

## THE ROYAL ANGLIAN REGIMENT VETERANS' COMMUNITY: LOOKING TOWARDS SIXTY AND BEYOND

### WHY

1. **The Regimental Family.** The Royal Anglian Regiment's "Regimental Family" is a loosely defined grouping of those who wear the Regimental cap badge in the Regular Army and Army Reserve; those who have worn it or the cap badges of our antecedent regiments and are no longer serving - in other words our veteran community; the families of our servicepeople, veterans and fallen comrades; and our cadets and their instructors. Those who have served owe their support to those in uniform today. It is they who take to the field to keep the country safe, just as their forebears did. Equally, those serving today have a huge debt to those who created the Regiment's heritage. Against the background of this symbiotic connection, and as the Regiment looks towards its Diamond Jubilee on 1 Sep 24, this paper assesses one part of the Regimental Family: its veterans.

2. **The Current Situation.** The current embodiment of our veterans' community is the Regimental Association. It exists, *inter alia*, to maintain comradeship of all past and present members of the Regiment and its antecedents<sup>1</sup>. It relies on volunteers and has a broad canvas. On the one hand the Association has a formal constitution, structure and branches. On the other, much looser, hand the Association, technically, encompasses anything involving our veterans, e.g. the "Big Breakfast". However, this latter aspect is not widely recognised. Recent work suggests there are image and perception challenges. The Regimental Association is seen as a separate group within our wider veteran population. Many veterans do not recognise "the Association's" all-encompassing role and purpose. Conversations with younger veterans and serving soldiers suggest they look/will look for different ways to connect with their previous comrades from what they perceive "the Association" to offer.

3. **The Imperative for Change.** The needs of our veterans' community are wide and diverse. Similarly, the community itself is wide and diverse. Some veterans recognise the role of the present Regimental Association, and what it means, as a manifestation of that community; other veterans do not and seek something different. Hence, as our Diamond Jubilee approaches the Regimental Council has directed work should commence to evolve our present veterans' community, while coalescing views and understanding across that community at every stage. Such a review, which will be resourced mainly through new Regimentally funded capacity, must consider delivery of support for our veterans' community, particularly our younger and our more vulnerable veterans, while remaining cognisant of our heritage and present structures and the wishes of those within them.

### WHAT

4. **The Regimental Veterans' Community - Looking to the Future.** Our veterans' community is large and always growing. The day someone joins the Regiment they become a veteran in waiting. When their service ceases they should transition immediately within the Regimental Family from being a serving Royal Anglian to a Royal Anglian veteran. Having a Royal Anglian join the broader Regimental community on their initial entry to the Regiment would immediately establish a connection to something wider than a battalion. It would also ease and help facilitate that serviceperson's seamless transition to another part of the Regimental Family, the veterans' community, when their service ends. Ultimately, we seek a vibrant and growing Royal Anglian veterans' community built around **six key tenets**. It must be **attractive** to our veterans for what it means and offers and their community must be seamlessly **connected** through a range of interlinked networks. Those in our veterans' community should be

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<sup>1</sup> See Regimental Standing Instruction No 7.

**inspired** to be involved; **informed** about their community; feel **supported** and know how to obtain further support; and **bonded** around a broad common purpose supporting the wider Regimental Family.

5. **Attractive.** As military careers end those wearing our cap badge will continue to transition away from Regular and Reserve service. If we wish to involve those service leavers in our veterans' community it needs to be attractive for what it means and offers. The focus of those transitioning is likely to be family, housing and work. With these imperatives needing attention the time and ability to devote attention to other things is likely to be at a premium. Accordingly, transitioning to our veterans' community should be understood in advance, simple and easy. There should be no forms to complete<sup>2</sup>, no costs involved and no barriers to entry. The review that identified younger veterans seeing the "Regimental Association" as something separate and for a different generation is illustrative. This perception is their reality and must be addressed. Names are more than semantics; they carry weight and meaning. However it is to be known, our evolving veterans' community must represent something to which people are attracted and wish to be connected.

6. **Connected.** Connecting veterans in some kind of network is essential if they are to be able to draw from, and contribute to, the Regiment's veteran community to the degree they choose. Across a spectrum of engagement connections will range from active to dormant, virtual to physical and frequent, through occasional, to (until inspired to change) never. Connections will also be in varied forms across many touch points. At one end are a range of connective activities, such as gatherings organised by hardworking volunteers<sup>3</sup> and virtual meeting places drawing veterans together. At the other end are the annual gathering of the Regimental Family at Duxford and other activities with established places in the Regimental calendar<sup>4</sup>. In between are (face to face or virtual) ad hoc conversation between friends within groups or one to one. All these elements provide opportunities to maintain human contact amongst like-minded people with shared experiences. The word "maintain" is critical. Connecting serving personnel to our/their veterans' community long before they leave service life is important. Moreover, many connections rely upon the commitment and drive of volunteers who are inspired to be involved.

7. **Inspired.** Inspiring a veteran has many aspects. At one level it is about being inspired to stay or get in touch with others in their veterans' community. At another level it is about being inspired to take part in an activity or activities being run within our veterans' community. At a third level it is about being inspired to volunteer to organise something for fellow veterans. With an individual's circumstances being just that - individual - no one size will fit all. It means a wide range of activities need to be offered to appeal in some part to our diverse veterans' community. In this way people will be inspired to give to the Royal Anglian Regiment's veteran community, and take from it, in various ways as their circumstances dictate and allow and to the extent they know what is available.

8. **Informed.** For a veteran to be able to extract the most benefit from the community of which they are part, and to be able to contribute to it, they need to know who is in the community, what is available from it and what is going on within it. So informed, each veteran can decide what they want to do with the information; e.g. file it away for later, act on it or decide they do not need that element of information. Again, it is a matter of personal choice. It is also essential that any information made

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<sup>2</sup> A key building block in achieving a seamless transition between uniformed service and the Regiment's veterans' community is having the digital contact details of those on the point of leaving. As noted in Para 3, having a soldier join the broader Regimental community on their initial entry to the Regiment (and, hence, providing their contact details to the Regiment) would ease and help facilitate their later transition to the veterans' community.

<sup>3</sup> For example, meetings of veterans on a routine basis in some towns across the Regimental area, the Vikings' Veterans and Poachers' Veterans Balls, the Eagle and Garter Dinner and the annual Regimental rugby match.

<sup>4</sup> For example, monthly services at the Essex/Regimental Chapel, annual Regimentally funded "Big Breakfasts", spring and autumn Band concerts, RHC Chapel gathering, the Remembrance Service at the Regimental memorial, an Officers' Club dinner and a carol service.

available is relevant, timely and accurate. People are busy; extraneous information is unhelpful. The provision of information to the Regiment's veterans' community must follow a guiding principle: only provide it if it helps the community grow and flourish. Information must be current, accessible and reliable to generate and maintain credibility. Anything less does more harm than good.

9. **Supported.** The nature of a veteran's commitment to their veterans' community is driven by several factors. Paramount among them is a veteran's individual circumstances. Similarly, everyone's need for some form of support, if any at all, will be different. The key aspect here for our veterans' community is knowing what is available and how to access it if required for themselves or a comrade. The range of support will be wide and varied, for instance assistance with transitioning to civilian life, how to obtain help to organise a veteran's event and how to access benevolence or other welfare support. It will also include time-critical support that can be accessed rapidly by a veteran for themselves or perhaps a struggling fellow veteran of which they may suddenly become aware.

10. **Bonded.** Our veterans' community has a multitude of potential meanings, reflecting individual needs and choices. However, there is perhaps a broad common purpose: to bond with like-minded people with the same ethos, a range of shared experiences and motivated by similar values and esprit de corps derived from military service in the Regiment or its antecedents. A vibrant Royal Anglian veterans' community within the Regimental Family is a visible manifestation to those who wear the Regiment's cap badge today that they have the support and trust of those who helped build the Regiment's heritage. As such, and in many, perhaps intangible, ways the Regiment's veteran community can help the serving element of the Regimental Family maintain its military efficiency and, hence, provide combat power for the Army and country.

## **HOW - THE FIRST STEPS**

11. **Creating Capacity.** The Regimental Council determined that a project for the Regiment's veterans' community of the scale envisaged warranted the appointment of a suitably experienced and empowered individual to undertake the work alongside the Regimental Secretary and RHQ team. The Regimental Charity Trustees agreed Regimental funds could be used to "buy-in" this necessary capacity. A job description was created, and an open recruitment process completed. The individual appointed will conduct further analysis to realise the intent established in this paper; make detailed costed proposals and recommendations to those the Colonel of the Regiment appoints to oversee this work; and implement what is agreed. This new capacity will also be involved in a fundraising role and work in connection with the Regimental Charity under the auspices of the Chair of Trustees.

12. **Timings.** The framework surrounding a reshaped and rejuvenated Regimental veterans' community should reach initial operating capability (to be defined during the work and agreed by those overseeing it for the Colonel of the Regiment) by 1 Sep 24 - the Regiment's Diamond Jubilee. Full operating capability (similarly, to be defined) is to be reached by 1 Sep 25.

13. **Key Considerations.** All work will balance the imperative for change with an understanding of our heritage and present veterans' structures and the wishes of the multiple generations within them. The work already conducted in RHQ (e.g. benevolence, the Regimental website and the digital muster) and by County Colonels must not be lost. Adaptation and flexibility will be important during the formative period. So too will be the use of focus groups alongside the "road testing" of ideas. For members of our veterans' community the pace and scale of change will reflect individual choices. Different people want different things from the same community. No one size will fit all. Each veteran will decide.