

From Major General A R D Sharpe OBE



ARMY

Colonel of the Mercian Regiment
Regimental Headquarters
The Mercian Regiment
Whittington Barracks
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Lichfield
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Christopher Pincher MP
House of Commons
Westminster
London
SW1A 0AA

Reference: ColRegt/Parliament/12/008

17th October 2012

Dear Mr Pincher,

Thank you for interest in The Mercian Regiment, and for your continued support of our links with our counties, and with Staffordshire in particular. We, as a Regiment, are doing our best to shape our future following the 'Army 2020' announcement that we will lose a battalion. We are dealing with this re-organisation of our people while carrying on our normal duties, duties which include the recent deployment to Afghanistan of another battalion; for the Regiment's sixth tour since 2007. Despite the need to put as much effort behind them and their families as possible as they begin their tour, rest assured that we are also putting considerable work into securing the Regiment's long-term future.

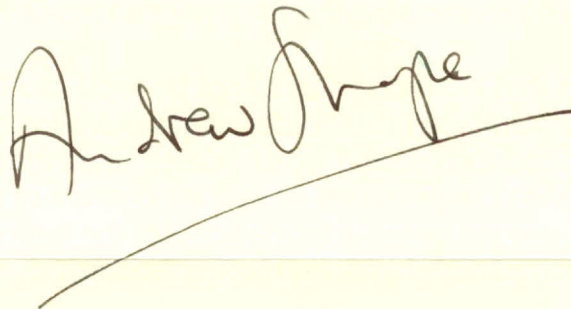
It is worth starting by saying that too much should not be read into the announcement that it would "specifically be the 3rd Battalion (Staffords)" that we are losing. Our three Regular battalions are being reduced to two, and we are determined that we will do so by providing a regimental construct that can preserve all that we cherish of our past, but which provides a solid, enduring and sustainable framework for the future. So, my first point is that this is very much a complete regimental reorganisation, not simply an exercise in cutting 3 MERCIAN (Staffords).

My second point is that we will make decisions on the detail of our future in a measured and sensible way. A key part of this transition concerns our heritage. I was born into the Cheshire Regiment fifty-two years ago and have served now for thirty-three years, alongside my father and my brother, as a county infantryman. The importance of heritage and of our county roots is not lost on me; indeed, it has shaped my life and I understand the vital role that it plays in our esprit de corps. I am determined that we will get this reorganisation right and I am not prepared to rush to hasty decisions which we may regret later. For that reason I have set up three dedicated planning teams to look at key areas of the transition; the sole task of one of these is 'Heritage'. This Planning Team, led by a former Commanding Officer of the STAFFORDS, is heavily involved in this detailed work and will present a number of options for the Regimental Council to consider in November. I can categorically assure you that no decision has been made on our naming protocols at this stage despite what you may have heard.

I fully understand the essential linkage between an English county-based regiment and its home base: this is something that I am very keen to preserve. And this is my third point. The Regiment in which I grew up has always been, and remains, despite the upheavals of recent changes, a family of local men fighting alongside each other: that is what defines us. Despite how we often get painted in the media, we are a bunch of very ordinary local blokes; but it is that close 'local family' feel to our ethos that gets very ordinary people to be happy to do extraordinary things on others' behalf. We are proud of our roots and of our history – indeed there is no-one more proud of these things, nor keener to preserve them, than us. And we remain deeply grateful for the continuing support that we receive from Staffordshire, from the West Midlands, and from the other counties from which we draw the men of The Mercian Regiment. Regardless of what the team proffers as possible solutions please be assured that, like you, I have no desire to see a solution that weakens our county links.

I would be very happy to come to the Houses of Parliament to listen to your views and to let you know how our detailed work is going. I will have a clear idea of what the wider Regiment thinks by early November and will also have discussed the Heritage team's work by that time, so it would probably be most informative for you if I were to come to see you after that. I have asked Lieutenant Colonel Richard Spiby, at Regimental Headquarters, to liaise with you over a mutually suitable date. I would be grateful if you could distribute this reply to your letter amongst your co-signatories. Indeed, I would welcome to our proposed meeting not just those who have joined in signing your letter, but also any other interested and supportive MPs from across the Mercian area (Cheshire, Worcestershire, Staffordshire, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire).

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Foy', with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the signature.

CHRISTOPHER PINCHER MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Major General ARD Sharpe OBE
Colonel of the Mercian Regiment
RHQ, Whittington Barracks
Lichfield
Staffordshire WS14 9PY

LONDON SW1A 0AA

7th November 2012

Dear General Sharpe

Thank you very much for your informative letter.

I read it with attention and it is clear that you and your team are working hard to preserve the traditions of the regiment whilst trying to cement its future success.

Thank you for arranging a member of staff to liaise with my office. We have Room O booked in Portcullis House on the 3rd December at 5.00pm and I look forward in seeing you then. I have invited Members of Parliament from the Mercian recruitment area and antecedent regiments to attend also.

Yours sincerely,
A large, stylized handwritten signature of Christopher Pincher.

Christopher Pincher

Member of Parliament for Tamworth