

# **THE MERCIAN REGIMENT**

**QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER - Q3 2023**  
Print-friendly Edition

# 1 MERCIAN COMMANDING OFFICER'S FOREWORD

Lt Col Grant Brown

Well, the summer has sped past us this year – we had some high temperatures to begin with but were then left with a soggy season. Still, 1 MERCIAN did not let it dampen our enthusiasm or energy. We have had troops in Germany fighting The Royal Welsh, helping them prepare to take on a readiness role from our battlegroup. We have had troops on Salisbury Plain and in Castlemartin training to be a part of the Kings Royal Hussar battlegroup. Some of our soldiers have been training hard in preparation for the Cambrian Patrol competition in October, and a team of our people deployed to Saudi Arabia to help train their Cambrian Patrol team.

The last quarter has seen us all celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Crich Pilgrimage and 16 years since the formation the Mercian Regiment. September has also seen us mark 1 year since the 1st and 2nd Battalions amalgamated. The football team won the Infantry Cup – beating 5 RIFLES convincingly, and the SPS Detachment have conducted fundraising events in aid of ABF. The point is that despite the summer supposedly being the quiet period, it has been anything but.

The run in to Christmas will no doubt be as busy as always – already we have elements of the battalion slated to deploy to Germany to support the Estonians as they develop their staff skills, we have a company deploying to Romania to train in the Carpathian Mountains, and have a battalion multicultural day planned in November. I will no doubt mention how busy the battalion has been in my next update to you all – I guess that is just the way it goes!

# 1 MERCIAN Ex EAGLES PILGRIMAGE

Capt Barney Blackstone

In a feat that involved grit, teamwork and an alarming number of energy gels, a team of ten soldiers from 1st Battalion, The Mercian Regiment, embarked on Exercise EAGLES PILGRIMAGE. The aim was to run the 150-mile route from our base in Bulford, through the heart of our recruiting area, to the Crich Memorial for the 100th annual pilgrimage in July 2023.

Over three days, the team smashed out a remarkable combined total of 359-miles. Leading the charge was Private Gething, C Company, who took 'going the extra mile' to a whole new level and conquered 70 miles himself. EAGLES PILGRIMAGE was a test of resilience, unity, and the ability to endure agonising cramps. In between running, the team would support the other runners, providing water, food, and morale throughout.

The final day saw the team complete the last three miles together up a cliff (or it felt like that at least) to the Crich Memorial. Fuelled by energy powder and held together by the medics' tape-work, the team arrived at Crich Memorial in front of the crowds gathered for the Crich 100 celebrations. The event raised over £2500 for The Mercian Regimental Charity.

# 1 MERCIAN Ex IRON CYCLONE

Lt Michael Knowles

In June, A (Grenadier) Company deployed with the Kings Royal Hussars Battlegroup on Exercise IRON CYCLONE, a first run out for many new Warrior commanders and the Battlegroup itself. Blessed with wall-to-wall sunshine for the first phase in Castlemartin, the company successfully completed its Live Fire Gunnery Training, up to Annual Crew Test, and dismounted Live Fire Tactical Training. This intensive range package provided the first opportunity for newly qualified vehicle gunners and commanders to hone their skills on the ranges, ready for the next phase.

The company then recovered to Bulford before deploying to Salisbury Plain during what must have been the wettest July on record. Following two weeks of company level training, the Grenadiers then progressed up to battlegroup level practising the full extent of combined arms manoeuvre. Operating against a free-thinking enemy, realistic training serials forced commanders to use every ounce of their tactical acumen to be successful, integrating a wide range of assets to achieve mission success, it tested everyone's ability to plan and execute complex missions in a realistic environment. For many soldiers new to the company, this was their first time operating in a combined arms environment, a steep but welcome learning curve.

# 4 MERCIAN COMMANDING OFFICER FOREWORD

Lt Col Charlie Whitting

Over the past quarter, the 4th Battalion have seized many opportunities, which have seen soldiers and officers taking part in a wealth of activities around the world. Firstly, from an operational perspective, the team of 4 MERCIAN soldiers and officers who are currently deployed on Op INTERFLX continue to deliver a credible, threat-focussed training package to members of the Ukrainian Armed Forces; this is vital work which is directly linked to CGS's top priority of support to Ukraine. The task is not only hugely important, but those deployed are also gaining a wealth of experience and qualifications that they will bring back with them when they finish their deployment later in the year.

Op ILKANE has also continued to draw volunteers to support the UK Border Force, with members of the battalion committing themselves to this vital task. Training events have been abundant, both internally driven, but also externally with soldiers joining 7 RIFLES on Ex BALTIC FIST in Estonia, and 1 MERCIAN as Taskforce Hannibal (enemy forces) on Ex IRON STORM. It has not all been hard work though, Adventurous Training is a mainstay of the summer months for 4 MERCIAN and this year has been no exception.

The battalion has conducted mountain biking, climbing and hill walking in both the UK and Cyprus, with the highlight this summer being a superb trekking exped to the Dolomites led by the RAO. As we look forward to the winter, trekking shoes will be swapped for ski boots and planning is now focussing on the annual alpine skiing exped, which will take place in January.

With many opportunities awaiting, there is no doubt that the Battalion will continue to take advantage of all that a career in the Army Reserve has to offer and the next update and associated articles will be equally action packed.

# 4 MERCIAN Op INTERFLEX

Maj Deepe Rawji

21 members of 4 MERCIAN have deployed on OP INTERFLEX in support of Defences main effort to ensure Russia is defeated in Ukraine. They are a part of Trident Company, the first reserve company to deliver on the operation.

Troops from 4 MERCIAN are delivering a 4-week basic combat course to a diverse set of Ukrainian soldiers and officers. Over 80% of Ukrainian troops have experience from the front line. 4 MERCIAN troops are delivering lessons on 5 different weapon systems, delivering static range packages, fieldcraft exercises, trench warfare, C-EO and urban warfare. The humbling part is understanding their experiences and assisting the way we could potentially deliver and adapt our doctrine through a robust lesson's exploitation process.

Inoculation is imperative and the utility of MABWAY special effects and CASSIM has enhanced the delivery ensuring the Ukrainians are best prepared for their return to the war.

4 MERCIAN troops will be contributing to making over 1,000 Ukrainians more lethal and increase their survivability on the battlefield. JNCOs have also attached to our receiving regular companies in 2 RIFLES and backfilled their positions to cross-pollinate experiences and instruction.

The mission does not stop there. Whilst deployed, troops have exploited the opportunity to develop themselves whilst mobilised for up to 9 months. Troops will return to unit with experience of a regular battle rhythm, have achieved many qualifications and become the next generation of excellent instructors. Troops have acquired SAA & live firing qualifications, SCBC, RPAS, BCD, Team Medic, DTTT and many more. This has demonstrated how we can provide delivery and improve our effectiveness for the whole force.

# 4 MERCIAN C (KOHIMA) COMPANY - Ex BADLANDS

2Lt Payne

On Sunday, August 3, 2023, six individuals from across the Army converged in Granada, Spain, to take part in the Badlands ultra-cycling gravel race. The team was a mix of pairs and solo riders, with 2Lt Payne from C Company, 4th Mercian, racing in the Solo category. The Badlands race is nothing short of epic. It is a single-stage course spanning 800 kilometres with over 14,000 meters of elevation gain. What further sets the race apart is its "self-supported" nature, requiring riders to be entirely self-sufficient, carrying all their gear and supplies and having no pre-planned support stops.

The Badlands race draws a formidable field of riders, with many professional riders, Olympians, and ex professional riders stepping up to the challenge. This year was no exception; over 350 riders set off from Granada, with some serious competition at the head of the race. The goal was to cross the unforgiving Badlands terrain within the demanding five-day and eight-hour cut-off time. Due to some inclement weather in the days leading up to the race – the course was altered slightly to avoid the riverbeds which had become raging torrents. Whilst many were slowed by the mud and rain of the first two days, the British riders took it in their stride and powered on, unfazed.

The course itself is renowned as the toughest gravel race in Europe, leading participants through some of the most remote and challenging locations on the continent. Riders traversed the stunning forests of Sierra de Huétor, navigated the arid deserts of Gorafe and Tabernas, braved the wild coasts of Cabo de Gata, and conquered the steep climbs of La Alpujarra. They faced searing temperatures, unpredictable rainstorms, and treacherous mud caused by previous days' downpours.

Among the memorable segments of the race was the Gorafe Desert, renowned for its vast gullies and colourful sandstone formations. As the rain eased, riders were treated to breath taking scenery and remarkably fast-rolling terrain. The Sierra de los Filabres presented a formidable challenge, marked by isolation and remoteness. With over 100 kilometres without villages or resupplies, riders crossed forests and plateaus at altitudes exceeding 2,000 meters. The iconic Calar Alto Observatory at 2,168 meters marked a high point in the race. A demanding climb was rewarded by a spectacular 60-kilometer descent that left riders in awe.

The Tabernas Desert, the only officially recognised European desert, further tested the mettle of the competitors. It was here that the harsh terrain took its toll, with punctures, broken spokes, and even a seized front brake posing

threats to completing the race. The sea views from Almeria were a pleasant break from the mountains, however the route soon regained the height it is renowned for: the last 100km being a gruelling test of determination and fitness as the fatigue set in. Some sections topping out at over a 28% gradient and others simply unrideable for various reasons. It was extremely slow going. In the early hours of the morning, as the village of Capileira came into view, a sense of accomplishment and elation pervaded. 2Lt Payne rolled in, a few hours ahead of his 4 - day target. Completing the race in three days, 21 hours, and 45 minutes - Placing him 149th overall.

Beyond the individual accomplishments, the Badlands race provided an excellent platform for networking and showcasing the Army at an international level. It exemplified the core values and principles of the Armed Forces, emphasising resilience, fitness, self-reliance, and perseverance. The race was not only about the competition but about representing the Army with distinction while pushing the limits of endurance in the most challenging conditions Europe had to offer. Special thanks should be given to the team at Badlands, Capt. George Steele for organising the Exercise and all at 4 Mercian who have assisted and supported in the endeavour.



# 4 MERCIAN C (KOHIMA) COMPANY - Ex KOHIMA SHOT

Pte Brownlee

On Saturday 23 Sept, members of C Company travelled to Chetwynd Barracks, Nottingham for a day of training. The morning consisted of using the 25m range to practice different firing positions and working on improving groupings. The range time was invaluable with only one detail firing, meaning the firers managed to get plenty of rounds down the range. After zeroing, along with some practice and coaching as seen in the below image, there was a bit of competition to obtain the best grouping from the different positions. After a few rounds of static positions, the later rounds incorporated more dynamic shooting with time limitations and transitioning between different firing positions. There was good shooting all round with the Privates giving some of the NCOs and Officers a run for their money! All in all, the morning range session was enjoyed by everyone and will be beneficial for the upcoming ACMT sessions being run over the next couple of months.

After some well-earned lunch, LCpl Bruton led a fieldcraft session drawing on his military experience. He setup an observation lane and took the troops through the process starting by sketching the scene, highlighting some more artistically talented troops and some less so! Sketches done, there was then a 30-minute time period for participants to identify 10 hidden items and record these on the sketch. Most people managed to find 5 or 6 of these, with some well concealed items getting the better of the troops. This was a well-run session and gave the participants a different type of lesson than what they were used to.

A spot of rifle cleaning back at the ARC finished off the day before troops departed for home. A huge thank you to the staff involved in organising a brilliant day's worth of training! Hopefully there are opportunities in the future to run similar training days and utilise the facilities nearby to C Company locations.

# 4 MERCIAN HQ (Eagle) Company - Commission Course Short Experience 232

2Lt Alexander Boyer, Kidderminster Anti-Tank Pl

I am Second Lieutenant Boyer from Kidderminster Anti-Tank platoon, 4 Mercian, and I recently completed CCS 232 on the 22nd of June 2023. I joined 4 Mercian in 2020 and completed Phase 1 + 2 reserve soldier before I commissioned. I am currently a third-year history student at the university of Exeter.

I completed my Mod B whilst attached to Exeter UOTC over a year before going to Sandhurst, therefore I needed to revise. I focused on physical fitness, individual skills and drills and the combat estimate. Major Richard Peacock very kindly helped me revise the combat estimate by organising training nights and provided extra resources. Two weeks before Mod C I completed the BRU course organised by WO2 Castledine which was held by 1 Mercian in Bulwell. The BRU was extremely useful for RMAS and made me competent with radios.

On arrival to RMAS I was put into 40 platoon which was made up of people who had also just arrived. The two exercises, Wavell's Warrior and Horrock's endeavour, challenged and educated us as a platoon and as individuals. I was fortunate enough to have a field visit from Captain Paul Tyrer and to have Privates Baird and Rolands from HQ Coy playing enemy during Wavell's Warrior. I really enjoyed my command appointments as a platoon commander and sergeant where I learnt a great deal. In addition to the exercises, the onslaught of lectures also tested my ability to concentrate, however were very useful (especially the paperwork orientated lectures).

CCS 232 was a fantastic experience that I thoroughly enjoyed. The staff at RMAS were incredibly professional and helpful, furthermore my platoon was fantastic and really enhanced my time on the course.

# **4 MERCIAN HQ (EAGLE) COMPANY - Mountain Biking**

Pte Graham Gribble

On the 26th and 27th August 4 Mercian HQ Company attended Cannock Chase for an amazing weekend of Mountain Biking (MTB) as our annual AT event. The day started with Sgt Tristram and Sgt Noon teaching techniques on handling different corners, breaking and going up-hill. This helped us throughout the day and made the MTB easier. The group then split into two and rode either the Monkey Trail or the Dog Trail.

Though the weather wasn't on our side at times, all of us that attended the weekend had an absolute blast on the hills at the Chase. In the evening we had a barbecue cooked by Pte Corlett and a small social. The following morning, even though our bodies were sore all over, we went round the trails again and finished off the day with a presentation for the best rider (Pte Endres) and the best fall (2Lt Boyer).

The trails were incredible and very challenging at times but the sense of achievement we got from the event was priceless and we all hope to do more training like this in the future and can't wait for the next one.

# 4 MERCIAN - HMS ALBION

Maj Max Sones

In July HMS Albion welcomed Maj Sones, Capt Burrige and Capt Davies onboard HMS Albion, a Landing Platform Dock, and the affiliated ship of the Mercian Regiment as part of their affiliates celebrations prior to the ship going into extended readiness.

The MERCIAN team joined HMS Albion at the tail end of a 7-month deployment where she had been as far North as the arctic circle, North or Norway, and into the Baltic Sea. She picked the MERCIAN team up from Falmouth via a Landing Craft Vehicle Personnel (LCVP), while enroute to Northeast Scotland to de-arm. The trip out to sea in the flat bottomed LCVPs turned out to be very wet and rather rocky until they were eventually hauled up the side of HMS Albion! The team were hosted onboard by the embedded Royal Marine Squadron 2IC, Maj Ads Seaney, who looked after them very well throughout. They were treated to a three-man cabin and three-square meals a day (plus a very generous ration of Albion's specially brewed beer; the Dock and Davit).

The activities started with a very thorough tour of the ship, including the Bridge, Ops room, the engine room and the well-equipped gym! No stone was left unturned, unfortunately the tour took so many twists and turns that later that evening, when left to navigate the ship alone, the three officers require a little help finding their cabin... Later that evening members of the ships company were also treated to a talk from Rear Admiral (Retd.) Jeremy Larkin, who, during the Falklands campaign, commanded HMS Fearless, the then version of HMS Albion. He covered his reflections of commanding the key assault ship and some wider background of the scale of the operation and its key commanders. This was all set to the backdrop of huge waves braking over the bow of the ship as it pitched and rolled in heavy seas!

It's fair to say that life at sea for the MERCIANs took some adjusting to, especially with the sea state during the first 24hrs, which presented an interesting challenge at dinner; holding onto a pint while trying to cut a steak was an interesting challenge!

Day two saw the MERCIANs get stuck into the various activities from firefighting to damage control demonstrations. They also got hands on with the RM Recce Platoon kit and received a talk on how they operate. Later that day HMS Albion was diverted from its Merlin Helicopter trials to assist the coast guard in a real-life search and rescue when an abandoned sailing yacht was spotted with a snapped mast, sadly no survivors were found. This also meant that HMS Albion had to cancel its firepower demo for fear of survivors in the water.

At the end of the 36hrs the MERCIAN team presented the Captain of HMS Albion with a MERCIAN plaque and departed over the side of HMS Albion again, via an LCVP to what looked like to be a beach landing – little did everyone know that Rear Admiral Larkin had taken control of the LCVP from the RM CSgt coxswain and was heading for the beaches of Hoyhead!

# THE BAND OF THE MERCIAN REGIMENT

The summer season is the time The Band of the Mercian Regiment is at its busiest, incorporating performances across the region and abroad, including during their ATX in both marching band, concert band and small groups.

The Band joined forces with the Band of the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers to return again to provide musical support and entertainment for the annual Ringriderfesten held in Sonderborg, Denmark. From marching the competitors on horseback through the streets of the town to the showground, massed band and individual concerts in the town, a mayors breakfast, a ladies lunch and a gentlemen's lunch to a full Military Tattoo, they played to thousands upon thousands of cheering spectators, bringing the majestic pomp and circumstance of traditional British military band music to the masses. It may have been busy, but certainly a fantastic success!

Sonderborg was followed by ATX part 2 based at Shrewsbury Flower Show in Shropshire. The Band opened the show with a march through the streets of Shrewsbury. Even the rain didn't stop people coming out to watch, wave flags and enjoy the music resounding off the buildings as they marched down the high street and into the show grounds. The Band also played on the traditional bandstand to a busy showground, showcasing music of all genres from the traditional to the modern, complete with solos by Musns Kinsey, Cooper and Pithers, the audience dancing along and a marriage proposal by the Bandmaster!

The firework finale featured the combined bands of Royal Signals (Northern) Band, The Band of the Mercian Regiment and Lancashire Artillery Band, who, along with local choirs and a packed out showground singing along, performed a traditional marching display, anthems and flag waving sing along.

This event involved different bands all working together to support each other and adapting to produce a great experience for the visiting show goers.

Other events including a retention trip to the Tower of London, musicians supporting other bands in high profile performances, the saxophone group supporting mess dinners across the region, and the dedication of a new Standard at the NMA have meant its been a busy quarter for The Band of the Mercian Regiment.

## **Upcoming Events:**

9th December - Tettenhall Church Christmas Concert

# Museum of The Mercian Regiment (WFR Collection)

Jennifer Brookman-Moore

Well, it has been a busy 6 months here in Nottingham!

On Monday 26th June Nottingham Castle (and our gallery) reopened to the public after a 7-month closure. 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](mailto:garycrosby1375@live.com)). Serving Mercian personnel are asked to contact the Assistant Regimental Secretary ([cindy.clark247@mod.gov.uk](mailto:cindy.clark247@mod.gov.uk)) who will arrange for complimentary entry. Further details about the Castle can be found at [www.nottinghamcastle.org.uk](http://www.nottinghamcastle.org.uk).

We have received a legacy donation of £4,000 left to us by Ronald Grocock. Ronald passed away last year, and his nephew presented the legacy to us. Ronald served as a National Service with the Sherwood Foresters from 1950-52 and made the decision to leave the museum £4,000.

If you are interested in leaving the museum a legacy no matter the size, then just email [curator@stand-firm-strike-hard.org.uk](mailto:curator@stand-firm-strike-hard.org.uk) to discuss further. All funds go towards keeping the museum staffed for the future. As we approach 2030, our museum will lose its MOD Funding so no matter the size of the legacy it all goes towards the sustainability of the museum.

# Mercian Regiment Museum (Worcester)

## **NEUVE CHAPELLE MARCH 1915 BY MATANIA RETURNS TO THE OFFICERS' MESS**

Dr John Paddock FSA

Following discussions with Brigadier Banton, the Trustees of the Mercian Regiment Museum Worcestershire have loaned the picture to the Officers of the 1st Battalion, initially for a period of five years. This painting depicts an episode from the first major British offensive on the Western Front.

On 10 March 1915, the initial assault had broken through the German lines, whilst the 1st Battalion, The Worcestershire Regiment waited in reserve. When they were ordered forward the following afternoon, withering fire from the Germans on the flanks of the captured salient caused heavy casualties. The survivors were able to do no more than reinforce the British front line.

When at dawn on 12 March the Germans counterattacked, the Worcesters opened a rapid fire, and, as the Germans reeled, the 1st Battalion broke from their trenches and charged with the bayonet, pursuing the enemy back beyond their own trenches, which the Battalion occupied and held.

Their position far in advance of the remainder of the Brigade, encircled on three sides, and shelled by both sides' artillery, was not tenable. Falling back to the trenches they had left that morning; they were decimated by enemy crossfire. Nine officers and 92 men were killed, ten officers and 226 men wounded, and 27 men missing, with Lt Colonel Wodehouse DSO becoming the first commanding officer of the Regiment to fall in the war.

Fortunino Matania, a war artist, known for his realistic depictions of trench warfare, visited the battlefield soon after and made sketches from life whilst under fire. Once home, he reconstructed the scene to complete his painting with materiel and uniform taken from the battlefield.



# Staffordshire Regiment Museum

Peter Collins

The Museum has had a busy Summer with us welcoming a number of visitors and staging some excellent events such as now popular annual Blitz event.

The Museum also welcomed relatives of two regiments, VC winners. First was Lance Corporal William Coltman VC, DCM & Bar, MM & Bar great, great, great niece, and her family to the Museum to view the medals awarded to her great, great, great Uncle in the First World War. Lance Corporal Coltman, who was the British Army's most decorated non officer of the First World War, was awarded his medals whilst serving with the North Staffordshire Regiment as a Stretcher Bearer during the First World War.

His great, great, great niece was amazed to be able to see his medals, including his Victoria Cross awarded for his actions at Mannequin Hill, north-east of Sequehart, on the 3rd and 4th of October 1918.

The Museum then welcomed the relatives of Private Wassall VC to the Museum. Private Wassall served with 80th Regiment of Foot (later to become part of the South Staffordshire Regiment) in the Zulu wars. On the 22nd January Private Wassall saved one on his comrades from a River under enemy fire, being awarded the Victoria Cross for his efforts.

# Stockport Branch CRA & MVRA The Mercian Regimental Association

Steve Gregory

## July Meeting

July's meeting was held on a sweltering Friday 7th, the weather being in marked contrast to the same day 34 years prior, when 1st and 3rd Battalions of the 22nd (Cheshire) Regiment received new colours from HRH Prince Charles in an absolute downpour.

After a lively debate about what constituted 'Planter's Order' we had a productive meeting in various states of undress.

The effort around Armed Forces Day was reviewed and thanks were expressed to all members who attended and assisted in our joint venture with the Mortar Platoon from 4 Mercian.

Future events discussed were: CRA Chairs' meeting 29/7/23; tickets for Stockport County's game on the same day; the CRA Memorial event at the NMA on 3/9/23; and the Mons service at Chester on 10/9/23. Our 'pilgrimage to Stalybridge to the pub with the longest name in the country - "The Old Thirteenth Cheshire Astley Volunteer Rifleman Corps Inn" has been thwarted twice by industrial action on the railway – and is to be re-attempted in September – wish us luck!

## Stockport County and the Armed Forces Covenant

Saturday, 29th July saw Stockport Branch in attendance at Edgeley Park to witness Stockport County FC signing the Armed Forces' Covenant. In addition to being present at the signing ceremony, standard bearers from the branch formed part of the guard of honour for the clubs to take to the field. The Standard Bearers on parade for the branch were Derek Sykes (MRA Standard), Joe Sutton (CRA Standard), and Les Heighway (MVRA Standard) – well done all!

As part of the day, which also celebrated the club's 140th anniversary, Stockport County provided free tickets for branch members to witness them beat Preston North End 2 - 0 in a pre-season friendly.

## Audregnies 2023

On Sunday, 21st August, Steve Whaite, the Branch Treasurer, attended the memorial service in Audregnies where 1st Battalion served with honour during the retreat from Mons. He can be seen standing next to the memorial which reads:

*“Dedicated to the 25 officers and 925 men of the 1st Battalion, The 22nd (Cheshire) Regiment who stood firm on this field before an overwhelming enemy on the 24th August 1914. At the end of the battle, only 7 officers and 200 men answered the roll call. Their heroism saved the British 5th Division from disaster.”*

For more information, you can Google “The Hidden Flag – Miniature Cheshire Regimental Colour”.

### **Stalybridge 2023**

Unfortunately, the outing to ‘The Old Thirteenth Cheshire Astley Volunteer Rifleman Corps Inn’ was again thwarted by public transport strikes. This was the third attempt, foiled by joint action of bus and train strikes this time – it’s as though we’re not wanted! Anyway, onwards and upwards to the next attempt; Illegitimi Non Carborundum as they say.

# Lt Col (Retd) Keith H Jeavons TD

It was with great sadness that the WFRA lost its Chairman, Lt Col (Retd) Keith H Jeavons TD, on 8 August 2023.

Keith joined the Worcestershire Regiment as a National Serviceman in 1954 and quickly rose to the rank of Sgt. Upon leaving the regular Army, he commissioned into the TA and began a long reservist career, first in the 7th Bn (Worc) and then the Mercian Volunteers. Rising up through the ranks, he finally retired as a Lt Col in 1987.

He was instrumental in starting the MVRA and played an active part throughout. He was also active in the WFRA and in 2018 took on the position of Acting Chairman of the WFRA. It was he who insisted on the 'Acting' title as he didn't intend to stay for long! We shall miss his wise words and supportive manner.

*A full obituary for Col Keith can be found on the WFRA newsletter Vol 14 Issue 35 and one will also be published in the 2023 Mercian Eagle.*

# CHESHIRE REGIMENT ASSOCIATION

## **Service of Remembrance**

Sunday 3rd September 2023 saw approximately 60 members of the CRA gather before the Regimental Memorial at the National memorial Arboretum for an Inaugural Service of Remembrance. The service was suggested by members at the last AGM and was organised by a small number of committee members.

The weather on the day was extremely warm with the temperature reaching 27C and many members were keen to shun the chairs and opt for the shade a little further back under the trees.

The service was conducted superbly by Canon Dr Gregory Platten, Padre to 4 Mercian (V), who is fast becoming a regular at CRA events.

Musical support was provided by a small ensemble provided by The Mercian Regiment Band, supported by a bugler, and once again where just right for a service such as this.

During the service we took the chance to lay up the old CRA Association standard, after 35 years' service it is sadly looking its age and was deteriorating quite swiftly.

Having laid up the old standard the new CRA Standard was unfurled by the padre before being dedicated for use by the CRA.

The new standard will very quickly be used at funerals and at the Mons Wreath Laying ceremony at Chester Cathedral on Sunday 10th September.

In addition to getting members on their feet to sing a couple of hymns lessons were read during the service by Maj (Ret'd) Eddie Pickering MBE and Maj (Ret'd) Mike Tarbuck MBE and we are very grateful to them both for taking an active part in the service.

A floral wreath was laid at the memorial, on behalf of all members of the Association, by the CRA Chairman, Mr Peter Gresty, which even had a couple of Cheshire Regiment roses cunningly placed amongst the other flowers.

Following a picnic lunch, not provided by the CRA, members were escorted to the Northern Ireland Copse where a small service was held and wreaths were laid, by Peter Gresty & Dave Ingram, Chairman 22nd Riders, in memory of those members of the regiment who were killed whilst serving in Northern Ireland.

Members and guests then took the opportunity to walk through the copse and visit the 9 trees which have individual named regimental plaques in their memory.

Following a positive response, the Cheshire Regiment Association hopes that the service will become an annual event, but it would be really nice to have more members, along with their loved ones and friends, attending to make it worthwhile.

### **Commemoration of The Battle of Mons**

A very small service was held at noon on Sunday 10th September in the Regimental Garden of Remembrance, at Chester Cathedral, to commemorate the heroic actions of the 1st Bn The 22nd (Cheshire) Regiment at Audregnies as part of the Battle of Mons on 24th August 1914.

As part of the commemoration service a poppy wreath was laid by Peter Gresty, CRA Chairman, a total of 3 standards were on parade.

Following the service the Association standard was dipped, by Mr Derek Sykes, at the Regimental Chapel in the Cathedral

### **Droppin Well Memorial Refurbishment**

The refurbishment work being carried out on the Droppin Well Memorial are now complete.

# **WORCESTERSHIRE & SHEWROOD FORESTERS ASSOCIATION**

## **WFRA REUNION 2023**

On Saturday 3 June 2023, the WFRA Reunion was held at the hospitable Worcester RFC. A sunny and somewhat windy day for the WFRA veterans to get together with friends of old, make new ones, engage with the serving soldiers and to raise a glass to absent friends.

Rev'd Peter Hart lead the Drumhead Service and Lt Col Brown, CO 1M gave an engaging address and then took the salute when the veterans paraded to rapturous applause. Music for the day was provided by the Tenbury Town Band and the event was supported by the Regimental Mascot, the IET, soldiers of 1 Mercian and the Worcester Branch WFRA.

## **BRANCH UPDATES**

### **Derby Branch**

The Derby Branch continues to enjoy the hospitality of the Allestree Social Club (RBL), Derby with meetings taking place on the first Friday of the month, commencing at 1945hrs and dress is casual and the branch welcomes serving and former members of the Mercian Regiment, the antecedent regiments, and other arms. Attendance at meetings has picked up a little, but we still have a way to go to reach the attendance numbers we had prior to Covid. Regretfully our "sick parade" continues to grow but we do keep all advised of events via email and post. It has been a quiet few months, the highlight being 35 members and guests enjoying another curry lunch at the Mount Everest Gurkha Restaurant, Derby. This is an informal event and again it was a most enjoyable afternoon with all enjoying the excellent selection of foods provided. We received a very nice letter of thanks, and a home-made card from Finlay, an eight year old boy. Finlay had been very unwell, thankfully now recovered, and at his own expense had made and sold various Remembrance Day items, donating the proceeds to various charities. To reward his efforts the Branch decided to sponsor him with a donation to allow him a day out at his chosen theme park.

### **Nottingham Branch**

The Chairman and members of the Nottingham City Branch of the WFRA became concerned when their efforts failed to find a member to carry the Branch standard at the 100 years anniversary of the Crich Pilgrimage.

Chairman, John Richards with the approval of Branch members agreed to visit the Retford Mercian Cadets to ask for one of their Cadets to carry the Nottingham City Branch Standard

Four cadets had volunteered and it was accepted that cadet Callum Merrill had been chosen.

At the following Branch meeting members and Chairman agreed to make a donation to the Retford Mercian Cadets in appreciation of their support.

### **Worcester Branch**

Worcester Branch are having another enjoyable busy year in 2023. On 3rd June, Worcester Branch were assisting, Asst Regt Sec Cindy Clark, in setting up and the running of the Association Reunion at Worcester Rugby Club. The weather gods were very kind again. This is our second time at this venue and the atmosphere is very good. It was a pleasant day, meeting old friends and new. Plus the beer is cheaper! Lt Col Grant Brown from 1 Mercian took the salute at the Veterans march past. Lt Col Brown's speech was very well received.

The 15th August saw some of the branch members at Evesham Burma Star Memorial to attend the VJ day Commemoration. A tradition that in most places is being forgotten. On the 26th August the branch were on parade at the Worcestershire Regimental Stone in Gheluvelt Park, Worcester to remember the actions of the 1st, 2nd and 7th Battalions the Worcestershire Regiment in WW2 at the crossing of the Seine at Vernon France, Burma and The Malaya Emergency. This year we missed our regular attendee the late Lt Col (Retd.) Keith Jeavons TD who was a great supporter of Worcester Branch activities.

On 16th September, the Worcester Branch had their inaugural Branch Lunch at the Berkeley Inn nr Worcester. The invited Guest was WO2 Rich Joynes (1 Mercian) and his mother Dianne. A good time was had by all. Simon Gresty, the Manager at the Berkeley is ex WFR and 2 Mercian, so the lunch was kept in family.

### **Worksop Branch**

Lindsey McGuire, Branch Secretary

Worksop Branch has been a little quiet over the summer months but activity will pick up in the coming weeks.

This week the branch had a good turnout at the unveiling of the commonwealth headstone for 39606 Cpl Thomas Highton which took place at Manton Cemetery in Worksop on Tuesday 19th September. It was very interesting to hear how local resident, Gary Kyriacou was moved to pay his respects after a named poppy was placed on a lamp post outside his home by Worksop Branch, The Royal British Legion back in 2018. Gary visited the cemetery looking for Thomas's grave but as the grave was unmarked, he was unable to locate it. Gary made contact with The Royal British Legion and has



worked with them since to ensure that Thomas's grave would be appropriately marked and his service properly commemorated.

The service was attended by local dignitaries including members of Bassetlaw District Council, The Royal British Legion, there were representatives from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission as well as WRFA HQ, Worksop Branch and the Mercian Regimental Mascot, LCpl Derby XXXII. A 3 Volley Salute was fired during the service by the Matlock pals, a group of military and history enthusiasts who portray life during The Great War.

Ahead of our branch meeting this month, Worksop Branch members will meet with a local gentleman, Chris, whose father served with the 8th Bn Sherwood Foresters in Lillehamer and the Norway Campaign. Chris wishes to share notes and photos with branch members so that his father's story can be shared with others, especially those with a Regimental connection. Arrangements will be made for copies of these documents and photographs to be shared with the regimental museum.

### **Mansfield Branch**

The branch staggers gamely on, we manage to form a quorum for meetings and sometimes reach the dizzy heights of six or seven attendees (not very often). The halcyon days of 30 or 40 are a distant memory, perhaps the dwindling attendance reflects the ever-shrinking numbers of the Armed Services in general. (I'm not sure whether the current Order of Battle includes the present incumbents of the Royal Hospital Chelsea.)

We seem to number funerals as our foremost branch activity, perhaps it is the prospect of a decent wake that generates the attendance, what a sign of the times. One day someone may run a book on who will be next to hit the buffers, then the odds will be evens when it gets to the last two survivors!

Our activity, beyond visits to the crematorium/cemetery, was confined to the pilgrimage and Armed Forces Day. In the case of the latter, it was surprising to note that although a good number of Standards were present the contingent of ex-service personnel was small.

# THE ROYAL HOSPITAL CHELSEA

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

1. Over 65 years or of State Pension age (whichever is higher).
2. Either in receipt of an Army Service Pension or War Disability Pension which you would be required to surrender upon entry to the Royal Hospital **OR** if you do not receive an Army Pension you would be required to make a weekly financial contribution (payable by Standing Order) towards your living costs. This contribution will be based on an assessment of affordability completed during the application process. Please note if you are in receipt of an Army Service Pension and/or War Disability Pension you may also be required to make a top-up contribution (also based on an assessment of affordability).
3. Free of any financial obligation to support a spouse or family.

To be able to live independently in the sheltered accommodation (Long Wards) – the Royal Hospital Chelsea is unable to accept direct entries to the nursing wards.

If you have lost your partner / wife and have felt lonely over the Christmas period and would like more information about living at The Royal Hospital Chelsea, please contact Lt Col (Retd) Bill Temminck on Philip.Temminck100@mod.gov.uk

More information about The Royal Hospital Chelsea can also be found here: <https://www.chelsea-pensioners.co.uk/eligibility-how-apply>

## VETERANS' GATEWAY

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

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

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