



THE CHESHIRE REGIMENT ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



VOLUME 2 ISSUE 7

MARCH 2011

EDITORIAL

It has been a cold and gloomy start to the year in both meteorological terms and also from a humanitarian and political perspective. Perhaps the only event worth rejoicing in was our spectacular Ashes win Down Under, although as I write the gloss has begun to come off a little. Now, as the snowdrop makes way for the crocus and daffodil we know that spring is finally upon us and at least the weather will be warmer and brighter.

There are not too many positive aspects to being editor of this newsletter but I am conscious of one in particular. That is the wonderful correspondence that I receive, some from people that I have never met and some from old acquaintances who I have not seen for many years. The one thing that they have in common is that they have taken the trouble to write, often in praise of others. It is a truly humbling experience to hear about the exploits of others, often long ago but brought to the forefront by the wonderful and encyclopaedic memories of others. It is also a mark of the regimental esprit de corps that so many take the trouble to attend funerals of their former comrades. From a personal point of view, and I know that it is unfair to single out individuals, but I was sorry to learn of the passing of Major Roy Connor, Geoff Hunt and Jim Stanley, all members of the regimental family, who displayed their professionalism and regimental spirit from beginning to end.

Items for the June issue should reach me by 20th May 2011. Please send your contributions to me at:

The School House, Dartmouth Road, London SE26 4RD.
My telephone number is: 020 8291 9225. You can also e-mail me at: george.szwejkowski@sky.com.

George Szwejkowski

CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN

This will be a shorter column than normal from me as the notes from the recent CRAMC meeting and the Annual General Meeting are included in this edition which covers the last year's events, for those who were present at the AGM thank you for your support and for those who couldn't make it we hope to see you soon.

Well as the saying goes "time flies when you are having fun." Believe it or not this column marks the 3 year point since I took over as Chairman for the CRA Management Committee from Major Ron Goodwin MBE. It has at times been shall we say a challenging role but overall it has also been worthwhile, and enjoyable, whether it has been travelling around the branches enjoying the many and varied functions or representing the CRA at the Regimental Council of The Mercian Regiment and helping out on the Benevolent Committee. The good news for me is that our President has seen fit to re-appoint me for a further 3 years so I am afraid you will have to bear with me for a while yet.

The period since the last newsletter has seen 1 Mercian (Cheshire) exercise their freedom rights around Cheshire as well as gaining the freedom of East Cheshire and, at long last, being re-presented with the freedom of Stockport. The 1st Bn also held a very moving service of thanksgiving in Chester Cathedral on 11th November, Armistice Day, after which they marched through the city. I would like to thank all members of the CRA and their families for turning out to support their own County Battalion and welcome them back from a very arduous tour of duty in Afghanistan, I know your support is genuinely appreciated by the serving soldiers and their families.

The annual Droppin Well memorial service in Ballykelly ended on a slightly different note this year when all those flying back to England were delayed by the weather for anything between 1 and 3 days. It was a special occasion for some of the parents this year as we were able to see them awarded with their long overdue Elizabeth Crosses and the Scrolls, more on this elsewhere in the newsletter.

On a more sombre note Derek Sykes and Gordon Smith, representing the CRA, attended the funeral of Rifleman Remand Kulung at very short notice ensuring that both The Mercian Regiment and the Cheshire Regiment Association Standards were on parade to pay our respects to the last of the fatalities from the

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The link for the CRA webpage is:

<http://www.cheshiremilitarymuseum.co.uk/regimental-associations/the-cheshire-regiment-association.aspx>

The Mercian Regiment website is:

<http://www.army.mod.uk/infantry/regiments/Mercian.aspx>

The opinions expressed in the articles in this newsletter are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the policy and views, official or otherwise of RHQ or the Regiment.

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CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN (continued)

recent tour of Afghanistan to be buried. Rfn Kulung served with G (Tobruk) Company who were the Ghurkha Reinforcement Company attached to 1 Mercian (Cheshire) over the last couple of years and was killed on the 10th August 2010. Around the time this newsletter hits your doormats G (Tobruk) Company will be disbanded and 1 Mercian (Cheshire) will revert to 3 Rifle Companies, Support Company and Headquarters Company.

As you will all be aware we sent out a call for applications to join the CRA Management Committee and as a result we are very pleased by the appointment of Gordon Kipps, Ellesmere Port Branch, and the re-appointment of Martin Walker, Chester

Branch. These appointments are for a period of 3 years and I would like to thank these individuals for their interest in the Management Committee, next year sees a requirement for a larger number of persons to be elected and I hope people will be prepared to put their names forward for a place on the committee.

To finish I would like to say congratulations to the recipients of The President's Award, Derek Sykes and Terry Finlay, and the recipients of The General Peter Martin Awards, Percy Cooke and Keith Mort, well done to each and every one of you.

Peter Gresty

MINUTES OF THE CRA AGM 2011

THE CHESHIRE REGIMENT ASSOCIATION ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING SATURDAY 19TH FEBRUARY 2011 THE REGIMENTAL CLUB, CHESTER

59 Members attended.

1. Opening Remarks

The meeting was opened by the President of the Regimental Association, Brigadier J P S Donnelly CBE who welcomed everybody and thanked the Chairman and Secretary for their work on behalf of the CRA. He stated that Mr Peter Gresty's term of office as Chairman had come to an end and asked him if he would serve for a further 3 years. Mr Gresty agreed. He gave a brief resume of activities of the Mercian Regiment over the last year and expressed his pride and gratitude for the support given to them by the CRA and hoped that the support would continue over the coming year. He then went on to speak about the future in Defence following the announcement of SDSR before wishing a warm welcome to WO1 (RSM) Tony Blackshaw and WO2 Matt Henry. He then invited the Chairman, Peter Gresty to chair the meeting.

2. **Apologies for absence** were received from Brigadier M D K Dauncey DSO, Brigadier W K L Prosser CBE MC, Brigadier A J MacG Percival OBE, Brigadier A R D Sharpe OBE, J R H Knott MBE, T Finlay BEM, Lt Col D L H Owen, W Helliwell and D Rochell.

A roll-call of Branches was taken, Birkenhead, Chester, Ellesmere Port, Macclesfield, Nantwich, Sandbach, Southern Region, South Wirral, Stockport, Stoke on Trent, Tranmere and Walsall Branches answered.

3. Minutes of the previous AGM

The President reported that he had taken the concerns about naming of Battalions to the Regimental Council and that the response was that the titles are fixed and cannot be changed. The Secretary reported that he had raised the matter of the suffix "Cheshire" being used by the media with Brigade Media Ops who told him that the decision to use it or not lies with individual editors. With no further matters arising, it was proposed by Mr Alan Kennedy and seconded by Mr Keith Parsonage that the minutes of the 2010 AGM be accepted as a true and accurate record. Carried.

4. The Chairman's Report

The Chairman welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending, observing that without such interest and continued support the CRA would quickly grind to a halt. He expressed thanks for support to all of the events and functions over the last year especially to those who worked hard to organize them.

He remarked upon the support being given to the 1st Bn by the CRA especially during their OP HERRICK tour with such things as attendance at Repatriations and funerals, the purchase of special books for the children of deployed soldiers, assisting the Welfare Officer with "Inform Home" briefings, voting for the Battalion in the Sun's Millie awards.

He spoke about the many reunions and events of the previous year and congratulated George Szejkowski for continuing to produce an interesting newsletter that has something for everybody. He reminded the meeting that the Newsletter will revert to 4 editions this year. Other means of finding information, he said were the CRA page on the Mercian Regiment website and the Cheshire Military Museum website and he commented on the increasing use of facebook which has been credited with the attracting younger members, especially to Race Day.

The review of legacy funding from The Mercian Regiment saw an agreement to receive the sum of £10K for the financial year of 2011/2012.

He thanked CRAMC for their work in ensuring that the CRA has been able to carry on after amalgamation as it did before. He also thanked the Secretary, Major Eddie Pickering, for his work on behalf of the CRA.

He outlined the planned events for the coming year and mentioned that HMS Ambuscade have asked to join in on Race Day and to hold their reunion in the Club the following night.

He stated that The Regimental Collect of The 22nd (Cheshire) Regiment has been amended for use at CRA events to include the phrase "Cheshire Regiment Association."

He ended by saying he has had the pleasure of serving as Chairman for the past three years and is looking forward to the next three.

5. The Secretary's Financial Report

The Secretary presented the final accounts for the 19 months ending 31st October 2010. He explained that in addition to the CRA account, the Club account and the Officers Association account are also included in the figures presented. Maj Huntriss asked about investments and it was explained that a working capital is retained and roughly 50% of the funds are invested through the Charities Aid Foundation at 6 months notice and 25% with NS&I at 1 month notice. It was proposed by Mr Keith

MINUTES OF THE CRA AGM 2011

Mort and Mr John Cooney seconded the proposal that the Accounts for the period ending 31st October 2010 be adopted. Carried.

6. Election to CRAMC

The Chairman reminded the meeting that two places on the Cheshire Regiment Association Management Committee were vacant. He explained that only two nominations had been received, Mr Martin Walker for re-election and Mr Gordon Kipps therefore there was no need to hold an election and accordingly, both members are appointed to CRAMC to serve for a period of 3 years.

7. Appointment of Independent Examiner of the Accounts

It was proposed by Mr John Cooney and seconded by Mr Cotgrave that McClintock & Partners be appointed as Independent Examiner of the Accounts. Carried.

8. Propositions

Proposal by Mr Bill Helliwell that the CRA installs a memorial at The National Arboretum. Mr Helliwell was unable to be present as he was admitted to hospital the previous day. Major Pickering presented the proposal in his stead, it was seconded by Mr John Fairbanks. During discussions, the Chairman said that a donation to cover the cost of reserving a plot has been secured and Major Goodwin suggested that a committee be formed to carry the project forward. Carried.

9. The President's Award & The General Peter Martin Awards

There were two nominations for The President's Award, Mr Derek Sykes and Terry Finlay BEM in recognition of the positive way they represented the CRA as Standard Bearers at the repatriations and funerals of 1 MERCIAN's casualties.

The General Peter Martin Award was made to Mr Percy Cooke of Sandbach Branch and Mr Keith Mort of Stockport Branch in recognition of their outstanding service to their branches.

10. Date and time of next meeting

The next meeting will take place in Chester on Saturday 18th February 2012 at 1830hrs.

WO1 (RSM) Tony Blackshaw then addressed the meeting on current events in the 1st Battalion and WO2 Matt Henry spoke about his experiences in Sangin during the OP HERRICK tour in Afghanistan.



Derek Sykes (MRA Standard) and Keith Mort (CRA Standard) are the standard bearers at a charity rugby match at Gigg Lane.

VIEW FROM THE CASTLE



This is more of a Notice Board than a view, I have drafted several "Views" for this edition and discarded them, probably as a result of someone telling me that they didn't read my bit, they went straight to the "interesting part", which I presume to be either the Branch Notes or my good friend John Fairbanks' ramblings (I mean "interesting stories" of course).

The Reunion Weekend in Blackpool in June is attracting a lot of attention, thank you to all those who contacted me to point out the error on my letter, I realised that I had left the title "Grand Meeanee Reunion" just as the 2000th copy rolled off the photocopier and decided that it was too expensive to scrap it and start again – the pitfalls of cut and paste...

Unfortunately, the VAT rise has meant that the prices quoted will have to go up, meaning that the 3 night package will cost a few pence under £138, 2 nights will cost just under £116.50. It is still a bargain for what promises to be a great weekend. Another letter and booking form is enclosed with this Newsletter for those who have yet to book and have mislaid the first one.

The history of The Cheshire Regiment, "Ever Glorious" is now on sale. It is a 3 volume set and comes in hardback at £75 plus £8 p&p or softback at £45 plus £8 p&p. To get a copy, please send a cheque made payable to "CRCRF" to Sue Weston at RHQ. Of course, you can pick up a set at the Museum and save the postage charge.

Many of us have children who were born in the local BMH of whatever far flung part of the world Her Majesty's Government felt needed the benefit of our services. Births registered at Consulates and Embassies are recorded at the General Registrar Office (GRO) and they should be able to issue duplicate Birth Certificates. GRO can be contacted:

Telephone: 0845 603 7788

Email: certificate.services@ips.gsi.gov.uk

By letter:

Certificate Services Section
General Register Office
PO Box 2
SOUTHPORT
PR8 2JD

The Big Lottery Fund is committing an additional £1million to assist in funding WW2 veterans who wish to make personal commemorative journeys to the places in which they saw action. The programme is known as "Heroes Return 2" and will last until 31 January 2012 and will aid not only veterans, but widows and carers or accompanying spouses.

For more information, telephone 0845 000 0121 or visit the website – www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/heroesreturn

CRA CHAIRMAN'S AGM REPORT 19TH FEBRUARY 2011

Welcome to the CRA Annual General Meeting for 2011, and thank you for attending this evening, AGM's are never the most entertaining of events but as a registered charity they are still something we have to do. Without your attendance, commitment and continued support the CRA would quickly come to a grinding halt, my thanks are not just for the AGM this evening but for all the CRA functions and events throughout the year as well. I would like to thank those of you, who run and support, the CRA branches and associated groups around the country for the time and effort you put into ensuring branches, and the CRA, continue to survive, your dedication is appreciated.

It has been good to see our own County Battalion, whether they are called 1 Cheshire or 1 Mercian (Cheshire), still receiving the full support of the CRA and the people of Cheshire. For those who said it would never be the same perhaps they need to look again. Interestingly the last year has been one in which the CRA has once again been brought back to mind as far as 1 Mercian (Cheshire), and The Mercian Regiment as a whole are concerned. This has mainly been through the very public support we have been able to give at events such as Repatriations, Funerals and Freedom Marches but also through the less public activities such as:

Assistance with purchasing books for the children of soldiers deployed

Support for Home Inform briefings around the County

Collections for Jiffy Bags and Shoe Boxes

Letters to those deployed

Visits to the injured

Fundraising and support for The Mercian Regiment Benevolent Fund.

Voting for 1 Mercian (Cheshire) in The Millie Awards at which they won best unit.

The period since the last AGM has once again been a very busy, and successful, time for the CRA with some excellent memories to file away for a rainy day. Some of the event successes of the year, to name a few, have been:

Regimental Race Day (400 people),

Malaya/Singapore Reunion (140 approx.),

Suez Reunion (100 approx. sadly the last one organised by Birkenhead Branch although we are looking at a 60th anniversary function)

Regimental Society Golf Days (An average of 26 members playing),

Mons Reunion (120+ with a contingent from 1 Mercian (Cheshire) and some of the families of the fallen from Ballykelly and Afghanistan),

East Cheshire Reunion (190+) and the;

Droppin Well Memorial at which we saw some of the families of those killed 28 years ago awarded with their Elizabeth Crosses and Scrolls

All of these, and many other events, have been recorded in the CRA Newsletter which George Szwejkowski continues to edit on our behalf, I am sure you will all agree that the newsletter continues to be a great asset to the CRA and we owe our thanks to George for the hard work and the not inconsiderable amount of time he puts into making sure we have an interesting newsletter that has something for everybody. As you will now be aware George is going to try producing 4 issues of the newsletter this year and we will see how that goes.

In addition to the CRA page on the Mercian Regiment Website the Cheshire Military Museum website continues to be our shop window on the electronic world and as well as

advertising our future events, newsletter and constitution it was used very successfully to get details concerning the recent repatriations and funerals out to members. Face Book also continues to advertise Association events, particularly to the younger members, and has been credited with ever growing numbers at Race Day.



Percy Cooke receiving his General Martin Award

The 3 year review of the legacy funding from The Mercian Regiment saw an agreement by the Regimental Council of The Mercian Regiment that we would continue to receive the sum of £10K for the financial year of 2011/2012, a further review will be held before the figure for 2012/2013 is agreed. You will hear shortly how the Association stands financially but on your behalf CRAMC continues to support everything that we supported before the amalgamation namely Mons, East Cheshire and Over 90's hampers but as I explained at last year's AGM we now provide financial support to other long running CRA events such as Malaya Reunion and the Droppin Well Memorial and of course we will consider any reasonable request from branches.

On your behalf I would like to thank the Management Committee, CRAMC as they have become known, for the work that they do behind the scenes in ensuring that the CRA has been able to carry on after amalgamation as it did before. In particular I would like to thank Martin Walker for the 3 years' service he has given to CRAMC. I am glad to say that he has agreed to put himself forward for re-election, as you will see from the agenda there is a requirement to elect members to CRAMC this evening, so we may still have him about.



Keith Mort receiving his General Martin Award from the President

CRA CHAIRMAN'S AGM REPORT (continued)

Thanks are also due to our secretary, Major Eddie Pickering, not just for keeping us on the straight and narrow but also for managing the Association Club so effectively.

The club is still a worry some of the time but Eddie and Iggy Jones work tirelessly to provide the best service with the resources available to them and it is a credit to both of them. Eddie tells anybody that will listen that if we only had 2 additional customers every week we would not have any concerns over the profitability, could I make a plea for you to support the club whenever possible and see if we can make a profit in this financial year.

This year sees the CRA planning for all of our normal events and reunions, less the traditional Suez reunion as previously mentioned but additionally and at the request of members we are holding a Grand Reunion at The Norbreck Castle Hotel in Blackpool. We are trying our luck in June this year so there will be at least a chance of getting out of the hotel, in fact there are rumours of potted sports being held on the beach to encourage people to get out. For those of you who remember our affiliation with HMS Ambuscade you will be pleased to hear that we keep in touch and I am glad to say we will be seeing some of their association members at the Races in May and they will be making use of the cub as well the following day.

The CRA has, since amalgamation, used the Regimental Collect of The 22nd (Cheshire) Regiment but the point has been raised that without an active serving Regiment it does not work for the association so CRAMC has agreed to the use of a slightly different version where the word "Association" has been inserted



Terry Finlay MBE receiving the President's Award

after "The Cheshire Regiment." The Existing Regimental Collect of The 22nd collect will remain in existence for use when appropriate but for all CRA events the amended version will be used.

Gentlemen the CRA remains on a firm footing with our affairs and finances being managed in accordance with the Charity Commission requirements, and the CRA constitution. I have had the pleasure of serving as your chairman for the past 3 years and look forward to doing so going forward.

Peter Gresty
Chairman CRAMC

THE CHESHIRE MILITARY MUSEUM

The Museum, which incorporates the archives of The 22nd (Cheshire) Regiment, is always looking for photographs and anecdotes which tell the story of the Soldier of Cheshire, we have many "official" and posed photographs, but not enough which show the Regiment at play and family groups. We welcome copies of your pictures of any era, with a brief "Who, Where, What and When" (*but not on the actual photograph*). They can be emailed to cheshiremilitarymuseum@live.co.uk or posted to us. Good examples will find their way to exhibitions from time to time; most will be placed in the Regimental Archive for your descendents to marvel over when they are doing their family history.

Swinging the lamp. The museum hopes to embark on a programme of recording "oral history" and would like to hear from CRA members who feel that they have a tale to tell. As well as the obvious "war stories" from WW2, Suez, Malaya and NI, we want to record other features of life in the regiment such as sport, social, the Mess, life in Married Quarters, no subject is too trivial.

Is there anyone in our readership who can strip and reassemble a Vickers gun and who would like to star in a video doing it?

Easter Saturday. The 22nd Foot 1726 Re-enactment Society will be spending the day at the Museum demonstrating life in the 22nd in the days when they garrisoned New York. It is also hoped that they will be in the Regimental Club on Good Friday evening to hold a 1726 Tavern Games Night.



A private of the 22nd Foot Re-enactment Society

WORD FROM THE BRANCHES

BIRKENHEAD BRANCH

We started this quarter on a sad note with members attending the funeral of the late Major E T Talbot MM. Many Suez vets will recall Ted from the 1951-54 period when he was CSM first with C Coy, followed by HQ Coy, a soldier who will not be forgotten.

Following another excellent evening at the east Cheshire Reunion, where we met many old friends and colleagues, we moved into remembrance period with the branch represented at Birkenhead, whilst the main contingent attended the services at Port Sunlight war memorial followed by a service at Christchurch, Port Sunlight. The parade to and from the memorial and church was led by the Port Sunlight Lyceum Band and we were joined at these services by a detachment from 1 Mercian ACF and many other associations and organisations. Following the parade members attended Port Sunlight Vision for a short service in remembrance of the men of the 13th Service Battalion.

Later in the month members, along with friends from Ellesmere Port Branch, took a trip to the NIA, Birmingham for the International Military Tattoo, an event well worth seeing and enjoyed by those attending.

Another sad event occurred with the sudden loss of Geoff Hunt, a long standing member and Branch Chairman for the last fourteen years. Geoff's wit and comments will be greatly missed at future branch meetings. The branch would like to thank all CRA members and standard bearers for the massive support at Geoff's funeral. The donations made in memory of Geoff, which totalled around £700 have been passed to the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre as he requested.

December saw us enter the festive season with 42 members and guests enjoying a five-course luncheon and excellent entertainment on the history of Arabian dancing with members taking part in the performance. Our guests included two Warrant Officers from 1 Mercian (Cheshire). We then accepted an invitation from the Not Forgotten Society to join with other services and associations to a lunch at the Marriott Hotel in Liverpool. This was followed by Ellesmere Port Branch's Christmas event, so by the end of the month everyone was beginning to feel the pace.

January took us to the AGM, although this was not an election year, we needed to appoint a new Branch Chairman and Secretary. These positions were filled by Mr Ray Hogan and Mr Peter Jackson respectively. We now look forward to catching up with CRA matters at the AGM and enjoying the Meeanee Supper and a few drinks with old friends.

Graham Ball

CHESTER BRANCH

As usual the Branch Christmas festivities were witnessed and enjoyed by a large slice of the membership. The excellent turkey dinner, with wine included, was prepared and served by the inimitable Dawn and thoroughly enjoyed by all. The bingo addicts were treated to an after-lunch session whilst the anti bingo brigade got down to putting the world to rights. The Christmas Draw and Party was well received by a packed house. Once again the tongue loosening properties of mulled wine, and Kath Beech's powerful mince pies, was evidenced by the full throated uninhibited carol singing which almost drowned out the sterling efforts of Eddie and his Hot Shots to provide a musical

accompaniment. The draw itself went well with Dan and Nancy Bly, Sheila Chidlow and Brian and Eileen Westley all needing assistance from Pickfords to get their prizes home. During the evening we presented Christmas boxes to Reg Lancelott and Alan and Linda Jones by way of thanking them for their efforts on our behalf during the year.

We held the Branch AGM on 22nd January. The committee were re-elected unopposed and to the delight of members the annual subs remained at £5. One of the worries voiced at the meeting was the general waning of support throughout the Association and several ideas were put forward with the aim of defeating the apathy of members. After the meeting all members present and the ladies enjoyed an excellent curry supper.

One answer to the question of declining attendance is being provided at Chester by one person in particular namely, Mrs Linda Jones. Of recent weeks we have noted a slow but sure increase in the number of members turning up on Friday evenings. This welcome change began just before Christmas when we suddenly found ourselves without cooks and consequently unable to feed our hungry members. Into the breach stepped Linda and the result has been spectacular. So much so that the 'Friday Night Supper Club' is gaining new members every week and Linda's cooking goes from strength to strength. My expanding waist band is irrefutable evidence of this. If these notes have wetted your appetite (literally) please let us know in good time if you wish to join us on a Friday so that we can kill an extra fatted calf.

In the meantime greeting as always to all our friends and ex comrades wherever they may be. See you at the races!

John Fairbanks

ELLESMERE PORT BRANCH

Greetings once again from Ellesmere Port. Nothing much to report this period. In October I headed up a party of nine members to the east Cheshire Reunion, together with members of Birkenhead Branch. Once again, congratulations to Stockport Branch for an excellent event.

November saw the branch well represented at the homecoming march through the town by our 1st Battalion. On the day we managed to get one of our WW2 veterans, George Ford, onto the saluting platform – his rightful place. Two days later our branch standard was carried at Chester Cathedral by Norman Wakefield, well done Norman.

On Remembrance Sunday we saw massive support from the people of Ellesmere Port.

Sadly I have to report the passing of Jim Humphries, Geoff Hunt and Dot Steadman, wife of Alf. Their presence will be sorely missed.

On 22nd December we had our Christmas dinner, where 28 members and friends sat down to a traditional menu. An excellent event with background music provided by our member DJ, Tom Simkins. A vote of thanks goes to Brenda and her squad of ladies for setting up the room prior to us sitting down.

In January at our AGM the presiding officers were returned to office unopposed, with one exception. John (Tiny) Davies stood down as Chairman. The posts held now are: Bill Kearney – Chairman; Gordon Kipps – Secretary; Mike Dempsey – Treasurer.

At the meeting I welcomed back Bill Maguire, who renewed his branch membership.

WORD FROM THE BRANCHES (continued)

February will see us dedicate our new standard and I will report more fully on this event in the next edition.

Gordon Kipps

Gordon has forwarded an early photograph as shown below – Ed.



KIRKHAM BRANCH

I would like to wish all members of the CRA and all ranks 1st Battalion Mercian Regiment (Cheshire) a happy and peaceful New Year. The Kirkham Branch Christmas party was very good, well attended by members, families and friends and everybody enjoyed the evening at the Stables Hotel at Kirkham.

Tommy Davies would like to thank all CRA members on the Belgium trip, who helped him find the grave of his uncle, Reg Hughes, who was killed in the First World War. Tommy and his family thank you all.

We have just had our AGM at the Stables Hotel, Kirkham and I am very pleased to report that it is “carry on committee:”

Secretary – Ricky Burchett, Chairman – Noel Brookes and Treasurer – Bill Birkett.

All members thanked the committee for the work that they do in keeping the branch ticking over. Now we are all looking forward to 6th May for the Regimental Race Day Reunion at Chester. Well, that’s all for now.

John Gibson

MACCLESFIELD BRANCH

Since the last newsletter, Remembrance Day, the 1st Battalion homecoming and Christmas have all been and gone. I attended two of the above and left out Christmas.

Whilst our Chairman, Trevor Taylor, carried the standard at the Macclesfield remembrance ceremony, accompanied by other branch members, my wife and I made our usual trip to London. As always we received a warm welcome from our Southern Region comrades (thanks George and friends). Unfortunately we did not get a mention on the BBC this year.

Around the same time the 1st Battalion homecoming marches were taking place throughout Cheshire. Along with Colonel Scott, I attended the march in Macclesfield and lunch afterwards at the Town Hall. Due to poor weather the turnout was low and the ceremony was totally outshone by the Congleton march a couple of days later. Frank Worrall and the other members from Congleton attended a party arranged by the

council, which was thrown for both the public and the troops. Credit where credit is due.

Despite my comments in the last newsletter, I called to see Gordon Worthington who had not been too well. He was busy framing medals for somebody, which he does a very good job of. His address is available from Norman at a reasonable donation cost.

On Sunday 13th February a good few members, along with eight of our comrades from Stockport, met at Capesthorpe Hall for the second annual service, since it was re-introduced, after invitation from Mr Bromley Davenport. After the service around thirty of us met at the Flower Pot pub for lunch. Unfortunately Colonel Scott went missing after the service and is still AWOL at the time of writing.

Well that’s all for now, all the best.

Andy Wood

NANTWICH BRANCH

The branch continues to have excellent membership and attendance at our once-monthly meetings, held in the Crosville Social Club, situated in Chester Street, Crewe. As ever, there continues to be much lively discussion, and humour of course. The meetings are ably chaired by Harry Tomkinson.

Yet again there was an excellent attendance at the pre-Christmas dinner, held at Ye Olde Manor in Crewe, which had again been organised under the direction of our Vice-Chairman, Brian Billington.

Several of our members have not enjoyed the best of health recently and “thinking of you” cards have been sent to Tony O’Connor, Bill Corn, Betty Cooke, Jean Webster and Ray Young. Additionally Gerald Walker has been hospitalised and a card for a speedy recovery has been sent to him.

The branch has recently mourned the death of Ron Percival, a very well loved and respected man, who not only served our branch extremely well but previously had served the Crewe Branch over an even longer period of time. Ron latterly served in the Nantwich Branch as Assistant treasurer. He was most certainly “a good un.” May he rest in peace.

There was a good attendance at our AGM in January, when reports were given by our president, chairman and treasurer and branch accounts were presented and approved. It was unanimously agreed that £500 be sent to the Mercian Benevolent Fund.

Branch officers elected for the year were: President – Ray Stafford MBE; Chairman – Harry Tomkinson; Vice Chairman – Brian Billington; Secretary – Major Jim Salisbury; Treasurer – Dave Waring; PR Officer – Ray Stafford; Almoner – Peter Hoffman; Standard Bearer – Dave Waring, Deputy Standard Bearer – Wilf Burgess.

Details of the branch activities and events for the year were being formulated as this newsletter went to press. These include possible visits to Chester races, Malaya Reunion, the National Arboretum, Imperial war Museum in Manchester and the grand reunion in Blackpool. Members have recently attended the CRA AGM and Meeanee reunion in Chester.

The branch continues to meet, by kind permission, in the Crosville Social Club, Chester Street, Crewe, on the last Tuesday of each month from 7.30pm Meetings commence at 8pm. New members are always welcome. Do come and join us.

Ray Stafford

WORD FROM THE BRANCHES (continued)

SOUTHERN REGION

It was a busy end to the year, with the Field of Remembrance, visit to the Tower of London and then Remembrance Sunday, all within a few days of each other. It was a bit of a shock to the system to discover that access to the grounds of Westminster Abbey for the Field of Remembrance was by ticket only. Fortunately we managed to get enough tickets, however there were many who had travelled long distances in order to attend, oblivious to the fact that they would be denied access. It was also a shock to discover the queue for security snaking around the back of the abbey. Not a happy start to proceedings, however we just about managed to negotiate security before the arrival of HRH the Duke of Edinburgh.

We enjoyed an excellent visit to the Tower of London on the following Saturday and it was nice to welcome Thomas Jones and his daughter Karen, who had travelled down from Wolverhampton for the remembrance weekend. Also enjoying the visit was the Chairman of CRAMC, Peter Gresty and his wife Lynne.

Remembrance Sunday saw us a little thin on the ground, but we managed two ranks as we marched past the Cenotaph and it was so nice for a change to be in the first column to march. It was particularly good to have Thomas Jones marching with us at the age of 94. A great effort and I am sure that he deserved his lunch and liquid refreshment afterwards in the Chandos.



Returning to Horse Guards after marching past the Cenotaph.

In January we held our AGM and it will come as no surprise that the usual suspects were re-elected to the committee. It was also the last time that we would be using the Royal Hospital, Chelsea as our meeting place, after over ten years of their excellent hospitality.

February saw our annual Meeanee Ladies Dinner and Trevor Taylor ensured that it was another spectacular success. It was nice to have Peter and Lynne Gresty attending and also the RCM and his mother who were our official guests. Both the RCM and his mother hail from Chester and his mother is one of the flower ladies at Chester Cathedral, so there is a strong connection. It is also worth mentioning that during the evening we raised over £800 for the Haig Housing Trust, an organisation that is doing sterling work to help re-house ex-Service personnel.

On the subject of charitable works it is probably worth mentioning that although camaraderie is one of the main aims of the Southern Region, we also raise and donate large sums of

money to worthwhile causes and last year alone we raised over £1,000 that went to service charities.

A few of us made the journey in order to attend the Meeanee Reunion and AGM in Chester the following week. Perhaps the presentation by WO1 (RSM) Tony Blackshaw and WO2 (CSM) Matt Henry on the 1st Battalion's recent tour of Afghanistan was the highlight.

We look forward to our next meeting, to be held at 7pm on Thursday 28th April 2011, in our new home which is the WOs & NCOs' Mess, Hyde Park Barracks, Knightsbridge.

George Szwejkowski

STOCKPORT BRANCH

In November twelve members joined up with a party of eight from Tranmere Branch for seven days R & R in Malta and attendance at the remembrance parade in Valletta.

On Friday 17th December we held our annual Ladies Christmas Dinner when thirty ladies sat down to a superb three-course dinner, washed down with the odd glass of wine or two. Meanwhile the lads tucked into their own buffet in the lounge bar, washing it down with copious amounts of ale. Once again a good evening enjoyed by one and all. On Saturday 27th November several members joined the Mercian Volunteers' Association for their first regimental dinner, held at the Armoury Public House. Guest of Honour was Colonel Keith Jeavons, President of the Association, who travelled up from Burton-on-Trent. A very enjoyable evening which the Volunteers hope to make an annual event, now that they have dipped their toe in the water. On Sunday 13th February, seven members joined Macclesfield Branch for their Meeanee Service at Capesthorpe Hall, before going to lunch at the Flower Pot in Macclesfield. A very good day enjoyed in congenial company.

Keith Mort

TRANMERE BRANCH

A busy winter programme started for us on the 5th. November when we attended the Sgts' Club Reunion at Catterick. Joe Cotgrave, Tony Baker and myself look forward to this every year and are never disappointed. As usual the RSM and Senior Ranks made us very welcome and we were updated as to what every platoon had to endure in Afghanistan as we circulated around the lads during our first evening there. All of their tasks were arduous and most of them went through some horrendous experiences, one could tell that many of them were still traumatized and needed time to "settle down" to a normal way of life. They did a great job and we were proud to be in their company.

It has to be said that the attendance of the Association members was very poor indeed this year and if the Sgts', Club is to survive in the future we all as members need to give our full support on a regular basis.

Considering our lads had only been back between one and two weeks and could have been enjoying Bonfire Night with their families, it says a lot that they turned out in force to welcome us and give us a great weekend.

I am pleased to report that once again we had a very successful and enjoyable Christmas Social. The talented all girl group was given a standing ovation, the prizes were top quality and the buffet was excellent. Many of the locals supported this function as they do every year and it is fair to say without their

WORD FROM THE BRANCHES (continued)

attendance it would hardly be worth organizing. I still find it very hard to understand that some of our own Branch members do not attend a function such as this.

My sincere thanks go to Joe and Val Cotgrave for all their help and commitment every year; they really are stalwarts of our Branch.

DROPPIN WELL MEMORIAL WEEKEND

This was our first visit to the Memorial Service and we were very impressed with the welcome we received and the way the weekend was organized.

The Drummond Hotel is an excellent venue, family owned, they and their staff are very friendly and nothing was too much trouble for them in assisting us all.

On Sunday before the Memorial Service the families were presented with the Elizabeth Cross by Deputy Lord Lieutenant Harry Boyle. The dignity and demeanour of the recipients during this poignant ceremony was so impressive considering the heartache they must still be enduring. Their cheerfulness and attitude throughout the whole weekend was exemplary.

Our special thanks to Ken Cooper, Barry who transported us everywhere and was so very helpful, and all members of the Limavady Branch for your hospitality and organization. We look forward to seeing you at future functions and, of course, Ballykelly next December.

Rusty

WALSALL BRANCH

We would like to thank Joe Sadler for taking on the post of Secretary, but we are sorry that we are losing Les Sutton as our Treasurer, due to chronic eye failure. We are hoping to recruit a volunteer for the post by March when Les will be forced to resign.

Fourteen of our members attended the east Cheshire Reunion and met up with friends from other branches. The Hot Pot supper was up to its usual tasty standard and as in past years the event was well attended.

The Remembrance at Walsall was the largest turn out for years with a respectable attendance by veterans. The parade was double ranks with people paying their respects six deep on route.

The next event should have been our Christmas Dinner Dance on 18th December, but the worst snow for years caused us to cancel at the eleventh hour. We have rescheduled for Friday 4th February at Rushall Labour Club.

Two of our members are on crutches, Graham Page fractured an ankle and Tom Clay knee replacement. We wish them both a speedy recovery.

We hope to have at least 14 members attending the AGM and Meeanee Reunion on 19th February. Again we can meet up with friends that we first met 53 years ago.

Reg Smith

MALTA EXPERIENCE

The "Three Amigos" mentioned in the Tranmere Branch notes just had time to unpack and re-pack and the following day were off to Malta with an additional seven members which included 'Simmo' and his LITTLE tribe from Crewe.

We met up with our comrades from Stockport who wasted no time in familiarizing us with their drinking haunts in Sliema.

Malta is brilliant, lots to do, plenty of interesting places to see and nice warm, sunny weather as a bonus. The War Museum in Valletta is one of the best we have visited and the island of Gozo is fascinating.



Heading for Gozo

We paraded for Remembrance with Stockport and the local forces in Valletta, the parade was excellent and afterwards Ralph Brown and the Stockport lads introduced us to yet another establishment to celebrate for the rest of the day, They know how to shift a few gallons of ale that lot, and are great company.



Old sweats at Valletta War Museum

The people of Malta are a pleasure to be amongst and are very helpful and friendly, there is still so much to see and do that we have had to book for two weeks next year!

MILITARY WORDS OF WISDOM...

"If you find yourself in a fair fight, you didn't plan your mission properly." *David Hackworth*

"If your attack is going too well, you have walked into an ambush." *Infantry Journal*

"It is generally inadvisable to eject directly over the area you have just bombed." *US Air Force Manual*

"Never tell the Platoon Sergeant you have nothing to do." *Unknown Marine Recruit*

"One of the best ways to keep peace is to be prepared for war." *General George Washington*

HOME FROM HELMAND: Why Leaving the Front Line Isn't Always Easy

The following article written by Terri Judd, appeared in The Independent on 11th December 2010. I am sure that many of you have already seen it, however I thought it worthy of repeating it here for those who may not have seen it. I am grateful to The Independent for allowing me to re-produce the article here (Ed):

What is it like returning to normal life after being at war? Terri Judd meets the soldiers adjusting to a more peaceful existence, with all the relief, joy and bewilderment that brings.

Private Mark Dickinson steps off the coach to an explosion of cheers and welcome-home banners. As a mass of emotional families surges forward, he stands dazed by the television lights that slice through the autumn night.

His wife, Natalie Dickinson, pushes her way through the crowd to hand him his two-month-old baby girl, Lily Jean. Behind her, his three-year-old son, Alfie, warily eyes up the stranger in uniform. "I didn't know what to say," explains the 25-year-old soldier, later. "Natalie gave me the baby and I just looked at her. She was all wobbly and I passed her to my dad. I just wanted to get home."

Nearby, Sergeant Andy Hawkins, aged 31, waits, oblivious to the mothers that jostle him in their hunt for their returning soldier. His last promise to his friends, as he was stretchered on to a helicopter with vicious wounds, was that he'd be there for their homecoming at the Catterick Barracks in North Yorkshire. Eyes wet with tears, he grins as they envelop him in suffocating hugs.

"I've been having nightmares, worrying about them," he says. "They're like my kids. Now they're back and I can sleep a lot better."

With the return of B Company, the last of their men in Afghanistan, the 1st Battalion, The Mercian Regiment (Cheshire) breathes a collective sigh of relief. Seven months, a dozen deaths and 97 wounded in action, eight of them amputees, they can finally take off their battered body armour and helmets.

Coming home, 26-year-old Corporal Gary Roberts explains, is like "being a four-year-old on Christmas Day."

"It's the everyday things you look forward to. Being able to use a cashpoint, walk to the shops, have a hot shower," adds 19-year-old Private John Jones.

"You take for granted being shot at and that becomes normality," continues Lieutenant Stephen Rice, aged 25, a scar on his neck evidence of the bomb that left one of the others in A Company a double amputee.

"The best thing is just getting used to the day-to-day humdrum other people take for granted, like sharing a bed with my fiancée or putting up shelves or going shopping. I actually enjoy going to Ikea now."

But the joy of coming home is complicated. The soldiers are now suddenly separated from the men with whom they have shared seven months of banter. They must cope with feelings of guilt at surviving when others have died. The adrenaline of combat is replaced by household chores, and boredom. They can struggle to fit back into a family that has had to learn to live without them and a society that asks searching questions about their time in combat but does not want to hear the answers.

"The worst bit is adjusting from life that was so fast-paced," explains Major Rich Grover, who commanded B Company in the notorious Nahr-e Saraj area of Helmand. "You are running around at 100 miles an hour, and then suddenly you are at nought."

Despite the thrill of seeing his wife, Hannah, and baby boy,

Henry, he confesses: "Suddenly you are detached from everyone, back with your family, which is great, but at the same time it can be quite lonely."

On leaving Afghanistan, soldiers spend 24 hours in "decompression" on Cyprus, where they are briefed on how to readjust to family life and how to recognise mental health problems. The military now operates a trauma risk management programme after any major incident. Already, some of the Mercians are being quietly observed for signs of combat stress.

One soldier admits: "I have never had a cross word with my wife in all the years we have been married and now I can't stop snapping at her."

Thousands of miles away from Helmand, soldiers tend to remain over-vigilant, still searching for signs of an IED (improvised explosive device) or an ambush.

"I am more jumpy here," explains Mark Dickinson's older brother, Sergeant John Dickinson, aged 30, who served with A Company in Sangin, a town which claimed a third of British lives until it was handed over to the US Marines this year. "Out there, when there was a bang, no one flinched, but you don't expect it to happen here."



Left to right: Private Mark Dickinson, his son Alfie, Private Dave Rafferty and Sergeant John Dickinson

In the four weeks of holiday the returning soldiers are given before they must rejoin their regiment, the temptation is to make up for the dry months by drinking and driving fast cars.

"A lot get killed behind the wheel after a tour," says Major Ronnie Goodwin. "And this was without doubt the most difficult tour the regiment has had since the Second World War."

"Young infantrymen are risk takers," continues Major Grover. "I worry intensely about them, what they are going to do in the fog of a few beers with mates who don't live by the same code of conduct and how accommodating will their families and friends be to them."

Most of the soldiers complain of being bored. It is an inactivity that forces them to confront suppressed grief. Some will take months to face the families of the dead, fearful that they will break down or be blamed.

"Everyone is getting pissed and having a laugh and then you get a random moment when you think so-and-so is not here," says Second Lieutenant Nathan Rager. "As things get back to normal, it highlights the things that aren't normal."

Alone in a cemetery in Runcorn, Sgt Dickinson contemplates a simple wooden cross that marks Colour Sergeant Martyn Horton's grave until a headstone can be made. He places down 11 cerise carnations and the same number of buff-coloured

HOME FROM HELMAND: Why Leaving the Front Line Isn't Always Easy

blooms, marking the historic number and colours of the 22nd (Cheshire) Regiment, before promising his old friend that he will watch over his nine-year-old son, Ethan.

On 23 June, Sgt Dickinson received news that the friend he made on joining the army 12 years earlier, had been killed. Col Sgt Horton, aged 34, Bobby to his friends, had been mentoring the Afghan police at another base in Gereshk when he went to the aid of a checkpoint under attack and his vehicle rolled into a waterway, killing him along with three other soldiers.

A senior non-commissioned officer, Sgt Dickinson, is unabashed as he explains: "I cried myself to sleep for 10 days. I couldn't be alone. I just kept working."

A week after B Company's return, Ellesmere Port was just one of nine Cheshire towns that came out in force to welcome their county infantry regiment, as well as attached Royal Gurkha Rifles soldiers, with homecoming parades.

Private Dave Rafferty, aged 31 and the Dickinsons' cousin, smiles as he recalls how his form teacher told him he would never make anything of himself: "It is really, really good to be treated with such respect."

Bemused by the adulation, soldiers who slipped back into the country unnoticed after Iraq have one word for it: "overwhelming."

In Congleton, the scene is reminiscent of a post-Second World War street party as the frail frame of Corporal Tony Williams strains to stand up out of his wheelchair to receive his medal.

His pallor and shaking limbs belie the ferocity of this combat nurse, aged 26, who was shot four times as he fought in vain to save two of his colleagues. Around him, teenagers stand on rooftops while office workers crowd around windows. Onlookers applaud and cheer. Young girls push forward to take pictures on their mobile phones.

Unflinching, the 600 men of the battalion stand, bayonets fixed, the light rain running down stern faces with haunted eyes.

In Stockport, a group of school children wave union flags as Private Ryan Hewitt, aged 18, who lost both his legs in an explosion, stubbornly pushes his wheelchair uphill, refusing all help during a two-and-half-mile parade.

The men do not want sympathy, insists Sergeant Major Matt Henry: "None of us are victims. We are all volunteers."



Soldiers of the 1st Battalion parading through Birkenhead

In Birkenhead, Denise Owen watches proudly in tears, knowing her son Private Douglas Halliday, aged 20, is missing. Her only request is assurances that his death was not in vain.

Lieutenant Colonel Andy Hadfield, the commanding officer, is adamant: "A spirit that triumphs through adversity really is the essence of the morale that drives these very humble, very modest men of the Midlands every time. What they have achieved, whether in a patrol base or working with the police, has been amazing. I know Afghanistan was a better place when they left than when they arrived. I know it. They made a difference."

Back in the Wirral, a few days after the parades, a battered yellow ribbon flag still flutters above the Dickinson family home. In the pub, the two brothers and their cousin play pool. Nearby, families gossip, unaware of the quiet conversation about friends that were killed or terribly maimed. Sgt John Dickinson recalls the horror of hearing his younger brother had been wounded by a grenade. Pte Mark Dickinson interjects that he was desperate to leave hospital and return to his unit, fearful that somebody else might be injured covering his duties.

A week earlier, the pub had hosted a surprise birthday party for Mark. A banner with his picture had hung above the bar. "People kept coming up and asking questions. It was doing my head in," he says now. "'Did you kill anyone?' I just swerved it. You say, 'I was just doing my job', especially if you have a few pints in you, you don't want to bring it up in case you get emotional. But you could take months to explain, show them videos and they still wouldn't understand."

"There are things in the back of your head, you want to keep there," continues his older brother. "Our dad served in Bosnia and Northern Ireland. He won't start a conversation about it. If you do, he will just listen."

They say that no one wants to hear that they love their job, thrive on the adrenalin, the rough simplicity of life, the pride of taking part in the toughest conflict the British has faced for decades, even if that means kill or be killed.

"If people ask questions, you say, 'It was horrible and I am just glad to be home'," says John. "That usually stops them in their tracks."

Preparing himself for his next posting at the joint services staff college, Major Rich Grover's voice reverberates with emotion as he explains what a humbling privilege it was to lead B Company: "To be a commander is awesome. I loved it, even though we had testing times. It was brilliant. I would not change anything, but of course I would, to have those killed and injured back to how they were."

He is, he confesses, not looking forward to being wrenched from his regiment. "There is not a day goes by I don't think about the guys who died. I remember Andrew Breeze the morning he died, sitting there in a T-shirt and shorts, chilling out with a brew. John Sanderson, I took a photograph of him. He was asleep because it was so hot and I was taking the piss out of him. Webster, I cut his hair a couple of days before. Cochran was quieter. I have lasting images of all of them I will take to my grave."

MERCIAN REGIMENT MEMORIAL

On Sunday 3rd July 2011 the Regimental Memorial at Crich, showing the names of members of 1 MERCIAN who died in Afghanistan on Op HERRICK, will be dedicated. Attendance by members of the Regimental Association is encouraged and further details will appear on the CRA pages of the Cheshire Military Museum website shortly.

BELGIUM AND FRANCE

Tuesday the 9th November 2010 saw the Tranmere Branch annual pilgrimage to Belgium and France take place. In total 46 souls including members from other Cheshire Regiment Association branches and friends, and for the first time a large contingent from the Stockport Mercian Volunteer Regimental Association.

Three standards and their bearers accompanied us from Kirkham CRA, Stockport MVRA and Tranmere CRA.

We also had our own entertainment team with us that would have put Butlins redcoats to shame, but more about that later.

After a quiet journey and smooth crossing of the channel we arrived in Ostend, Belgium, late in the evening. The only highlight to this was when Dave MAPLEY put on a DVD called SOLDIER starring Mel Gibson, the audio being completely in German. Very educational, "Thanks Dave." Alan Rowe also held a raffle raising £165 including a £60 donation to the Mercian Regiment benevolent fund.

After sorting ourselves out, most decided to explore the local watering holes. It was not a good day to be a chicken in Belgium as at least half the coach went to the nearby grill and ordered half a lovely chicken, bread and beer. Some, who will not be named, had a full one.

Day One saw us up early, a few wishing they had gone to bed earlier, and we then travelled to Villers Fuacon Cemetery to place a wreath on the grave of Pte T.E.DOWNEY of the 15th Cheshire Regiment who was killed in 1917. The standards were all on parade and the Cheshire regiment prayer and eulogy spoken over the grave, followed by the last post. Swaying Birch trees at the top of the cemetery on a hill away from the road surrounded the grave itself and when the minute's silence took place I thought what a very peaceful place to rest with just the sound of the rustling trees around you, a number of the other members reflected in the same way.

We then made our way to Arras where we visited the Wellington tunnels, 20km of subterranean passages and tunnels used to house and hide 25,000 men of the British and Commonwealth armies for 8 days prior to the major battle of Arras in 1917, where they popped up from holes punched in the

ground and attacked the Germans. A significant success but blighted by a general's orders to stop after a day's fighting, which gave the Germans time to counter attack resulting in a huge loss of life. The highlight of this trip was the very impressive reconstruction of exit ten at the end of the tour where the sound of guns and battle could be heard from the tunnel exit with large flashes and artillery crashing in. What a truly frightening experience that must have been, to compel you to leave the safety of those tunnels, especially when the average age of the soldiers was 19 years of age.

We then left Arras to travel to Vimy ridge. There are always two stories to any war and en route we stopped off at the Neuville-St Vaast German War Cemetery which is the final resting place of 45,000 German soldiers from the Great War. The difference between our own graves and these was clear. Whilst very tidy and orderly and well set out, the unusual aspect was that each metal cross bore the names of four bodies buried beneath. On some that were officers were only two names and German Jewish soldiers were buried alone under a stone headstone. A sobering fact considering the persecution of the Jews by the Germans in the Second World War.

We then went to Vimy Ridge and I think at this stage of the journey I should introduce our first Tranmere Redcoat, in the guise of Brian from the TRANMERE Branch, whose forte was making balloon sculptures. From that point on, at regular intervals, we were presented with balloon motorbikes, guns, hats – you name it – he even made a meat and two veg hat that created great amusement with the ladies. Most of them were given to kids we met along the route, though not the special headwear, rest assured.

At Vimy Ridge two very knowledgeable and funny Canadian University Students, who for me made the visit very interesting, guided us through a large trench complex and underground tunnels. This is the place where Welsh miners tunnelled 7km in a straight line under German lines using just pick axes, and en route tunnelled off, planted a load of explosive in underground caverns, blew a few hundred Germans up along the way, and then carried on. The final destination for them was the ridge itself



Wreath laying at Larch Wood Cemetery

BELGIUM AND FRANCE

where they again planted vast amounts of explosives under bunkers along the line and blew them up when the main attack started. This attack was the first time a rolling barrage was introduced, that saved the lives of thousands of Canadians, unlike the French and British armies who had both failed to take the ridge at a huge cost.

The finale was the actual memorial itself, a huge structure imposing itself on the ridge with fantastic views towards the coast. You could understand why this was such an important strategic position; many pictures were taken by the party and will no doubt adorn many facebook pages by now.

The chickens had to make themselves scarce again that night. The second redcoat made himself known that evening; Roy from the Tranmere Branch whipped his guitar out and gave a guest appearance for the party in Flannigan's Bar.

The following day, the 11/11, was the main event. We travelled early to a cold and rain-swept Ypres to take part in the parade at the magnificent Menin Gate memorial.

We bumped into WO2 'Chalky' White from 1 Mercian who was in full No2 dress, supporting the ACF contingent. Two wreaths were laid this year: The Cheshire Regiment wreath was laid by Paul Coy (WO2) from Stockport MVRA and the second, The Mercian Regiment wreath, was laid at the gate for the first time by Peter Marsh (WO2), also from Stockport MVRA. The three standards were again on parade and when we finished the parade and retired to the usual Stella bar they turned up with their newly adopted fellow standard bearer, Nathan, a serving Staff Sergeant from the USMC, who enjoyed a couple of hours of English camaraderie.

From Ypres we travelled to Larch Wood Cemetery where we laid a wreath and held a ceremony at the grave of Pte P Hughes of the North Staffordshire Regiment. The weather had got worse since leaving Ypres, the rain was coming down horizontal and blowing a gale. This area was very exposed and you could imagine the conditions these young lads put up with back in 1917, absolutely horrendous.

We then paid a visit to Tyne Cot where we visited the new visitors centre and paid our respects at a number of Cheshire graves.



En route to Tyne Cot

That night the redcoats put on a proper show in the hotel bar. It transpired that Brian not only made balloon models but could play the guitar and sing as well, so we had two guitarists with a fine catalogue of songs. Everyone attended and had a good time. Even the driver (Ray) was entertaining everyone with his cameo of the Crazy Frog with the aid of a green balloon mouth.

The final day was an easy one with a late start where we visited the nearby Atlantic Wall. We had the benefit of being the only guests there as they had closed the week previous and Dave Mapley had negotiated them opening up for a special visit. Although again cold and wet we spent three very interesting hours walking through fortifications and examining artillery pieces and other equipment. The highlight for the MVRA contingent was their re-enactment of the very famous photograph of Rommel visiting the wall back in 1942. Well they enjoyed it anyhow.



Rommel and his entourage walking the Atlantic Wall in 1942...



...and the MVRA contingent in 2010 – spot the difference!

That evening we tried to drink Ostende dry and nearly did. A few regretted the attempt the following morning when we started the long trip back.

All in all a brilliant trip, organised and well run by the Tranmere Branch, and everyone who attended will agree and thank Alan and Dave and the rest of the committee for it.

It allowed us to pay our respects to the brave soldiers who died in WW1 and WW2, combined with good company and ample social activities. We intend to go again next year so, as they say in the industry, 'Book early.'

Peter Marsh

“PLUS ÇA CHANGE, PLUS C’EST LA MÊME CHOSE” by Arthur Clarke

“Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose” or “It was ever thus.”

Pursuant to my interest in sniping – a subject I explored in the September 2008 edition of our newsletter – I recently came across the following account of an incident which happened in the Boer War where my local regiment (I now live on the Leicestershire Nottinghamshire border) was heavily engaged with the Boers and suffering not a few casualties from their sharpshooters. It is recorded by a British sniper. I thought it so well written, interesting and typical that I thought it worth passing on.

“One morning I was late, and a sniper almost got me. I determined however to get him; so every day I took a beautiful rifle with telescopic sights, lent me by Colonel Howard of the Rifle Brigade. One morning I saw my sniper approaching his post. Captain B. of the Leicestershire Regiment was commanding the company that held this Observation Hill position and he sent me the best shot they had in the Regiment. Together we made out the distance to be 1000 yards and that evening, when we had seen the sniper depart, I got some explosive bullets and successfully hit his lair. [presumably to work out the correct calculations].

I waited a week until he took no trouble, just walking to his post, reaching it regularly by 2.30am, leaving it at 12 noon to return at 1.00pm. Captain B. told his men not to frighten the ‘bird,’ as I would do the trick when I thought it was a certain kill. One day Harry Rawlinson [General] and some of the Headquarters staff came up about 11.30 am and I told them to watch my sniper leave his lair as his time had come. The sniper that day just sauntered from his post, and with the first shot I got him, as far as we could see, stone dead. This was a red letter day for me, as I was invited to dinner at Headquarters, and ate the best meal I had had for over two months.

The conversation turned on the shooting of the sniper, and I remarked that this event had kept me awake and relieved the monotony of remaining behind a rock from 3.00am until the following nightfall. It was more exciting than deer stalking. After dinner Sir George White, General Hunter and Colonel Howard asked me if I would go with an officer named Watson to try to find out where the Boers were camping on the North side of Bell’s Kopie, as the Rifle Brigade had suffered a lot of casualties from

dawn attacks. We started on this night’s reconnaissance two nights afterwards and were more successful than we could have imagined for Watson and I got within listening distance of their bivouac, and the former made a very clear report, with sketches of their positions. If ever a man earned some recognition for his work, Watson did, but at the end of the siege, when I was in control of the Mapping Section, I found Watson’s work had been signed and credited to a certain staff officer; who is now dead so I won’t give his name; and this staff officer had signed Watson’s reconnaissance as his own work.”

Reproduced from ‘Magazine’ the journal of the ‘Nottinghamshire Society of Riflemen,’ Issue 10, December 2005, with permission.

The art of sniping has moved a long way since the Boer War but it is still fundamentally the same activity – hitting the enemy without him knowing where the shot came from. As a form of warfare it owes its origins to the American sharpshooters during the War of Independence where their skills in woodcraft, camouflage and shooting terrified the British Redcoats who were sitting ducks and had no idea from whence they were being shot at. These sharpshooters had an influence on the war out of all proportion to their numbers. However, the term ‘sniping’ itself is actually an English word coined during the days of the British army in India when game shooting was a favourite activity of the officers. Men who were able to hit a snipe in mid-flight were chosen for special duties as marksmen and became known as ‘snipers.’ Very quickly the best shots in the regiment, regardless of rank, were selected to join this elite band.

The hairy camouflage suits which the snipers often wear are known as ‘ghillie suits’ after the Scottish gamekeepers who pioneered them.

To start with, snipers worked alone but it has now been proven that it is better for them to work in teams of three – one to find the target, one to shoot and one to provide security. Of course, every man is fully capable of doing all three tasks and they frequently change roles (working with a small team also helps to prevent them from going crazy).

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have proved very suitable for this type of warfare and the snipers are part of a vital and elite body, chipping away little by little at the insurgents, and frightening the wits out of them.

JOHN FAIRBANKS WRITES

THE MIRACLE

I make no apologies for discussing my eldest granddaughter, Sophie, yet again. She has now reached the age of eleven and during the past two years has become something of a sporting sensation. She is already a Karate Brown belt, and has displayed awesome strength and agility at gymnastics. Last term she represented her school at basketball and is at present breaking in a new pair of football boots. No doubt most of her sporting genes are inherited from her parents but I like to think that a few of mine are in there somewhere.

My sporting record, particularly during my somewhat chequered army career, is of some interest to Sophie. She is intrigued that whilst playing a lot of cricket, hockey, football, and throwing the occasional hammer, I somehow managed to find the time to win medals for javelin, and – unbelievably – hurdling. I must say that in some cases the word ‘win’ is difficult to justify, ‘came my way’ is nearer the mark. However I digress.

Sophie’s problem is that she cannot equate my present day spherical shape and ponderous method of moving with the lithe fitness and lightning speed needed by a successful athlete. So, with the enthusiastic help of her sister Amelia and being aided, abetted, and bribed by Grandma, Sophie is leading a no holds barred campaign to ‘Get Granddad Moving.’ But to date, due to my military training, I have been able to make myself scarce whenever strenuous exercise seemed likely.

However in recent days and much against my will, I have had to use ‘Shanks’ Pony’ on a large scale. This extracurricular foot slogging was not due to Sophie’s determined and ruthless crusade. It came about because of an electronic fault which kept my car off the road for a week or so. As a result of having to walk everywhere I lost a couple of pounds and felt much fitter. (I hope Sophie won’t read that last sentence – it will only encourage her.)

Last Saturday, when considering the problem of the weekly shopping, and no transport, I agreed to put my new found well-

JOHN FAIRBANKS WRITES (continued)

being to the test and walk the odd mile or so to the local supermarket. Our purchases were packed into a rucksack, which I carried, and so burdened we set off home along the local cycle track. A little while later, as we trudged along, we saw our family cycling towards us with Sophie in the lead. On seeing us they stopped and sat staring in utter disbelief at the astonishing sight before them. Then, in the reverent tone of voice no doubt used by the Disciples on witnessing the healing of the lame man, Sophie proclaimed, "Granddad is walking! Cool!"

THE TREATMENT

Each time I see my family doctor he shows more interest in my military medical history than in my current state of health. Having quickly disposed of the reason for my visit he spends the rest of the consultation asking me with great relish about ailments I suffered and the gory details of how I was treated. He always seems amazed that I, and many other soldiers, managed to survive the administrations of occasionally poorly trained nursing staff and surgeons whose butchery skills would not be tolerated today, not even in an abattoir. On my last visit he was fascinated by my account of my first experience of a British Military Hospital in Suez, in 1952, and the treatment I received for what was then called 'yellow jaundice.'

After a stay of about three weeks the doctors decided that I was fit to return to duty in time to take part in an extremely long exercise in the Sinai Desert!! To anyone who would listen I forcibly expressed my doubts about this incredibly bad decision. Later that day a male nurse, who had heard my heartfelt misgivings about my impending discharge, appeared at my bedside. He said that for the paltry sum of ten shillings, in advance, he would fix it for me to remain in hospital a while longer. I had no hesitation in agreeing and paid his exorbitant charge on the spot. Shortly after 'lights out' my saviour materialised as promised and gave me my 'medicine.' This was a bottle of Anchor beer which I confess I drank without question and, I might add, with great pleasure. As a result of this dangerous 'treatment' (the alcohol could have caused permanent liver damage), when the tests prior to my discharge were completed, my urine sample was a vivid shade of orange. The doctor could not ignore this classic symptom of jaundice and so, courtesy of my avaricious 'nurse' and his irresponsible action, I spent a further two weeks in BMH.

It was in Singapore in 1958 that I witnessed another example of the 'treatment' to which military patients of the era could be subjected. I haven't yet told Dr Davies of this incident but I'm sure he will be intrigued because it involves psychiatry, in which he takes a keen interest.

The incident happened during an official visit to the hospital by Lady Edwina Mountbatten. At the time I was a patient in the open plan medical ward which was on the first floor and directly beneath, on the ground floor, was the equally spacious psychiatric clinic. The big day dawned and the patients lay rigidly to attention in their pristine, creaseless beds for what seems like hours. It was shortly before the lunch hour when Her Ladyship, at the head of a large retinue of medical staff and aides, started to make her way slowly down the ward. Suddenly, as she did so, from the ward below, a plaintive male voice could be heard enquiring, "Nurse, where's my dinner?" There was no reply as the procession proceeded on its stately way until the voice, somewhat angrier bellowed, "Nurse, I want my dinner. Now!!!" Again there was no answer but, looking somewhat

concerned, Lady Edwina halted the procession and sent a member of her staff to investigate. She then continued the inspection but had barely restarted when the voice called vehemently, and with exquisite clarity, "Nurse. Where the f..... hell is my fu....." The ranting demand was interrupted by an emphatic meaty thud followed by instant silence. A slight quivering of her lips was the only indication that Her Ladyship, the wife of a distinguished naval officer, had heard and understood the patient's earnest plea. Possibly she was surprised by the treatment meted out according to the psychiatric profession's 1958 list of recommended treatments. I know Dr Davies will be when I tell him. proclaimed, "Granddad is walking! Cool!"

SKIING GROUPIES

If my recently published treatise on the art of stopping inspired anyone to try their hand at skiing they will no doubt be in need of a few more words of advice. I feel I should give all the help I can to any of my countrymen who are stupid / sorry / brave enough to strap on a pair of skis. One of the first things I would advise is that they should be aware of just who they are skiing with. Each winter hordes of skiers assemble in groups and, just like lemmings, set out to do themselves harm. There are specific types present in every group who are instantly recognisable and therefore, if necessary, can be avoided.

The Leader

A group needs a leader. That is someone who will round everyone up, keep an eye on the luggage, marshal and entertain the kids, check on departure times, and generally take command. If as you assemble you cannot immediately identify such a person don't worry. Within minutes of meeting together the unelected leader will assume command. He always does.



Beautiful Women

Any man who takes an attractive woman on a skiing holiday, or successfully chats one up on the journey, is wasting both his time and his money. This is because all good-looking ladies will be targeted by the predatory ski instructors who will fall upon their prey within minutes of suitable nubile young ladies arriving in the resort.

Wallflowers

In the interests of sexual and possibly racial harmony the ideal group should contain only women of indeterminate age and plain appearance. Such ladies are guaranteed plenty of masculine attention, particularly when alcohol consumption rises. That this statement is a fact of life is borne out by the words of the male skiers' anthem, which contains the immortal lines, "I've never been to bed with an ugly woman, but I've sure woken up with a few!"

The Siren

Whenever and wherever skiers assemble the 'femme fatale' will be present. She is always expertly groomed, wears the most fashionable skin-tight ski clothing, and is drenched in erotic perfume. Although she is never seen on skis she is on intimate terms with a large percentage of the instructors. If all else fails she can be recognised because of her après-ski footwear which looks like a pair of dead Shetland ponies.

The Ex-Matron

This woman is essential to the well-being of any gathering of winter sportsmen. She wears a tiny watch on her large intimidating bosom and is paranoid about standards of hygiene in foreign climes. Whilst she has no interest or ability in skiing she is expert in bending irascible hoteliers or pompous local bureaucrats to do her awesome will and the Lord help anyone who defies her.

Male Skiers

In any group the men can be handsome, or plain, or even downright ugly. No one will care. The only assets a man needs in his quest to survive a week's après-ski are the ability to drink a Liverpool docker under the table, a well-filled wallet, and complete immunity from brewer's droop.

The Minders

Every happy band of skiers has in its ranks several dedicated men willing and able to physically defend their new-found friends. These heroes can be identified by their green striped rugby shirts, their insatiable thirst for copious quantities of lager, an inexhaustible repertoire of obscene songs, and a very narrow space between their eyebrows and the hairline.

The Interpreter

On arrival in foreign parts it is not long before the unofficial interpreter emerges from the ranks. Although he can never be classed as fluent he does prove capable of settling disputed bar bills, ordering suitable meals, and occasionally translating secret letters from love-sick lady skiers to sex-mad instructors. The interpreter therefore often comes into highly classified information concerning the clandestine behaviour of some group members. Which is the reason why the linguist never wants for anything.

The Lecher

This sexual Dracula is never seen before sunset. He is noticeable because of his sallow complexion, his bloodshot eyes, and his habit of blinking rapidly if exposed to daylight. He also has a penchant for chasing anything in skirts, except Gordon Highlanders and members of the Greek National Guard.

NOW IT CAN BE TOLD

In the early 1950s life in Hodgson's Camp, Suez was not without incident. For instance it was not exactly unknown for a trigger-happy member of the fellaheen to seek, alone and unaided, to expel the infidels from his homeland. The method of attack was always the same. From very long range, and usually by dawn's early light, a heroic descendant of Saladin, being filled with patriotic fervour, and not a little hashish, would aim a single shot from an ancient Lee Enfield rifle, probably issued by Lawrence of Arabia, in the general direction of our camp. He would then melt into the surrounding desert without waiting to find out if he had hit anything. Such incidents, apart from introducing new ventilation holes in one or two tent roofs, had little general effect and were only of passing interest.

However, there was one occasion when a short burst of gun fire caused alarm and despondency throughout the entire Brigade area. It happened on the night when Lieutenant X, newly arrived from Sandhurst and on duty for the first time as Battalion Orderly Officer, decided in his wisdom to demonstrate his newly acquired powers of command.....

It was 2.30am when Mr X paid his compulsory visit to the guardroom. After inspecting all and sundry, and being unable to find any fault, he ordered me, as Guard 2 I/C, to pick up the Bren gun and a couple of magazines, and follow him. We marched through the totally dark and silent company lines until we reached the furthest corner of the camp. Choosing a spot which overlooked a desolate stretch of desert which lay between us and the distant outskirts of Suez and from where, to the west, we could see the location of one of our neighbouring units, the Inniskilling Fusiliers, the green, young subaltern ordered me to adopt the firing position and load. It was when he gave me the order to fire that I objected and tried to tell him that this was not a good idea. Mr X refused to listen and threatened me with a court martial unless I immediately carried out his order. So without more ado I fired a long burst, an action that produced an instantaneous and memorable reaction.

And it was at that moment that the rookie officer realised what I had been trying to tell him. Because hostilities between Egypt and Israel were liable to erupt at any given moment, our 'piggy in the middle' Brigade had been put on a war footing. Which was why as the sound of our gun fire died away, from the direction of the 'Skins' position a mortar flare lit up the night sky to the accompaniment of sporadic small arms fire.

Meanwhile, in the rest of the Brigade area thousands of young national servicemen, being rudely woken from their sleep and believing that the balloon had gone up, reacted in similar fashion. In Hodgson's Camp Lieutenant X and I could only stand and watch in awe as all hell broke loose. Bugles urgently sounded the call to arms. Scores of sleepy half naked young soldiers, clutching a variety of weapons, blundered about in the darkness searching desperately for their slit trenches, which some of them found by the simple expedient of falling into them. From all sides voices could be heard enquiring what on earth was happening (or words to that effect) and terrible curses rent the air as NCOs fought to bring order out of chaos.

Which was why, when the Orderly Officer and I arrived back at the guard room, we were met by the Guard Commander with the news that an extremely irate Brigadier was on the phone demanding an immediate and up-to-date situation report. The unfortunate Mr X then experienced a lengthy and truly harrowing discussion with the said Brigadier, followed a little while later by an even more horrendous audience with the CO. As a direct result of the latter the chastened young subaltern became famous throughout the Battalion for performing the most consecutive terms of duty as Battalion Orderly Officer ever recorded.

DROPPIN WELL MEMORIAL

On the now annual pilgrimage members of the CRA, civil dignitaries and local residents joined with relatives and friends of those killed and injured in The Droppin Well bomb in Ballykelly for the 28th Anniversary on Sunday 5th December 2010. The purpose of the pilgrimage is, of course, to remember the events of that tragic night, 6th December 1982, when 17 people lost their lives, this figure as we are all aware included 8 members of The 1st Battalion The 22ND (Cheshire) Regiment. Some of the relatives and a number of CRA members travelled over from all corners of England for this event, as they do year after year.

In the face of atrocious weather conditions the church community did an excellent job in clearing snow and ice and making the church and memorial accessible for the service, we are really lucky to have such support at this event from the local community.

Prior to the memorial service a small private ceremony, organised by Maj Eddie Pickering MBE, was held at which the following were awarded the Elizabeth Cross and Scroll by Mr Harry Boyle, Deputy Lieutenant:

Mrs Bagshaw – Mother of LCpl Steven Bagshaw

Mr & Mrs Williamson – Father & Mother of Pte Shaw Williamson

Mrs Escott – Mother of LCpl Clinton Collins

The memorial event was organised by Limavady Branch of the CRA with the service being led by Canon Samuel McVeigh in Tamlaghtfinlagan church. Lessons were read by the Deputy Lieutenant, Mr Harry Boyle, and the Chairman of the CRA, Mr Peter Gresty, with the act of remembrance being conducted by Mr Andy Callan, Chairman of Limavady Branch, Major Ron Goodwin MBE, Regimental Sergeant Major at the time of the atrocity and WO1 Mac Philpott.

Following the memorial service wreaths were laid at the memorial, in the church grounds, by members of CRA, other military associations, civil organisations, relatives and friends of those killed. On this occasion the CRA wreath was laid by a man who, at the time of the bomb was the youngest survivor and had returned to the scene of so much pain and torment for the very

first time, Philip Tongplaw (his name was Chatterton at the time) was made very welcome and has since become a member of Stockport Branch of the CRA.

As is customary following the service and wreath laying ceremony the congregation retired to the church hall for a bowl of very welcome and warming soup followed by tea and cakes, provided by the church ladies, before moving to the Combined Services Club in Limavady for something a little stronger to ward off the winter chills.

The next Droppin Well Memorial service will be held in Ballykelly on Sunday 4th December 2011 and we would be pleased to see as many people as possible at this annual event. Flights are available from Liverpool to Londonderry City Airport, and from Manchester to Belfast, good rates are negotiated with local hotels by Limavady Branch. For more information and photographs of the Memorial please visit the “Droppin Well Memorial” page on Face Book.

Peter Gresty



*Pictured at Tamlaghtfinlagan Church for the Droppin Well Memorial Service:
Mr Harry Boyle, Deputy Lieutenant; Mr Peter Gresty, Chairman CRAMC;
Mr Michael Carten, Mayor of Limavady; Maj Ron Goodwin MBE;
and Maj Eddie Pickering MBE*

CORRESPONDENCE

Dear Editor,

Forgive me, but you will always be Corporal ABC to me! I saw your svelte-like figure on page 16 of the recent Newsletter (Vol2, Issue 6 Nov 10) and it made me think how I could walk past old friends nowadays whom I may not have seen for 30 or more years and never recognise them. This was confirmed by seeing a picture of Brigadier Mike Dauncey with Phil Oulton on page 10 and General Keith Skempton with Brigadier John Donnelly on the same page, both Phil and Keith had changed, of course, but Brigadier Mike was just the same as ever. I was delighted to see another picture of Brigadier Mike on page 20 with his son, John, who also hasn't changed one iota. My congratulations on his free fall and I'm just grateful that they don't make a parachute big enough for me (heavy drop excluded, or is it?). Sadly I see more of my friends in the “Last Post” than in the body of the Newsletter, but that I suppose is the name of the game. I retired from military service in 2007 after completing 45 years in uniform. 22 years (appropriately) with the British Army (including TA Yeomanry, RMA and Mons) and 23 years with the Sultan's Armed Forces. It is sad how few Cheshires took

up the challenge of service with SAF. It is too late now, unless you are looking for a family R&R away from operational tours, but from the 60s to the 80s it was great training and good fun.

I regret that my very few and brief visits to the UK have prevented me from keeping up with former comrades. I have managed to make contact over the years with Mike Hart, who I was at RCB with, Mike Huntriss, Bob Stewart, Harry Conlin, Colin Neville, Bill Allen, David Colbourne (lost contact), Rolly Pillman, Nigel “the Doc” Reid, Nigel French (visited he and Robyn in Canberra last year), Tony Twiss, Tony Gauvain and Philip Wilde (I'm sure that I have missed out a few).

On a farewell note, I thought that I would recount the story of the young Second Lieutenant John Dauncey. He had crashed his very nice second hand Beetle and it was left for many weeks rusting in front of the Weeton Officers' Mess, where it became quite an eyesore. The CO told me as Adjutant to deal with him. I summoned him into my office (Adjutants “summon” they don't invite!) and asked him why he hadn't had the car, which he was still driving, repaired. John's reply was “well, I might do it again!” I gave up.

“Up the Twos” *Nick Moulton-Thomas*

CORRESPONDENCE (continued)

Dear Editor,

I was very interested to read Les Stelfox's letter in the November 2010 Newsletter regarding the bravery of the late Richard Blackburn in trying to save the life of my father in 1935. Since, in our eyes today, the award of a BEM to Richard Blackburn in these circumstances might seem a little less generous than his courage deserved, I would like to clarify how this came about.

A Medal of the Order of the British Empire was instituted in 1917. There was a Civil Division and a Military Division – the medal was the same, the ribbons slightly different. This medal was discontinued in 1922 when two separate medals were instituted. The first was the Medal of the Order of the British Empire for Gallantry, usually known as the Empire Gallantry Medal (EGM). The second was the Medal of the Order of the British Empire for Meritorious Service. These medals are of different design; the ribbons much the same. Richard Blackburn was awarded the EGM in the London Gazette, 23 June 1936, in recognition of his courage a year earlier.

The George Cross was instituted in September 1940. Holders of the Albert Medal (originally for saving life at sea, and later for saving life on land) and the Edward Medal (life-saving in mines and quarries) were invited to exchange their medals for the George Cross, which many of them did. In September 1941, holders of the EGM were told "to return" their medals to be exchanged for George Cross – some did not! Richard Blackburn did, and quite rightly his bravery became properly recognised both then and today.

Charles Lane

Dear Editor,

For anyone who served in Palestine 1945-48, you may be interested in a book entitled "Cordon and Search." It is written by Major General Dare Wilson CBE MC. It is published by The Battery Press

Des (Taffy) Powell

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Dear Editor,

I served as a National Serviceman and have a number of photographs from my time in Berlin in 1955-1956. I thought that I might send you a few to see if any of them stir memories. I regret that I cannot remember many names, but I am sure that someone else will.

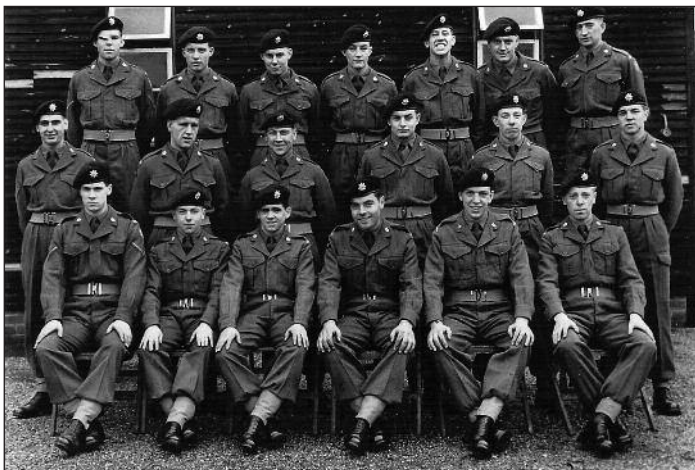
Edward (Ted) Sutcliffe



Lt Phil Oulton holds the stopwatch for a race on the No 2 track in the Olympic Stadium, Berlin 1955



*End of an athletics competition.
Mike Batty and Jack Billington are 2nd and 3rd left on the back row.*



*NCOs Cadre run by RSM Birkby in Colchester 1954.
I am front left, but cannot remember any other names.*



Some of the 22nd Ski-ing Team in Winterberg. Left to right: Nobby Clarke, ? Tatton, Mike Barber, Mike Blackburn, Ted Sutcliffe

Dear Editor,

I am looking for Robert Buddy Honeyford from the Stafford area who was with us in 1 platoon A Coy in 1965- 71. If anyone who knows Buddy or his whereabouts, please would they contact me on 07919867092 so hopefully we can meet up for the Grand Reunion in June. Many thanks.

Bill Richards

CALENDAR OF EVENTS 2010-2011

14 Apr	Regimental Golf Day Prestbury
15 Apr	Officers Association Lunch, Wellington College, Crowthorne (tbc)
6 May	Chester Races
17 May	Regimental Golf Day Sutton Hall
3-6 Jun	Grand Reunion, Norbreck Hotel, Blackpool
1 Jul	Regimental Golf Day Chester Curzon
9 Sep	Regimental Golf Day Pryor's Hayes
10 Sep	Officers Association Ladies Dinner, Chester
11 Sep	Mons Day Parade & Lunch Chester
29 Oct	East Cheshire Reunion, Stockport
4 Dec	Droppin Well Memorial Service, Ballykelly

CLUB NEWS

The Club can be used for Branch Events and Private Parties by arrangement. A concessionary hire rate for CRA members' private use applies. Branches do not pay to use the Club.

Revised normal opening times are:

Monday 1200-1400

Wednesday 1200-1400

Friday 1200-1400

1900-2330

Saturday - by arrangement

Sunday 1200-1400

For all Club enquiries, contact Alan Jones on 07906753699

22nd GOLF 2011 SEASON

Stand by your beds! It's Golf again. After a really successful 2010 our new season opens on Thursday the 14th of April at Prestbury.

We have been playing Prestbury, as a society, for over 50 years and they really do look after us. It promises to be a great day and we advise getting your booking in as soon as possible. Don't forget that it's a formal dress code with the Regimental tie on show! Just remember all our days' presentations are formal.

Our other days for golf are May 17th (Tuesday), July 1st (Friday) and our final day is 9th Sept at Pryors Hayes. On Friday the 5th August we have a match against Eastham for which Capt John Bigland puts a team together.

Golf has come on in "leaps and bounds" over the past few years thanks to John's organisation, and his free 22nd Hats and Sweaters mean we are now looking like a top class society.

Really make the effort to get to as many of these days as possible. They are great fun and cover over 70 years of served and serving members.

Contact is to Sue at RHQ for any further information.

Tel. 01244 327617

Bill Jones

HADRIAN'S WALL

Pete Coward is planning to spend his 50th birthday, in June, walking the 85 miles or so of Hadrian's Wall. He is doing it in order to raise as much as possible for the Help for Heroes charity. Over £1,200 has been pledged so far. For more information or to pledge support, then please see the following link: www.justgiving.com/pete-coward, or you can telephone him on 07801 707 497.

CAPE BRETON HIGHLANDERS

Many of you will recall that for many years our regiment has been affiliated with 2nd Battalion Nova Scotia Highlanders (Cape Breton). In view of what has happened with our regiment it may be interesting to know that they also lost part of their identity over fifty years ago.

In 1954 the Cape Breton Highlanders were re-named 2nd Battalion Nova Scotia Highlanders. A year later (Cape Breton) was tagged onto the end of their regimental title.

Surprise, surprise! With a bit of prompting the Canadian Defence Ministry have recently realised that the regiment's former name was more identifiable to the public. A short campaign culminated in the Defence Minister saying "Sure" to the restoration of the regiment's former name of The Cape Breton Highlanders.

If only things were as simple here. There again, it took them 50 years to get their name back, so there is still hope.

George Szwejkowski

22 CLUB WINNERS

November

£100.00	Mr WG Price	Northwich
£50.00	Mr WH Blakeman	Market Rasen
£25.00	Mr JMH Owen	Chorley

December

£100.00	Mr C Lane	Warminster
£50.00	Mr AJ Ridgway	Chester
£25.00	Mr WG Price	Northwich

January

£100.00	Mr RG Nottage	Macclesfield
£50.00	Mr E Ness	Pontefract
£25.00	Mr DR Cornes	Nantwich

MEEANEE GRAND DRAW 2011 WINNERS

1st	£400	Mr W Cartwright, Woodchurch
2nd	£200	Mr J Dennis, Blackpool
3rd	£100	Mr R Whitlock, Tonbridge
4th	£50	Mrs J Kennerley, Northwich
5th	£25	Mr A G Higgins, Bury
6th	£25	Ms H Earnshaw, Flint

MORE MILITARY WORDS OF WISDOM...

"Only the dead will know the end of the war." *Plato*

"The beatings will continue until morale improves."

Attributed to the Commander of the Japanese Submarine Force.

"The graveyards are full of indispensable men."

Charles De Gaulle Military Quote

"Tracers work both ways." *US Army Ordnance*

"Try to look unimportant; they may be low on ammo."
Infantry Journal

"The purpose of war is not to die for your country. The purpose of war is to ensure that the other guy dies for his country." *General Patton*

"Nothing is so good for the morale of the troops as occasionally to see a dead general." *Field Marshal Slim*

"It makes no difference which side the general is on."
Unknown British Soldier

OBITUARIES

ERIC TOREVELL

The following is a slightly abridged version of a tribute from Eric's daughter, Lorna (Ed).

Dear Editor,

Our father Eric passed away on 16th December 2010 aged 93. He joined the 22nd in January 1934 and served with B Company where he reached the rank of Sergeant. He served mainly in the Middle-East, Palestine, Damascus, Gaza, Syria, India, Cyprus and Egypt, to name but a few. He met our mother Mary in Palestine and between them they had a family of five, three sons and two daughters. They were married for 51 years, until Mary died in 1992 aged 72.

Our father was laid to rest with our mother on 4th January 2011 after a very moving service at St Mark's Parish Church. We would like to thank all members of the CRA who attended, particularly those standard bearers. We know that our dad would have been very proud, just as we are and always will be very very proud of our dad.

I would also like to take this opportunity to pay a tribute to our father as an *Unsung Hero*.

Whilst serving in Palestine in 1934 our father, along with three other private soldiers and a corporal, were stationed at a railway station.

On one particular day an Arab came running up shouting "Bomba! Bomba!" My father, together with the corporal and other soldiers followed the Arab to the place where two bombs had been laid across the tracks. The corporal shook his head and told everyone that it was a job for the engineers and walked away with the three other soldiers. Our father, being an engineer, went back to the bombs. They were fixed with a spring mechanism, over which our dad placed his rifle to stop the lid hitting the detonator (pin). He then removed the pins from both bombs making them safe. The corporal gave our dad a bag to place the defused bombs in and told our dad that he would take it from there. The corporal took all the praise and consequently was mentioned in dispatches, awarded the oak leaf to wear on his Palestine Medal.

No more was ever mentioned until years later he met the corporal, who had now been promoted, outside a bar in Damascus. Our dad pointed at the oak leaf and told him that it should have been his. "A lot of water has gone under the bridge now," was the reply. Our dad was annoyed, but let it go.

I am only writing this because I think that our dad, who served so long with the 22nd Cheshire Regiment, deserves to be recognised as an *Unsung Hero*. Our dad will always be a hero in all our hearts.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs Lorna Patrice Parsons

MAJOR R C CONNOR

I first met Roy 50 years ago, he was a lean, fit, smart and very LOUD drill instructor at the Depot Lichfield. Some 20 or so recruits of Goojerat Platoon used to be awakened by the crashing of the barrack room door and the banging of his pace stick on steel lockers and metal bed ends to his well known shouting, ending with "and into your socks NOW." We all ran around like headless chickens to get on parade, smart and on time to not let him down.

One story comes to mind, in those days seven privates were put on guard but only six were used, the smartest (stickman) was excused the guard. I had been selected for a 48 hour guard on the Friday and was in the barrack room trying very hard to press my greatcoat to ensure that I got a free weekend by being the smartest. Roy came in and said that I was doing it all wrong and for ten shillings he would press it for me. Too good to miss, the deal was done. On the inspection it was pleasing to see that it was Roy who was to select the stickman. No problems, I thought, and was already planning the train times for my free weekend. However, he picked someone else and as we went to our duty in the Guard Room he said, very close to my ear "Right Goodwin, first lesson learnt, always look after your own kit." Something I never forgot. On my farewell dinner after 35 years with the regiment, Roy presented me with a framed ten shilling note, printed around 1961, with a simple brass plate upon which were written the words "Ron will tell the story." He said that he had felt guilty for taking ten bob off me all that time ago.

After driving the 260 miles to Chester for reunions, checking into my accommodation, having lunch and a quick power nap, I used to wait for Roy's call to say "Goodwin, I have arrived in Chester, what pub are you in"? It all seemed to go downhill from there on. If ever you wanted to know the answer to Who, What, Where and When, Roy was the man. His knowledge of regimental events, dates or names was second to none.

Doris and my thoughts, along with his many friends are with his family and friends in Southport and beyond. I will miss Conks very much.

R S Goodwin MBE

LAST POST

Maj Roy Connor died 1 Jan 2011 Ex 1 & 3 Bn

Barry Cooper died 5 Nov 2010 Served 1957-58

Bob Herbert died 21 Feb 2011 aged 80 Ex 1st Bn Suez

Tom Hughes died 20 Jul 2010 aged 77

Ex 4 Bn Drums 1962-67

Geoff Hunt died 29 Nov 2010

Ex 1st Bn Suez & Secretary of Birkenhead Branch

Hilda Jones Widow of the late George Wilfred Jones DCM, died Feb 2011 aged 94.

A K Jordan died 4 Dec 2010 aged 77.

Ex 1st Bn 1951-53 (Suez)

James Thomas Mansell died 15 Feb 2011 aged 76.

Ex 1st Bn Corps of Drums served 1952-55 (Suez)

John Massey died Dec 2010

John Potts died 15 Nov 2010 aged 85

Arthur Roberts died Oct 2009 aged 87

Jim Stanley died 7 Feb 2011 Ex 1st Bn

Sydney Thomas died 04 Feb 2011 aged 70. Ex 1st Bn served 1960-72 Munster, Cyprus, Bahrain, & N Ireland

Eric (Torra) Torevell died 16 Dec 2010 aged 94

Served 1st Bn 1934-56 India & N Africa

Lt Col Alfred Wright died 2009

John Yates died 18 Nov 2010 aged 94 Ex 7 Bn