

# **THE MERCIAN REGIMENT**

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER  
Q4 2024

Print-friendly Edition

## **1 MERCIAN COMMANDING OFFICER FOREWORD**

*Lt Col Brown*

The final quarter of 2024 has been characteristically busy, with elements of our battalion engaged on helping the Home Office house entitled Afghans, conduct a battlegroup exercise in horrendous weather conditions, and compete in various international competitions.

The battalion has worked hard to excel in all of these areas and more, from the eye-catching activity to the less glamorous, but all important, day-to-day work that keep an Armoured Infantry unit going.

I am deeply grateful to the efforts of all of our Service Personnel for their efforts, and to their loved ones for the continued support that they provide. 1 MERCIAN's reputation is strong, and that is all down to the hard graft of our people.

## **1 MERCIAN - Ex IRON CYCLONE**

*Lt A Roberts*

In November 2024 C Coy deployed on Ex Iron Cyclone in preparation for its deployment on Op CABRIT. During the month-long exercise, C Coy demonstrated a clear willingness to work, and tactical understanding as the CO's vanguard.

As any Armoured Infantry Company would tell you, the ideal testing ground for Warrior is the chalky wasteland of Salisbury Plain Training Area (SPTA), and the Company 2IC had finally worked out how to book the weather. With storm Bert and red weather warnings firmly in our rear-view mirrors, we rolled out ready to put together the four-year return to role which C Company has gone through into practice.

For the first two weeks, the Combined Arms Manoeuvre Centre called on the expertise of our Warrior commanders to supervise students on the Armoured Infantry Commanders Course (AICC). This saw the company conducting a variety of Coy level mounted training, always seeking to maximise cooperation between dismounted troops and Warrior AFVs. By "cooperation" we really mean trying to figure out why the radio wouldn't work again. C Coy performed well, qualifying 16 new AICC vehicle commanders, whilst also developing a strong relationship with B Sqn KRH, who would be deploying with us on OP CABRIT.

With students now qualified and a productive maintenance day under their belt, the company united with the rest of the Battlegroup for two weeks of BG-level training. With the integration of the Tactical Effects Simulator (instruction manual not included), we faced a live and unpredictable enemy. The BG had free rein of the entirety of SPTA and conducted a variety of battlegroup actions, including delays, defences, obstacle crossings, and attacks, both during the day and night. C Coy took it all in its stride, often leading the way with constant morale, and a willingness to lead the BG forward. The exercise culminated in a deliberate defence of Copehill Down Village (CDV). Members of the platoon were all issued new warm kit (a shovel) and began building their defences with trenches and the recreation of 10 Pavlov's Houses. Despite the best effort of SCARAB 32 (Engineers), in de-turfing and digging out trenches, there was no way to escape the impending noise of shovels hitting earth and wriggly tin being used as internal support. 36 hours later, we were set.

Tired and wet but still positive, C Coy went into routine on defensive positions. For the four people per trench, it was a long 48 hours of hour on hour

off sentry, numerous CBRN attacks and 8PI being tasked to lead a sentry, but finally we were given a chance to demonstrate our willingness to stand and fight. With the ISTAR screen withdrawn to the North, C Coy took up the FLOT of the BG and were almost immediately engaged in close fighting with the OPFOR. Holding the line, all personnel fought hard, including the attached Engineers who launched a counterattack to SECURE trenches which were coming under increasingly heavy attack. Hours went by, as C Coy held, before then being released to move back to the MDA in Shrewton Street, Copehill Down Village. As the enemy tried to break in, there momentum was shattered, armour destroyed by glorious counter attacks under the direction of Sgt Wood, Sgt Willis, and Cpl Connelly, and not a single building was broken into. The defence was successful, and Copehill Down was defended. Basking in the glory of successfully holding the MDA, C Coy had excelled. This morale was only dampened when we realised we would have to take the defences down.

An excellent four-week deployment, C Company 1 MERCIAN proved they are more than ready for deployment on OP CABRIT, ready to take on whatever tasks are given to us.

## **1 MERCIAN - Ex CAMBRIAN PATROL 2024**

*Lt Gray*

B Company were tasked with this year's CAMBRIAN PATROL, providing Recce platoon with some well-earned respite after back-to-back years in the seat.

Prior to the Exercise, the team conducted an intensive week of training in Dartmoor, led by LCpl King and LCpl Watts from the Recce Platoon. This 'zero to hero' week combined all aspects of the patrol, with each member designated as an SME in

a specific skill set. In challenging weather and terrain, the team really began to find its feet, and the camaraderie gained from this exercise was priceless in the face of one of the worlds hardest patrols.

Training completed; the team then deployed to Brecon in the early hours of the morning. After scoring full marks on the kit and comms checks, Lt Gray then received orders from the familiar face of CSgt Evans - a fellow Mercian and B Coy veteran. The orders set the conditions for success on the patrol and the team was full of enthusiasm as we stepped off.

The first stages of the patrol involved cross-country navigation in unpredictable weather conditions, with some members carrying over 50kg of equipment. On arriving at the CBRN stand, the sun finally made an appearance just in time dress state 4 and the DS were in good spirits as they led an uphill extraction away from the chemical threat. The next stage then required a wet gap crossing. Arriving in darkness and donning only their underwear and jungle hats, the team dived straight into the Brecon waters with high morale.

The team then received some timely intelligence regarding a helicopter crash and as we patrolled up to the moors, we encountered a 4km stretch of bog. The heavens opened up, and the only light came from the fireworks display of mini flares as teams withdrew around us. Despite energy and morale hitting rock bottom, the team quickly revived themselves and performed exceptionally in the mass casualty scenario in front of them – a testament to their will and character.

Relief came as we ditched our bergens and were transported to Sennybridge Training Area for the second phase of the patrol. The next challenge was a reconnaissance mission of an enemy position

conducted via drone. Each team member made detailed notes and sketches according to their roles and we were quick to identify the various enemy assets.

The information gathered needed to be delivered to a CP in Cellini Village, however we encountered a relic minefield on route. Clearing a safe path through this proved to be a mixed success, but the team remained focused. Upon arriving in Cellini village, we were contacted by indirect fire (IDF) and executed a swift extraction into a nearby building with “the best drills we’ve seen so far” – Brecon Colour Sergeant.

Inside the building, the team prepared their patrol report while the commander and 2IC conducted AFV recognition and fire missions on the enemy mortar line. With the patrol report complete and Cellini secured, the team embarked on a long tab to a suspected enemy position to the northeast. Here we conducted a section attack by night before detaining enemy personnel beyond the cleared position. As Infanteers, the team took this opportunity to really showcase their infantry skills and experience.

The final leg of our journey led us to a farm where the team was interrogated on every aspect of the patrol. With the heaters on full blast, the team won the battle of the eye lids and delivered a full back brief on the last 48hrs.

Overall, the 1 MERCIAN Cambrian Patrol team delivered an outstanding performance. All eight members completed the patrol, displaying exceptional resilience and camaraderie throughout, and they were rewarded with a silver medal for their efforts. The battalion was quick to recognise this achievement with a reception in the WO’s and Sgt’s mess on their arrival back to camp – a fitting end to rewarding few weeks.

## **4 MERCIAN - HONORARY COLONEL**

### **A message from Colonel Carl – Reflections on the final quarter of 2024**

*Colonel Carl Richardson*

In recent months I have been delighted to have the opportunity to get ‘out and about’ and meet many Mercians at various activities.

In October I visited C (Kohima Company) at Bulwell Army Reserve Centre in Nottingham to meet and engage with soldiers and officers. Hosted by Major Lloyd Watts, soldiers and officers participated in a training demonstration using the Company’s purpose-built urban combat skills facility, before I was given the chance to follow soldiers through the facility for a first-hand experience.

Then in December I had the privilege of presenting the King Charles III Coronation medal to eligible soldiers from 4 MERCIAN in Wolverhampton, along with the inaugural presentation of the Richardson Trophy, awarded to the year’s best Private soldier following a series of competitive tasks.

The aim of the Richardson Trophy is to foster a spirit of competition within the Battalion in order to encourage innovative thinking and problem solving, as well as camaraderie, cohesion and teamwork. It will also serve to help identify future leaders and prepare them for their first position of command as Lance Corporals.

Congratulations to Pte Connor McGarry, a history teacher from Nottingham, who emerged as the first winner of the trophy, and best of luck to all who are competing for the trophy in 2025!

## **4 MERCIAN - Ex SLIM VELO Cycle Sports Trip to the French Alps**

*Capt Sidwell*

I had the incredible opportunity to take on some famous Tour-de-France stages in the French Alps on two wheels alongside a group of Officer Cadets and staff from Birmingham University Officer Training Corps (BUOTC). From stunning climbs to challenging conditions, it was an unforgettable experience.

Day 1 took us from Bourg St Maurice over the Cornet to Lac de Roselend, for a very expensive but well-earned coffee, before climbing back over the lump to the start point.

Day 2 kicked-off with a hill-start on Bourg St Maurice up to the beautiful ski resort of Val d'Isère, and over the mighty Col d'Iseran. After having spent 4 hours climbing, I managed just 9 minutes of enjoyable descent before my tyre exploded at 58km/hr. Feeling lucky to be alive, I spent the remainder of the day sipping coffee on the jack wagon.

On Day 3, with the Galibier closed due to stormy conditions, and on achy legs, the group rode to Briançon, conquered the Izoard, and tackled the Lauteret.

With plenty of carb-loading after Day 3 – utilising the nutritious qualities of locally-brewed lager - we took an early night and readied ourselves for a big final day. The final day we climbed the prestigious Alp d'Huez (famous Tour de France climb) in a poorly-timed blizzard. This iconic climb certainly proved a test, but the views (and experience of climbing the mountain in snow) were certainly worth the pain.

This is just one example of the opportunities the Army Reserves offers to push your boundaries, make new friends, and learn new skills..

(Oh, and if you're going to cycle at 58km/hr, make sure you conduct a bicycle first parade inspection first!!)

## **4 MERCIAN - BATTLEFIELD STUDY TO ARNHEM 80th Anniversary of Operation MARKET GARDEN**

*WO1 (RSM) Fowles*

Soldiers and officers of the 4th Battalion deployed to Arnhem in the Netherlands to complete a Battlefield Study of Op MARKET GARDEN to coincide with the 80th anniversary of the Airborne and Gliderborne Operations that took place in September 1944. The battlefield study, Ex FIRM GARDEN, focused on the 2nd Battalion, The South Staffordshire Regiment who were one of the main units who fought alongside units from the Parachute Regiment.

During the Battlefield Study, members of 4 MERCIAN took time looking at all the components of fighting power, focusing on leadership skills and the moral component of warfare, as well as the planning and logistical challenges that such an ambitious operation such as MARKET GARDEN created. Prior to arriving in Arnhem for the start of the battlefield study, pre-reading of historical publications and a Battalion-produced study-pack to set the strategic and operational context took place. This allowed for the scene to be set and for all ranks to gain a full understanding of each element of the visit.

Op MARKET GARDEN, and specifically the Battle for Arnhem has the strongest of links with one of our antecedent regiments who deployed in gliders to mark Drop Zones (DZ) before marching into battle. The light infantry-centric nature of the operation provided excellent historical examples to stimulate doctrinal discussion on contemporary issues, in addition to considering the complexity of multi-national operations and combined arms manoeuvre.

- The battalion visited Hartenstein Hotel, in Oosterbeek which focused on the 1st Airborne Division and Route Lion into Arnhem.
- The battalion paid a visit to the Commonwealth War Graves, researching fallen soldiers of the South Staffordshire Regiment.
- The battalion visited both John Frost and De Oversteek Bridge, looking at how we might have secured those objectives in a modern warfare context using equipment available today.

Finally, the Battalion finished the Battlefield study with tours at the Wings of Liberation, and the Freedom Museum, with the Commanding Officer laying a Mercian Regiment Wreath at the Glider Infantry Monument. It was a thoroughly excellent trip and it is hoped that future events can be organised around this most famous piece of history to keep the connection between Op MARKET GARDEN and the Mercian Regiment alive.

## **4 MERCIAN - Ex DRAGON VALLEY**

14 soldiers and officers from across the battalion deployed on Ex DRAGON VALLEY in California, USA. Upon arrival in San Francisco all SP took part in cultural visits to the Golden Gate Bridge and took a tour of Alcatraz prison.

After this the expedition moved inwards to Yosemite National Park and settled into a mountain lodge inside the park. From here the expedition began its mountaineering phase, which would see the Summer Mountain Foundation course be delivered by distributed training. The training was provided by 4 MERCIAN instructors CSgt Hudson and Sgt Wood. This was achieved over 6 days, trekking on routes ranging from 12km to 28km, summiting such famous landmarks as El Capitan, Glacier point, Sentinal point, and Vernal Falls.

During the course the students were taught both theory and practical lessons on navigation, risk assessments, weather, emergency procedures, and log books, so they can progress further on the ATG mountaineering scheme.

As the expedition began its journey back to the UK it moved to Santa Cruz where SP were given free time to go out and enjoy the seaside town and its amusements before flying home the next day. The exercise was a great success and was a fantastic experience enjoyed by all, which now sets conditions for further expeditions and internal growth of mountaineering instructors.

## **4 MERCIAN - RUNNING TEAM**

*2Lt Saunders*

The 4 MERCIAN running team has had a busy 2024 season. The team has taken their unique and passionate reservist commitments from the parade ground to the racecourse, participating in the Army Half Marathon Championships in Fleet, and Ex Eagle Hood, the Nottingham Half Marathon. Soldiers have also completed further races as individuals, even up to the ultra-marathon level. In total, 8 different soldiers and officers have represented the battalion in running this year.

The Army Half Marathon Championships in Fleet proved to be an early season test for the team and a good indicator of where running standards were at. The team's blend of physical fitness and mental resilience, honed through their military training, helped them tackle the course with determination. Several runners achieved personal bests highlighting their rigorous preparation including LCpl McFadden of B Coy with a team best time of 1:34:21 and all team members below 1:52:00.

On Ex EAGLE HOOD the team entered the Nottingham Half Marathon, a city embedded into the regimental roots. Despite the challenging and very hilly course, the team found inspiration from running in familiar terrain with family and friends cheering them on, to improve on times from the Fleet Half Marathon. 2Lt Saunders ran a team best time of 1:36:14 and all team members ran in a time under 2:07:00.

The 4 MERCIAN Running Team looks forward to what the 2025 season has to offer.

## **THE BAND OF THE MERCIAN REGIMENT Finishing the year with a flourish!**

Following on from their successful concert in Lichfield Cathedral, The Band of the Mercian Regiment finished the year in good cheer entertaining those who had braved the storms with a now traditional Christmas Concert at St Michael & All Angels in Tettenhall. There were stunning solos from Musician Katie Jenner on Clarinet, with Viktor's Tale, and from L/Cpl Michelle Pithers, with a contemporary vocal take on Wham's Last Christmas. The church rang with the now traditional audience carol singing and a feast of Christmas music new and old.

Earlier that day, 25 of the Band were presented with their King's Coronation Medals, which represents 5 years' service leading up to the Coronation date. The medals were presented by the Honorary Colonel, Colonel Carl Richardson, on parade in Wolverhampton. Congratulations to all.

In November, Remembrance Sunday saw the Band return to parade in Birmingham City Centre - shoulder to shoulder with members of the Armed Forces Community, City Officials and members of the public in Remembrance. As 1100hrs approached, Major General Timothy Hodgetts CB CBE KHS read the Act of Commemoration before Corporal Wendy Robert sounded the Last Post. Heads bowed in silent reflection as the community came together to remember. Wreaths were laid by Dignitaries, Representatives from the Armed Forces, Officials, Local Community Representatives and Veterans. Following the service, The Band led the parade on a complete circuit of the Cathedral Square and past the dais, where the salute was taken by the Lord Mayor of Birmingham.

Duty Bugler, Cpl Wendy Robert was also out on parade on the 11th of November to sound the Last Post and Reveille at The College of Policing, Police National Search Centre, near Coventry as part of the Act of Remembrance and wreath laying service.

Small ensembles and groups have been out and about adding pomp and ceremony to regimental dinners and events across the region including the first outing for the Brass Ensemble at the Rewards and Awards Dinner for tri-service military consultants who have been working within the NHS. The event was held in the Officer's Mess at DMS Whittington: well played!

## Personnel successes

A big welcome to Lance Corporal Mathew Curtis who has recently transferred to The Band of the Mercian Regiment. LCpl Curtis, who is a talented saxophonist by trade and is also often seen playing bassoon, clarinet and a multitude of other instruments, has served with the Band of the Coldstream Guards, The British Army Band Sandhurst and The Band of the Welsh Guards.

An overdue welcome to The Band of the Mercian Regiment for Musician Andrew Elwood who has transferred from The Band, Bugles, Pipes and Drums of the Royal Irish Regiment and settled in the Midlands. As a keen runner and orienteer, he is looking forward to exploring the area.

Welcome to the Midlands and to the Band! The Band of the Mercian Regiment is currently recruiting.

## DERBYSHIRE ARMY CADET FORCE

*Capt P Thomas*

### Lord Lieutenant's Cadet Investiture

Each year, Derbyshire ACF Cadets are invited to apply for the prestigious role of Lord Lieutenant's Cadet. The role sees them supporting the Lord Lieutenant at a wide range of events all over the county. This year, Cadet Sergeant India Johal of Mickleover Detachment, D Company, was recommended to the Office of the Lieutenancy by County Commandant Colonel Honeybell.

Toyota Manufacturing UK's Burnaston facility played host to the annual East Midlands Reserve Forces and Cadets Association event.

Cadet Sergeant Johal gave a speech to an audience of 150 that included business leaders and tri-service Armed Forces personnel. Her speech focused on service to the community, courage, determination and pride. She credited Derbyshire Army Cadet Force Adult Volunteers with making her the person that was stood before them.

The Lord Lieutenant thanked her outgoing Cadets - noting that they had all grown in confidence and character, and had been excellent ambassadors for their organisations. She then turned to her new Sea, Army and Air Cadets and expressed how much she was looking forward to getting to know them during the many public-facing events they will attend together.

### Remembrance Sunday Parades

After hundreds of hours spent practicing foot drill, polishing boots to a high shine and ensuring uniforms were immaculately presented, the county's Army Cadets and Adult Volunteers proudly took to the streets to proudly march with their units in their local communities.

Many cadets had key roles such as laying wreaths, carrying their unit's banner, escorting the RBL's Standard Bearer, being a memorial sentry.

The County Band played at Heanor's service, the Corps of Drums led the Eckington Parade in north east Derbyshire.

Lord Lieutenant's Cadet, Sgt India Johal, and Derby Mayor's Cadet, Cpl Mateusz Wojtowicz, both attended the Derby City Parade.

Hundreds of Derbyshire ACF cadets were out in their communities standing with the many people that were there to remember.

## STAFFORDSHIRE & WEST MIDLANDS NORTH SECTOR ARMY CADET FORCE County Cadets Raise £23,727.95 for the 2024 Poppy Appeal

Throughout November, cadets and adult volunteers across the county came together to support the 2024 Poppy Appeal, raising an outstanding £23,727.95 for the Royal British Legion. Their hard work and enthusiasm helped honour the sacrifices of veterans and provided vital support for their families.

Cadets were a visible presence in high streets, shopping centres, and supermarkets, engaging with the public and tirelessly collecting donations. Their professionalism and dedication inspired generosity from local communities.

Many also took part in Remembrance Sunday parades, marching with precision and paying tribute to fallen soldiers. Cadets further supported remembrance services by distributing programmes, assisting veterans, and ensuring events ran smoothly.

Adult volunteers worked behind the scenes, offering guidance and encouragement to the cadets, ensuring the success of every collection and event.

This incredible fundraising total reflects the commitment, teamwork, and community spirit shown by everyone involved. A heartfelt thank you goes to all cadets, volunteers, and members of the public who contributed to this year's appeal.

Together, we've raised essential funds and kept the spirit of remembrance alive. Here's to another year of making a difference and supporting such an important cause!

## **STAFFORDSHIRE REGIMENT MUSEUM**

### **Night in the Trenches**

7th November saw the museum hold its signature 'Night in the Trenches' event. For this 2024, visitors were given an extended one hour tour, with an emphasis on an immersive experience. Each tour group was guided by a museum volunteer and progressed through numerous scenarios, being given a feel for life in a western front trench during the Great War. These scenes included a simulated poison gas attack, a worn out medic ranting about the loss of life, a trench raiding party capturing one of the enemy and many more. This was all set to a back drop of sporadic gunfire and pyrotechnics for added ambience.

### **A Wartime Christmas 6th December 2024**

Storm Darragh caused last a minute re-think of the event which usually saw the Troops in the Trenches and a re-enactment of the Christmas Truce along with family friendly activities. Father Christmas and the elves landed the sleigh indoors, there was live music from museum volunteers, Don and friends, Christmas crafts and festive displays. A great way to wrap up the year at the museum.

In November, the Museum Director Peter Collins was given a great send off by the museum team as he has moved on to take up new employment in Derbyshire.

## **STOCKPORT BRANCH CRA & MVRA: THE MERCIAN REGIMENTAL ASSOCIATION**

### **East Cheshire Reunion Dinner**

Members of the association, together with ex members of the Cheshire Regiment, attended the

77th East Cheshire Reunion Dinner. In total 108 members were treated to an evening of music and speeches by honoured guests.

### **7th November Festival of Remembrance Manchester Airport**

The Festival of Remembrance, which is held in the Concorde Hangar at Manchester Airport, is not perhaps as well known as the one held at the Royal Albert Hall, but is no less of a celebration of the lives and the sacrifices that members of all services have made not only during the world wars, but in the years since.

This year the festival remembered not only the 80th Anniversary of the D-Day Landings, but also the battles at Montecassino, and Operation Market Garden. Mike Rogers attended this year's event as standard bearer for the association.

### **Wreath Laying at Stockport County vs Bolton**

At the Stockport County match against Bolton, commemorative wreaths were laid in the centre circle for remembrance weekend. Derek Sykes, Dave Willis, Steve Whaite, and Mike Rogers were standard bearers for the association together with standard bearers from other services across Stockport.

### **Remembrance Parade Stockport**

Members of the association attended the annual Remembrance parade in Stockport, which was well attended by all branches of the Armed Forces. This also included Cadet and voluntary organisations, all in the presence of the Mayoress of Stockport, civic dignitaries and representatives from many faith groups. Mike Rogers carried the MRA Standard for the parade.

Once again the service and the parade were well attended and supported by the people of Stockport. The association recognises this and wishes to thank the people of Stockport for their continued support.

### **Armistice Day Stockport**

A 2-minute silence was held at the war memorial in Stockport. This was attended by members of the association, including Steve Whaite and Mike Rogers as standard bearers, in the presence of the Mayoress of Stockport and civic dignitaries, officiated by Captain Lesley Oldham.

### **Ladies Xmas Dinner Night**

On Friday 6th December saw the annual Ladies Dinner Night, which is hosted as a thank you to the wives and girlfriends of members. The event was well attended. The association wishes to extend its thanks to all those that helped to make the evening a success.

Special mention goes to Pete Galley, Erica Mills, and Pete Marsh for organising and cooking the meal, Les Heighway and Steve Whaite for running the bar.

## **CHESHIRE REGIMENT ASSOCIATION**

*Peter Gresty, Chair*

### **42nd Droppin Well Bombing Memorial Service**

Despite Storm Darragh ravaging much of the west coast of Britain and Northern Ireland, sufficient hardy souls travelled to Ballykelly to attend the 42nd Droppin Well Memorial Service.

The service was held on the afternoon of Sunday 8th December, despite it being dry it was still quite cold. As was expected the congregation was smaller than in the past due to the ravages of time and the

service was once again held in the Memorial Garden.

There were still approximately 50 people in attendance, which I thought was quite good. The service was led, once again, by Rev Canon Harold Given after he missed last year. Mrs Alison Millar, HM Lord Lieutenant of County Londonderry read a lesson during the service and Peter Gresty, the CRA Chair, read the Roll of Honour.

The Piper and Bugler, kindly provided by 152 NI Regt RLC, played their part in the cold conditions and their parts in the service were really appreciated. A total of 4 standards were on parade which added to the service.

Wreaths and floral tributes were laid by many of the attendees including HM Lord Lieutenant, Eric Traylor for the CRA, ACC Association, Mc Philpott for the Mercian Regiment, Roland Harkness and Brian Hartigan in addition to families and friends.

Well done to those members of the CRA who travelled and attended whether you travelled from Germany (Sue Jones), from England (Mike & Heather Smith, Micky Murdoch, Roland Harkness, Phil Thomas, Dave Willis, Sam Nulty, Brian Hartigan, Elizabeth Buckley & Pete Gresty), from Southern Ireland (Paul Disley) or Northern Ireland (Mac & Fiona Philpott, Baz Potter, Eric Traylor, Bill Davenport, Carol Callan). We were sorry that Ken and Francis Cooper missed the day, due to a medical emergency, but our thanks to both of them for setting everything up and making the necessary arrangements.

Following the service, we beat a hasty retreat to the Church Hall for a welcome cup of tea or coffee and a biscuit or two, it was good to renew acquaintances

with many we had not seen since last year as well as see a couple of new faces.

Upon completion of the day's events those members of the CRA who were present retired to the even warmer bar of The Drummond Hotel.

Next years' memorial service will be held at 1500 hrs on Sunday 7th December 2025 in the Memorial Garden of Tamlaghtfinlagan Church in Ballykelly, Northern Ireland.

## **STAFFORDSHIRE REGIMENT ASSOCIATION**

### **SRACC – 80th Anniversary Battle of Arnhem Commemoration Ride 18-24 Sept 2024**

80 years ago, Operation Market Garden began. The plan was to drop troops of the First Allied Airborne Army by Parachute and Glider to capture key bridges in Holland. This was then supported by the British 2nd Army to push through the airborne corridor to break into Germany.

The 2nd Bn the South Staffordshire Regiment were part of the 'Market' airborne element, and over the 17th & 18th of September 1944, 767 men deployed in Gliders, landing just north of Arnhem.

Over the next 9 days, the Battalion would be involved in some of the fiercest fighting of the War. By the end of the battle, 85 men had been killed, 558 had been captured and 124 men were eventually evacuated across the river to safety. For Gallantry, two members of the Battalion were awarded the Victoria Cross.

On the 18th September 2024, an assembled team from the Staffordshire Regimental Association Cycle Club, embarked on their 80th Anniversary Commemoration Ride. Between the 18-24

September. The team rode over 400 miles with their aim, to follow, as best they could, the route that the 2nd South Staffords took. From their homes in Staffordshire, to their Base at Woodhall Spa in Lincolnshire; before they deployed to Arnhem. The Team were grateful that both mascots, Sgt Watchman VI & Pte Derby XXXIII where there to see the team off.

During the ride, the SRACC carried out commemorations on behalf of the Regimental family to honour all those that fought in the battle. Sadly, the Veterans who were there are diminishing year on year. So, it is left to the next generations, to continue to remind, remember and honour that solemn oath 'Lest We forget' and the sacrifices of those brave men at Arnhem.

Keeping with the Regimental family theme, the team had the honour and privilege to have the families of 4 men of the Battalion who fought in the Battle to commemorate with us. The families of Major Robert Cain VC, LCpl Victor Chillingsworth, Pte Alfred Johnson and Pte Amos Fairbrother joined us once in Arnhem. Major Cain's Daughter riding with us from Rotterdam.

With great support from the Regimental Museum and the Regimental Family as a whole, the members of the SRACC, were committed to this commemoration ride, not just by attending, but also to replicate, in some small way the Mental and Physical hardships that the Soldiers at Arnhem endured. Although the ride was specifically to commemorate the battle, it was quite a significant distance and, as it was a challenge, they supported the following charities.

- Mercian Regiment Benevolent Fund – Regimental Fund to support serving



soldiers and Veterans of the Mercian Regiment and its Antecedent Regiments.

- The Staffordshire 3 Memorial Fund – A fund established to raise money for a permanent Memorial for 3 Soldiers of the Regiment who were killed on Op Telic 6.

The Commemorations in Schoonhoven, Arnhem and Oosterbeek were a very emotional and a real family affair with as mentioned the families of the fallen joining us on the day. We were honoured to have them with us at the various key locations where the Regiment Landed, fought and were laid to rest. We held commemorations at the following locations.

- 1st Airlanding Bde Memorial – Woodhall Spa
- The Lone Soldier – Pte Clarence Ash – Schoonhoven
- Glider Memorial – LZ S just north of Wolfheze
- CWGC Cemetery – Oosterbeek
- Baskeyfield Tree – The site where LSgt J D Baskeyfield won his Victoria Cross
- Old Church Oosterbeek – Site where the final defence of Arnhem took place and near to where Maj Robert Cain won his Victoria Cross
- Municipal Museum (Monastery) – The location of the last attempt by the Regiment and Division to get to the besieged units holding the bridge
- Resistance Memorial – Woeste Hoeve 117 Dutch Resistance killed in reprisals after 'Market Garden

The Arnhem 80 Ride was a great achievement. The team rode 413 miles with the wind in our faces the whole time. It was tough both physically and mentally with sore legs, sore bums, and sore eyes

for us all. In particular the Dike road from Rotterdam to Arnhem and back. The wind, like the Germans in Sept 1944 never gave us Stafford's a break. It was an emotional rollercoaster for the team with memories that will last a lifetime.

For all the SRACC's efforts we were generously supported and raised £6266, which has been split equally between the two charities.

We hope we have done the Regimental family proud.

## **WORCESTERSHIRE & SHERWOOD FORESTERS REGIMENTAL ASSOCIATION**

### **Chesterfield Branch**

Chesterfield Branch have had a good last 6 months with the Branch members enjoying a few events and outings; trips to Chester and the Manchester Christmas Markets. Our Alma Social was well attended with our members and friends of other Regimental Associations in Chesterfield who seem to enjoy our company.

Looking ahead, a group of Branch Members, in March will be going to France and Belgium, on this 80th Anniversary of the Second World War to carry out wreath laying to remember those of our previous Regiments who paid the ultimate price for our freedom. We are also looking to the remainder of 2025 and the events that will be planned and enjoyed by members.

### **Derby Branch**

We start with the sad news of the loss of Mrs April Davis, wife of Leon Davis. To add to this sad news, we then lost Ian (Eddie) Edwards, who until his illness attended most meetings and functions. We

extended our condolences to family and friends of those departed.

For Remembrance parades, members attended their own local services however, as in previous years we assisted at the Chaddesden Schools Remembrance Parade, with our members taking control of a school for the march past. The service at Allenton War Memorial Village, organised by Mick Doyle, was very well supported. We also attended the service at Soldiers Corner, Nottingham Road Cemetery, which always takes place on 11 November.

In December we held a Christmas Curry Lunch at the Mount Everest Gurkha Restaurant, Derby. All entered into the festive spirit and had a really enjoyable afternoon. Santa and his little Elf made a surprise visit, with Santa giving out packets of sweets to everyone. The Elf then led us in a carol singing competition. It was hard to judge the winning table, although being biased I would say it was the "Grinch" table (on which I sat), with Rudolf and Frostie tables tying for second! Our thanks go to Bethany Robinson and Evie for making such a success of selling the tickets for the raffle and persuading people to part with their money, and Brenda Derbyshire, who on behalf of the Branch purchased the prizes.

For our meetings we have moved venues. Our thanks go to Captain (QM) Scott Parker of Derbyshire ACF, who was instrumental in arranging the venue at the Derbyshire ACF HQ, Sinfin Lane, Derby.

So, apart from the sad news the Branch has enjoyed a good three months, and anyone wishing to join us can be assured of a warm welcome.

### **Worcester Branch**

Worcester Branch continue to attend many events and one of the main highlights of the year is the Gheluvelt Service which is an annual event. The 110th Commemoration which took place on 27 Oct 2024 saw the Vice Lord Lieutenant of Worcestershire joined by other Civic Dignitaries including the Mayor of Zonnebeke.

Our President, Lt Col (Retd) Mark Jackson OBE led the branch, of which many members including Standards were in attendance. 2Lt Boyer of 4 Mercian represented the Mercian Regiment and the Regimental Mascot was also in attendance.

### **Workshop Branch**

As always, Workshop Branch activity has been a good mix of formal and social events. The autumn is naturally more formal with events focused on remembrance. In October, the branch attended Workshop RBL Festival of Remembrance. The deputy Standard Party were on parade for this event having met a few times beforehand to brush-up their drill and be able march out confidently on the night. The festival was attended by a good number of members, Branch Secretary read In Flanders Fields as part of the Act of Remembrance and members joined the Muster of Veterans on the stage for a drumhead service. The branch members also supported the RBL Poppy Appeal by volunteering for shifts on the poppy stall in Workshop Asda in the run up to Remembrance Sunday.

The branch was well represented at Remembrance Parade when as well as the Branch Standard Party, Workshop Branch also provided escorts for the Union Standard and the Royal British Legion, Workshop Branch Standard. Our branch Chair was Contingent Commander for the veterans contingent, where many branch members marched too. The Standard Party was again on parade on Armistice Day for the

Act of Remembrance in the Old Market Square and later at the war memorial in Hardwick village.

The E Coy annual memorial night, which took place in November, was attended by a large number of branch members as well as others from the 3 WFR family. This has become a regular social event where we raise a glass for absent friends.

The branch sadly lost a key member with the passing of former CSM Dave Swan in November. Dave served as Vice Chair of the Workshop WFRA Branch from 2015 until he was appointed Chair in 2016 and was a respected and much-loved member of the branch. Dave resigned as Chair in 2022 due to his health. Dave's coffin was carried by former members of E Company and escorted by the Workshop Branch WFRA Standard on his final journey.

In between the respectful and sombre occasions, branch members did relax and enjoyed a Christmas party night with music from The Jersey Tones and a hot supper at North Notts Arena.

Workshop branch meetings continue to be held at The Station Hotel in Workshop, 6pm on the last Sunday of every other month: Saturday 29th March (16:00 hrs for AGM), Sunday 18th May, Sunday 27th July, Sunday 28th September and Sunday 30th November.

### **THE STAFFORDSHIRE CORPS OF DRUMS**

The Staffordshire Corps of Drums has had a very steady year. We are now practicing at the Staffordshire Regiment museum in Lichfield on every 3rd Saturday of the month.

For this year's Remembrance Sunday, we paraded at Brewood, Staffordshire, leading the parade to and

from St Mary & St Chad Church. We then performed a static display at the Royal British Legion.

New members are welcome, with or without music experience. We can offer training on most corps of drums instruments. Uniform and instruments are provided.

For further information please reach out to RHQ Mercian via: [communications@mercianregiment.co.uk](mailto:communications@mercianregiment.co.uk) and your details will be passed along to the Corps of Drums.

The next Corps of Drums practice is Saturday 15th March at 1000 hrs at the Staffordshire Regiment Museum. Those interested in Corps of Drums music are welcome!

### **PLANNING FOR YOUR FAMILY SHOULD THE WORST HAPPEN**

#### **Planning tips to help your next of kin**

Like every good soldier, it is best to be prepared, as Benjamin Franklin wrote that nothing can be certain, except death and taxes. It is not ghoulish to give serious thought to how your loved ones would cope with sorting out your affairs if they do not have the necessary information. Putting together an emergency file that contains your personal data of birth, marriage certificates and details of insurance policies would help the family with the inevitable administration.

#### **Important numbers:**

1. National Insurance Number
2. Military Service Number
3. NHS Number
4. Driving License Number

5. Passport Number

**Where to find things:**

1. Your Will
2. Power of attorney
3. Insurance policies
4. Deeds of house or lease of house
5. Rent book and tenancy details
6. Medical cards
7. Pension documents
8. Birth /marriage certificates
9. Banking/savings information
10. Certificate of stocks/shares or investments
11. Income Tax records
12. Car documentation
13. Keys
14. Address book
15. Pre-paid Funeral Plan
16. Computer passwords
17. Valuable items

**Initial action by the bereaved:**

1. Inform doctor
2. Register the death and obtain the death certificate (get a minimum of eight copies)
3. Inform relatives and friends
4. Consult the will, identify the executor
5. Instruct funeral director
6. Inform Armed Forces Pensions at Veterans UK (Call them if Spouse is entitled)
7. Apply for pensions as necessary
8. Inform Gov.UK if claiming State Pension
9. Make appropriate insurance claims
10. Instruct a solicitor to wind up the estate
11. Prepare obituary
12. Cancel policies that are paid out by direct debit
13. Inform/change gas/electric account holder

14. Inform local council re council tax if account holder
15. Inform Bank (if separate or joint account)

**Tell us Once:**

Tell Us Once is a UK Government Web Site that will give good advice and inform all Government departments at: <https://www.gov.uk/after-a-death/organisations-you-need-to-contact-and-tell-us-once>.

They will also contact some public sector pension schemes so that they cancel future pension payments:

1. HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) - to deal with personal tax and to cancel benefits and credits, for example Child Benefit and tax credits
2. Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) - to cancel benefits and entitlements, for example Universal Credit or State Pension
3. Passport Office - to cancel a British passport
4. Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) - to cancel a licence, remove the person as the keeper of up to 5 vehicles and end the vehicle tax
5. The local council - to cancel Housing Benefit, Council Tax Reduction (sometimes called Council Tax Support), a Blue Badge, inform council housing services and remove the person from the electoral register
6. Veterans UK - to cancel or update Armed Forces Compensation Scheme payments
7. Social Security Scotland - to cancel benefits and entitlements from the Scottish Government, for example Scottish Child Payment

8. Armed Forces Pension Scheme (note it is better if you have a surviving spouse to call them direct)
9. Civil Service Pension Scheme (note it is better if you have a surviving spouse to call them direct)
10. NHS Pensions for NHS staff in England and Wales
11. Pension Protection Fund and Financial Assistance Scheme
12. Local Government Pension Schemes (LGPS)

**Details of who to tell:**

1. Doctor
2. Friends and relatives
3. Solicitor and estate executor
4. Bank
5. Employer
6. Veterans UK if getting a military pension (please call them direct)
7. HMRC
8. Dentist
9. Gov.UK if obtaining state pensions or entitlements (done by Tell us Once)