

16 Nov 17

Letter to Branches

PRA MEMBERSHIP CHANGES TO THE CONSTITUTION

1. Outline. At the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of The Parachute Regimental Association, held at the National Memorial Arboretum on Saturday 8 July 17, a proposal was put forward to change the constitution in regards to membership categories and their qualifying criteria. This was subsequently carried.

2. Legality. There has since been some discussion about the legality of the vote. The rules (Page 6, Para 9-2 and Page 6, Para 9-4) for alteration to the Constitution state that:

a. (2) Proposals for constitutional change shall be submitted to the executive committee for consideration. They shall be designated by the executive committee as either 'branch affairs' or association and individual affairs'. The decision on designation by the executive committee shall be final and not open to appeal.

b. (4) Proposals for constitutional change designated as 'association and individual affairs' shall be voted on by individual members attending the general meeting where the proposal is tabled. The resolution will be carried by a minimum two thirds majority of those present and voting.

3. Voting Members. Names of those attending the AGM were taken prior to the meeting taking place. This detailed list was removed from the room by persons unknown, before it could be secured. Therefore, the only evidence we have of those attending and subsequently voting on the proposal are as follows:

a. The attendance records held by the Midland Region Secretary, which show that 186 were in attendance.

b. A photograph taken after the official ceremony which shows approximately 135 members, of which at least 97 are visibly Parachute Regiment.

This is far from ideal but beyond RHQ control. A figure of 370 people attending the meeting has been mentioned in correspondence received by RHQ PARA but it is not known where this came from.

What is clear however is that the vote comfortably met the criteria of being carried by a minimum two thirds majority of those in attendance.

4. Reason for Change. Changes to the membership categories and criteria were required for a number of reasons, including:

- a. Dwindling Branch numbers
- b. Ageing Branch membership
- c. Current Branch situation
- d. Closure of other Armed Forces Associations

5. Objections. There have been a very small number of comments raised on the matter and I feel it is important that all members of the Association are fully aware of the following:

- a. The reason these changes were needed
- b. The process the Executive Committee (EC) went through
- c. The implications within each category

6. Conduct of the Executive Committee. Information regarding changes were initially sent out in January 2017. The following message was distributed in the monthly newsletter for two months consecutively:

Membership Categories and Criteria

The membership categories and criteria for membership of the Association are under review. I imagine this will become an emotive subject in some Branches but must be addressed at the earliest opportunity. Looking across the Branches we welcome a wide range of people who unfortunately do not fit any of the criteria for membership. Please discuss this in detail at your Branch meetings. This will take some time and all comments and views are welcome and encouraged.

It is accepted that this did not provide much in the way of direction and information but it was intended to provoke discussion and questions from Branches.

7. Feedback. The above statement did not provide much in the way of feedback, which was disappointing. It has recently come to light that some Secretaries 'may have overlooked it' and therefore the Branch did not discuss the matter at all. The Regional Secretaries who form the EC also discussed this at Regional meetings.

Immediately prior to the meeting of the EC in April 2017 the Committee conducted a table top 'war game' of the membership categories and criteria to discuss the situation across the Branches, in order to assess the situation and identify ways of improving some of the above. This was a long and drawn out discussion that was not dealt with lightly. The changes to the Categories were as follows:

- a. **Cat 1: Full Membership.** It was identified that a serving Parachute Regiment soldier who had passed P Company but had not completed his Basic Para Course (BPC), was not eligible to join the Association. This was despite a number of cases where a soldier had joined his unit, deployed on operations, been injured and was unable to complete BPC. This was not acceptable and the wording was changed to ensure that all Parachute Regiment cap badged personnel were eligible to join. It is worth noting that parachuting was moved to Phase 3 of Training (unit) some years ago.
- b. **Cat 2: Associate Membership.** The limitations on how many members in this category were removed. No other changes were made to Cat 2 other than to formalise the dress.
- c. **Cat 3: Affiliate Membership.** No changes were made to Cat 3 other than to formalise the dress. It has since been pointed out that we should consider removing the paragraph where it states 'they may not be elected as members of the Branch Committee'. This is due to a number of Branches having individuals who could fill an official role if they were permitted to do so. As members of The Parachute Regiment are unwilling to take up such appointments it is felt that this is a viable option.

d. **Cat 4: Armed Forces/Cadet/Social Membership.** The EC looked at all the Branches and its members at the current time. It identified that there were a number of Branches that had members of the Armed Forces within their ranks, that had not served with The Parachute Regiment or Airborne Forces. Although they had not passed P Company, they had served with an Airborne Unit or Brigade and were being allowed to wear the maroon beret when on parade at Branch events, despite the rules at the time not permitting this.

(1) The discussion was taken further within this category by looking at the option of permitting those members of other units, that could provide evidence that they had been attached to an Airborne Unit or Brigade during their military careers to wear the maroon beret.

(2) The wearing of the maroon beret for WW2 Veterans attached to an Airborne Unit or Brigade is commonplace. The wearing of the maroon beret whilst attached to the Airborne Brigade (5AB Bde, 16AA Bde) has been in line with MOD Policy since 1990. Modern day Airborne soldiers were engaged in continuous operations from 1999 to 2013, including Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Macedonia, Iraq and Afghanistan. The enduring operations in Afghanistan alone have seen some Airborne soldiers deployed for a total of 2 years or more during their careers. Those attached to 1 PARA (SFSG) are still deploying to this day. The EC reasoned that due to some Branches currently permitting their members to wear the maroon beret under the present rules, it was a viable option within the Association.

(3) The Committee also took into account that there were a number of other military organisations and associations closing down in many areas due to dwindling numbers. The British Legion is a good example of this. It was felt that we, as a Regiment could close this gap by inviting members of other units in their own right to join forces with us under 'Armed Forces', as many Branches and Regions already do.

(4) Cadet membership was added to allow members of the local cadet force to take on official roles. This was not an invitation for any cadet officer or soldier to wear a maroon beret if they had not earned it or served within an Airborne Unit or Bde as a Regular or Reserve Officer or Soldier.

Cat 5: Honorary Membership. The number of Honorary members was increased to 10 to allow each Branch to keep its Honorary members in the event of amalgamation. It was also stressed that this category was to be used in exceptional circumstances and to ensure that members were reviewed on an annual basis to preserve its prestige.

8. Other Considerations. The wording was purposefully subtle and allows those that are currently in the Branches and wearing the maroon beret to continue to do so. The approach and attitude within some Branches will discourage the wearing of the maroon beret by those that have not 'earned it' and that fits well across the Association. This is Branch business and leaves it for those Branches that are fortunate enough to operate with large numbers of Parachute Regiment or Military Parachute course qualified Airborne Forces members to carry on as they are. The option is there should their situation change further down the line. The simple fact is that other Branches will rely on this new option for increasing members or face closure.

9. Summary. This in no way devalues the wearing of the maroon beret and would not encourage a large number of individuals to take up the offer. It will not create the opportunity for more 'Walter Mitty' characters to infiltrate the Association, as they will still be required to provide evidence of their service in an Airborne Unit or Brigade, in whatever Arm or Service they were part of.

It is expected that by reputation, recommendation and invitation by existing members, we would benefit from the professional qualifications, experience and qualities our 'Attached Arms' have always provided to the Regiment since our formation.

Annexes:

A. Membership Categories and Criteria