

THE MERCIAN REGIMENT

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER - Q4 2023

1 MERCIAN - CO'S FOREWORD

Lt Col Grant Brown

The end of 2023 saw a huge amount of diverse activity being conducted in and by the 1st Battalion. From royal visits to battalion boxing, from live firing to assisting the Home Office rehome entitled Afghans, this quarter has offered challenge and variety. It also offered up to 3 weeks of leave for some of our personnel, which was very welcome. Hopefully, it allowed our soldiers and their families an opportunity to recharge and reset.

2024 promises to be equally busy and as always, our ability to perform is contingent on the support of our families and loved ones. We have a few projects in the pipeline to support our people and say thank you, including the build of a NAAFI-funded greenhouse project in Picton Barracks and a 1 MERCIAN Families Day towards the summer – we will do our best to time it to allow maximum attendance.

I wish everyone of you all the very best for 2024.

1 MERCIAN - HRH The Prince of Wales Visit

On the 23 November 2023, HRH The Prince of Wales (The Earl of Chester) visited 1 MERCIAN in Bulford. This was his first visit to the Mercian Regiment following his assumption of the role of Colonel in Chief from His Majesty The King.

The Prince of Wales was met off the helicopter by the Colonel of the Regiment, Lt Gen Cave, who together with the Commanding Officer and Regimental Sergeant Major, briefed on the state of the 1st Battalion. HRH was then hosted by DRAGON Company, who were deployed on Salisbury Plain acting as enemy for Exercise WESSEX STORM. He received orders as part of the Recce Platoon before taking part in a company-level attack in the turret of one of the Warrior vehicles. This was a first for Prince William, as he had never been on the platform before, and it provided a clear insight into our Regiment and our role on the modern battlefield.

He then had an opportunity to meet a broad cross-section of personalities from across the Regiment, both from the 1st and the 4th Battalions, who discussed their backgrounds, roles, responsibilities, and what it means to them to be in the Mercian Regiment. It was clear that the Colonel in Chief cares deeply about his new Regiment and that he has a clear desire to visit regularly and to become a reliable feature of regimental life.

The visit provided a brilliant opportunity for the Mercian Regiment to welcome our new Colonel in Chief, and he left with a clear understanding of our ethos and role and, hopefully, feeling very much part of the Mercian Family.

Audience with His Majesty The King

On 7 December 2023, the Colonel of the Regiment and the Commanding Officer of 1 MERCIAN travelled to Buckingham Palace to have an audience with His Majesty The King, Charles III. King Charles III had a long association with the Mercian Regiment and antecedent regiments, and the audience provided an opportunity for His Majesty to bid the Mercian Regiment 'farewell' following the handover of Colonel in Chief to His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales. The regiment presented him with a gift in the form of a 3 MERCIAN drum which had been converted into a table, having been produced by Mens Shed Lichfield. His Majesty was his usual warm self and wished all members of the Mercian Regimental Family the very best for the future.

1 MERCIAN - INTER COMPANY BOXING

The atmosphere throughout the night was electric, with the crowd of 500 1 MERCIAN Soldiers cheering their Company Boxers on, creating an intense and thrilling environment. The hangar was filled with excitement and anticipation as the soldiers eagerly supported their comrades throughout the 10-bout evening. Boxers from various companies within 1 MERCIAN showcased their skills and put on an impressive show, demonstrating incredible courage, determination, and resilience, truly embodying the ethos of the regiment. Their performances were a testament to the perseverance and strength that is characteristic of 1 MERCIAN.

Thanks to the generous financial support of Mr Tim Fisher and Mr Harry Porteous of Halochrome, the competition was able to take place and be a success. Their contributions ensured that the event will continue to be a highlight of the regiment's calendar.

At the end of the night, special mentions were given to the outstanding boxers. Pte Shaw of C Coy was voted the best boxer on the night by the judges, showcasing his exceptional talent and skill. Pte Cloake, also from C Coy, was recognized as the most courageous boxer for his unwavering determination and bravery in the ring.

The new Boxing company champions for 2023 were announced as C (Kohima) Company, and therefore were awarded the privilege of holding onto the Company Boxing Shield for the next 12 months, a well-deserved honour for their impressive performance.

Overall, the annual inter-company boxing competition was a resounding success. It brought together soldiers from different companies and showcased their talents, creating an exciting atmosphere for everyone in attendance. The event not only demonstrated the incredible skill and determination of the boxers but also highlighted the unity and camaraderie within 1 MERCIAN.

1 MERCIAN - MULTICULTURAL DAY

Sgt L Westfield

A day of culture, unity, and bonding – the aim of the event was for all service personnel and families of 1 MERCIAN to experience the diversity of cultures within our battalion. Walking around Picton Barracks, one sees soldiers from all walks of life and corners of the globe, but rarely do we have the opportunity to experience and celebrate this diversity.

The Battalion Multicultural day was tied into Op TEAMWORK, a time when the battalion's focus can be centred on becoming a better, more cohesive and understanding team. Kicked off with briefs in the Bulford Garrison Church, many of the cultural differences and traditions of the various nations represented within the battalion were briefed to broaden everyone's understanding of the various cultures from which we hail.

The event was themed for different regions of the world, and the afternoon saw a variety of stands showcasing the typical cuisine of those regions. There were Fijian, Caribbean, African, Nepalese, Indian and British stands. As soldiers and families entered the room with all the various cuisines, faces lit-up as they saw the wide range of excellent food on offer. The food at each of the stands was sublime, and the effort put by those running the stands was apparent,

all of which created a buzzing atmosphere and space where we could learn about each other's' backgrounds.

Certainly an event to remember, and one which most certainly developed the cohesion and understanding across 1 MERCIAN.

4 MERCIAN - Op INTERFLEX TRAINING UKRAINE'S ARMED FORCES IN URBAN WARFARE

By The East Midlands RFCA

A Nottinghamshire Soldier has spoken of an emotional exchange he shared with a Ukrainian Soldier after helping him to defend his homeland from Russian aggression.

Corporal James Noble said he has never heard higher praise than the words spoken by a trainee on completion of his training on UK soil.

The Infantry Section Commander, of C Company, 4 Mercian, teaches urban warfare training as part of Operation Interflex: the codename for the British-led multinational operation to support the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

The 27-year-old said: "At the end of each course we sign flags and things and say bye to them.

"Completely out of the blue, a Ukrainian Soldier came over to me with a picture on his phone and said: 'This is my wife and this is my young child. Thanks to you and what you've done, I have a much greater chance of living to see them again.'

"Personally, I've never heard anything more impactful or higher praise than that. It's difficult to match.

"Those guys know – as do we – that our training absolutely keeps a lot more Ukrainian Soldiers alive than otherwise would be the case."

You can read more about this article by visiting the RFCA website:

<https://eastmidlandsrca.co.uk/news/op-interflex-meet-the-nottinghamshire-soldier-training-ukraines-armed-forces-in-urban-warfare/>

4 MERCIAN - Ex SAXON CROWN

Capt Nick Olive

In October 4 Mercian participated in their Annual Training Event (ATE), split between Okehampton camp and the Dartmoor Training Area. The ATE provided the battalion with a valuable opportunity to deploy to an arduous and unfamiliar training environment and work on the skills required for upcoming deployments.

The event comprised of three distinct phases. In the initial phase, a comprehensive 5-day course programme was implemented, allowing reservists to acquire essential military instructor qualifications, including BCDT instructors, M qual, DTTT, and Basic Radio User.

On transitioning to the exercise phase, the XO's prediction was found to be correct and the weather shifted dramatically. Bright sunny skies transformed into a dark grey canopy accompanied by heavy rain. Undeterred, soldiers executed section attack lanes, employing section-level tactics to efficiently clear all enemy positions. The exercise progressed seamlessly into platoon actions, culminating in a deliberate attack led by Sgt Birks, who adeptly assumed the role of platoon commander. During the exercise's finale, soldiers demonstrated their skill by moving under the cover of darkness to eliminate designated enemy positions.

The third and final phase centred around a meticulously planned 3-day range package. Unfavourable wind conditions posed a significant challenge, rendering firing unsafe for substantial periods. In response, the battalion's NCOs demonstrated resourcefulness by organising engaging background activities during wind-free intervals. Despite these challenges, the battalion successfully conducted the Annual Combat Marksmanship Tests, with the Machine Guns platoon also completing an enjoyable range package under CSgt Harris.

As the G4 team closed the camp and recovered equipment, an additional and highly anticipated activity awaited the soldiers. Hosted by the Royal Marines, members of 4 Mercian travelled to Plymouth where they were treated to a unique experience – being taken out on beach landing craft. A first time for most of the soldiers and an experience that will not be forgotten.

In summary, the ATE showcased 4 Mercian's versatility and resilience in diverse and challenging scenarios. The inclusion of instructional qualifications, realistic field exercises, shooting assessments, and the opportunity to work alongside the Royal Marines in Plymouth underscored the battalion's preparedness and ability to maximise training opportunities. We look forward to further progression we move towards the 2024 ATE, Ex LINOTYPER.

4 MERCIAN Ex SNOW EAGLE

2Lt Hitch

Exercise SNOW EAGLE is the annual December Battalion training event to celebrate the hard work everyone in the Battalion has put in throughout the year. On Friday night the Battalion arrived in Wolverhampton ARC, eagerly awaiting an inter-company PT competition in the morning. Christmas music was used to get everyone up and in the mood for PT. The competition was circuits consisting of 5 stands, testing all aspects of fitness. Once completed we departed to the National Memorial Arboretum. This offered everyone an opportunity to reflect and think about the past.

Next on the agenda was a church service at DMS Whittington. The Padre delivered an excellent service, even encouraging the singing of hymns through a battle between the left and right side of the church for volume (a battle the left side clearly won). The appetite built up from the day was soon to be satisfied with a Christmas dinner. This was served by 4 Mercian's officers and SNCOs. This is tradition within the regiment, and serves as a way to thank the troops for all their effort over the past year.

Next, the bar. A pub quiz awaited, which was thoroughly enjoyed by all. The weekend ended with a parade, including an address from CO. Some well-deserved promotions took place, congratulation to all for their promotions. Chants of "Stand Firm Strike Hard" echoed throughout the building as the weekend concluded. Each company went back to their respective ARCs before heading home for some well-earned rest over the Christmas period, in preparation the what is an exciting year ahead for 4 Mercian.

4 MERCIAN - HQ COMPANY

Pte Laura Hollomon

My name is Pte Hollomon, and I am currently attached to 4 Mercian HQ company as a Royal Army Medical Corp. I completed my basic training in November 2022 and have since been completing my trade training. In June 2023, I completed my CMT3 course, and I look forward to completing my CMT2 course at the beginning of 2024.

When I first joined the reserves, it felt very overwhelming. I walked into a room where there were only men and I felt very intimidated being the only female. Additionally, I didn't have any military background therefore it was all very new to me. Nevertheless, everyone was so welcoming, and I have never felt like I have been treated any differently for being a female.

Throughout my time in the reserves, I encountered a few barriers that had the chance to hinder my progression, however, my unit never failed to support me through them and help me achieve every goal I have regarding my career.

My first barrier to progression was my confidence. I had a lot of self-doubt during basic training. Despite the self-doubt, my unit was able to help me increase my confidence in any way they could. For example, after highlighting a weakness in skill at arms during mod 2, my unit provided lessons at drill nights so that I could practice, increasing my confidence for the weekend.

Secondly, being attached to an infantry unit has meant that it is more challenging to be informed about upcoming medic courses and opportunities I can take part in. Regardless of the difficulty, the unit helped me identify what courses were available to me and ways I could develop myself professionally as a medic.

After completing my CMT3, I was eager to complete extra courses whilst waiting to be booked onto my CMT2. I was unsure on what I was eligible to do therefore my unit did what they could to accommodate my desire to take part in extra courses. From this, I completed the DTTT course where I have now been able to lead interest lessons to recruits and soldiers. Not only does this make me feel like a vital member of the unit but it also helps with increasing my confidence.

I began my journey unconfident and unsure that this was the right path for me. Without the support from my units at Worcester and Kidderminster, I would not have developed the skills I attain now. 4 Mercian have provided me with confidence, a sense of importance, self-discipline, communication, and many other skills. I am optimistic for my future with 4 Mercian and determined to progress even further.

THE BAND OF THE MERCIAN REGIMENT

On Remembrance Sunday, The Band of the Mercian Regiment were pleased to be working with their colleagues in The Band of the Royal Yorkshire Regiment as part of the City of York's commemoration events.

The parade wound around the city from the iconic Clifford's Tower to the City War Memorial and featured Standards, Artillery Guns, representatives of every service, veterans, regulars, reserves, cadets and other groups. The parade was so large it also had The York Railway Institute Band to move the parade in sections!

The Act of Remembrance took place at the City War Memorial, with the Last Post being played by Musician Adam Finch, an Artillery Gun salute, wreath laying and a moving service to offer thanks and memorial to all those who have sacrificed so much.

As the veterans proudly marched off to the famous Betty's Tea Shop, the combined bands marched the rest of the parade back through the city, along a route lined with flags, supporters and those who had joined the act of remembrance. It was a great tour of York, with its old over hanging buildings resounding the band's sound and creating a great atmosphere.

STOCKPORT BRANCH CRA & MVRA THE MERCIAN REGIMENTAL ASSOCIATION

Shotgun Shoot

Eleven members and guest were assembled on 1st October under the tutelage of our friendly BSAC coach, Paul. The weather held up and all enjoyed a full English, followed by 50 birds and then a social Sunday pint. Another good day was had by all.

East Cheshire Reunion

Stockport Branch again hosted the 76th East Cheshire Reunion, held on the last Saturday evening in October at St. Julien Barracks, Stockport. One of the major events of the CRA, it has stood well the test of time, being held contiguously every year since 1948. The reunion commemorates the landing in France of the 7th Bn, The 22nd (Cheshire) Regiment, the first TA infantry battalion in theatre at the commencement of WWII.

Bollington Brass Band, were once again on hand to provide the musical accompaniment for the evening. "Cook House Call drew everyone's attention to the matter in hand and memories were stirred on hearing again some of our Regimental Calls prior to "The Roast Beef of Old England".

Derek Sykes (85 years young and still carrying the Association Standard) marched on the Standard to the strains of the Cheshire Regiment Quick March "Wha Wadna Fecht for Charlie". This was followed by the Act of Remembrance which included the roll of those gone to higher formation.

The next phase was the traditional Hot Pot Supper (and once again there was meat in it!), followed by a cheese board. Maj Ron Goodwin MBE, our Presiding Officer, made a short speech welcoming Lord and Lady Evans of Rainow. The next speaker was Maj Will Rose, OC B Coy 4 Mercian, who gave an update on both the 1st and 4th Battalions of The Mercian Regiment.

The Loyal Greetings to HM The King and HRH Prince of Wales were read before proposing toasts to "The King", "The Colonel in Chief", and "The Regiment", which in turn received the very familiar responses of "The King", "The Earl of Chester", and "The 22nd".

To the delight of all present, The Cheshire Constabulary Corps of Drums marched on and delivered a display of drumming that was very well received, this year they added to their repertoire by doing a black light display as well.

STAFFORDSHIRE REGIMENT ASSOCIATION

Hednesford Branch

We had a very busy week of activities for the Hednesford Branch in November with several visits to local schools and care homes, and of course the local war memorials.

The branch visited Littleton Lodge Care Home to speak with residents, and Chadsmoor Junior School and St Luke's Primary School to engage with pupils about remembrance. We also enjoyed a school lunch while we were there.

Over the course of the weekend of 11-12 November branch members, including the standard bearer, attended remembrance services at Chadsmoor and Hednesford.'

The Hednesford Branch committee consists of:

President - H Pyke

Chairman - M Denny

Secretary - P & D Smith

Membership Secretary - D Smith

Social & Welfare Officer - T Evans

Treasurer - M Evans

.... Plus four other Committee members.

The Hednesford branch meets on the first Sunday of every month at the Soldier's Club in Hednesford.

THE WORCESTERSHIRE AND SHERWOOD FORESTERS REGIMENTAL ASSOCIATION

Nottingham City Branch

The Chairman and Secretary of the Nottingham Branch of the WFRA joined other WFRA branch members at the Crich Armistice Day service, organised by the Chesterfield branch. Thankfully it was a dry, sunny day and the Tea Shop was open for refreshments.

Our Veteran Branch member, Pete Rick, took and laid the Branch wreath at the Nottingham Victoria Embankment on Remembrance Sunday.

Through this Newsletter, the Nottingham Branch would like to thank the Retford Mercian Cadets for selecting a Standard Bearer to parade our Standard, alongside the Mercian Standard, at the Remembrance Day Service on Sunday 12 November, which took place in the Retford Market Square. On Saturday 11 November, our Standard was also paraded at an evening Drumhead Service at the Retford Council House.

Worksop Branch

Lindsey McGuire, Worksop Branch Secretary

Worksop Branch membership remains healthy with a good turnout at our branch meetings as well as good representation at local events. October saw a fantastic turnout from Worksop Branch WFRA at the Worksop Branch Royal British Legion – Festival of Remembrance. The Worksop Branch standard was paraded by Rob Fox, making his debut as Deputy Standard Bearer as our longstanding Standard Bearer, Stuart Jepson was out of action having had a hip replacement only a matter of days prior. Several branch members joined the muster at the Festival playing an active part in the formal act of remembrance, other branch members were in the audience along with family members.

Naturally, November is a time when the military family gather to honour our fallen comrades, those who have served and those who still serve their country today. As always, the Worksop Remembrance Parade was well attended with many organisations and members of the public

turning out to pay their respects. The branch was well represented with the Branch Standard on parade and numerous branch members including Stuart and his new hip, marching in the parade.

Many branch members attended an E Coy memorial night later in November, a social evening when many who served in E Company, 3WFR gather to honour those members of our WFR family who are sadly no longer with us.

On the subject of E Coy, branch member, Simon Kirkham recently commissioned an E Coy pin badge. Simon had 20 badges made and by selling these to former E Coy personnel, he raised £70.00 which was donated to Worksop Branch funds at the November branch meeting. A very kind and memorable way to give something back to the branch.

Also at the November branch meeting, former Branch Secretary, Mark Butcher was presented with a framed certificate of appreciation and a gift of thanks for his services to the branch over a 10 year period as secretary. Mark handed over the role of Secretary earlier this year in order to concentrate on other activities. Mark played a vital role in keeping the Regimental name visible and relevant and ensuring branch membership remained healthy and strong.

In December, branch members celebrated by attending a Christmas party night at North Notts Community Arena. The evening's entertainment was provided by tribute acts Benidorm Tom (Tom Jones) and She's Pink (Pink). The following week, some members gathered for a more sedate evening meal at the Blue Bell in Carlton in Lindrick.

Worksop Branch meetings continue to be held at The Station Hotel in Worksop, 6pm on the last Sunday of every other month. The next meeting will be on Sunday 28th January 2024.

BUDDY BUDDY GROUP

The Buddy Buddy group, based in Chesterfield, has been running for around 18 months now and is a Tri-Service, multi cap badge group for veterans (although serving personnel are invited to come along), both male and female, of all ages. It is an informal group that meets once a month with a guest speaker and food. Although not a formal support group, it applies the Buddy Buddy system that was used whilst serving - looking out for each other.

The next meeting will be held on Thursday 25 January from 1800 – 2000 hours. Full details are on the flyer and you can also contact Oli Barnes (ex WFR/Mercian): olibarnes@spireitetrust.org.uk

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.