

### ***Recent Acquisitions***

In 2015 the Museum made over 170 new accessions. Amongst these, perhaps the most significant, is a MM medal group from the Second World War (Accession No.: WOSWR 2015-152) belonging to LCpl Denis Flowers of the 8<sup>th</sup> Btn the Worcestershire Regiment. His MM was gazetted on 20/8/40.

His group of seven medals was presented to the Museum by his daughters Mrs Yvonne Starr and Mrs Diane Hughes. In addition we have a cutting from a Worcestershire newspaper which is headed 'Dennis (sic) Flowers MM' and reads: *'During the retreat through Belgium in May, 1940, the 8th Battalion, the Worcestershire Regt made a stand in and around the village of Wes Welvain. Headquarter Company with all*



*trucks and vehicles, were scattered around the grounds of a chateau on the edge of the village. At first light a British Artillery Battery opened up on the German positions and in a very short time it seemed that every gun in the German advance was concentrated on that small area. For many hours it went on with many dead and casualties mounting up. The trucks were unable to get out with the wounded, many of whom had been taken on stretchers to comparative safety between the high entrance walls to the chateau. The medical officer and his right hand man, Corporal Dennis Flowers, worked for hours tending the wounded and then the Germans started lobbing in the mortar bombs. The MO was killed and Dennis became the doctor. When the company finally got out it left many dead and took with it many more wounded who had cause to bless Dennis and his doctor before he died. There was no replacement MO and Corporal Flowers continued with his work up to the 25 mile perimeter where the battalion made its last stand on the last rear guard before Dunkirk harbour – not many came back. For his devotion to duty Dennis was awarded the Military Medal.'*

The Attestation Registers for the Worcestershire Regiment held in the Museum Archives for the period covering the start of WW2 include 5252554 Denis Flowers in Register No 14 which is for allotted numbers 5252000-5252999; however it gives no attestation dates but does provide the reasons for soldiers becoming non-effective. In the case of Denis Flowers, it reads *'Transferred to the Green Howards with effect from 26 July 1942'*. Clearly at some further stage in his service, he was again transferred to the Royal Engineers.

The name of LCpl Flowers as an MM winner appears in the Honours and Awards 1939-1946' Appendix of Lt Col Lord Birdwood's book 'The Worcestershire Regiment 1922-1950'. *'On 18 May there should have been a brief rest at Wez-Velgain (sic), where the Battalion came into reserve and harboured for the night in the grounds of the chateau. But that night some enemy mortars ranged on to Battalion HQ and there were many casualties, among them a very gallant medical officer, Captain Jones.'* Unfortunately there is no mention of the gallant Cpl Flowers.

## ***The One That Got Away...***

The museum was recently outbid at auction for the First World War medals of Captain A. E. Kemp MC DCM of The Royal Irish Rifles. He was awarded the MC for leading a company in a successful attack in Dadizelle, France in October 1918 when he was wounded in both thighs but remained in command for four hours before being relieved.

The museum's interest lay in the fact that his DCM was one of three awarded to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion The Worcestershire Regiment for Gheluvelt. The citation reads:

*"For conspicuous gallantry and ability on 31<sup>st</sup> October at Gheluvelt in the control of his men during the very critical engagement which resulted in the recapture of the village."*

The Regimental History of the Great War by Captain H. FitzM. Stacke indicates this action took place when *"the routed enemy were hunted out of the hedges and across the open fields beyond the Chateau."*



Both the other two DCMs for Gheluvelt, to Sgts Ellis and Sutton, are held by the museum.

## ***Elsewhere, another World War One hero was being remembered... 'In the Corner of a Foreign Field'***

Family descendants of 2147 Cpl George Alexander Mackie, 1st/8 Bn The Worcestershire Regiment, paid their respects at his graveside on Sunday, April 3, exactly 100 years to the day that their uncle died.



Cpl Mackie was among 17 wounded and seven killed when the Battalion's trenches East of COLINCAMPS, were subjected to constant shelling and bombardment. He was taken to a forward Casualty Clearing Station where he 'died of wounds' on April 3, 1916, aged 19.

Alec Mackie, the fourth generation of the family to serve in the Regiment (1957-60) led the family tributes to his uncle at

Gaizencourt CWC, near Arras, France. Also in attendance are (L-R): Tony Mackie, Phil Mackie, Paul Tomlinson, Andrew Mackie and Jane Tomlinson.

# ***New Display at the Soldier Gallery***

The Museum has created a new display to mark the end of the combat role of the Mercian Regiment in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, in the Gallery. Bringing the displays up to date, the new exhibit is composed entirely of objects, photographs and video collected by the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, The Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters Regiment and the Mercian Regiment in Afghanistan between 2004 and 2014.

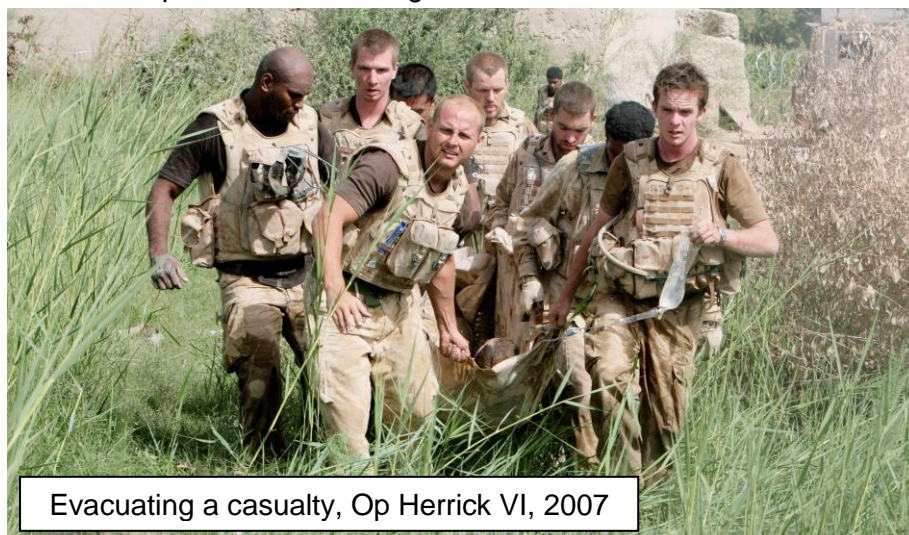
Over the course of a 13-year deployment of British troops in Afghanistan, three battalions of the Mercian Regiment, and its antecedents, have been deployed there almost continuously. Through the personal stories of those on the ground, the new display seeks to provide a snapshot of this pivotal point in the history. It aims to help our visitors understand the challenges that soldiers from the County Regiment faced from initial peaceful deployment through to high intensity combat missions and the critical role of mentoring and training of the Afghan National Security Forces. The new display puts recent deployments into an historical context and perspective, helping to explain the current role and dilemmas facing the Regiment and the army more widely.



The Curator and Chairman of Museum Trustees were pleased to be able to show Brigadier Andrew Williams OBE, Colonel of the Mercian Regiment around the new display. Dr John Paddock, Curator, said:

*“In thirteen years of conflict in Afghanistan the British Armed Forces have suffered 454 casualties in service of this country. Since formation on 1st September 2007, through the amalgamation of The 1st Battalion, Cheshire Regiment, The 1st Battalion, Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters Regiment and the 1st Battalion, Staffordshire Regiment, the Mercian Regiment has deployed on eight operational tours, one in Iraq and, seven in Afghanistan, making it one of the most experienced regiments in the British Army. In the course of its service in “Operation Herrick” the Regiment has sustained its own losses of 27 men. It is only right and proper that we should honour and acknowledge their sacrifice.”*

Lieutenant Colonel (Ret'd) Mark Jackson, OBE, Chairman of the Museum Trustees, said *“The Afghanistan campaign saw the most intense combat the British Army had faced since the Korean War over a period twice as long as the Second World War. We should be very proud of bravery and*



Evacuating a casualty, Op Herrick VI, 2007

*conduct of our local soldiers as they faced a determined and skilful enemy in very hostile environment. The Mercian Regiment was the most heavily deployed Regiment in the Army during this campaign, receiving 24 gallantry awards. We hope that this new display will help the people of Worcestershire, and beyond, who visit our museum to understand the realities of the Afghanistan campaign.”*

## Volunteer Profile

John Wrightson has been volunteering since late 2013, when he responded to an appeal for new volunteers shortly after he had retired. John's always been interested in history; one of his other hats is leading the Worcester U3A Family History Group. It's no surprise then that he particularly enjoys helping enquirers to find out as much as possible about their ancestors service with the regiment.



Inevitably at the present time most of the research enquiries received at the museum are concerned with military service during WW1. That's very much to John's liking because it's a period of history that particularly intrigues him.

He became interested in it thirty years ago when he began researching the operations of 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry in preparation for a trip to the Somme battlefields. One of his great grand uncles, a subaltern in that battalion, was killed during the Battle of Flers-Courcellette in September 1916. In more recent years John has been able to discover the stories of some of his other relatives who served variously on the Western Front and in Mesopotamia with the Royal Welch Fusiliers, the Coldstream Guards, the RAMC and the Army Chaplain's Department.

Many men who survived the war didn't talk much about it so quite often we get enquiries from descendants who know very little about their relatives' wartime service. Because many individual soldiers' service records were destroyed during WW2 we can't always rediscover their specific histories but with the wealth of other records held here in the museum and elsewhere we can usually supply content and informed interpretation that at least gives some insight into that part of their life and times. Some of the most satisfying cases that John has dealt with have been those where the now elderly sons and daughters of WW1 veterans have at long last discovered something about their fathers' service.

John is keen to support the development of the museum's outreach services. Since becoming a volunteer he's facilitated the museum's participation in the annual local history open days run by the Dudley MBC Archives and History Centre. At Areley Kings, a small village near Stourport, he organised a 'table-top' exhibition of regimental WW1 artefacts as a contribution to the village's two-day festival commemorating the start of WW1 and the role of their menfolk in it. As an experienced public speaker he is often asked to give talks on history subjects to local groups and societies so he intends to develop a few presentations about aspects of the regiment's history and add them to his repertoire. He sees it as another way he can contribute to promoting public awareness about the museum and its services.

As a family historian John knows only too well that more and more of the key military records about WW1 service are now in the public domain and becoming ever more visible and accessible on the internet. It's perfectly possible now for many people to discover quite a lot about their soldier ancestors at the click of a mouse, without ever visiting a museum or using its research services. John likens that to viewing a picture in black and white; perfectly acceptable as far as it goes. But what the museum is often able to do, by mobilising all its unique resources, including the impressive collective knowledge of its dedicated band of volunteers, is provide the full colour versions that really bring those stories to life. It's up to us to exploit that point of difference for the museum's, and ultimately the wider community's, benefit.

# **Saracen Armoured Personnel Carrier: Northern Ireland Saracen Workshop REME**

**By Lt Col (Retd) Peter Lockyer, REME**

This article is based on my tour of Northern Ireland October 1972 to March 1973. I was on the posted strength of the recently formed Northern Ireland Saracen Workshop REME. As its title indicates, the Northern Ireland Saracen Workshop REME was set up to meet the demands of supporting Saracens.

They had been hurriedly deployed to fill the APC capability gap caused by the Humber Pig being withdrawn in July 1972 to be up armoured. The key issue here is OP MOTORMAN 31 July 1972. Hence it was decided to take immediate action on 27 July 1972 to provide 230 more Saracens. Most were sourced from military sales dumps, and of these many were painted desert-yellow and modified for hot sandy climates!

Saracens entered into service in 1952, and by 1972 was an obsolescent equipment. It was being replaced by AFV 432 on a rolling programme. Not surprisingly spares, test equipment, and technical expertise were in short supply.



The role was to provide centralised first line REME repair and recovery to Saracens only, and work alongside the centralised Servicing Bay run by the RCT. In this way valuable resources could be better utilised. The workshop was hastily constructed in July 1972 using large canvas Aldershot Shelters located on the edge of the Royal Naval Yard, Sydenham (now The George Best Belfast City Airport). This was probably fine during the summer months, but not so for the winter as it was constantly wet and very cold. Just to add to the pleasure, the wind would howl in horizontally from Belfast Lough.

The Saracens that had been modified for desert conditions had reverse air flow cooling systems; whereby the air was drawn in through raised louvres on the engine deck and expelled out via the front radiator louvres. To accommodate this forward air flow there was a metal cowling to divert the hot air out towards the front wheels. As the tour progressed more and more detailed build differences were identified.

The reverse air flow cowling on the front of the armour got damaged so often, and to such an extent, it was discarded. It didn't seem to make much difference to the performance. Both reverse air flow and normal air flow Saracens suffered from the same engine over-heating problem, due in no small part to its slow moving street role. Coupled to this the B series engine had a unique type of ignition system with twin contact breaker points, which few tradesmen had been trained to set up (remember it was an obsolescent equipment!).

These two issues combined to cause excessive overheating and damage to cylinder heads. Many a jolly night was spent in the 'specialist repair facility' renewing a cylinder head gasket.

Other tasks that kept us occupied were the never ending repairs to the semi-automatic preselect gearbox, brakes, steering, and wheel stations. To all this the mechanics had to learn quickly. Although the Saracen was designed to provide protection as a troop carrier, it was not effective against high velocity rounds. The job of welding up bullet holes was quite common.

Having overcome these hurdles life began to settle into a sort of routine. Saracens were called forward from unit locations in the morning to be serviced in the central servicing station on a daily basis. After this they were sent across to us, and we worked on them until the job was done – which could be an all-night task. Nevertheless we congratulated ourselves on getting things about right. The daily availability return to HQ NI was regularly in the high nineties of percent, indeed one morning we achieved 100%. For all the discomfort of our location we were at least grateful we were not being shot at. Although even this was tested when involved with recovery, road testing, or going out on local purchase runs. The high point was being accommodated on the Good Ship Maidstone – it was warm, dry, and relatively quiet.



A Humber Pig in Northern Ireland, 1972

The Saracen engine had an unmistakable noise signature, which brought comfort to some and fear to others. Whichever the case, the Saracen was well respected on the streets of Northern Ireland.

By March 1973 the Pig was returning to duty, and it was now the turn of the Saracen to be up-armoured. At the same time The Northern Ireland Saracen Workshop REME was retitled to the APC Workshop (Northern Ireland) REME in recognition of the work conducted on both Saracens and Pigs.

## ***To put the above in context 1WFR used Saracens driven by RCT drivers during both the 1972 & 1977 tours in Northern Ireland...***

In Londonderry in 1972 Saracens and Pigs were used by B Coy to deploy into William Street on the edge of the Bogside, a 'no go area', to enable soldiers in them to fire baton rounds to disperse rioters who gathered there each afternoon. Had the soldiers deployed on foot they would have attracted the fire of IRA snipers in the area. Pigs were also used to protect men moving between company locations.

In 1977 C Coy had two Saracens in Crossmaglen which were used to deploy foot patrols around the town and to control the exit roads towards the border in the event of an incident in the town.



## ***Goodbye to Jenny***

We are sad to say goodbye to Mrs Jenny Shenton who has had a long association with the Museum. Jenny started working as Clerical Officer to the Regimental Secretary at RHQ in September 1998. Having married Ray Shenton of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Staffordshire Regiment, Jenny was very used to military life, even running their PRI shop in Germany. Her former work included several years at the Worcester Evening News, honing her skills as a typist. Jenny greatly enjoyed her time at RHQ, working with Angela Arthur and Regimental Secretaries, Major Robert Prophet and Colonel John Lowles. After the Headquarters closed she worked part-time at the Medical Centre in Innsworth, Gloucestershire, whilst continuing to assist with the admin of the Regimental Museum collections at the TA Centre, later Dancox House. Jenny has contributed so much to the up-keep of the collections and the research that has been conducted at the museum. She has definitely earned herself some time to relax and enjoy her retirement, and although she will be greatly missed by us all, we feel sure she will keep up her promise to stay in touch and support the museum at future events.



## ***A Message from your Chairman, Keith Jeavons***

The Friends are pleased to welcome Major Jim Featherstone to the Committee. Jim has kindly stepped into the breach to assist us with organizing and carrying out events. The Museum's Treasurer, Mr. Shaun Mooney, has kindly agreed to oversee our finances. However, there is still room for more volunteers. So please join us if you feel you have something to offer. We continue to rely upon volunteers, who have worked hard to make events successful by manning the doors, welcoming friends and serving the refreshments - we are most grateful for their help!

We are still currently without a Newsletter Editor, and so are also, most appreciative to all those who have contributed to ensure it continues to go to press. Anyone interested in taking on the role or wishing to include interesting and stimulating articles would be welcome.

The Committee would like to hear from anyone with suggestions for new/different events. It is important to maintain a fresh approach and delivery of a programme of events that is both appealing and stimulating for our Friends, and enhances the profile of the Museum, supporting its aims and (hopefully) creating a potential source of income. We welcome ideas on how the Friends should be progressing in general.

***Your continued support is very much appreciated.***

# **Visit to The Gloucestershire Soldier Museum,**

## **Wednesday 13th April**

*Doctor Foster went to Gloucester...*

but on this occasion it did not rain! In fact the sun shone, it was a lovely, warm spring day and we all had a very successful and enjoyable time. If you have not been to the museum, it is well worth a visit. The gallery itself is on two floors and arranged on the principle of a timeline. There is a great emphasis on providing an experience rather than just a display for the visitor. This is achieved through a number of dioramas complete with noises off, depicting the major actions fought by Gloucestershire soldiers. The most striking are the battle of the Imjim River fought by the Gloucestershire Regiment in the Korean War with maps videos, photos and a display showing Lt Colonel Carne VC in his bamboo cell carving his Celtic cross whilst he suffered long periods of isolated incarceration. The Gloucestershire Hussars are also represented in the museum with an equally impressive scene depicting the crew of a Crusader tank, complete with tank, in action during the battles of the Western Desert in 1942.



Interaction with the exhibits is actively encouraged, with opportunities to handle some artefacts. The provision of a series of attractively presented booklets next to the displays and lots of interactive screens allows the visitor to find out more about particular campaigns, all arranged in a chronological order from 1694 to the present day. There is a particularly impressive tableau of the current infantry soldier in action in Afghanistan.

There is also a cafe on the terrace in front of the main entrance and the shop caters for all ages. Car parking is convenient with a pay and display area at reasonable cost just across the road.

### **[See insert for forthcoming events](#)**

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#### **'The Worcestershire Soldier', The Mercian Regiment Museum (Worcestershire)**

Worcester City Art Gallery and Museum, 40 Foregate St, Worcester, WR1 1DT.

Tel. 01905 25381. 10.30am – 4.30pm Mon-Sat (closed Sun and Bank Holidays)

*"The Friends exists to help the museum to record, preserve and display the history and traditions of The Worcestershire Regiment, its predecessors and successors from 1694 to the present day including the deeds and sacrifices of those who have and are serving in it"*, to join, or for further information please email [museummercian@btconnect.com](mailto:museummercian@btconnect.com) or call 01905 721982.