



Chairman's report

Autumn 2020



RFCA

For Yorkshire and the Humber
Reserve Forces and Cadets Association

www.rfca-yorkshire.org.uk

Foreword

Cover: Private Dan Millea was among the 150 reservists from 4th Battalion The Yorkshire Regiment who operated mobile testing units across the region. When not deployed he is an assistant accountant with Morgan Sindall in Sheffield.

As the new chairman of the Reserves Forces and Cadets Association for Yorkshire and the Humber (RFCA), I am pleased to present my first report to members.

Covering the months since April, it inevitably reflects the impact of Covid-19. But it also demonstrates the resilience the RFCA has shown in finding new ways to deliver its remit against the shifting backdrop of this 'new normal'.

One highlight was the brilliant work of 150 reservists from 4th Battalion The Yorkshire Regiment who operated mobile testing units across the region throughout the first three months of Covid. Their remarkable achievement was possible only because supportive employers were prepared to allow their staff to deploy at short notice. This, in itself, was a testament to the relationships the RFCA has developed with businesses and other employers on behalf of reservists and the wider military over many years.

We were delighted to be able to deliver Wolfe Armoury in Beverley and the Joint Cadet Centre in Harrogate as pristine and purpose-designed bases for both army and air cadet units. These wonderful centres will serve the cadets long into the future.

We were also pleased to produce successful and well-attended 'virtual' ceremonies to replace prestigious annual events such as the Lord-Lieutenant Awards and the Employer Recognition Scheme Silver Awards. This was new territory for the RFCA and reflected our determination to honour our outstanding cadets, volunteers and supportive employers even during the trickiest of times.

The suspension of in-person training for both cadets and reserves saw a rapid shift to online activities that engaged and inspired. This was a further testament to our forces' can-do spirit and determination to overcome difficulty.

In the months ahead, we will face continued uncertainty. But in-person training is once again becoming the norm thanks to the hard work of our permanent and volunteer staff. Indeed, the adaptability shown thus far gives me confidence that we can face whatever the future holds with optimism. The RFCA will deliver for our cadets and wider military in the region for as long as we can be of service.

As a final note, I would like to record our deepest thanks to our outgoing deputy chief executive Jeremy Bleasdale, whose contribution to the RFCA's work was immense. I trust all our members will also join me in extending a warm welcome to his successor Wayne Pledger who joins us after a long and illustrious military career.

Lieutenant Colonel David Rhodes Chairman

RFCA for Yorkshire and the Humber



Championing your cadets

Cadets in many parts of the region began to resume in-person training after months in which Covid restrictions had led to activities being limited to the virtual realm.

Permanent staff and cadet force adult volunteers worked hard to ensure units were Covid-safe by undergoing specialist training to ensure they could implement all the health and safety guidelines.

Sadly, the suspension of in-person activities in March lasted throughout the summer which meant cadet camps did not go ahead.

However, adult volunteers were quick to embrace online technologies to keep their young people involved – holding ‘virtual’ drill nights and organising challenges to make sure cadets remained engaged and continued to gain skills and qualifications, such as the Inspiring Digital Enterprise Awards, pictured right, centre.

During the early months of the pandemic, cadets donned their uniforms to salute to the NHS and carers each Thursday night, with units posting photos of the tribute on social media, pictured top right.

As the summer progressed, Scarborough Sea Cadets pictured right, were among the first to meet up with their units to do on-water training. Keighley Sea Cadets was among those who later followed suit.



Boosting support from employers



Despite the challenges facing the business community, some 85 employers in Yorkshire and the Humber pledged their support for the military by signing the Armed Forces Covenant in the period since lockdown, including Wensleydale Railway, bottom left.

That was 19 more than the previous six months and included 20 new signees in September alone.

In addition, more employers than ever before won top honours in this year's Ministry of Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) – which recognises forces-friendly organisations.

Eight employers won a Gold Award – the top honour possible for any organisations – including York Teaching Hospitals Foundation Trust whose director of Workforce and Organisational Development Polly McMeekin is pictured above. Among the 18 employers that won a Silver Award were Askham Bryan College, top left, and NG Bailey, middle left.



Providing buildings where cadets and reserves can thrive



The RFCA worked with contractors to ensure they could safely return to work at key sites across the estate as soon as Government guidelines permitted.

During lockdown, all but emergency repairs and mandatory maintenance work were suspended but revised guidance meant they were able to resume by the end of May.

In Harrogate, decorators, floorers and electricians worked to complete the first stage of the Cadet Centre's renovation so that cadets were able to return this autumn. Officer commanding of 58 (Harrogate Squadron) Flight Lieutenant Clare Crebbin is pictured right, top, inspecting the new facility.

Similarly, in Beverley, work was accelerated so that the new joint cadet centre at Wolfe Armoury was ready to open its doors as soon as cadets returned. A Company's new officer commanding, Major Richard Lenton, pictured above, even joined in with giving the place some finishing touches.

The new Cadet Centre in Barton on Humber is nearing completion while at Keighley Drill Hall, pictured right, contractors are waiting to begin the second phase of renovation after completing work to ensure the building is watertight.



Showcasing cadets and reserves



The RFCA promoted the role of cadets and reserves across the region.

We secured both print and broadcast coverage for reservists from 4th Battalion The Yorkshire Regiment for their work operating Covid-19 mobile testing units across the region as well as producing in-house photography and videos which reached thousands of viewers via our social media channels.

For Reserves Day we attracted more than 200 people to take part in two online Question and Answer sessions on our Instagram channel with support from reserves from both the Royal Navy and the British Army. Similarly, our support for the Freshers Week recruitment drive reached more than 1,000 people with over 50 choosing to take steps to get further information online about joining the Yorkshire Officer Training Regiment, whose cadet officer Matt Dougherty is pictured above.

With cadets' and reservists' participation largely limited to the online events during lockdown and its aftermath, the RFCA worked to keep them involved and enthused by maintaining its strong social media presence including through online quizzes and Covid-19 advice.

Social media engagement nearly tripled in the six months to October this year compared to the same months in 2019 – from 3,000 to 8,700. This was largely accounted for by the launch of our Instagram channel and the engagement it generated particularly among young people. However, our engagement on Facebook also increased substantially as did engagement on LinkedIn.

With the flagship Her Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant Awards unable to go ahead in person, the RFCA communications team delivered video ceremonies for each of the counties (filming pictured bottom left). More than 100 people watched the YouTube premieres of the first two ceremonies and the 'on demand' videos were together viewed by some 5,000 people across all our social media channels, see left.



Finding new ways to deliver



The RFCA quickly adapted to the challenges of Covid-19 by finding new ways of working in order to deliver its remit.

Its in-built IT resilience meant staff were able to continue working effectively remotely from the start of lockdown with safety arrangements in place to enable a proportion of staff to return to office-working when required.

Virtual gatherings replaced in-person events not only for staff meetings but also for networking purposes – so that the organisation was able to continue to engage with businesses, military representatives and other stakeholders throughout.

Our permanent staff, such as Mal Clark, pictured above, supported units to prepare premises for the return of cadets and reserves by ensuring regular supplies of cleaning materials and putting in place measures to support social distancing.

New appointments during the period included Wayne Pledger as the RFCA's deputy chief executive, above right, and Tom Woodall as the new cadet executive officer for Yorkshire (North and West) ACF, bottom right.



Officer cadets from Yorkshire
Officer Training Regiment on
training camp in Strensall.



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