

THE MERCIAN REGIMENT

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER
Q3 2024

Print-friendly Edition

1 MERCIAN COMMANDING OFFICER FOREWORD

Lt Col Brown

1 MERCIAN is now fully engaged with its pre-deployment training for a battlegroup deployment to Estonia in early 2025. This has seen large parts of the battalion conducting live firing, both dismounted and from our armoured vehicles, throughout September.

We have also had training teams deployed as far afield as Saudi Arabia, Liberia, and Uganda, which has provided novel challenges to those personnel deployed. A and B companies, who will not be deploying in March, have also been busy.

A Company has been live firing with the KRH battlegroup, and B Company has started early preparations for a deployment to Estonia in September 2025 with the RTR battlegroup.

Throughout we have found time for some adventurous training, have celebrated Dashain with our Nepalese service people and their families, have run a successful Family Day in Bulford, and B Company generated a team to compete in the Cambrian Patrol.

The next quarter will see much of the battalion deployed on exercise on Salisbury Plain and then hurtle towards Christmas!

FAMILY FUN DAY KICKS OFF SCHOOL HOLIDAYS IN STYLE AT BULFORD, WILTSHIRE

Capt J Timperley

On Thursday, 25th July 2024, Bulford, Wiltshire, was alive with excitement as over 600 service families

gathered for the annual Families Day celebration. Unfortunately, this event had not taken place since COVID 19. However, this annual event has now returned. Coinciding with the first day of the school holidays, this much-anticipated event was a resounding success, uniting the military community for a day of fun, camaraderie, and shared pride.

Participating regiments included the 1 MERCIAN, 5 RIFLES, Household Cavalry Regiment (HCR), 3rd Division Signal Regiment (3 DSR), and 3rd Regiment Royal Military Police (3 RMP). These regiments pulled out all the stops to create an unforgettable experience, filled with activities and entertainment for all ages.

From the moment the gates opened, the excitement was contagious. Children hopped between bouncy castles, face-painting stations, and interactive military and civilian vehicle displays, while parents enjoyed the chance to relax, mingle, and take part in the festivities.

Adding to the joy of the day was the impressive community spirit on display. Families Day not only provided fun and entertainment but also raised over £300 worth of food donations in support of the Amesbury Food Bank, thanks to the generosity of attendees. This charitable contribution highlighted the deep sense of care and commitment within the Bulford military community.

Live music, delicious food, and local performances created a festive atmosphere throughout the event. One attendee, Sarah Thompson, whose husband serves with 3 DSR, reflected on the day's success: "We couldn't have asked for a better way to start the holidays. The kids had a fantastic time, and for us parents, it's been a chance to relax and connect with friend.

Corporal Adam Silvers from 1 MERCIAN, one of the event's organisers, expressed his pride in the day: "Families Day is all about celebrating the incredible support that service families provide. Without them, we couldn't do what we do. Today is our way of saying thank you."

A special thanks must go to the event's generous sponsors — Forces Mutual, KBR, Aspire Defence, and Anderson Education—whose support enabled the day's success. Their contributions ensured that the community could come together for this fun-filled and meaningful event. As the sun set and families packed up to head home, there was no doubt that Families Day had been a tremendous success. More than just a day of fun, it was a celebration of unity, resilience, and the invaluable role that military families play. With the school holidays now in full swing, this event has set the tone for a memorable summer for the service families of Bulford. Here's to many more successful Families Days in the future!

LIBERIA STTT

Capt B Blackstone

A team of eight soldiers from 1 MERCIAN's B (Malta) Company recently completed a successful Short Term Training Team deployment to Monrovia, Liberia, aimed at preparing the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) for future UN peacekeeping missions. The team focused on building essential skills and operational readiness, whilst fostering strong relationships with the AFL.

The training package covered a wide range of training in line with UN training standards including Team Medic qualifications, enabling personnel to provide critical medical support in the field. The team also conducted exercises, building and

operating from a Forward Operating Base, emphasising defensive tactics and resource management. Urban operations training sharpened participants skills in combatting threats, whilst patrolling drills developed navigation and tactical movement.

Leadership development was a key focus of the task, with the team dedicating time to ensure the AFL could effectively command and manage their teams during complex situations. Throughout, the team worked closely with AFL HQ, strengthening professional ties and enhancing interoperability with a UN partner force. This rewarding partnership not only built Liberia's capacity for future peacekeeping missions, but also provided valuable training experience for our own 1 MERCIAN team.

ADVENTUROUS TRAINING

Capt B Blackstone

Adventurous Training (AT) plays a pivotal role in the development of soldiers, fostering resilience, leadership and teamwork in challenging environments. In July this year, 1 Mercian deployed on Ex MALTESE METTLE in Cyprus, undertaking rock climbing and offshore sailing. The sailors took over the yacht from Limassol Marina and spent the week learning new skills whilst exploring the coast of Cyprus. Concurrently, Ex MALTESE ERYRI in the rugged terrain of Snowdonia saw soldiers conduct Mountain Biking and Mountaineering, honing their endurance and problem-solving abilities in a demanding environment.

1 month later and a further deployment to Germany on Ex BAVARIAN EAGLE saw more opportunities for 1 MERCIAN soldiers to conduct AT, learning kayaking, hill walking and climbing.

Whilst providing enjoyable training and opportunities to our soldiers, these AT expeditions aim to stretch individuals outside of their comfort zones, promoting physical and mental robustness, preparing them to face unpredictable situations in both operational and personal development contexts. This also saw individuals gain foundation-level AT qualifications, working towards gaining instructor qualifications in the future.

Outside of our own expeditions, soldiers have also attended a wide range of courses on offer from the Army AT wing including parachuting, kayaking and sailing.

A MESSAGE FROM COLONEL CARL

September 2024

I am extremely proud to have been appointed as Honorary Colonel of 4 MERCIAN, and look forward to meeting as many of you as possible over the coming months at various drill nights and other activities around the country.

Over the summer our business, Richardson, was delighted to sponsor a concert in the Hyde Park Bandstand with the Band of the Mercian Regiment. Captain Sidwell did a sterling job rallying members of the Gheluvelt Company for a pre-concert social, and the concert itself was enjoyed by a significant number of active and retired Mercians, members of the public, and even Lord Spellar, the former Minister of State for the Armed Forces. Well done to Major Johnson and all members of the Band who performed spectacularly on the day.

I also had the pleasure of receiving a tour of The Royal Hospital in Chelsea with Mercian Pensioner John Byrne. John has lived a colourful life by his own admission, but his pride in the Regiment and

the positive impact it had on his life shone through throughout our time together – a good reminder of the lasting ties that bind us all together.

Finally, best of luck to Major Chatterley who is taking on the five day, 200kn Ultra X Nevada Run in late October, raising funds for SSAFA.

4 MERCIAN B (MALTA) COMPANY

Maj Rose, OC B Coy

B Coy has had a varied summer conducting mountain biking in North Wales, spiced up with some axe throwing and archery. Many thanks to WO2 George Moitt for arranging; this was followed by an ITR and field weekend up in Catterick which was firmly focused on green soldiering.

Ellesmere Port gym refurbishment has continued and we will formally open the gym this Autumn.

Congratulations go to LCpl Nadim Challah who completed SCBC and well done to LCpls Patrick Stafford, Nadim Challah and Owen Evans who completed their Cpls ADLP allowing them to promote.

We say farewell to WO2 Kit Harrison who has retired having been the body and soul of the Mortar Pl. Congratulations to CSgt David Dickinson-Wood on his promotion to Colour Sergeant as he takes over the leadership of the Mortar Pl.

4 MERCIAN C (KOHIMA) COMPANY

Maj Watts, OC C Coy

OUT OF THE ORDINARY VIRTUAL TRAINING WEEKEND

C (Kohima) Company hosted a Team from Elbit Systems who provided the 'Interim Combined Arms

Virtual Simulation (Deployable)' (ICAV(D)) at Bulwell ARC in late-June. A capability that allows troops to exercise in a virtual CGI generated environment. The weekend was a combination of familiarization training, force on force training and Artillery Fire Control culminating in a full mission testing where all those attending were practised in their soldiering skills, whilst combating an Artificial Intelligent (AI) Enemy.

The training weekend was broken up with a visit from the Chief of the General Staff (CGS) briefing team. The team act on behalf of the CGS and give an opportunity for Soldiers from the lowest rank to put their views indirectly via the team to the most senior General in the Army.

Prior to the Presentation starting the Commanding Officer (CO), Lt Col Charlie Whitting took an opportunity to present Major Lloyd Watts his OP SHADER Medal. OP SHADER is the British contribution to supporting Iraq and Syria by a combination of training, equipment support and direct support to those indigenous forces. Major Lloyd Watts spent over 6 months supporting the operation based out of Aman in Jordan. Major Lloyd Watts only recently take over the role of Officer Commanding C (Kohima) Company back in June 2024, and will be with the Company for the next 3 years.

ADVENTURE TRAINING WEEKEND - Ex KOHIMA DRAIG

C (Kohima) Company descended upon Capel Curig camp in north Wales for a weekend of AT activities. Set in the scenic Eryri (Snowdonia) National Park, the soldiers had the opportunities to take part in both Mountain Biking and Hillwalking activities.

The Mountain Biking took place on local trails of gradually increasing difficulties challenging the varied skills of all riding; whilst those walking summited Tryfan (917m) on Day 1 and Glyder Fawr (1001m) and Glyder Fach (994m) on Day 2.

The Ex was concluded with a Coy Cohesion event at a local pub and restaurant in which the soldiers' meals (usually being the case of a medium rare ribeye steak) were paid for. Conclusively, Ex KOHIMA DRAIG was a highly enjoyed and rewarding Ex and another successful annual Company level AT trip.

4 MERCIAN D (DRAGON) COMPANY

Maj Peacock, OC D Coy

I write this 1 year into my tenure as OC Dragon Company, and having looked back at the article I wrote then, it seems to have been an even busier year than last. Since July onwards, D Company 4 MERCIAN have recovered from Ex IMMEDIATE RESPONSE 24 in Poland, run and instructed on a number of the Bn August AT packages, and provided the meat on the bones to both the Cambrian Patrol team and Exercise Army Experience 2024. We have also deployed personnel on Exercise FIRM GARDEN for the commemoration of the Arnhem campaign, Ex SPEARPOINT in Northern Ireland in support of LFTT, as well as a well-deserved summer leave for the permanent staff.

With D Coy officers in the lead for the Officers' Mess events, the joint mess event in Manchester was well appreciated by all, and I am sure the Christmas event will be as well supported.

We said farewell to Sgt Conor Ball as the PSI at Stoke on Trent (only for him to return as a Reservist

in December), welcomed Sgt Si Cohoon as the new PSI, as well as also saying farewell to 2Lt's Hitch and Connor, who have returned to RMA Sandhurst to the Regular Commissioning course, and D Company wishes them the best of luck there! We also wish the best of luck to 2Lt Hardy when he attends Brecon next month.

Looking forward into 2025, D Company continue to lead the way in recruiting and also with responsibilities for Bn Social media, which goes from strength to strength. Stand Firm, Strike Hard!

4 MERCIAN HQ (EAGLE) COMPANY

EXERCISE EAGLE AXE 1

Pte Brown

Ex EAGLE AXE 1 was organised by 4 MERCIAN and conducted at Catterick training area. The weekend gave soldiers the opportunity to conduct ITRs including navigation and battlefield casualty drills while also giving young officers the opportunity to prepare orders.

The objective of the weekend was to test the soldiers and young officers' ability to occupy and live out of a platoon harbour area. The platoon began with a patrol out over Catterick, before carrying out the drills to establish a harbour area. Following on from the occupation, various platoon attacks were performed that enabled young officers to test their command and control. The soldiers and NCO's got experience of destroying the enemy position over difficult terrain.

Training that goes back to the basic elements of being an infanteer are essential. It ensures that all individuals no matter what level and experience have the knowledge and skills required to conduct more advanced infantry tactics.

ADVENTUROUS TRAINING - CANOEING

Pte Gribble

On 16 July 24 HQ Coy, 4 Mercian attended an amazing canoeing AT opportunity. The experience was both challenging and exhilarating, as we navigated through winding rivers, getting out of our comfort zones, and learning essential paddling techniques. From early morning starts to paddle against strong currents, the weekend was a true test of our endurance and determination. Evenings back at the campsite provided a perfect end to each day, filled with laughs and stories. The bonds we formed were just as valuable as the skills we developed, turning this training into more than just a physical exercise but also a team-building experience that will enrich our future on and off the water.

THE BAND OF THE MERCIAN REGIMENT

Sgt Wood

A SUMMER SEASON OF CONCERTS AND SPECTACULARS

In blazing summer sunshine and in the rain, the Band have been out around the region and beyond with performances, concerts and spectacles, working with other bands and with the wider regimental family.

Beginning with the Annual Regimental Pilgrimage to Crich, they joined members of the Mercian Family in celebration, contemplation and remembrance. The Band enjoyed playing alongside Derbyshire Army Cadet Force Band, and with unusually pleasant weather, there were picnics, socialising and laughter, creating a fantastic atmosphere.

ATX this year was held in Shrewsbury and included performances at the Shrewsbury Flower Show.

"Camp" provided opportunities for training, intensive rehearsals, and for the small groups to hone their skills. This saw the contemporary group and the brass groups both showcase new repertoires, and the saxophone quartet preparing for a busy schedule of dinner nights around the region.

Shrewsbury Flower Show showed the Bands full range, with show goers treated to marches through the town to open the show, being entertained on the bandstand with a mix of music that brought out the sunshine, and those who braved the showers were treated to an entertaining set featuring film music, traditional folk songs, a touch of comedy and classical favourites. Then, to end each night, there was a traditional massed bands marching set, sing along and fireworks. This year's cast contained musicians drawn from 7 different reserve bands – working together with other bands has been a real highlight.

In August, The Band of the Mercian Regiment were guests on Hyde Park Bandstand in London, as part of a series of concerts organized by The Friends of Hyde Park. The concert was sponsored by Richardson and attended by the Honorary Colonel of The Mercian Regiment, Colonel Carl Richardson, and by Lt Colonel Whitting, Commanding Officer of 4 Mercian. The concert was packed with varied music, ranging from traditional military music with marches, overtures and waltzes through to film and pop music, with Elton John hits and The Greatest Showman. It was certainly a great afternoon of entertainment with a stunning parkland backdrop!

September provided the opportunity for the band to highlight their recent hard work when they welcomed visitors from RCAM to their weekly rehearsal as part of an Army Music Technical Compliance Audit (AMTCA). The Principal Director

of Music (Army), Lt Col Lauren Petritz Watts and her team visited and observed the band in action. They assessed the bands capabilities in performance and rehearsal, with both the DOM and BM conducting. The chosen sight reading, the second and third movements of Philip Sparke's 'The Year of the Dragon', provided contrasting challenges to test the band's ensemble playing in a variety of ways. The band would also like to thank their CO, Lt Colonel Whitting, for his ongoing support and for his attendance and valuable input during the AMTCA.

Continuing the spectacular concerts and regimental theme, The Band of the Mercian Regiment performed in the magnificent Lichfield Cathedral in a concert to commemorate the 80th Anniversary of the Battle of Arnhem. From traditional marches to big band, film music, waltzes and overtures, there was something to delight all manner of concert goers, who were also treated to some stunning solo performances. The acoustics and back drop of the Cathedral were made even more special as it is the home of the regimental chapel and standards.

PERSONNEL SUCCESSES

Musician James Wykes was presented his VRSM for ten years efficient service.

Corporal Helen Cooper was presented with the CO's coin from Commanding Officer Lt Col Charles Whitting for her work on developing the Mercian Regiment Army Reserves Social Media footprint.

Musician Lewis Kirk successfully completed his 'Foundation Course' basic training, and his first public appearances with the Band.

Captain Johnson was honoured to be personally invited by the Committee of the Ringriding Festival to rehearse and lead a cast of 228 international musicians.

Musician Laura Morris was presented with an award that recognized her effort and performance during their annual training exercise.

DERBYSHIRE ARMY CADET FORCE

MILITARY MUSICAL SPECTACULAR, HORSE GUARDS PARADE

6 Derbyshire Cadets were in the 100-strong massed band specially selected - from Army Cadet Force units all over the UK - to play at the Household Division's Military Musical Spectacular on Horse Guards Parade.

A series of evening performances gave audiences superb displays of the abilities of young people dedicated to music and proudly representing their regimental affiliations.

Senior Bandmaster of the ACF, 17-year-old Cadet Sergeant Major Katie Howat, was called upon to conduct 4 musical pieces. Her centre stage performance impressed Lt Col Halliday, Director of Music for the Household Division, so much that he wrote a handwritten note and gifted a conductor's baton.

DERBYSHIRE ACF AT THEIR ANNUAL SUMMER CAMP

400 cadets – from all over the county – came together at Beckingham Training Camp in Lincolnshire for the highlight of the year: Annual Camp.

The week-long camp provided cadets, aged 12 – 18, with a taste of military life on camp, in the field, on ranges and during Adventurous Training. For many the highlights included blank firing exercises, live firing from 25m, tunnelling and climbing a 30ft pole before taking the 'Leap of Faith'.

All these opportunities are not possible without uniformed Adult Volunteers enabling the Cadet Experience. With many using annual leave from their day jobs, serving their local community is a passion for most.

The camp ended with an inter-Company sports day that included a lively Tug-of-War competition! Final parades awarded cadets badges and certificates for achieving progress in the Army Cadet Syllabus – and there were also promotions in rank.

Annual Camp was also supported by HQ Central – East's Cadet Training Team, with Regular Soldiers lending their expertise in training safety and enabling the action in the field and on ranges. Derbyshire ACF are thankful for their part in making Annual Camp 2024 a memorable one for all.

STAFFORDSHIRE REGIMENT MUSEUM

At the Museum we have had a busy Spring and Summer.

As many will know, this year has marked the important 80th Anniversaries of both start of the Normandy campaign and Operation Market Garden, which we themed our two main summer events around, and proved very successful. The Museum also produced a book in conjunction with a local author on the activities of the 59th Div in Normandy 'The Hills of Hell', this commemoration also saw a memorial service and a plaque renewed in France. This campaign was also marked at the Museum by a dance inspired piece from a local dance company. As we enter latter part of the year, we have just hosted a theatre piece inspired by the Battle of Monte Casio (in conjunction with local theatre group), our Learning programme delivery and themed activities for half term. Finally, November

sees the Museum host our ever-popular Night in the Trenches event and our Wartime Christmas event.

On the curatorial and interpretation side we have been busy auditing our uniform and reserve collection, repacking and amending database as needed, this is being led by student placement student from Aston University. Also, we have busy integrating our recent additions from the Mercian Regiment chattels. Our Summer Temporary Exhibition focused on Bren Gun and its use in the Normandy Campaign was well received. This will be replaced by an exhibition focused on Dispatch Riders/Wartime Christmas and an exhibition produced in partnership with the Staffordshire Yeomanry Museum.

Busy times ahead and hopefully we will see some of you from the Regiment at the Museum when you are in the area.

MERCIAN REGIMENT ASSOCIATION - STOCKPORT BRANCH

CRICH MEMORIAL SERVICE

Members from Stockport MVRA attended the annual Crich Memorial Service, held at Crich Memorial Tower on Sunday 7th July. The memorial was well attended by not only MVRA members but also WFR and MVRA members.

Mr. Peter Gresty, chairman of the CRA, laid a wreath at the memorial, to commemorate the sacrifice made by all, but especially by those members of The Cheshire Regiment who landed on the beaches of Normandy on D- Day.

ST JULIEN REMEMBRANCE SERVICE

On Sunday 28th July Members of the MVRA attended the St. Julien remembrance service at St. Julien Barracks Stockport.

The service was to commemorate the darkest day in the history of the First World War for the soldiers of The Cheshire Regiment in Stockport and the battle at Ypres on the 31st July 1917 would all but wipe out the 6th Battalion of The Cheshire Regiment with more than 100 dead, only 57 men were left un wounded out of 600 men.

The service was attended by the Mayoress of Stockport, past Mayors and Mayoresses, local councillors as well as members of 207 Field Hospital and 208 MMR.

After the service there was a reception with buffet and drinks, to the backdrop of photos from the time. Many thanks to Stockport Council for assisting with the service.

AUGUST 2024

The Association held its branch meeting where details were discussed for the association to take a more active role in running the entertainment facility at the Armoury, and more will be revealed as discussions are ongoing.

Some of the members later went on to celebrate the 60th Birthday of Mike "Buck" Rogers, and a celebration of his 40-year association with the Regiment.

SEPTEMBER 2024

On the 1st September, Members and family of the MRA together with past commanding officers, attended the annual memorial of the unveiling of the Cheshire Regiment Memorial presided over by

Major General A R D Sharpe CBE former Colonel of the Regiment and led by The Revd Canon Dr Gregory Platten CF Chaplain of the 4th Battalion The Mercian Regiment, with music by the Mercian Regiment Band, and Standard Bearer Duties performed by Mr Derek Sykes.

After the service, there followed a second smaller service in the Northern Ireland Wood to honour those of the Cheshire Regiment killed in 'The Troubles'. This was followed by a picnic at the arboretum and an opportunity for reflection.

On the Sunday the 15th members of the association and family attended the Annual Civic Parade in Stockport, held at St Mary's Church.

The service was held in the presence of The Worshipful Mayor of Stockport Suzanne Wyatt and former Mayoresses of Stockport.

The Service was performed by The Right Reverend Sam Corley, and the Association standard bearers, Derek Sykes, Steve Waite, Dave Willis and Mike Rogers performed Standards Duties.

Representatives of other faith groups, together with representatives of local charity organisations were also in attendance to celebrate the diversity and all that is good in the town.

September also sees the 40th Anniversary of Operation Lionheart, the Biggest peacetime NATO Exercise with over 130k UK service personnel deployed to the then West Germany to simulate a Soviet invasion of Western Europe, and the biggest single mobilisation of troops since the Second World War.

The Association remembers the achievements of the exercise and pays tribute to all those from every service that took part.

STAFFORDSHIRE REGIMENT ASSOCIATION - WOLVERHAMPTON BRANCH

Maj (Retd) M Banks

The Wolverhampton Branch of the Staffordshire Regiment Association have had a hectic summer (If you dare call it that!!). Once again, the few volunteers we have within the branch and support from across the wider community has seen the branch support many events which have included deployment of the Air Soft Range, engagement with the local Sikh Gurdwara, Celebrations of the 80th anniversary of the Arnhem Airbourne landings, and a day with the Wolverhampton History Society, celebrating the history of the Staffordshire Regiment from its formation through to its transition to the Mercian Regiment.

The branch also continues to be extremely well supported by The Wolverhampton Mayor, Sureena Brackenridge MP, and Councillor Greg Brackenridge, and with the branch Treasurer (Mrs Anne Partridge) sitting on the Armed Forces Covenant committee our influence in the community continues to flourish.

CHANGE OF BRANCH CHAIR

I reported in the last newsletter that Chris Banks had taken over has the branch chair, unfortunately, due to personal reasons Chris has had to step down and we welcome Ade Basford in to the role as Branch Chair with effect August 24.

Ade has stepped down as the branch secretary and this has now been taken on by Simon Hamilton. Congratulations to both and a Hugh thank you from all members of the branch for your guidance and leadership over the coming months/Years. Also, a

special thank you to Chris for the work he did whilst chair of the branch.

FUNDRAISING ACTIVITIES

The branch has continued to collect funds from all events through the strategic placement of collection buckets, the members of the public that have attended our events have been very generous with their donations, especially at the History Society event and the Arnhem showcase event at the Wednesfield Gurdwara.

The team have also carried out an all-day collection at Morrisons where again we were very well supported by the branch and excellent donations from members of the public. Well done team for all your outstanding efforts.

RIFLE AND PISTOL AIRSOFT RANGE

The Airsoft Range is deployed across the summer and is the main source of income for the branch to support the membership and the veteran community. We are always looking for people to support range activities and if you are interested then please get in touch, (No previous experience needed). See forecast of events for future deployment dates and locations.

80th ANNIVERSARY OF THE ARNHEN LANDINGS

Members of the branch attended the 80th Anniversary of the Arnhem Landings. The branch was very well represented and the Branch Standard was carried by Gary Thomas. An extremely poignant moment in time for the Regiment and one that will never be forgotten.

Those unable to attend the trip to Arnhem attended the Arnhem showcase to give their support as mentioned above.

2024 FORECAST OF EVENTS

- Annual Black Tie Dinner Pavilion, W-Ton - 5 October
- Remembrance Jeffcock Road & Bilston Cemeteries - 9 November
- Remembrance W-Ton City & Wednesfield - 10 November
- Branch Xmas Party - 7 December

THE WORCESTERSHIRE AND SHERWOOD FORESTERS REGIMENT ASSOCIATION

3 WFR BRANCH

The Alma Dinner and 3WFR AGM took place on 21 September. The event was well supported with 40 members attending a most enjoyable evening.

DERBY BRANCH

Alan Derbyshire, Chair

We start with the good news that the Branch welcomed 13 new members. It is encouraging to see that "younger blood" has swelled our ranks, and that they were not shy of volunteering to take on responsibilities, with Kirstie Parker as our Branch rep for the new Mercian App and her brother Scott as Silver Member.

We held a curry lunch at the Mount Everest Gurkha Restaurant, owned by a former Gurkha soldier who is also a member of the Branch, with some 38 members attending. A most enjoyable afternoon was had by all.

This year our annual dinner was held to commemorate Alma Day. Normally it is held in the evening but this year we changed it to mid-

afternoon, which proved very popular. A first-class meal and excellent company ensured the success of the dinner. Our thanks go to the committee who organised and set up the room, with a special mention to Adrian Harper (former Royal Marines Bugle Major) who sounded an excellent rendition of Dinner Call, followed by "Cookhouse" which brought forth a burst of applause! It would be remiss not to mention the generosity of those attending for providing so many good raffle prizes. Our friends from the Royal Marines Association again supported the dinner with some 11 persons attending.

As with other Branches we are experiencing problems with our Standard Bearers feeling the ravages of age and health! We were fortunate to have two volunteers from the ACF prepared to take on this task. At the Pilgrimage, Cadet Sgt Harry Parker carried the WFRA Standard whilst Gordon Carran again paraded the Foresters Standard. Gordon says, it is the last time "going up the hill", but he said that last year!

Due to poor health Ronnie Smith has at long last relinquished the post of Secretary. Ronnie has served in the post for 40 years, which surely must be a record. As well as being Secretary and Silver Member for the Derby Branch, Ronnie served on the Executive Committee for many years. His dedication to said posts is to be commended. A few years ago, the Branch recognised his commitment with the presentation of a cut glass decanter and glasses. And the WFRA recognised his commitment with a Merit Award.

The Derby Branch offers a warm welcome to serving and former members from the Mercian Regiment and the antecedent regiments, as well as other arms.

MANSFIELD BRANCH

Keith Kenworth, Secretary

This year, Mansfield branch has had a very patchy run of branch meetings due to the Secretary's new-found love of hospital food and anaesthetics. We will leave out the cannulas and catheters at this point! Anyone trying the food in Sherwood Forester Hospitals Trust will be pleasantly surprised. I think some people book a summer break there!

Given the parlous state of branch numbers, we have managed to attend the Crich Pilgrimage and made the effort to attend Area Meetings. Having only a nucleus of five or six regular attenders at branch meetings, we still manage to finance our annual commitments. These include wreaths for our memorials, the Crich flower barrels and an annual donation to an overseas forces charity.

2024 saw the 100th anniversary of the branch. We have been extant for 1924 holding our branch minute books for the beginning. Some of the entries earlier times, make interesting reading. We were 100 years old on Crich Sunday this year, with four members in attendance.

We intend to soldier on.

WORCESTER BRANCH

Nigel Smith, Chair

We attended the Annual VJ day commemorations at the Burma Star Memorial at the Almonry in Evesham, where a wreath was laid at the memorial in memory of the 2nd and 7th Battalions the Worcestershire Regiment.

Worcester Branch have been enjoying some social nights at the Maple leaf in Lower Wick, Worcester, hosted by the Landlords, Dave and Heidi. They have

been providing a free buffet to those attending and in return we had a small presentation of a Certificate of Appreciation. Skittles seem to be the activity of choice, Rudi Heaume won with a score of 42.

Two small groups from Worcester Branch were in France for the 80th Anniversary of the Liberation of the town of Vernon. Major (Retd) Richard Fox and his wife Anne, Rob Atkinson and his wife Carol, were guests of Worcester Twinning Association that has a Friendship Pact with the Town of Vernon. In the other group was Gerald 'Nobby' Clarke, Vincent 'Gnashers' Edwards, Alan 'Kipper' Fish and Nigel Fish. They visited the new-ish British Normandy Memorial and the 'Standing With Giants' Silhouettes feature with a view out to the bay and the remains of the Mulberry Harbours. There is an informative visitor centre and a very good cafe there.

Afterwards they headed for Hill 112 the scene of very bitter fighting. Then it was onto Berjou to visit the re-furnished museum there. The Museum is now the 'Blackwater Museum' that is named after the operational codename to cross the Noireau and the taking of the village of Berjou. In 2016, on our last visit, it had two small rooms with lots of items, that had been donated by locals.

On a guided tour in 2016 we were told that an old lady told someone that she had some items for the museum, a wardrobe full of German Teller mines! In 1944 the locals were using propellant to start fires in the very cold winter.

At Vernon, on 26th August the two groups met up with the Worcester Twinning Association for the 80th Commemoration Services. Our first stop was at the Worcesters layby on the Tilly Road past Vernonette, on the opposite side of the river to Vernon. The layby was the Bn HQ and first aid post

after a bridgehead had been established, after the crossing of the Seine by the 43rd Wessex Div. The Bn led by D Coy came up against fierce resistance in the form of infantry and two tiger tanks. The memorial in the layby, at Fontaine de Tilly, is of Malvern stone the same as the Worcestershire Regimental Stone in Gheluvelt Park Worcester.

After this Commemoration we visited the Vernonette Cemetery where those killed on the Tilly road are buried. We then went back to the Vernon side of the river to the road bridge where there is a plaque to the Resistance members of Vernon who paid the ultimate sacrifice in stopping the Germans crossing back over the bridge into Vernon, just before the arrival of the 43rd Wessex Div. After that Ceremony it was a short walk to Pentheivre Quay where on the back of the Sherwood Yeomanry Royal Tank Regiment, a plaque was to be unveiled to a David Mylchreest; an Officer attached from the Sussex Regt, in one of the lead boats of the Somerset Light Infantry that were in the assault in crossing the Seine. Some of the boats hit an underwater gravel bank and suffered badly from machine gun fire. David Mylchreest resided in France and attended the commemorations that have been held since WWII.

When the Bailey Bridges were built during the assault to cross the Seine, the Royal Engineers suffered many casualties from the German gunfire from the cliffs on the opposite bank that overlook the Vernon side of the river. We ended the day by returning to the town centre and the main memorial at place de la Republique. There were more people and French military organisations at this location. The Mayor of Vernon and other French dignitaries gave lengthy speeches. Afterwards there was an outdoor reception in the warm sunshine.

WORKSOP BRANCH

Lindsey McGuire, Secretary

Workshop branch continues to have a strong and active membership with a nominal role of 28, around half of these regularly attending branch meetings and many more attending recent social events.

That said it was a small group who attended the annual Pilgrimage at Crich in July this year with a number of members being on holiday at the time. As always, it was a great opportunity to catch up with members of the Regimental family who we don't see often and to visit Crich Comrades Club who welcome us back each year.

Since the D-Day 80 Commemorations and Armed Forces Day event in June, links with the local RBL Branch have been strengthened immensely with members from Workshop Branch WFRA attending the RBL Workshop Branch July meeting and vice versa. These strengthened links have included social events through the summer and have led to joint social gatherings being planned for the future.

A group of 38 members and friends came together for our summer social event on a Saturday in August. This event was hosted by Workshop Rugby Club, with the bar open through the afternoon and evening and a number of members, family and friends camping on the grounds for the weekend too. Plans are already in place to repeat this event next summer, extending an invitation to the wider 3WFR family.

Branch Secretary, Lindsey McGuire attended the second annual Boots and Berets Awards Night hosted by Nottinghamshire County Council in August. Nottinghamshire is the only County Council to host a dedicated awards night which recognises

the local Armed Forces community with and awards ceremony like this.

Workshop Branch rounded off August with a large group of members attending a social event hosted by Workshop Branch RBL to thank all who took part in the local Armed Forces weekend.

Moving into the autumn, the Branch focus becomes more formal. Deputy Standard Bearer and 2 escorts have been practicing ahead of the Workshop RBL Festival of Remembrance which takes place next month and members will gather for the Branch meeting before the end of September.

Workshop Branch meetings continue to be held at The Station Hotel in Workshop, 6pm on the last Sunday of every other month: Sunday 29th September 2024 then Sunday 24th November 2024.

VETERANS' GATEWAY WEBSITE AND APP CLOSURE

On 30th September the Veterans' Gateway App and website, which were operated by the Royal British Legion, were shut down. In its place, the Office for Veterans' Affairs have created a resource on the Gov.uk website, where you can now find support for veterans and their families.

<https://www.gov.uk/support-for-veterans>

The Veterans' Gateway telephone helpline however is still operational, and they can be contacted by calling 0808 802 1212.

BLUE LIGHT CARD

Members and Veterans of HM Armed Forces are eligible to apply for a Blue Light Card. Serving personnel who wish to apply will need to provide a payslip. Veterans who wish to apply will need to

provide either: Armed forces pension, Certificate of Service, Veterans ID card, or Certificate of Discharge. Veterans who do not have any of these documents may contact Veterans UK on 0808 1914 218 and they will be able to assist.

<https://www.bluelightcard.co.uk/>

NHS 111 FOR MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT FOR THOSE IN CRISIS

NHS 111 now offer mental health support to people of all ages in crisis. People in England who are in crisis, or who are concerned about a loved one, can call 111 and select the mental health option to speak to a trained professional.

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/2024/08/nhs-111-offering-crisis-mental-health-support-for-the-first-time/>