spectacular success, and with the typical banter between the Director of Music, Captain Ian Johnson, and the audience, there was laughter aplenty between pieces. The Band would like to thank their guest players for supporting (rumour has it that one of the Band's own tuba players was actually at Eurovision!) and they would be delighted to welcome them back anytime.

They are looking forward to returning to the venue in December for a Christmas extravaganza.

Earlier this month, they performed in a special event at The Potteries Museum and Art Gallery in Stoke on Trent in aid of ABF - The Soldiers' Charity. They were joined by The Corps of Drums of Staffordshire and West Midlands North

Sector ACF and Pipers from the Scots Guards Association (Manchester) who joined the Band in a series of famous pipe pieces, including 79th Farewell to Gibraltar and Highland Cathedral. It was a thoroughly enjoyable evening in fantastic surroundings, with funds raised to support a thoroughly worthwhile cause.

Currently, the Band are preparing for their upcoming ATX, which involves deployment to Sonderborg, Denmark, as one of the resident bands for the traditional Ringriderfesten, a unique event that takes place over the first weekend in July. If that seems like a bit too far to travel, you can also catch them at the Shrewsbury Flower Show on the 11/12th August. It promises to be spectacular!

DERBYSHIRE ARMY CADET FORCE

National Band Sergeant Major

Derbyshire Army Cadet Force's Cdt Sgt Corey Kohut was appointed the National Band Sergeant Major in April 2023. Cadet Sgt Corey Kohut has been recognised for his fantastic attitude and achievements within ACF Music to be the first National Cadet Band Sgt Major – Band Master. He has completed 4* Music which is the highest award available for a Band Cadet alongside being a 3* Trainer cadet.

He is an accomplished musician, fantastic ambassador for the ACF and an all-round great cadet. He has also recently joined the Band of the Royal Engineers reserve forces band and is looking to continue as a CFAV at the end of 2023 when he turns 18.

"Being appointed as Cadet Force Music National Band Sergeant Major is undoubtedly the proudest moment of my life." - Cdt Sgt Maj Kohut

"Since joining the Band of Derbyshire Army Cadet Force aged 12, I have taken every opportunity to push myself to develop as a musician and been able to perform at prestigious events around the country. Attending national music camps has allowed me to meet up with like-minded young people and make friendships with cadets from all over the country that will last a lifetime.

"Now I am 17, the leadership, discipline and team working skills I have gained through cadets have been invaluable, not only in my school career but helped me gain employment. For the short time I have left I hope to pass on my experience and enthusiasm to my fellow cadets before I join the Band of Nottinghamshire Engineers as an Army Reserve musician.

"I would like to thank the amazing adult instructors of Cadet Force Music including Captain Peter Ward, who has always believed in me and allowed me to fulfil my potential."

Derbyshire Army Cadet Force are immensely proud of his achievements and feel that this should be recognised nationally.

Ex Telemark Challenger

Cdt Aryan Sediq

In April 2023, Derbyshire Army Cadet Force encouraged their cadets to attend The Ex-Telemark Challenger, whereby cadets were part of a 7 day Nordic Ski training package, followed by a 5 day self-sufficient Nordic ski training journey crossing the Hardanger Vida following in the footsteps of the Heroes of Telemark and finally completing a battlefield study of Operation Grouse and Gunnerside on the 80th anniversary of the original mission.

Cdt Aryan Sediq, from Ticknall detachment, Derbyshire Army Cadet Force attended the exercise and thoroughly enjoyed it, although challenging as it was.

He writes: "We started the journey off, by getting trained how to ski for 6 days and these days were my favourite as I found how amazing skiing is. This prepared us for the expedition mentally, physically, and also the skiing. We carried out survival training in the conditions including avalanche training and also snow shelters.

"Throughout these days I made really good friends that I will remember forever."

"We started the expedition by getting transported by skidoo through the Hardanger Vida which is the highest plateau in the Northern Europe. We settled in our first mountain hut and relaxed for what was coming up next. We travelled across many kilometres over the days we were there, which made me realise how hard the exercise was to be with unpredictable weather being a challenge.

"Over the two weeks of the exercise, I met other like-minded cadets that have now turned into long standing friendships. The fun we had during that 2 weeks will surely stay with me for a long time. I would definitely recommend this to everyone as the experience alone is amazing but the things you take away from these trips are priceless. The opportunities you get from CCAT through the Army Cadet Force is incredible and I would highly recommend to anyone thinking about it."

NOTTINGHAM CASTLE RE-OPENING & COMPLIMENTARY ENTRY

Nottingham Castle has now re-opened to the public as of Monday 26th June 2023.

Nottingham City Council has kindly agreed to continue with complimentary entry for WFRA members who hold a membership card and serving members of the Mercian Regiment. This is to visit the Castle, grounds and the Museum of The Mercian Regiment.

Please note that extra charges for Experiences and Tours are not included. WFRA Membership card holders are to produce their cards on entry at the Museum to allow complimentary entry. Anyone requiring a WFRA membership card is to contact Gary Crosby: garycrosby1375@live.com

Serving Mercian personnel are asked to contact the Assistant Regimental Secretary who will arrange for complimentary entry:
cindy.clark247@mod.gov.uk

Further details about the Castle can be found on their [website](#).

THE STAFFORDS IN NORMANDY 1944

Calling all Staffords!

Did you serve or do you know of anyone who served in the above campaign either with the South Staffords, the North Staffords or the 59th (Staffordshire) Division during World War 2?

August 2024 will be the 80th anniversary of their finest hour; the first successful crossing of the River Orne (La Bataille des Collines), which hastened the end of the Normandy Campaign and the march to Berlin. We intend to commemorate with a parade and memorial in France.

The Staffordshire Regiment Museum would like to hear from you if you have any information about this campaign; either first hand or more likely tales passed down by those who were there. Please contact Peter Collins, Museum Curator:

- curator@staffordshireregimentmuseum.com
- 01543 434394

STOCKPORT BRANCH CRA & MVRA THE MERCIAN REGIMENTAL ASSOCIATION

April Meeting

Postponed a week to accommodate Good Friday; the meeting opened with a minute's silence in memory of Bill Simpson (ex 'E' Coy (HSF) 3 Cheshire).

Attendance was slightly down with 17 present plus 11 apologies and a new member, the Mortar PSI, was gladly voted in to swell the ranks.

A formal vote of thanks was recorded for Macclesfield Branch's donations to the GPF and ECR fund on dissolution.

Other topics covered were: feedback from both CRA and MVRA; Ken's Curry Night (9/6/23); calendar of events; shotgun shoot (23/4/23); a pilgrimage (date tbc) to Stalybridge to the pub with the longest name in the country - "The Old Thirteenth Cheshire Volunteer Rifleman Corps Inn"; the coronation celebration; the MVRA picnic to the NMA (11/6/23); Crich Memorial; and activities on Armed Forces Day (24/6/23).

'Catch 22'

Two members of the Branch, Pete Marsh, and Tony Angel, competed at the inaugural Catch 22 Charity Fishing Match on Sunday 16th April in aid of Cheshire Military Museum.

Thanks to Neil Spruce for the venue, bacon baps, hotdogs, and burgers; thanks also to Ian Murphy and Vic Evans for organisational activities.

The day raised a very respectable £270 for the museum, with the trophy going to Steve Littler.

Shotgun Shoot

April 23rd, St. George's Day, was celebrated with the first shoot of the year, organised by Mike Pilkington, and held at Doveridge Shooting Ground.

Ten guns were on the ground, including two new members; One ex-1 Mercian and one ex-3 Cheshire. Great to see!

April Meeting

Another well-attended meeting on the Coronation Eve; 20 were present (including 2 by Zoom) with 12 apologies.

The two new members from the shotgun shoot were voted in, and a WngO issued for nominees to take over the role of Welfare Officer, pending Pete Williams' imminent move away from the area.

Topics covered were: Coronation Event; CRA update; MVRA picnic at the NMA; Armed Forces' Day; Stalybridge Trip; Normandy 2024, and Ken's Curry Night.

And finally.....

....on 16th June we bade a fond farewell to one of the Branch stalwarts who had passed on to higher formation – Gordon Smith; a proper gent and a Cheshire through and through.

Coronation Event

God Save the King! On 6th May, sixty-six members and guests came together at the Armoury to celebrate the Coronation of King Charles III.

The Loyal Toast was followed by a buffet, drinks, and dancing. Many thanks to the organising committee.

And also, one of our members, Dave Willis, marched proudly with the contingent of (appropriately) 22 prison officers in the Coronation Parade. Here he is, smart as a carrot as always.

Ken's Curry Night

Nice to see some fresh faces at Ken's Curry Night last night at the Chilli Massalla in Edgeley. Usual suspects plus Swanny, Cranky, Bondi Bondy, also nice to see the lads from 4 Mercian.

MVRA Picnic NMA

The Branch was well represented on this fine Sunday in June on the MVRA Parade and Picnic. Thanks to chef extraordinaire Pete Galley for the cakes, buns, and a wee dram! As a combined Branch, respects were also paid to the memorial of the 22nd.

Armed Forces Day

The Branch paraded all three standards, in addition to the Union Standard, at the parade which marked the opening of Armed Forces Day, Stockport.

The Mortar Platoon from 4 Mercian at Stockport kindly made room for us to share their stand outside the Market Hall.

A great collaboration that saw us all speaking to interested parties across a wide range of ages throughout the day.

The weather was kind and everybody appeared to enjoy the occasion.

WORCESTERSHIRE & SHERWOOD FORESTERS REGIMENTAL ASSOCIATION

Chesterfield Branch

Another trip organised by Chesterfield Branch of the WFRA. A day out in Scarborough for Armed Forces Day, was enjoyed by members of the branch and some friends from both Mansfield and Worksop branches.

Old friends got to meet up and chat about the past and new friendships were made. The parade was enjoyed by all, lots of stall for both buying things and supporting the Armed Forces. All taking place on the sea front with beautiful views of the coast

Derby Branch

The Derby Branch has now settled in its new meeting place, the Allestree Social Club (RBL) Derby. Meetings are normally on the first Friday of the month. Unfortunately numbers attending meetings are down a little, not helped by six of our long standing members, due to health problems are no longer able to attend. We wish them well. We maintain regular contact with all members via email and post.

On 15 April we held our Annual Dinner. Gordon Carran and his band of helpers set up the room, which as always looked impressive, with Ronnie Smith providing the Branch Silver. We thank Mick Doyle for setting up a stand with replica Regimental Colours, these complimented our two Branch Standards. A most enjoyable evening was had by all.

To celebrate the Coronation we held a curry lunch at the Mount Everest Gurkha Restaurant, organised by Paul Derbyshire. Leading up to the lunch, as a reward to those attending meetings, at the monthly raffles the first ticket out was for a free lunch, with one lucky member winning two! Mick Doyle again set up the Replica Colours, this time including a Gurkha Flag, which at the conclusion of the meal he presented to Suresh. Suresh in turn presented the Branch with a small replica ceremonial Kukri.

For the raffle Suresh donated a bottle of Gurkha Rum, the bottle shaped like a Kukri, a prize everyone wanted to win! All attending the lunch were given a commemorative pen. Ronnie Smith and Leighton Fuller were both celebrating birthdays so it seemed only fit that they should cut a cake together, accompanied by a Happy Birthday Tune (in Gurkhali), but sung in English by members. It was an excellent afternoon, good food and good company. We are already planning the next one!

The Derby Branch offer a warm welcome to serving and former members of the Mercian Regiment, and to former members of the antecedent regiments.

Worksop Branch

Lindsey McGuire, Branch Secretary

Worksop Branch WFRA continues to be active socially as well as formally. There have been a few more 'Saturday bimbles' and a request for some on Sundays too. Walks are generally an opportunity for members, family and four-legged friends to 'catch up and have a chat'. Congratulations were in order in May when numerous members of Worksop branch had a fantastic evening celebrating the wedding of Charlie and Sue Keep.

In June, we have had a more Regimental focus; while some members enjoyed the Armed Forces Day event in Scarborough (many thanks to Chesterfield branch for inviting us to join them), others participated in the Worksop event held at Shireoaks Sports and Social Club. Simon Kirkham set up a stall on behalf of the branch. His display included relevant pictures and information as well as rifles and equipment from his personal collection to attract visitors.

The event was opened with a flag-raising ceremony and there were activities and stalls from many organisations, music from The Miners Welfare and Blidworth Welfare Bands and singing by Lynda Robin. It was a glorious afternoon representing Worksop Branch, WFRA. Attendance at the event was very good with at least 100 through our stall; a great number of families and veterans from a number of Corps and Regiments, a good number of which were ex WFR or Sherwood Foresters.

We met a veteran whose father served with the 8th Bn in Norway. He became a POW but escaped taking 9 months to get back to Britain. This gentleman wishes to share notes and photos with Worksop Branch so that his father's story can be shared with others, especially those with a Regimental connection. Discussions are ongoing about how this could be done.

We met another veteran whose Nanan served on the home front during the war, packing ammunition in Retford. These stories are less frequently shared but they are about the lives of those who served too. Many young people also came to the stall where they read up about their County Regiment, asked lots of questions and had fun trying out some of the old rifles and equipment.

In Simon's words, "Ice cream. A band. Sing songs and a cheeky shandy or two made for a splendid day's event representing Worksop Branch, WFRA".

MERCIAN VOLUNTEERS REGIMENTAL ASSOCIATION (MVRA) 2023 ANNUAL SERVICE

The 2023 MVRA Service was again held at the National Memorial Arboretum (NMA) on the 11 June. It was attended by over 100 association members and their families.

The association Chairman – Mike Pilkington and our President – Major General (Retd) Alan Hawley CBE welcomed everyone to the event. Major (Retd) Ian Strongman then lead us through the service, with music from the Tenbury Town Band. The standards of the MVRA and Staffordshire Regimental Association were on parade, as well as members from other associations. The MVRA thanks the Mercian Regiment for the attendance of LCpl Derby XXXII the Mercian Regiment Mascot.

Following the service, association members and guests attended a picnic in the area of the Mercian Grove, shade was the main aim of the day as the temperature was in the high 20's. We now look forward to next year's event, hopefully it will be a little cooler.

ROYAL BRITISH LEGION - COST OF LIVING GRANTS

Members of the Armed Forces community struggling with their fuel bills can apply for emergency energy top up grants of up to £200 per month depending on their financial circumstances, through the Royal British Legion.

[Find Out More](#)

This programme is designed to allow them to assist people who need help in a quick and easy way with everyday essentials such as kitchen appliances, clothes, and energy costs.

This programme is open to [anyone who is eligible](#) for our support struggling to pay for items and services they need. And you can apply online the above button. They aim to assess your application within 5 days of submission.

NEW ONLINE ARMED FORCES COMPENSATION SERVICE GOES LIVE

Veterans UK, part of Defence Business Services (DBS), has launched a new [online claim service](#) to help people to access injury and illness compensation more easily. Veterans UK is responsible for administering compensation and pensions schemes for both serving personnel, veterans and their families. The new service is part of their commitment to modernising the services they provide to the Defence community and is the first step in the digitalisation of DBS's Compensation Schemes. The aim of claim service to help people to access injury and illness compensation more easily.

[Find Out More](#)