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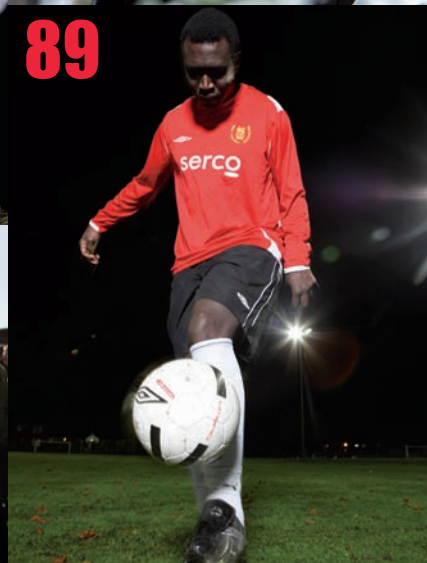
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FREE STUFF... bank yourself £100 and win an Army-branded iPod (Page 67).



Cover picture (left): Actress and model Gemma Atkinson shows her support for Britain's military Picture: Electronic Arts

Background image: Players from the Army women's polo team talk tactics at Tidworth Polo Club Picture: Graeme Main



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& **STRESSFUL**

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"Another fine mess you've got me into Herbie. Welcome to 2009."

● Terror killers – Pages 26-27

Tackling terrorism

AS combating insurgency continues to dominate the world security agenda, the Israeli counter-terrorism model is being increasingly closely examined.

After decades of conflict with neighbouring states and controversial divisions within the country, the Middle Eastern nation stands at the forefront of the fight against indiscriminate attacks from every direction.

Over the last 60 years the country's law enforcement agencies have developed a sophisticated intelligence and response network designed to prevent terrorists from striking. It is also capable of effectively dealing with any that slip through the net.

The tragic events in Mumbai brought the Israeli's methods into even sharper focus, with politicians including former Army officer and counter-terrorism specialist Patrick Mercer MP among those urging a greater emphasis on dealing with the potential threat of domestic attacks (Page 7).

Mercer's warning that the UK is ill-prepared to deal with a strike similar to the knockout blow that brought the Indian city to its knees is already recognised as a valid concern on Israel's front lines, where insurgent gunmen, suicide bombers and kidnappers have been a constant enemy.

The legacy of counter-insurgency has its roots in the 1940s, when partisan groups were formed in the build up to the British withdrawal from the region (Pages 29-31).

Fast-forward six decades, and specialist units such as The Metilan (Pages 26-27)

have the flexibility to combat terrorism with a blend of ingenious camouflage, sophisticated surveillance techniques and the ability to storm buildings and remove threats.

But it is not only the elite law enforcers who play their part in defending civilians. The constant danger affecting cities such as Jerusalem, where recent attacks have included a strike against a crowded bus, demands close cooperation between the police and the military (Pages 22-25).

Back home in Britain, robust training from Military Preparation Colleges is helping to convert scores of unruly youths into well-drilled, battle-ready soldiers (Pages 53-55).

The quality of trainees is also reflected at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst where the gruelling commissioning course really sorts the men and women from the boys and girls.

In *Media ops* – our new series of features in which we tackle aspects of Army jobs – *Soldier* joined the aspiring officers for a spot of riot control training and was left in no doubt about the high ability levels of the future leaders (Pages 45-49).

Elsewhere, cover star Gemma Atkinson, long-time Services supporter Jim Davidson and chef Angela Hartnett are the latest celebrities to share their admiration for today's soldiers.

Their thoughts are certainly not misplaced. In a world where devastating terrorist attacks can strike anytime and anywhere, it is good to know our safety is in the hands of well-trained, fully-capable professionals. ■

"Our safety is in the hands of professionals"



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Picture: AP Photo/David Guttenfelder

Under siege: Indian forces moved against insurgents after terrorist gunmen attacked and occupied key landmarks in Mumbai, killing more than 100 people

Taking on terror

UK ill-prepared for Mumbai-style terror attack, warns former Army officer

B RITISH security chiefs should consider a more robust, Israeli-style counter-terrorist model in the wake of the Mumbai massacre, a senior MP has claimed.

In an interview with *Soldier*, Conservative Patrick Mercer, a former colonel who served with The Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters Regiment, insisted troops had to be prepared to face an attack in the UK similar to the strike on the Indian city.

And he believes there needs to be a re-think of the way that specialist military and police units are organised to deal with domestic terrorism, particularly with events such as the 2012 Olympics on the horizon.

Mercer, who is chairman of the House of Commons Counter-Terrorism Subcommittee, added: "It would be unfair to say that we are unprepared, but I don't think we are ready for an attack of the scale we saw out in Mumbai.

"We have units to deal with hijacked aircraft and situations such as the Iranian Embassy siege, but we must be ready for a new dimension of terrorism."

Examining the Israeli model, and looking at how its highly specialist police units are trained to deal with a com-

plex threat, would be a useful exercise, he said. Expanding counter-terrorism forces would also act as a deterrent to would-be attackers.

Mercer added: "The threat that we saw in Mumbai was not from a suicide bomber. In this case, we are not dealing with somebody that is going to blow themselves to pieces, but is going to fight with a new degree of force and is capable of doing a lot of killing.

"In order to meet this threat, we need a greater number of police and military

forces that are capable of dealing with more than just isolated incidents."

Mercer, who was commissioned in 1975 and went on to serve nearly 25 years in the Army, also warned that terrorists operating in the UK had already proven that they could acquire the weapons and equipment to carry out attacks.

A British court recently convicted an Islamic fundamentalist of attempting to procure weapons, he added.

● Walled in – Pages 22-25

Afghanistan success 'critical'

NATO'S future credibility rests on success in Afghanistan, according to Defence Secretary John Hutton.

Speaking at the Berlin Security Conference, Mr Hutton told delegates the alliance should recognise the importance of the mission's aims.

He also suggested that the campaign needed to succeed to preserve Nato's hard-won reputation.

Mr Hutton emphasised that "the old doctrine" of the Cold War no longer applied and that the alliance had to find new ways

of dealing with emerging threats such as global terrorism.

The Defence Secretary added: "Nato prevailed in the Cold War and it achieved this not by standing still but by adapting to the world.

"It must do so again today. In Afghanistan, Nato faces a real test of its credibility in the modern age.

"I do not want to see it [the alliance] become irrelevant to the critical security questions of our age, bypassed by new structures and coalitions."

UNDER Big Ben

A digest of what is being said on Army matters in Parliament

Nuclear test troops in new health probe

A COMPREHENSIVE study into the effects of radiation on British soldiers could be carried out this year, Veterans' Minister Kevan Jones has hinted.

Mr Jones told fellow MPs that there had been no evidence to date to suggest that soldiers involved in the nuclear tests of the 1950s were at greater risk of ill-health. But following a "constructive meeting" with members of the British Nuclear Test Veterans Association, he said discussions were now underway about the possibility of a further study focusing on health issues.

Mr Jones confirmed he would make an announcement on progress early this year, adding: "I am determined that all avenues of research are looked at."

Service record: Ministers are currently considering whether to issue a special ID card to veterans. Mr Jones confirmed the cost of the move had been clarified but the benefits of the card, should it be created, had yet to be finalised. The Minister added: "These are being considered by ministers and it is intended to make a statement after further consultation."

Wounded warriors: The number of soldiers seriously injured in Afghanistan has been climbing since the Op Herrick deployment to the south of the country began just over two years ago. Figures provided to the Commons by Defence Secretary John Hutton highlighted that 58 people had suffered injuries as of December 2008, nearly twice the number in 2006.

Fair wage: Three new appointments have been made to the Armed Forces Pay Review Body, Mr Hutton has announced. John Steele, Mary Carter and the Very Reverend Graham Forbes will serve a three-year term of office with the organisation, which determines the wages of military personnel, when they take up their new posts in March this year.

Tempo telling

Reducing op pressure is 'priority', says Stirrup

EASING the strain on British troops is a key priority before decisions are made about future operational commitments, the Chief of the Defence Staff has said.

In a speech at the Royal United Services Institute in London, Air Chief Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup said there had been speculation in the media that a drawdown in Iraq would mean numbers would be ramped up in Afghanistan.

But he stressed commanders could not make "a one-for-one transfer" between the two theatres as effort would be needed in both areas for some time.

ACM Stirrup added: "We're doing more than we're structured or resourced for over the long term, so reducing the operational tempo to a more sustainable level as quickly as possible is an important consideration in the balance we seek to strike."

"I am not saying that we couldn't or shouldn't do more in Afghanistan if we judge that to be necessary – what I am saying is we have to be able to sustain whatever we do."

ACM Stirrup said progress had been made on operations in the past year. In Basra, the security situation had improved in the wake of the Iraqi-led Charge of the Knights action.

But while he was satisfied that there had been successes in Afghanistan, such as the recent turbine move from Kandahar to Kajaki, he was concerned that the Nato-led International Security Assistance Force (Isaf) had struggled in an "information battle" with insurgents.

He said: "The Taliban recognise the importance of perceptions – they realise that the substance of security is of less relevance than how people feel about it."

"The Taliban also recognise the importance of speed in the information battle, and it is nearly always possible to be faster with an unsubstantiated claim or downright lie than it is with the established truth. We have been slow to recognise the public information traps the Taliban have been setting for us."

While ACM Stirrup was also confident that Isaf was moving the campaign forward, and that lessons had been learned in the public relations war with the enemy, he believed that "patience and persistence" would be needed in the long haul.

"The joint civil-military task force in Helmand is having a real impact – it is slow going after decades of conflict and there are occasional backward steps," he added. "But for all that it is halting and erratic, the overall motion is forward."

Heroes mount rescue attempt

GURKHA soldiers braved incoming Taliban bullets in a bid to rescue a mortally wounded comrade from the line of fire in southern Afghanistan, it has emerged.

In a desperate bid to move Rfn Yubraj Rai, soldiers charged 100 metres across open ground to where their friend had fallen and pulled him to cover.

While the soldier later died from his injuries, commanders have praised the members of 2nd Battalion, The Royal Gurkha Rifles for their selfless actions.

The revelations came as further details of a key British op to push the Taliban back from the outskirts of Musa Qaleh, Helmand province were released.

Gurkhas were given the lead in the 3 Commando Brigade action to clear the area to the south of the settlement, where insurgents had been threatening civilians.

The move was made in the wake of significant reconstruction progress in the town in the past 12 months, which has seen the building of a school and clinic.

During the operation, codenamed Mar Nonu, scores of British soldiers targeted compounds where it was reported that

insurgents had taken cover and were rigging up IEDs.

Supported by Mastiffs from The Queen's Dragoon Guards and Warriors of the 1st Battalion, The Princess of Wales Royal Regiment, the Gurkhas moved into position without contact but came under ferocious fire from Taliban fighters as they launched their attack.

With Rfn Rai hit, two of his comrades mounted a selfless rescue attempt, sprinting to the casualty and administering first aid as four Jackal vehicles moved in to evacuate the rifleman.

Capt Kit Kyte, officer commanding of the 2 RGR recce platoon, said the troops and vehicle crews had shown great courage.

He added: "We managed to get the casualty on board but unfortunately there was nothing we could do."

Lt Col Chris Darby, CO of 2 RGR, said his soldiers had been devastated by the loss of a popular colleague, but he maintained the operation had been a success.

He added: "We lost a very good man but we have pushed the insurgents back some two kilometres."



Picture: Steve Dock

Infantry boost: Soldiers from 1 RGR will continue to be bolstered by extra riflemen while three further reinforcement companies are on the drawing board

Himalayan help

Gurkhas ready to give front-line battalions a new cutting edge in combat

HARD-pressed infantrymen are being given a new year boost after senior Army commanders announced that additional Nepalese troops are to bolster the ranks.

Up to three more Gurkha Reinforcement Companies (GRCs) are being put together to help alleviate under manning among front-line troops, while the life of an existing GRC is to be extended for another three years.

It is anticipated that the new GRCs will become part of under-strength Infantry battalions, reducing the need for them to be backfilled from other units.

The first new company, GRC 2, is being formed at the end of the month and will serve as part of the 1st Battalion, The Mercian Regiment in Catterick.

The move will pave the way for the formation of GRC 3 soon after, with GRC 4 set up by 2011 if it is required. Which battalions they will serve with is yet to be decided.

The life of GRC 1, a company formed six years ago, is being extended until 2012. It will continue to be part of the

1st Battalion, The Royal Gurkha Rifles in Shorncliffe, Kent.

Army spokesman Maj Mike Butterwick (RRF) said the move would have a positive effect.

He told *Soldier*: "There will be absolutely no requirement for us to recruit extra Gurkhas for the new companies

as there are enough of them already to meet the need.

"With three extra companies being formed, a near-full battalion of extra troops will be ready to assist where required, which will be extremely useful given the high operational tempo that the Army is facing."

'Uncrunchable' Paras praised

TROOPS from the 2nd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment received royal thanks for their efforts in southern Afghanistan when they were presented with medals by the Prince of Wales.

The troops received their campaign awards at Merville Barracks in Colchester, where they reflected on the 12 comrades killed and others injured during their Op Herrick tour.

Prince Charles, who is Colonel-in-Chief of The Parachute Regiment, was joined by his wife the Duchess of Cornwall during the parade. He praised soldiers who had faced

a relentless battle with the Taliban. The Prince told the troops: "It is an enormous privilege to be able to join you with my wife and to hand you your campaign medals, which are richly deserved."

"I know you faced suicide bombers, RPGs, small arms fire, indirect fire and more. It is a testament to your training and uncrunchable Para spirit."

Along with colleagues from 3 Para, the 2 Para soldiers deployed to Afghanistan as part of 16 Air Assault Brigade last year. Territorial Army volunteers from 4 Para also served on the tour.

IN BRIEF

● **VOLUNTEERS** for a new holiday scheme for bereaved Forces children are urgently being sought.

Family Activity Breaks (Fab), which was set up by the MoD and is supported by the Army and RAF Widows Associations, is looking for officers and NCOs to help give children and their families a break.

Project officer Maj Belinda Forsythe (RMP) said Fab would offer vital support and allow the children to have fun and make new friends.

Volunteers would need to undertake a two-day bereavement counselling course before they begin. Visit www.mod.uk/fab for further information.

● **THE Prince of Wales** has officially opened a new exhibition dedicated to The Parachute Regiment and the Airborne Forces.

Called *Airborne Assault*, the showcase at the Imperial War Museum Duxford tells the regiment's story from 1940, focusing on Normandy and Arnhem during the Second World War up to recent exploits in Iraq and southern Afghanistan.

Second World War veterans and more recent participants in the Op Telic and Herrick deployments were among the VIP guests at the launch.

Also unveiled was ParaData – an online archive website which contains details and stories of the Airborne Forces and those who served with them. See www.paradata.org.uk

● **SOLDIERS** learning to drive military vehicles can get a good night's sleep thanks to a new, multi-million pound accommodation block at the Defence School of Transport.

Under Secretary of State for Defence Kevan Jones formally opened the £6.8 million three-storey accommodation in Leconfield, Yorkshire and said it represented real progress in conditions for soldiers.

"There has been a legacy of underfunding in Armed Forces housing so this is another in a series of improvements that are driving up standards," he added.

● **WORK** has started on a new swimming pool and gym complex for injured troops at the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre in Surrey.

The charity Help for Heroes raised £8 million towards the building costs at Headley Court, while the MoD also contributed millions of pounds and will meet the running costs of the project when it is built.

Defence Secretary John Hutton and Help for Heroes chief executive Bryn Parry took part in a turf-cutting ceremony for the complex.

Iraq deaths are probed

No-one else sought after two troops found dead

MILITARY Police are investigating after two soldiers died in Iraq within a week of each other.

Cpl Lee Churcher, a 32-year-old from HQ 20th Armoured Brigade was found dead at the Contingency Operating Base on December 11, seven days after the body of LCpl David Wilson of the Army Air Corps was discovered.

Both had suffered gunshot wounds although the MoD has stressed there is no evidence anyone else was involved.

Commanders and colleagues have paid tribute to the two soldiers, describing them as highly professional and committed individuals who had devoted their lives to military service.

Cpl Churcher enlisted in the Army in 1994 and was posted to Terra Troop, 13 Sqn, 42 Engineer Regiment (Geographic), where his dedication saw him rise quickly through the ranks.

He joined HQ 20 Armd Bde in 2007 where he served with the Bowman communications training team.

A keen sportsman, Cpl Churcher was in the first month of his Op Telic tour and had been controlling Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) in the weeks leading up to his death.

He had planned to transfer to the Royal Air Force to continue working in the Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance field.

Maj Chris Bell, 20 Armd Bde Chief of Staff, said: "Cpl Churcher was held in great affection by those who knew him in the headquarters."

"He had a relaxed confidence and had risen to the challenge of working within a vital team and delivering a key capability to an operational theatre. Our deepest sympathy goes out to his family."

His friend Cpl James Williams, RLC, said: "I looked up to him. He was a larger-than-life personality who I felt comfortable to be around."

Defence Secretary John Hutton said he was "very saddened" to hear of the NCO's loss.

Soldiers mourn 'devoted' colleague

LCPL Wilson has been remembered as being "always at the front of the queue to help others."

Described by colleagues and superiors as a popular and respected member of 9 Regiment AAC, the 27-year-old joined the Army in 2003 and already had an operational tour under his belt having served on Op Herrick in Afghanistan. He had been part of the Joint Helicopter Force in southern Iraq, where he served as a stores corporal in 659 Squadron.

LCpl Wilson, who was from Huddersfield, was remembered by his family as "a loving and devoted man". The soldier leaves a fiancée, Michelle Curry, as well as a newborn daughter, Poppy.

Lt Col Richard Green, CO of the Joint Helicopter Force, said the NCO was a professional and competent soldier who was well-liked by everyone.

He recalled: "He embodied what is best about soldiers in the Army and was a jolly,

friendly and selfless character respected by all friends and peers alike.

"LCpl Wilson was an excellent soldier and he will be deeply missed. We have all had the privilege to serve with him and he will be fondly remembered as a chatty and affable individual who was always at the front of the queue to help others."

The NCO's Squadron Sergeant Major, WO2 David Hope admitted his loss would "impact on all our lives."

He added: "David was part of the fabric of the squadron, renowned for helping others and always kind and positive."

● The MoD had confirmed a further British fatality in south-

ern Afghanistan as this issue went to press. The soldier, who was from 29 Commando Regiment Royal Artillery, was fatally wounded at a forwarding operating base in the Gereshek area of Helmand province.

A British military spokeswoman said: "The death is a hard blow for everyone."



● LCpl David Wilson



Picture: Slave Dock

Ongoing campaign: British soldiers will remain a familiar sight on the streets of Basra until Iraqi Security Forces are trained and capable of going it alone

Telic op continues

Commanders will have the final say on when Forces pull out, says MoD

B RITISH soldiers will only leave Basra when they are satisfied that the Iraqi Security Forces can operate confidently without any support, the MoD has emphasised.

Responding to media speculation about a complete withdrawal from theatre this year, the department reiterated its commitment to Op Telic and said military commanders would have the final say on when the time was right to begin pulling out their troops.

The MoD also stressed that there was “no question” of United States personnel taking over responsibility for Basra from the British soldiers, but confirmed that the UK would withdraw earlier than the Americans.

A statement from the department said: “We are planning, subject to the conditions on the ground and the advice of military commanders, to reduce our force levels in Iraq as we complete our key tasks in Basra in the early months of this year.

“We will remain committed to Iraq. We expect to move this year towards a

broad-based bilateral relationship similar to that we have with other allies in the region, including a training and education role for our military personnel.”

The MoD said the Americans would be responsible for protecting main supply routes when the UK finally pulled back from the region.

The statement continued: “Iraqis already have the lead in providing security in Basra and this will not change. There is no question of the US taking over.

“We continue to negotiate our future legal arrangements for the UK military role with the government of Iraq and have made good progress.”

Cash boost for wounded soldiers

COMPENSATION payouts for troops who suffer the most serious injuries while serving their country have been doubled.

Soldiers whose injuries are graded as level one on the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme’s 15-tier system will now receive a maximum lump sum of £570,000, a 100 per cent increase on the £285,000 previously offered.

More cash has also been made available to the less-seriously injured under the £10 million scheme, which comes after the MoD pledged more compensation as part of the Service Personnel Command Paper.

The 140 most-seriously injured troops have already received their extra money, while those with lesser injuries will be paid in the coming months.

The improved rates apply across the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme and will result in increases of between 10 and 100 per cent in lump sum awards. Wounded soldiers also receive an annual tax-free Guaranteed Income Payment for life.

Defence Minister Kevan Jones said: “Our Armed Forces deserve the best support. This increase will be a great boost to our injured personnel and their families.”

IN BRIEF

● PRINCE Charles has been announced as the patron of military charity Troop Aid, which aims to help injured Service personnel on their return to the UK.

Supported entirely by donations and fund raising events, the charity's key role is to provide wounded troops in hospital with basic supplies such as clothing, footwear, shaving and wash kits.

The prince is a regular visitor to Selly Oak hospital in Birmingham where Troop Aid carries out most of its work.

● The Army's London District has picked up a top prize at the National Recycling Awards 2008 after a three-year drive to improve recycling rates.

Over the past 12 months, more than three-quarters of all waste from units in that area has been recycled and there has been a marked reduction in the amount of waste put out for collection. This achievement led to the District picking up the Best Partnership Project award at Telford International Centre in November.

The military worked alongside contractor Sodexo to help change the way units dealt with waste.

● A new initiative to encourage officers to speak to the media has been launched in a bid to keep the public better informed of the Army's work.

Called The Senior Army Leaders' Public Engagement Programme (PEP), the scheme will give commanders targets to engage with the press.

Officers will have to ensure both they and their staff meet quotas on public-speaking engagements as well as external and internal media interviews.

Participants will receive media training and will be issued with the Army Communications Guide, which contains advice on how to stay press savvy.

PEP, which is similar to a scheme run in the US Army, is already underway among staff at Land Forces.

● The Forces Pension Society (FPS) has revamped its website to make it more accessible to its members.

Containing comprehensive information about the different schemes available to Servicemen and women, it now also provides links to other useful organisations and charities.

Benefit schemes such as will-writing and probate are listed in addition to details on discounted holidays and health and travel insurance.

The FPS campaigns for the pension rights of all Service personnel and is independent from the MoD.

FPS General Secretary Maj-Gen John Moore-Bick pointed out: "The new site will help greatly as it makes the society's work much more accessible." Visit www.forpen.co.uk for more info.

Ration raids

Police sting targets squaddies selling off scoff

CASH-hungry troops making a fast buck by selling their ration packs to civvy consumers could find themselves with a bad case of indigestion.

Military chiefs have warned that anyone caught dishing out their scoff for money is running the risk of landing themselves with a criminal record.

The warning follows revelations of a burgeoning market for the packs on internet auction sites such as eBay, with civvy bidders often willing to pay more than £20-a-time for a taste of the Army.

But now the MoD is clamping down on the illegal sales as part of Op Embroid, an action targeting those involved in the

unauthorised sale of military kit.

According to the department, 15 properties have so far been raided and more than 240 packs recovered. Several people have also been arrested.

Lt Cdr Neil Horwood (Royal Navy), who is responsible for ration packs at the Bath-based Defence Food Services team, said those selling scoff were committing a criminal offence.

He told *Soldier*: "For some reason there are people out there that want to buy these packs and there is now a huge market on eBay.

"But it has always been illegal to sell them, and anyone who does risks prosecution. Spare rations should be returned for destruction at the end of operations or exercises."

Lt Cdr Horwood also warned that civilians tucking into the parcels could find themselves eating out-of-date scoff and becoming ill with a severe bout of food poisoning.

While many civilians believe rations have an infinite shelf life, he pointed out that most of the packs were issued towards the end of their use-by date.

While nobody has yet become ill by eating military ration packs, Lt Cdr Horwood said there is always a risk if people consume food that should have been destroyed.

"Members of the public should not be buying ration packs and soldiers should not be selling them.

"If you are doing either then we will find you and you could face prosecution," he concluded.



Badge of honour hitting the mark

THE Veterans' Badge is continuing to grow in popularity among those leaving the Armed Forces following its launch four years ago, according to the new Defence Under Secretary.

In an interview with *Soldier*, Kevan Jones said that more than 650,000 of the lapel pins had now been issued, adding that it was "hugely important" that former Service personnel received public recognition for all they had done.

Mr Jones, who is also Minister for Veterans, said: "I think that number is quite a significant achievement. It is an important symbol and is something you can wear with pride.

"The badge is also available to war widows and, while I was in Colchester recently, I presented Victoria Bateman, the widow of LCpl James Bateman of the 2nd

Battalion, The Parachute Regiment with her Veterans' lapel pin.

"She is a very young widow who has shown tremendous courage and told me the badge meant a lot to her, which is incredibly humbling."

Mr Jones, who replaced Derek Twigg as Defence Under Secretary in autumn last year, said his new post was the ideal opportunity for him to press Parliament to give its support to veterans.

He added: "I have already set up meetings at Whitehall to discuss issues that I know are important to Armed Forces personnel and their families.

"One of these is the area of mental health, which has been very high profile lately. We need to have good mental health services for our Servicemen and women and reduce the stigma of asking for help."



Picture: Cpl Ralph Merry/RAF

Transatlantic praise: American soldiers believe the latest weapons and equipment used by their British counterparts on operations is now second-to-none

Brit kit applauded

Latest equipment cements UK as an 'elite power', say allied commanders

THE equipment used by British soldiers on operations in Iraq and Afghanistan is as good as anything found in the American arsenal, according to a group of US Army command sergeant majors.

Speaking at a conference showcasing the US military's advancements in science and technology, the senior NCOs insisted that British troops – referred to as “the Borrowers” and “Flintstones” by their American cousins ahead of the invasion of Iraq in 2003 – have no reason to look jealously across the Atlantic.

While asserting that US Forces have always respected their comrades in arms, the experienced commanders said that a proliferation of new kit, vehicles and weaponry through procurement programmes and urgent operational requirements had cemented the British Army's standing as an elite power.

CSM Jeffery Mellinger (US Army Materiel Command) told *Soldier*: “I have spent a considerable amount of time with the Brits down in southern Iraq and Basra in particular.

“And I spent enough time with them to realise that not only was the kit good, but that their tactics, techniques and procedures were things the US Army and the

rest of the coalition forces should take a closer look at.”

CSM Hector Marin (US Army Research, Development and Engineering Command), who served alongside British forces in the build-up to the invasion of Iraq, said he was bemused by the Flintstones tag, which alluded to soldiers living in Stone Age conditions, and argued the nickname was far removed from reality.

“The British soldiers had the same as-

sets that we had in the US and we were side-by-side sharing the same maintenance facilities,” he said.

CSM James Diggs (HQ North Atlantic Regional Medical Command) suggested that good cooperation would ensure parity between the British and US Army in the future.

He said: “When you think in terms of the UK it's a partnership. We're leveraging not only our technology but also our ability to get the mission done.”

Falklands mines remain at large

TROOPS responsible for clearing mines in the Falklands are to be kept on standby after the UK asked for an extension on a ten-year agreement to clear unexploded ordnance from the territory.

The British Government has a duty to remove the munitions after signing up to the Ottawa Convention in 1997.

But while a Downing Street statement said the Government was fully committed to its obligations, the military has admitted troops are not currently working to clear the territory of explosives.

An Army spokeswoman said: “There is

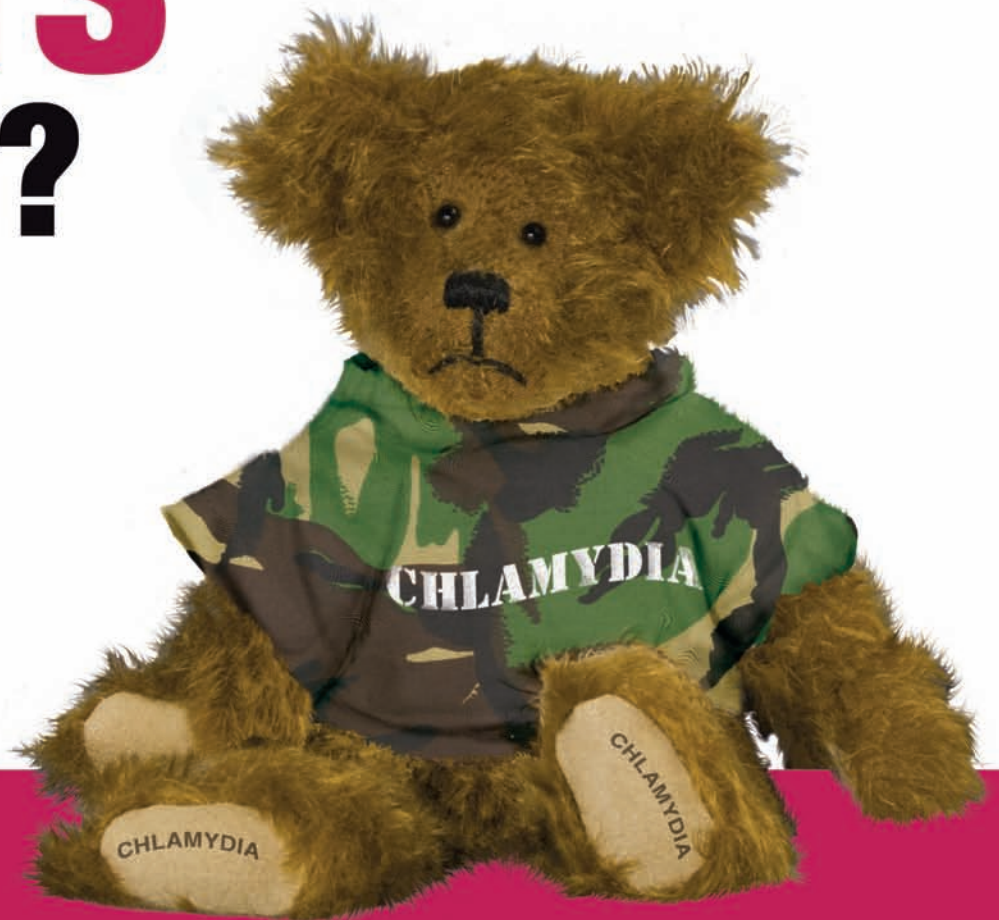
no active programme at the moment to clear the mines.

“However our team will go out and deal with munitions that have been washed up or worked their way loose from the ground, and also any old rounds that are found from the war in 1982.”

The team is called out to deal with up to 25 discoveries a month. Most recently they found mortar fuses, an anti-tank rocket, and numerous items of ammunition.

There are thought to be around 20,000 landmines across the Falklands, which were laid by Argentine forces in 1982.

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Picture: Imperial War Museum, Q744

War of the world: Images from *The Battle of The Somme* captivated UK audiences when the film was first released as propaganda more than 90 years ago

Sounds of battle

Musician recalls emotional rollercoaster of writing score for silent movie

AN accomplished composer has spoken of the “real challenge” of encapsulating a tragic period in history after penning a new soundtrack for an old First World War film.

Laura Rossi said that writing a score for the epic silent movie *The Battle of The Somme* had been a frequently challenging experience but she was satisfied with what she had accomplished.

Rossi, whose music has just been re-

leased on CD, said: “There was no dialogue in the film so the music had to tell the story – it had to make the connection between the images.

“There were also lots of conflicting shots. You would see happy soldiers and then dead bodies, so I had to write something that would help that flow.”

Originally shown as a propaganda picture, *The Battle of The Somme* is one of the most successful British movies ever

made, drawing in 20 million viewers in the first eight weeks of its original release in 1916.

It was the first time the reality of conflict had been captured for the movies and the stark images of British and German soldiers dying amid a relentless hail of bullets and shells made it a controversial and iconic documentary.

The filmmakers had unprecedented access to the front line and their footage of weary and muddy soldiers at the height of the battle captured the hearts of the nation.

Rossi was approached by the Imperial War Museum to write the score for the film, which was digitally restored to coincide with the 90th anniversary of the end of the war.

She also uncovered an astonishing family connection to the battle while carrying out her research when she discovered a relative had served on the Western Front as a stretcher bearer.

Rossi said: “I did know my great uncle Fred. He survived the war, but it was amazing and humbling to read about his personal experiences in the diaries that he kept.”

Israeli backs Palestine veterans

A SENIOR Israeli law enforcer and former Commonwealth soldier has thrown his weight behind a campaign to have policemen who fell in Palestine remembered on the UK's Armed Forces Memorial.

Superintendent Bob Mountwitten, who is also a keen student of modern Jewish history, said everyone who served in the volatile region during the 1940s era deserved total respect and recognition for what they had done.

He believes the Palestine Police officers who died alongside Army comrades should have their names recorded at the National Memorial Arboretum, Staffordshire.

Mountwitten added: “It is beyond doubt that the policemen who served in this area were combatants, and many of them are still buried here in Israel at the Ramalah Military Cemetery.”

As reported in *Soldier* (July 2008), members of the Palestine Veterans Association have called for police names to be added to the Armed Forces Memorial, claiming they were in the front line of operations. Some 800 British personnel and scores of civilians died in the Middle East campaign, waged from 1945-48.

● Birth of a nation – Pages 29-31

● Freedom fighters – Pages 80-81

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Picture: Graeme Main

Taste the best: Army chefs trained at St Omer Barracks in Aldershot have been one of the cornerstones of British military operations for nearly seven decades

Simmering down

Chefs pack up their whites and bid farewell to their old Hampshire home

TOP Army chefs have turned off the ovens at their Aldershot base for the last time after nearly 70 years.

Staff at the Defence Food Services School (DFSS) held a farewell parade outside St Omer Barracks before leaving for their new kitchens at Worthy Down near Winchester.

More than 600 visitors attended the leaving ceremony, including Chelsea Pensioners Robert Moy and Ronnie

Moore and personnel who staffed the school when it opened in the 1940s.

Chief of Staff Maj James Marshall (RLC) said: "Some people didn't recognise the school inside, which shows how much we have changed in the last 67 years.

"We had a variety of displays set out with photographs, memorabilia and a locker room layout from the 1960s. The event was designed to be a big walk

through the last seven decades of St Omer Barracks.

"It was sad to say goodbye to the town but we are looking forward to Worthy Down as it is a much more modern environment in which we can train the next generation of chefs."

The new kitchens have more up-to-date facilities and the chefs will cook on gas instead of electricity, because it is more environmentally friendly. Maj Marshall added: "We are mainly moving because of Project Allenby-Connaught.

"St Omer Barracks is ageing and the facilities there were becoming poorer and poorer as time went on.

"We may be back one day but for now we are looking forward to moving to our new kitchens."

The DFSS is made up of both military and civilian staff, who train Army chefs from the beginning of their career up to warrant officer level. They are taught to cook inside a normal kitchen and out in the field so they can adapt to whatever situation they find themselves in.

As they departed for Worthy Down, the proud Army caterers took with them both the Freedom of the Borough of Aldershot and the Freedom of the Borough of Rushmoor.

Fallen comrade remembered

ARMY bomb disposal experts have been taking time to remember a much-respected colleague who was killed in action as he attempted to diffuse an IED.

Soldiers from 11 Explosive Ordnance Regiment, Royal Logistic Corps, reflected on the life of WO2 Gaz O'Donnell as they marked their return from a hectic summer tour in southern Afghanistan.

The highly-experienced senior NCO, whose skills saved many people throughout his career, was killed in September after he was caught in an explosion.

His comrades held a minute's silence in his memory during their homecoming

parade in Didcot, where they were joined by colleagues from 219 Signal Squadron, 2 Signal Regiment.

During their tour with 16 Air Assault Brigade, the bomb disposal specialists performed a pivotal role on ops and were involved in hundreds of incidents.

They also helped clear the route for the much-reported operation to move a giant electric turbine from Kandahar to Kajaki while under contact from the Taliban.

Lt Col Gareth Bex, CO of 11 Regiment, said the troops had received exceptional backing. He added: "The support of the wider public means an awful lot."



Picture: SAC Andy Holmes

Close coordination: Soldiers and RAF Tornado bomber pilots joined forces in cyberspace to hone their skills in calling and delivering the perfect air strike

Simulation station

Royal Air Force crews back troops learning the deadly art of fire control

ARMY fire support teams have been put through their paces in a series of exercises to prepare them for Afghanistan's badlands – without ever leaving a hangar in Lincolnshire.

Troops from 40 Regiment Royal Artillery joined Royal Air Force Tornado bomber crews to rehearse tactics and procedures on a special simulator at Waddington station.

Using the Air Battlespace Training Centre, the fast jet pilots were able to fly realistic missions while the troops helped guide them accurately onto target.

During Exercise Mountain Dragon, soldiers and air crews made use of some of the most up-to-date technology to prepare them for situations they could face in Afghanistan.

Until March 2008, the system, which was designed for pilots, only saw limited use. But it has proved to be so successful it has been rolled-out for pre-deployment manoeuvres.

Wg Cdr Mike Costello (RAF), who oversees the Air Battlespace Centre at Waddington, said the latest exercise had proved popular with personnel from both Services.

He added: "It provided targeted training for soldiers operating very close to the enemy on how to work with fast jets and attack helicopters, how to talk to the pilots and how to execute a mission.

"We can't replace the need for live training but we can get close to it."

Lt Col Stuart Gray, Royal Artillery gunnery training team chief instructor,

was confident the troops had learned a great deal in cyberspace. He said: "The course here is awesome. It had a significant impact on both soldiers and airmen and their ability to coordinate and deliver firepower.

"This training is improving operational effectiveness and saving lives in Afghanistan," he added.

Polar explorer presses on

A SOLDIER who planned to be the first to walk unaided to the South Pole and back has refused to give up despite having his record attempt thwarted.

SSgt Mark Langridge's expedition relied on a flight that would take him from Chile to the Antarctic. But when the aircraft suffered mechanical failure it cost the para-trooper eight precious days, which made it impossible for him to arrive at his pick up point on time.

However, the 41-year-old is now aiming to become the seventh explorer to reach the Pole unassisted.

Speaking to *Soldier* from his tent in Antarctica, the adventurer admitted he was concentrating on reaching his goal rather than dwelling on the disappointment of losing the chance to set a world record.

He added: "There are three solo unaided attempts, including mine, going on at the moment. I want to make sure that I am ahead of the other two.

"I am still competing and I want to complete the trek in the fastest time possible. I'm walking nine hours a day."

● www.soloantarctica.com

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— J.B. USMC, 5th Marine Regiment



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2. Turning. Take a little weight off the leg in the direction you want to turn. So to turn right, lift your right heel a little. Never cross your skis – this is the fastest way to take a tumble.

3. Keep your knees slightly bent to control your weight. Look ahead, not at your feet. If you're about to crash into something and you're a beginner, don't swerve – you'll probably hit something else. Fall over instead.

4. Those are the basics. Practice your skills as much as possible.

SURVIVE AT -30C

At temperatures like minus 30C, the cold seems to penetrate every fibre of your being. But there are ways to minimise its effect.

More layers, lighter clothes

It's generally better to have several layers of lightweight clothes on than one or two thicker layers – the gaps between layers serve to trap air, which can act as good insulation. It can also make it easier to move, and the more layers you have, the more you're likely to shield your body from unwanted moisture.

Protect your extremities

Frostbite is one of the biggest dangers. Fingers and toes need to be protected by thick gloves and waterproof boots. A lot of heat is lost through the head, so always wear a hat.

Protect your face

Not only can your face become badly exposed to frostbite, but the wind can make life difficult and visibility will suffer. Goggles are important, and you might wear a balaclava or consider sunscreen if you're in an area where it's cold in summer – the ice doesn't half reflect the sun.

Find shelter

An igloo is one option, but ideally you'll have an insulated tent. You'll want a butyl ground sheet, inflatable mattress and sheepskin, plus a double-insulated sleeping bag.



• Extracted from 'BE THE BEST ... at just about everything' by The British Army. Published by Century at £12.99. Crown copyright 2008. Readers can buy the book for the special price of £10.99 incl free UK p&p. To order please call 01206 255 800 and quote the ref 'Soldier'.

WALLED IN

As the world wakes up to terrorism,
Israeli forces wake up to another day

Report: Cliff Caswell
Pictures: Mike Weston

AS ISRAELI soldier Jonathan Kupperman tore after a fleeing terror suspect in a busy town near Tel Aviv, he was well aware of the murderous possibilities he was facing.

In hot pursuit of a man he had seen wearing a padded winter coat in the rising spring heat, he was focused on the very real prospect that he was chasing a suicide bomber. And the potential killer was running for a busy coffee shop.

With his heart in his mouth, Kupperman managed to catch and pull the suspect to the ground, but as he fell his worst suspicions were confirmed. >>

Holy Land: Members of the Jewish community worship at the Western Wall in Jerusalem, the front-line city in Israel's ongoing war on terror



The human bomb detonated his lethal cargo leaving the soldier exposed to the full extent of the blast and fighting for his life.

"Jonathan was in hospital for six months and lost three of the fingers on his right hand," his grandfather Noah, CO of the Yasham counter-terrorism unit in the Israeli Police, recalled. "He was wounded in the town of Netanya some 60 years to the day that I was injured in Jerusalem – I was hit by four bullets during a riot a couple of months before the British troops left in 1948."

The Kuppermans' experience of terrorism is not unique. Ever since the UK pulled back from the region six decades ago, generations of families have faced a terror threat that has slowly but surely made its way around the world. In Mumbai, gunmen recently killed scores of people in a

sophisticated assault while the spectre of the suicide bomber arrived in London in July 2005.

But the daily reality of attack has led Israel to establish one of the most robust counter-terrorism regimes in the world. In a model that is now the focus of attention in the wake of Mumbai, the security forces have developed an elaborate intelligence and strike network to hit would-be offenders first.

On the front line of the war on terror in Jerusalem, they are on constant readiness. Above a controversial security fence separating Palestinian settlements from the city centre, a lone police fort looks out over the simmering hills of the Holy Land where patrolling officers relentlessly trawl for trouble.

"It is quieter at the moment than it has been for some time. After the Palestinian uprising early in the decade there were a lot of problems and buses were exploding in terror attacks every other day," Israeli Police spokesman and army veteran Micky Rosenfeld told *Soldier*. "During that period up to 1,000 citizens were killed, but now the security fence

that we established in Jerusalem has proved both effective and efficient.

"The terrorists are constantly trying to improve their own methods, so we are working 24/7 to deter them. Having good intelligence means we can stop 90 per cent of planned attacks, although there is no such thing as complete, 100 per cent protection. But when it is quiet, as it is now, you know that what we are doing is working."

The structure of the Israeli Forces is certainly well placed to deal with the complex threat. The Border Police, a domestic security outfit with military-trained staff, packs a powerful punch to provide the backbone of the front-line defence.

These units have embedded specialists including snipers, covert surveillance experts and dog handlers, so there is no need to call on any back up teams on operations. The troops are also highly trained in stealth, observation and camouflage.

On Jerusalem's streets, regular police units are



keyed up to fight any threat that finds its way through the net. Specialist units including the Yassam motorcyclists, who are trained to break through gridlocked traffic and shoot their M16 rifles on the move, can quickly be deployed to the scene of any trouble.

Despite having a highly-organised system to deal with attacks, Bob Mountwitten, a volunteer superintendent serving in the Jerusalem District with the Yasham unit, said that there were always occasions when unpredictable attacks occurred.

In July last year a construction worker rammed his excavator into a string of vehicles and pedestrians, killing three people and injuring dozens more before he

was shot dead by an off-duty soldier. More civilians were hurt in a copycat attack just weeks later while other would-be insurgents have been intercepted in covert ops.

"You have to know where the threat is coming from as there is so much happening around you all the time," Mountwitten, who served a stint in the British Royal Regiment of Fusiliers and the Australian Black Watch before enlisting in the Israeli Forces, admitted. "Fortunately the intelligence network here is well set up. Absolutely everything is noted, even down to every car we stop, and it all goes on the computer so that it can be accessed by the whole security network.

"Israel is different to the UK, but the same rules apply to me as to a policeman in London. I can't open fire unless I come

under attack and, even if I think about pulling my gun, I have to write a report."

While Mountwitten admitted that life in Jerusalem had proved to be quieter in 2008 than in recent years, he was adamant there

was no end yet to the terror threat.

Just as British troops on ops in Iraq and Afghanistan have had to accept that bombers will sometimes find a way through, the superintendent conceded the Israeli authorities were resigned to casualties.

"It has been a constant battle – nothing changed for us even after the 9/11 attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Centre," he said. "There is a saying in the Australian armed forces that the price of freedom is eternal vigilance – and that is the game we are playing." ■

‘The terrorists are constantly trying to improve their own methods, so we are working 24/7 to deter them’



Main picture, Flashpoint city: Jerusalem has been subject to frequent terror attacks

Left, Constant vigil: Israeli security forces, pictured on exercise, are on sustained alert to deter strikes



Report Cliff Caswell
Picture: Mike Weston

In the rolling verdant hills that surround Jerusalem, the Israeli Border police were in deep cover.

Beneath the strobes of lightning and thunder resonating through the valleys, the military-trained officers were playing a constant observation and waiting game. They remained silent, invisible and focused on their job despite the enormous globules of rain from the winter storm exploding around them.

The men of the elite Metilan counter-terrorist unit have taken camouflage to a new level. While a passer-by might, by chance, have clocked the sniper in the bushes, they would probably never have given a second thought to his colleague elaborately disguised as a rubbish tip by the side of the road.

Like real life *Transformers*, these men can set themselves up to blend in with everyday objects. Using lightweight disguises made from rubber and foam, they can merge flawlessly with the street and appear from nowhere with weapons at the ready.

The reputation of the men from the Metilan speaks for itself. Constantly in the line of fire in and around the holy city of Jerusalem, the 40-strong unit has been involved in actions as diverse as sniping against hardcore rioters and pinpoint snatch operations.

In the last 12 months alone, they have been responsible for hitting back at petrol bombers, arresting terror suspects and preventing illegal workers from entering the city.

"As a Border Police unit, our training is very much military focused," said the commanding officer who asked only to be identified as Superintendent A. "In order to undertake selection with us, you do your basic training with the Israeli Defence Forces before you come here for three months to learn the skills that you will need.

"All of our men undergo regular physical and psychological tests to make sure they are up to the job and, to give you an idea of how tough the process can be, we had 60 candidates recently apply and only eight made the grade."

Given the nature of the work carried out by officers in the Metilan, which ranges from dealing with public order situations to covert

surveillance, it is unsurprising that personnel in the unit have to be in excellent mental and physical shape.

They must also be intelligent and able to work on their own initiative. Additionally, the ability to endure long periods of isolation out on operations is vital.

Troops in the unit, which has embedded specialists including snipers and dog handlers, are also trained to deploy by helicopter and gather intelligence.

"We can carry out both straightforward and complex actions," said Superintendent A. "As an example, in one operation a team of troops had to cover a kilometre without drawing attention to themselves – it took five hours."

The Metilan is certainly well equipped to carry out its role. Along with a diverse suite of weapons, led by the US M16 assault rifle, the inventory includes body armour with a built in Camelbak-style hydration system and the latest night vision aids.

But, as in any military organisation, the personnel are the cornerstone of success. For those on the front line of the battle, maintaining mental and physical agility is key. "You have to be able to deal with some pretty claustrophobic

conditions," admitted one instructor, identified only as Trooper R. "But your training, experience and high adrenalin levels get you through them.

"While you are well prepared for what you are doing, no day is ever the same in this job. I have been on a number of different ops in my five years here."

A colleague, identified as Trooper A, agreed. "You have to take on whatever situation you find yourself in calmly and professionally," he stressed. "And you also have to be an excellent team player because you spend a lot of time with colleagues on deployments."

Constant operations are certainly the core business of the Metilan. Whether its forces are camouflaged and carrying out covert actions or involved in an all-out assault, there is no shortage of professionalism among the men in its ranks.

Armed with the latest kit and trained to the highest standards, this is a unique unit. And, on the front line of Israel's never-ending battle against terrorism, this world-leading capability has proved invaluable for hitting attackers before, as well as when, they strike. ■

"As a Border Police unit, our training is very much military focused"



Terror killers

As the insurgent threat evolves, so too have the elite fighters on the front lines of the war



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Birth of a nation

Six decades after the creation of Israel, *Soldier* talks to old adversaries of British troops

Under attack: Smoke rises from Jerusalem during clashes between Jews and Arabs in the days leading up to the British withdrawal from Palestine

Report: Cliff Caswell
Pictures: Soldier Archive

THE path that would lead Dror Shalom into action against British Forces in Palestine began in an unlikely place – the dignified atmosphere of a school classroom.

Brought up in Germany after the First World War, the Jewish teenager had hoped his studies would help him better himself. And then, in 1936, he had a change of teacher.

“This man came in to class dressed in a Nazi storm trooper uniform and started reading out the register of students,” Shalom recalled. “He didn’t call my name and when I asked why, he said that Jews had no place at the school. Then he made me sit in a place he had singled out for me – I was completely humiliated.”

The 14-year-old’s appalling treatment was just the beginning of Hitler’s campaign of hate that was to culminate in the extermination of millions in Europe’s concentration camps. But for those like Shalom, who left his family and fled to the Holy Land for a new life, it was also the start of a conflict that continues to

resonate 60 years on.

For the Jewish settlers, the battle was about creating the new home of Israel, an aim that took on a new impetus after the Second World

War with the arrival of thousands of immigrants fleeing the persecution of Nazi-occupied territories.

‘When I was sworn in I vowed to protect the country and protect life’

The resident Arabs, on the other hand, were angry at what they saw as a land grab. And in the middle of the face-off were the British authorities that held the mandate to govern the region, and found their soldiers under attack from all sides.

After arriving in Palestine, Shalom, who retired as a lieutenant colonel in the Israeli Army, had joined the Haganah, an illegal partisan group dedicated to the creation of a Jewish home. While the UK had also endorsed this cause in the Balfour Declaration of 1917, there was a perception among settlers that the old colonial power was becoming reluctant to meet its obligations as boat loads of refugees were turned away. For some, violence became a way of venting frustrations and making sure their

kinsmen who wanted to settle in the Holy Land were able to do so.

“After the Second World War my unit was mobilised around the Jordan Valley and Galilee and our task was to blow up bridges in the area to make it impossible for British troops to move around easily,” Shalom told *Soldier* in an interview from his home in Jerusalem. “Elsewhere our comrades were sinking the coastguard boats that were preventing immigrants from arriving.

“While I became anti-British for that time after the war, you must remember that this was immediately after the Holocaust and understand how important it was for us to have a homeland. Our relations with the troops were not very comfortable.”

Despite disrupting the British infrastructure, Shalom said the mainstream Haganah had no intent to kill soldiers to further the cause. He recalled being furious at the bombing of Jerusalem’s King David Hotel by the Irgun Zvai Leumi terror group, which killed nearly 100 people in 1946 and was met with outrage.

“Our commanders had told these people not to carry out this attack, but the group went ahead regardless,” he said. “So that was the end of any cooperation between us and them. What had been done was against what our movement was about.”

As Shalom fought to disrupt British efforts to stem the tide of Jewish immigration, Avraham Monzon had also volunteered to serve with the Haganah. But unlike his comrade, his family had lived in Palestine for several generations and he had watched his father Arieh serve in the ranks of the British Army’s Royal Pioneer Corps.

Monzon, who eventually saw service with the Haganah’s elite Palmach special forces unit, said he was adamantly opposed to attacks against policing soldiers – even after finding himself in custody for putting up posters promoting the partisans.

“I had started out in a youth group because our leaders wanted fit young

Main pictures, Adversaries: Haganah recruits prepare for action and, below left, a Bren gun squad from the Highland Light Infantry in the Belfry of the Armenian Convent, Jerusalem

Below, Six decades on: Lt Col Dror Shalom (right) and former Warrant Officer Avraham Monzon



men to help with defending our people,” the former Israeli Army warrant officer recalled. “When I was sworn in I vowed to protect the country and protect life.

“My first job was to put up these posters, which was forbidden by the authorities. There was a girl with me who was giving me the flyers and I was pasting them to the walls, but two British policeman saw what we were doing and I was quickly arrested.

“I was put in a cell, which stank and was full of criminals. It was also cold and I was very grateful when an Arab prisoner gave me a blanket. The next day the police called my father and made him sign a form saying I would behave.”

While Monzon, who was involved in several contacts with Arab insurgents in the years leading up to Israel’s creation in May 1948, admitted that many were frustrated by the





British presence, he maintained that the Haganah was not a terror group.

"The question was how we were to prepare for our new country that we knew was coming. The terrorists wanted to shoot the British out, but that is not what we wanted

at all," he said. "We had, after all, been living with them for many years."

Shalom and Monzon finally watched the British depart on May 13, 1948, ending a brutal period that had claimed the lives of hundreds of soldiers and civilians.

Unlike the British Palestine veterans, however, the declaration of independence only marked the beginning of a new conflict for the two men. Mobilised as the Israeli Defence Forces, they would fight the Arab-Israeli War before embarking on a lifetime of battle with neighbouring countries.

Yet, like their British counterparts, both men have now reached their advanced years. In the twilight of their lives they are quietly optimistic that reconciliation will prevail, and that sacrifices have not been made in vain.

"We were meant to share what God created, and I only hope now that Jews and Arabs will find a way to live together in peace, without jealousy and ill-feeling towards their fellow man," said Monzon. "With the nature of the world as it is today everyone should work together – you should love your neighbour as yourself." ■



Pictures: Mike Weston



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Wolf's still hungry

***Gladiators* legend sets the record straight about his reputation as the combatant everyone loves to hate**

Interview: Heidi Mines

In a show that became essential teatime viewing for an entire generation, one character from ITV's *Gladiators* loomed a little larger than the rest.

With his pantomime villain snarl and shoulder-length perm, the toned and tanned Wolf struck fear into the hearts of the show's contenders.

And although the infamous muscleman was missing from the revamped programme's relaunch on Sky One last year, Wolf is returning for the second series bigger, badder and better than ever before.

Speaking during a break from filming at Shepperton Studios, the six-foot, 15-stone hulk, explained he had been coaxed back onto the show to act as a full-time team manager for the up-and-coming generation of gladiators.

The veteran hardman has kept himself in peak physical condition, which he believes is essential to take on the formidable challenge posed by the show's games.

"To be a gladiator takes tenacity and consistency. You have to be fit and an all-rounder really," he said. "It's not just about strength – it's about tactics as well.

"It is difficult. All the contestants say it looks so easy at home, but when they get here they realise how hard it is."

Given Wolf's popularity among *Gladiators* fans, it is not surprising that more people know him by his stage moniker than his real name, Michael Van Wijk.

But when asked whether being constantly referred to by his lupine nickname was wearing thin, Wolf said he was proud of his gladiatorial identity.

"I answer to Wolf now, even abroad," he said. "It's like a second name and I'm used to it. If someone calls me Mike then I won't look around. To be honest, being a household name in Britain is a really nice thing."

The fighter already holds his place in the *Gladiators* hall of fame by appearing in more programmes than any other person in the show's British run.

After impressing during his initial trial at the Army's Woolwich Barracks in the early 1990s, the former bodybuilder made his TV debut in 1992 and soon became *Gladiators*'s resident bad boy.

When the show eventually left the nation's screens in 1999, no-one was more disappointed than Wolf.

"I don't know why *Gladiators* came off in the first place," he said. "We peaked at 14.2

million in the ratings and yet when we were leaving and taken off the air we had half that number. That's a figure which shows now would be over the moon to get."

Away from the cameras, Wolf lives in New Zealand with his wife and family and trains in Brazilian jujitsu ground fighting, mixed martial arts and cage fighting.

But for a man so used to taking on tough physical challenges, Wolf admits that Service life is the one thing he did not want to tackle.

"I couldn't have joined the military as I have never been a morning person and I'm too much of a loose cannon to be told what to do.

"I just haven't got the mental capacity to take that sort of lifestyle. As a gladiator you don't whinge about the knocks you just get on with it. If you are going to be in the Army, Royal Navy or Royal Air Force you know the training will be hard and that will make them better people in the end.

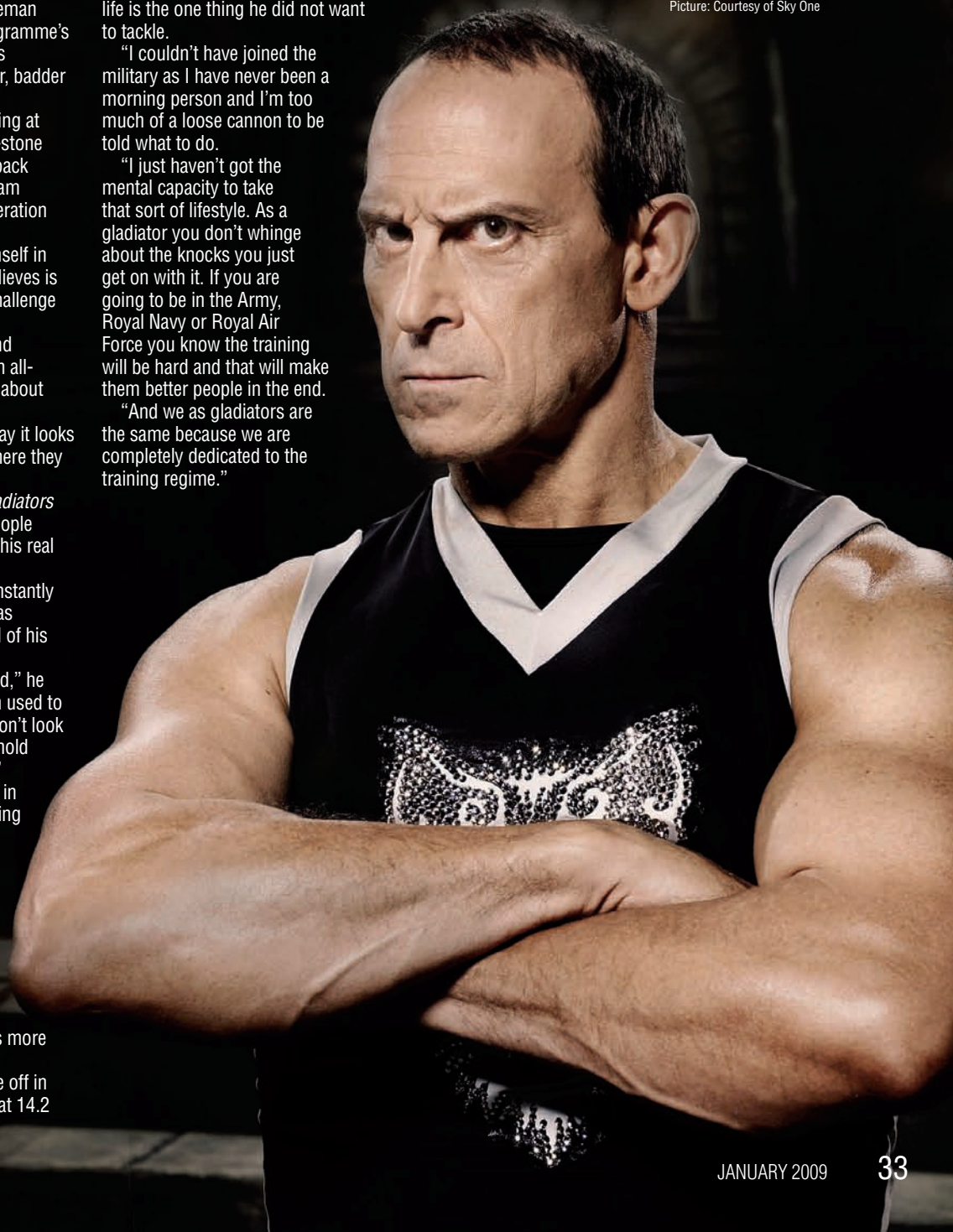
"And we as gladiators are the same because we are completely dedicated to the training regime."

Wolf appears to be a big softy at heart who always has time for his fans – many of whom are below three-feet tall – but he does have a word of warning for any challengers.

"I used to get little old grannies hugging me and saying I love you Wolf.

"I can honestly say I have never had a bad reaction from strangers, but if I ever did they can apologise when they wake up." ■

Picture: Courtesy of Sky One





Precious Gemma

Manc minx commands and conquers Brit soldiers' hearts

Interview: Cliff Caswell
Picture: Electronic Arts

EVER since sexy Gemma Atkinson first appeared in the Channel Four soap *Hollyoaks*, she has found herself in huge demand as both an actress and model.

Whether playing feisty Lisa Hunter in Chester's most dramatic fictional community or plunging herself deep in the jungle for the hit reality TV show *I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here*, the 24-year-old beauty always manages to capture the imagination for her talent as much as her glamorous looks.

Now the Manchester-born stunner has a new adventure in mind – to visit British Armed Forces personnel serving on the front lines of Iraq and Afghanistan.

"I have a great respect for the troops and the work they are doing," Gemma admitted during an event to celebrate the recent London Gaming Week in Trafalgar Square. "Not too long ago I did a military boot camp and, while it was nothing like what our troops are going through, it did give me a bit of a taste. So I am hoping to go out and visit some soldiers later in the year. It would be great to see what all the guys are doing and would be something very special for me."

By all accounts Gemma, who has friends serving in Afghanistan, has already proved that she has no aversion to roughing it when the need arises. In 2007 she was dropped into the depths of the Australian jungle for *I'm a Celebrity*, and revealed she has recently completed filming in South Africa for *Adrenalin Junkie*, where she swam with deadly sharks and took to the skies for a bungee jump from a helicopter.

She has also just played her first part as a Servicewoman, donning a skimpy air force uniform to become every soldier's dream superior officer, Lt Eva McKenna, in the Electronic Arts video game *Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3*.

"It has been a fabulous experience to be so involved in the latest title, especially working alongside such a fantastic cast in the United States," Gemma said. "And I'm also really pleased with the way the game has been received by fans."

"As Lt McKenna, I'm the second-in-command. I pop up whenever the player finds themselves in trouble and explain what buttons to press," she elaborated. "But it was great to mix gaming with acting as Eva is a strong female character and playing her was a blast."

Away from the action, Gemma has taken time out to continue her modelling career, appearing in photo shoots for lads' mags such as *FHM*, *Loaded* and *Zoo* and her 2009 calendar.

Last year she became the new face of the British Grand Prix and a driving force behind the glamorous image of high street lingerie chain La Senza. But as well as the many projects in her professional life, Gemma has also been acclaimed for her charity work, taking part in events to raise awareness of breast cancer, which included a walk along the Great Wall of China last year.

In addition she has been closely involved with the Teenage Cancer Trust charity, and has been asked to become a full ambassador for the organisation after helping to design a room for young patients being treated at Christie Hospital in Manchester.

It is all a far cry from Gemma's beginnings in Phil Redmond's *Hollyoaks*, the teenage soap set

in Chester that has continually been riding high in the ratings since its launch in the mid-1990s. Her character proved so popular that she was later given her own late night spin-off series, *Hollyoaks in the City*.

"The set of *Hollyoaks* was an absolutely brilliant place to work and the whole cast got on so well together," Gemma recalled. "I played Lisa Hunter for five years and I still meet up and go on holiday with the friends I made."

"It was a bit like going to university, only we all got paid for working. So the show will always have a very special place in my heart because of all the happy times."

As for her latest projects, Gemma has been playing the lead role of Peter Pan in panto at the Manchester Opera House, and admitted being relieved that she did not have to spend the lead up to last month's festive season feasting on insects in the jungle.

"Panto is a really great way to celebrate Christmas, and I enjoyed watching the last series of *I'm a Celebrity* sitting on a comfy sofa with tea and biscuits and knowing fully what the contestants were going through," she laughed. ■

"I am hoping to go out and visit the soldiers later in the year. It would be great to see what the guys are doing"



● *Jim Davidson On The Offensive – Live* is out now on DVD, CD, Audio DTO and Mobile.



Operational humour

Stand-up comedy veteran recalls the highs and lows of a life performing on stage in the world's toughest theatres

Interview: Stephen Tyler
Picture: Cpl Rupert Frere RLC

FOR a man used to fishing in the clear waters and bright sunshine of the Arabian Gulf, comedian Jim Davidson was remarkably upbeat to be sat beside a lake in rain-drenched Surrey.

The former *Generation Game* host, who now lives in the Emirate of Dubai, had every right to grumble after spending two hours exposed to the British winter with not so much as a bite to show for it.

But despite his morning's fishing failures, Davidson told *Soldier* that the prospect of an upcoming gig in Colchester for troops from The Parachute Regiment was enough to keep his spirits up.

"I'm pleased to be doing it," he said. "I enjoy performing for the Forces because when I do, I put on a completely different act. "They have a different sense of humour. I remember once I was performing in Bosnia and there was a journalist from the *Daily Record* in the crowd. He wrote a story about the show saying I was a sick bastard, but while that may well have been the case in his eyes the guys in the crowd loved it."

Davidson's ability to judge an Army audience has been founded on extensive first-hand experience as the self-confessed Forces fan has been doing his thing at military camps for many years.

The three-time showbusiness personality of the year has clocked up thousands of air miles to perform for troops, including five visits to the Falkland Islands as well as deployments to Bosnia, Macedonia, Northern Ireland and Iraq.

After a planned trip to Afghanistan fell through last

year, London-born Davidson remained determined that his show would go on and arranged to travel to Cyprus to perform a one-off gig in front of soldiers from the 1st Battalion, The Royal Welsh.

In soaring Mediterranean temperatures, the man labelled by *The Independent* as "Britain's greatest living stand-up comedian" was on top form, although it was only after watching the show back that he knew how his gags had gone down.

"I really wanted to do something [instead of going to Afghanistan] so I suggested filming a DVD to let the public know how wonderful these soldiers are," he said.

"It was a great experience. It was 38C and I was in the open air so it was actually quite hard and I couldn't tell at the time whether it was going well or not. You always have a rough idea but you can never be sure during the show. Luckily the guys loved it.

"There have been a couple of times when the audience haven't been particularly receptive, but the Paras are always good lads. You have to look at the fact that these are highly motivated race horses and if they are not running around the race course they will have all that energy left over."

As well as adding a further product to Davidson's growing comedy back catalogue, the DVD of the Cyprus show – *On The Offensive – Live* – is also helping to raise money for the British Forces Foundation (BFF), the charity he founded in 1999.

Using the stand-up's extensive network of celebrity friends, the BFF arranges entertainment shows for Servicemen and women all over the world.

Star turns including former *Soldier* interviewees Katherine Jenkins and girl group sensation *The Saturdays* are among the music acts to have provided their services in keeping the troops entertained at home and on operational deployments.

And after setting the trend for supporting the military – often without the positive publicity afforded to today's superstars – Davidson is happy to see more and more celebrities beating a path to Brize Norton to get the chance to pass on their thanks on the front line.

"There does seem to be a greater number of big names coming out and supporting

the troops and I think that's got a lot to do with the work that we and Help for Heroes have done," he said. "The public have an increasing desire to give something back to the Armed Forces and it's important that they have a way to pass on that sense of goodwill."

Davidson's military pedigree stems from a father who served in the Royal Artillery and a brother who had a career

in the Royal Navy. The comedian had considered signing up to the Senior Service himself, but admits that particular ambition fell by the wayside when he decided to devote his attention to women.

His move into comedy has not been without its controversies, with some quarters accusing his razor-sharp routines of straying into the realms of political incorrectness. But the thick-skinned performer makes no apologies for his often x-rated act.

"There's no room for political correctness on the battlefield," he explained, adding that would-be troublemakers at his shows are wasting their time.

"I don't bother with hecklers. I just ignore them. There's no point having an argument with a guy in the front row because the people at the back can only hear my answers rather than his smart arse questions." ■

"The public have an increasing desire to give something back to the Armed Forces and it's important that they have a way to pass on that goodwill"



Courage under fire

Kitchen queen speaks of her admiration for Army chefs serving up a feast for front-line soldiers



Interview: Samantha Chapman
Pictures: Steve Dock

WORKING under volatile celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay would be a trial by fire for any cook brave enough to take on the challenge.

His first kitchen at London restaurant Aubergine was known as "Vietnam" by those who worked in it, so strong was its resemblance to psychological warfare.

But soldiering through a hellish first day back in 1994 – and onto a glittering and hard-fought reputation as Britain's leading female chef – was Angela Hartnett, Ramsay's protegee and friend.

Despite having come out the other side, Hartnett's taste for battle hasn't diminished and in 2006 she went to Afghanistan with the Royal Marines to cook a Christmas dinner for 3,500 troops at Camp Bastion.

On the back of that, the kitchen maestro has helped launch a cookbook written by tri-Service chefs and filled with tasty recipe ideas using ingredients found in ten-man ration packs.

Standing in a mocked-up field kitchen at the launch in Esher, Surrey, and surrounded by busy Army chefs, Hartnett told *Soldier* of her tremendous admiration for the troops.

"Gordon, myself and another chef called Jason Atherton went out to Afghanistan two Christmases ago on December 21 to spend 48 hours with the Royal Marines," she said.

"It was a truly incredible experience for us. We were very impressed with the food and the high standards to which the chefs work.

"The quality is so important because it is a real morale booster. If you're served bad food then it's not going to give you an incentive to get on with your day. You need something to look forward to."

The cookbook, called *Ten Man ORP Recipe Ideas*, is filled with meal ideas relating to each ration pack menu box. Innovative dishes include Indian fish balls, Italian meatballs with pasta and garlic and chilli beef burritos.

Ramsay provided the book's foreword and in typical potty-mouthed style he penned: "Producing variety in such a f***ing dangerous environment is undoubtedly daunting."

So what was it really like working in a kitchen with the notoriously bad-tempered Scot?

"Everyone asks me that," laughed Hartnett. "He's a very nice man – a gentleman in fact. I wouldn't have worked for him for such a long time if he wasn't."

Hartnett has indeed been rewarded for her loyalty to the craggy-faced kitchen supremo. After sweating and grafting her way through the ranks, she was handed her first restaurant – Menu at The Connaught Hotel, for which she won a Michelin star.

Since then she has moved on to Murano, a fine-dining Italian restaurant in Mayfair and the York and Albany in Regent's Park. She has also opened Cielo in the exclusive Boca Raton resort in Florida.

Hartnett, who is descended from Italians, has just written her first book, *Cucina: Three Generations of Italian Family Cooking*, and has also won an MBE for services to the hospitality industry.

Despite her success, she is hugely modest and when asked if she could compare a Ramsay-run restaurant to an Afghan field kitchen, she barely paused for breath before answering.

"I don't think you can," she said. "In some ways they are similar – they are both such high-pressured environments and you have to make good quality food in a set amount of time for a certain amount of people.

"But at the end of the shift the chefs here can jump on their bikes or cars and go home, see their family and friends and relax after a hard day at work.

"The guys cooking in the field don't have that luxury. They have a much harder job really. They can't step away from things for a bit, it is definitely much tougher for them."

Following her debut deployment to see soldiers in Afghanistan in 2008, Hartnett explained that the surprising climate posed more of a challenge than catering for hundreds of hungry Servicemen and women.

"Well we had thought that the heat would be the hardest thing to contend with, but I found the nights much harder," she recalled. "It was absolutely freezing.

"We had on hoodies, scarves and fleeces. We were literally fighting over the

warmest clothes to wear. That was probably the only challenge we faced out there. The number of people we had to cook for was never really a problem for us – we just had to use a bigger wok."

Hartnett's father was an Irish sailor in the Merchant Navy and she freely admits that her friends in the Army are never far from her thoughts.

"I think that the job soldiers are doing is incredible because they have sworn an oath to Queen and country and are protecting us. They are doing a great job and they are doing it very well," she said.

"When we were out there everyone was so kind, very polite and there was no bitterness – there was just the feeling that they had signed up to go and they were going to do their best." ■

'We were very impressed with the food and the high standards to which the chefs work'

Where's the ketchup?: WO1 Jon Gray (RLC) and Sgt Jonathan Kingsbury (RLC) give Hartnett a taste of the food available from field kitchens at the Combined Services Culinary Challenge

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Interview: Samantha Chapman

LESS than a year ago Royal Military Police major Phil Packer was told he would never walk again after he was severely injured in southern Iraq.

His back snapped when a vehicle rolled on top of him and, despite the medics' best efforts, he lost the use of his legs and is now a paraplegic.

For an active man of just 36, whose life had been dedicated to the Army since joining as a private in 1993, the news was a massive blow.

Yet as he lay in his hospital bed in May 2008, Maj Packer decided that not only was he going to try to regain the use of his legs, but he would also raise money for charity.

"I became aware of Help for Heroes when I was in Iraq," says Maj Packer who, six months later, has set up an appeal called Phil's Million.

"In hospital I had time to read up on them and when I saw how hard they worked I felt I had a responsibility to give something back.

"I decided to take on a series of challenges so people can see what those in my situation can still do. I want to do about 20 different events as well as the London Marathon to also help provide information about disability sports."

'I want people to challenge me to any sport – I want to show what can be done'

True to his word, Maj Packer has already taken on the hair-raising challenge of skydiving with the Red Devils in his quest to raise £1million for Help for Heroes. Next on the ever-expanding list are rowing across the English Channel, climbing El Capitan — a 3,000 foot rock face in California, sailing a racing yacht, and the London Marathon, providing he is medically fit.

"I want people to challenge me to any sport," explained Maj Packer. "I want to show what can be done. At Headley Court some of the guys play wheelchair basketball or rugby as they used to play those sports before they were injured, and they show amazing determination."

Many of Maj Packer's challenges will be gruelling for a relative novice, but this has not dampened his enthusiasm.

"I spend three weeks at Headley Court and then have four weeks at home on a rotating basis," he added. "At Headley Court I am constantly working with the physiotherapist to try and regain some feeling. We are building my strength so I can take on these challenges."

Maj Packer also raises funds through events such as the Help for Heroes ball he organised in London last month, giving talks at schools and collecting cheques from supporters.

"There is an amount of self-healing that must take place," he said. "The most devastating thing I found was going from being in command to having that ripped away from me. It is a loss I can't find the words to describe.

"Yet when I'm at Headley and I see people a great deal younger than me and with far worse injuries it humbles me and drives me on." ■

● To challenge Maj Packer or for more details on Phil's Million visit www.philpacker.com

Packing a punch

Royal Military Police officer describes climbing his own mountain after breaking his back in Iraq



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High spies

Latest airborne radar provides soldiers on the ground with an all-seeing capability and the enemy with no place to hide

Report: Cliff Caswell

BATTLEFIELD commanders are to reap the benefits of a sophisticated new eye in the sky, which is set to be rolled-out to Royal Air Force crews.

The advanced Airborne Stand-Off Radar (Astor), which has just been accepted into service on the Sentinel R1 aircraft, is capable of detecting moving and static targets and beaming the information in real-time to troops on the ground.

Armed with this up-to-the-minute intelligence, commanders will be able to direct devastating strikes with pinpoint accuracy with weapons such as the Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System.

Operated by the Number 5 (Army Cooperation) Squadron (5 (AC) Sqn), based at RAF Waddington in Lincolnshire, the hi-tech radar can be operated around the clock and in all weathers, and operators are now fully up-to-speed after a thorough training programme.

The squadron's OC Wg Cdr Harry Kemsley (RAF) was confident his crews would provide combat soldiers with a battle-winning capability.

He said: "The Astor will provide battlefield commanders with critical, all-weather, wide area, near real-time intelligence which will enhance the effectiveness of operations.

"Training of our personnel and development of the system has progressed exceedingly well over the last 18 months and the squadron is now in a position to make a positive contribution to operations in the very near future."

Soaring at 40,000 feet, the Sentinel R1 is crewed by at least three radar operators and is linked to eight ground stations. The Astor is designed to communicate with a range of systems, putting it at the heart of the military's Network Enabled Capability.

It is expected that the radar, made by Raytheon Systems, will be used on an overseas deployment before achieving full operational capability in two years.

Bill Chrispin, the MoD's team leader on the project, believed that troops would be quick to recognise the potential of the highly-advanced kit.

He added: "Accepting Astor into service with the RAF represents the initial stage in the roll-out of this entirely new capability for our Armed Forces.

"But only through a strong working relationship between the MoD and the prime contractor has it matured into what we see

today. The squadron [5 (AC) Sqn] reformed on April 1, 2004 and has risen to the doctrinal and training challenges of this dynamic platform."

In announcing the roll-out of Astor, Minister for Defence Equipment and Support, Quentin Davies, believed the eye in the sky would become "a vital asset".

"The new system on board our Sentinel is a technologically advanced capability that will deliver exceptional surveillance," he said.

"The radar will link up

with other intelligence-gathering equipment, providing commanders with a complete picture on the ground and allowing them to make immediate decisions.

"It is also providing a number of companies with the opportunity to participate in a high-technology programme, ensuring that the UK remains at the forefront of defence technology." ■

Soaring start: Crews of a Sentinel R1 aircraft put the new radar through its paces on manoeuvres high above the Arizona Desert in the United States. Battlefield commanders are confident the kit will provide a critical edge in battle.

Picture: © Crown Copyright, image from www.defenceimages.mod.uk

'The Astor will provide battlefield commanders with critical, all-weather, wide area, near real-time intelligence'



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MEDIA OPS!

In our new monthly feature, members of *Soldier's* crack writing team pit their wits against some of the tasks faced by British Army soldiers. If your unit wants to challenge our intrepid individuals to anything from signalling to stagging on, email details to editor Stephen Tyler at styler@soldiermagazine.co.uk



Heidi "Danger" Mines

HAS the dubious distinction of having written about all three Armed Forces. Whether she's causing chaos by falling off ladders on an aircraft carrier, filling a sick bag on a C130 or digging for news in foreign countries, you can always rely on Heidi to put her own distinctive spin on a story.

Away from the cut and thrust of the *Soldier* newsroom, Heidi enjoys travelling and going to the gym in her spare time.

Strengths:
Outgoing personality
Willing to give anything a go

Weaknesses:
Nerves
Tendency to talk for a long, long time



Cliff "Casevac" Caswell

DESPITE encountering a whole host of dangers during his three-and-a-half years as *Soldier's* resident newshound, Cliff remains relatively unscathed.

But whether he is being unceremoniously slung out of a Qatari airbase or throwing up on various military aircraft, the 36-year-old video game-lover is almost guaranteed to return home with a side-splitting string of amusing anecdotes.

Strengths:
Iron stomach
Good sense of humour

Weaknesses:
Cowardly
Dislikes running



Samantha "Spam" Chapman

SHE may be the newest recruit to the *Soldier* team, but 27-year-old Samantha has already proved she is not averse to getting involved with Army life. The former civvy hack recently furthered her career by chasing penguins on the Falkland Islands.

A self-confessed gym freak, Sam's hard-earned fitness proves invaluable when running away from the spiders and other creepy crawlies she despises.

Strengths:
Calm under pressure
Athletic ability

Weaknesses:
Arachnophobia
Afraid of the dark

I predict a riot

News editor flees in terror as the spuds start flying at Longmoor

Report: Cliff Caswell
Pictures: Graeme Main

AS the column of British soldiers advances down the street in full riot gear, I'm beginning to wonder whether my shouts to bring down the British Government might have been a mistake.

Like Roman Legionnaires, the troops are plodding towards us like a giant armadillo, impassive and anonymous behind their protective kit and wall of shields. But my fellow demonstrators seem even more excited by the prospect that this situation might turn into an all-out battle, and up the ante even further.

I'm swept along with them, hurling insults at world leaders, yelling for the soldiers to go home. And before I know it, I'm right up against the shield wall, hammering my fists on the perspex, before sanity takes over and I realise that a smacking from one of the batons these officer cadets are carrying is going to really smart.

The heat is rising from the burning barricades and I can taste the petrol on my lips. A Gazelle helicopter hovers on the edge of our vision like an angry wasp, the sound of the rotor blades punctuating the chanting of the hysterical crowd.

Although this is an exercise, and conditions in Longmoor's mock village are controlled, it doesn't take anyone with even a modicum of common sense to realise that the adrenalin, fear and anger are entirely real. And when the situation deteriorates, and the rioters behind us start pelting the soldiers with potatoes – the missile of choice for these manoeuvres – you realise the pain is authentic too.

The false bravado in me has suddenly evaporated and the reality of cowardice takes over. The spuds are raining in around us and a few hardcore rioters are smashing into the shields. It's all too much. The final straw comes when the soldiers start letting loose with their batons. I'm off like a jet-propelled whippet in the opposite direction, hugely eager to get out of the striking zone. >>

That's a war face: Caswell attempts to look brave after a grade one exhibition of cowardice on the exercise area



"People have been injured on these exercises," one of the marshals had warned me after the safety briefing for this simulated demonstration, set up to hone the skills of Sandhurst cadets. "There have been cases where teeth have been lost – safety is a prime concern but we need to make sure the training is as realistic as possible."

He wasn't lying either. This is unpleasantly realistic and everything is a blur, a cacophony of noise erupting around me. "Seriously injured" – the potential has taken on a new reality. I'm instinctively ducking as blank baton gun rounds are fired. My breathing is ragged, and when I eventually have the courage to look over my shoulder to see what is happening on the front line, my heart sinks when it becomes apparent that the soldiers are still relentlessly advancing towards us.

A whistle sounds – the cue for a petrol bomber – and the action temporarily pauses as a wall of

fire explodes in front of the shields. One of the soldiers, his boots ablaze, frantically stamps his feet to put out the flames.

The raging crowd let out a huge collective cheer before the next wave of bombardment begins.

I'm spurred on by this. "Hit them hard," someone screams, and gathering an armful of spuds, I start launching them towards the troops, feeling a deep satisfaction as I watch one vegetable ricochet off a visor, leaving a messy smear. The soldiers are stunned. The rioters manage to push them back and are holding their ground.

Encouraged by our success I move back into the throng to let off a few close-range missiles but the sudden onset of courage does not last long. A couple of unexpected loud bangs send me

scuttling back again. I'm the complete opposite of the man who is currently being told off by a marshal for his over-zealousness.

Another whistle, and there is another whoosh of flames and the sound of boots crunching over broken glass. The air reverberates with clattering as the soldiers pound their batons against their shields to pump themselves up, Zulu style. It's intimidating and grates on nerves already raw. I'm now relying on my legs to do the work more than my

throwing arm, struggling to keep my footing amid the debris.

We have been fighting for the last 40 minutes and in that time the troops have advanced less than 100 metres through the melee. But I'm concerned about the upcoming bend in the street. There is the potential for the soldiers to chase us

'Fear and anger are entirely real. There have been cases where teeth have been lost'

Main picture, University of hard knocks: *Soldier* News Editor Cliff Caswell lays into the shield wall as the crowd incurs the collective wrath of Sandhurst's finest

Right, Streetfighter on film: Rioters take the battle to would-be officers as urban warfare becomes the order of the day

FAILED
ARMY 1 SOLDIER 0

round and break up the spud throwers. Despite being an amateur military strategist my prediction comes true with a remarkable ferocity. All hell breaks loose, a man with a baton is after me and I'm hacking it up a steep bank, only returning to the fold when I'm told to get back on the exercise area by a marshal.

Despite being briefly dispersed, our rioter-generals do a great job in regrouping our throng and a wheelbarrow full of more spud ammo has just arrived. I'm back in business, engulfed in smoke and smashing the enemy lines.

It comes as something of a relief, however, to realise that the troops, outnumbered two-to-one, have done their job in securing a cordon to carry out a search op. Despite the fact that we can still hit back, their objective is complete. The British commander steps out to try to negotiate a peaceful conclusion.

Personally, I'm very happy with his proposals,

and am dismayed when some hardcore rioters start calling for more trouble. I'm exhausted, and further action against this human wall will only enhance my chances of getting a beating with a blunt instrument.

But thankfully our leaders see sense, compromise is reached by negotiation, and we're told to disperse. I breathe a sigh of relief, thank God I am still in one piece and vow never again to fool around with heavily-armoured British soldiers.

Yet despite suffering the onset of an attack of nervous indigestion, stinking of petrol and caked in grime, this experience has also been a sobering display of the remarkable qualities of these young officer cadets. Even though they are not the finished article, they have shown bravery, leadership and, crucially, restraint in the face of a very real beating. And that, unlike my cowardice, has to be admired. ■



Glamourflage

Soldier speaks to a model not afraid to break a few nails

Interview: Heidi Mines
Picture: Steve Neaves

IT'S not hard to see why glamour model Peta Todd is a popular choice when it comes to posters covering bedroom walls across the UK. And in the past year the beautiful, curvaceous and successful Page Three girl has won an army of new admirers within the British ranks.

The 21-year-old has earned the respect of the military by jumping with the Red Devils, completing a 400-mile bike ride to France and attempting P-Company – The Parachute Regiment's notorious selection process.

"I have never been so nervous," said the sultry stunner, recalling her experience with the Paras.

"But I'd promised the lads at Headley Court I'd do it and I knew if I backed out I would never hear the end of it."

Inspired after a visit to the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre in Surrey, where she spent time talking to injured soldiers, the natural beauty volunteered her services to help raise money for Army charities.

The Essex-born model, whose grandfather served in the Royal Navy, soon became an ambassador for Help for Heroes with her modest attitude and keenness to get stuck in.

"One of my proudest moments to date was being asked to be the Help for Heroes pin-up because I take my role to raise public awareness of the charity very seriously.

"Before I became involved I was quite unaware of Help for Heroes and the military as a whole so this has been

really quite an eye-opener for me."

Anybody thinking that Peta simply turns up to events to have her photo taken would be sorely mistaken as the glamour model, who admires, among others, Katie Price and Melinda Messenger, is not afraid to get her hands dirty.

Speaking exclusively to *Soldier*, she explained her stubborn nature pulled her through the P-Company ten-mile speed march, which she completed just inside the designated time ignoring repeated offers to get a lift on the support wagon.

However, that is not to say that *The Sun* model has found her association with the Army easy.

Peta cited the Battlefield Bike Ride, a 400-mile cycle, as a real challenge and when she was presented with a bike on the day of the event, the magnitude of the mileage began to sink in.

But her panic soon disappeared after she was adopted by the Headley Court team who spurred her on, awarding her the nickname "face ache" due to her anxious grimaces.

"There were times when I was a real girl and just couldn't face another hill, but one of the lads told me to just steer and pushed me up to the top, even though he was riding his own bike.

"I was really made to feel like one of the lads, they even made me join in on the group punishments.

"If I fell behind I would have to wear the 'pants of purgatory' or the 'wig of

shame' on my head just like everyone else," the model added.

"Sometimes I would complain that my legs were aching to the others and then I would remember that I was saying this to people who were amputees and it made me think how remarkable they really were."

Peta began modelling after being spotted by a talent scout who suggested she try out for Page Three and she shot to fame soon after aged just 18.

Four years later and her career has gone from strength-to-strength with a regular slot on *Talk Sport*, her own calendar and modelling jobs across the globe.

Despite, by her own admission, being "a bit girly", Peta is hoping to visit troops in Afghanistan in the near future and also plans to try her hand at bobsleigh with the Army team.

However, the beautiful brunette was keen to tell *Soldier* that she will always have time for the military and Help for Heroes, explaining that she has made good friends during her fund-raising.

"I'll never forget how kind the Headley Court lads were to me. One day I completed a charity event course three hours after them and finished in a real mood and they were shouting 'chin up face ache'.

"They would never let me give up – this is from people recovering from horrendous injuries.

"And that is why I am so determined to keep raising the profile of such a great cause." ■

'I was really made to feel like one of the lads, they even made me join in on the group punishments'



Far left, Para power: Glamour model Peta Todd takes a break from P-Company's infamous stretcher race and, left, shares the load with her fellow recruits Pictures: Paul Kingston

Right, Beautiful brunette: Peta Todd as featured in her 2009 calendar, which is available from www.globalcalendars.co.uk



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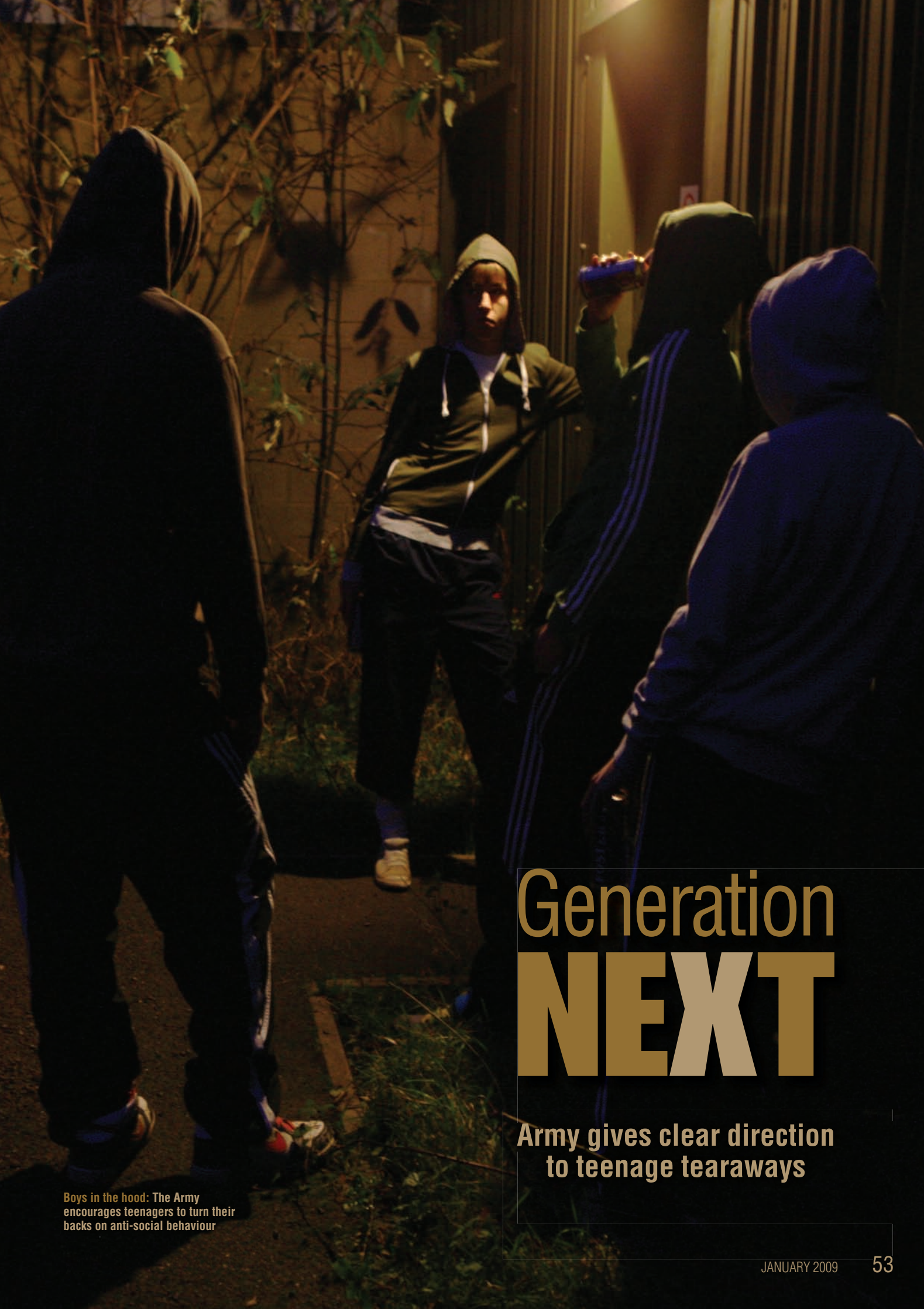
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From operational theatres
Paradigm Services *201



Boys in the hood: The Army encourages teenagers to turn their backs on anti-social behaviour

Generation **NEXT**

**Army gives clear direction
to teenage tearaways**

Report: Heidi Mines
Pictures: Graeme Main

HEADLINES of young lives lost to knife and gun crime have become a depressingly regular feature on Britain's news bulletins.

Communities have been torn apart as children, some of them barely into their teenage years, have fallen victim to the rising levels of violence.

Aside from the heartache for families, the spate of brutal attacks has also tarnished the reputation of the nation's inner-city youth and led to calls for tougher penalties or even the reintroduction of National Service.

While such a step is unlikely, the use of the military to coax young boys and girls back onto the straight and narrow is a tactic already being deployed by Huw Lewis's Military Preparation College (MPC) scheme.

Since opening the doors of MPC Cardiff in 1999, the former Royal Welch Fusilier has founded five more centres where young people from difficult backgrounds and with incomplete educations are primed for entry into Phase One training.

Run by a mix of ex-Service personnel and serving soldiers, the centres – including the newest one in Portsmouth, which opened in 2007 – are already churning out dedicated young citizens who are making their mark in the Armed Forces.

"We have ex-drug addicts, kids who were formerly homeless and those from deprived areas. But despite their backgrounds the boys and girls have great military potential," said Tony Keefe, a full-time instructor at the college.

"On our presentation nights at the end of the course, parents thank us for giving them back a different child."

Acting as a stepping-stone, the college instils the basic skills needed to get young people fit, confident and strong enough

to take on Phase One training across the Services. The only requirements for the rolling 22-week course are effort and respect.

Speaking to *Soldier* at the Portsmouth Territorial Army Centre, where the college is based, Keefe explained that he focuses on mentoring the students rather than bawling at them.

"The girls and lads complain if they are not disciplined. They want to train outdoors and do drill every morning," he said.

Despite the challenges facing MPC staff in transforming youngsters from disruptive to disciplined, nearly three-quarters of all students who enrol on the course end up in the Armed Forces and often return to the college proudly wearing their military uniforms.

One successful graduate, Pte Josh Drane, (1 PWRR) told *Soldier* that the MPC's help had been the catalyst in him breaking away from his troubled past.

The 20-year-old Hampshire resident was expelled from school and was a familiar face with the local police before signing up for the course.

"I have to say that if it wasn't for the college and careers office I would not have got into the Army and achieved what I have so far," said Pte Drane.

"I was turned down by the Armed

Forces Careers Office on my first application to become a soldier due to my past, but they suggested I approach the college.

"I worked really hard on all areas including fitness and in the end I thought the exercise regime was harder at the college than it was during basic training."

Although not every youth that passes through MTC's doors will

go on to become a Serviceman or woman, the skills taught at the colleges are invaluable assets in a wide range of careers.

And for every student who manages to overcome seemingly impossible odds to get themselves onto the straight and narrow, there is further proof that Britain's much-maligned next generation do not deserve their bad reputation. ■

'If it wasn't for the college and careers office I would not have got into the Army'





● For more information about military preparation colleges, visit www.militarypreparationcollege.co.uk



Top, No slacking: MPC's courses encourage impeccable levels of fitness

Push up, push on: Potential soldiers always take their circuit classes outside

Ben Hardy, 19, from Portsmouth

I had a bad past and I know that I went down the wrong roads. I was known to the police and arrested on occasions and it got to the stage where I was told the next thing I did I was going to prison. At the time I had no job but now I have better things to do and the college has helped me to achieve my goals. Before I was only confident with a drink and now I don't need alcohol to feel good.



Karl Clark, 17, from Gosport

I grew up with the Army as my father was in the Royal Artillery and now I want to join the RLC as an air dispatcher. I know that there is a low pass rate for this role but I am determined to put in a huge effort. The discipline here helps a lot, as it gets you ready for life in the Forces. I have a lot more pride in myself now.



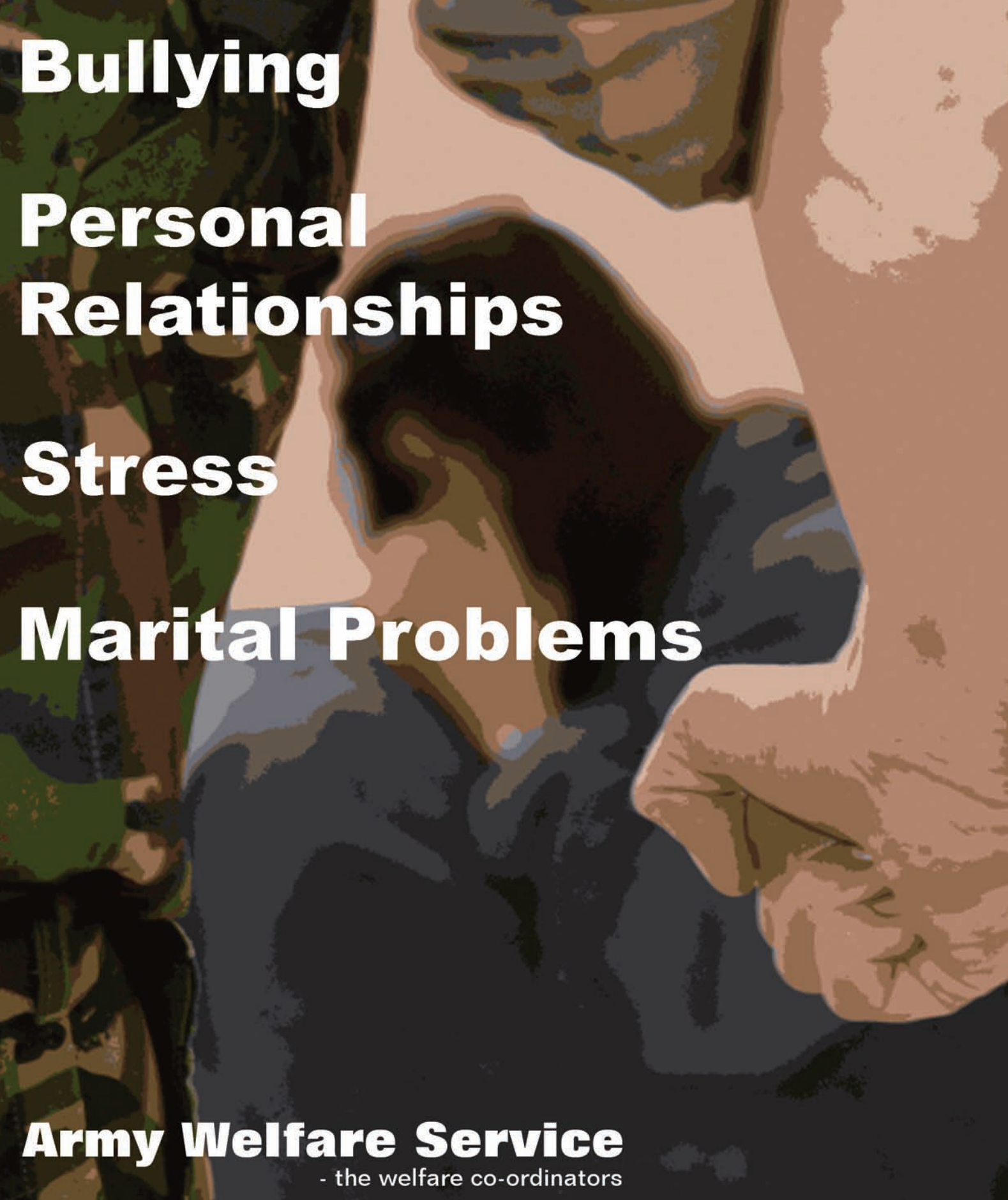
Adam Miller, 19, from Portsmouth

I had always thought about joining the Army but I mucked up my schooling. I wanted to do something that would make my family proud. I was expelled and I was always in trouble, involved in fighting and drugs but I am over all that now. I really feel that I have turned my life around as I'm much more confident and fitter than I have ever been. I know that basic training will be hard but I have my heart set on joining the Army and now I have set my mind to it I am determined to succeed.



Making good:
A PWR soldier teaches field craft skills to new recruits





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My beef with PAYD? Having to break bread with officers

I KNOW many letters have been written about regimental restaurants over the past few months, but I would like to offer my take on Pay As You Dine (PAYD).

Personally, I have no complaints about the standard of the food, which I feel hasn't changed that much, but I do take exception to PAYD facilities being open to all ranks.

As a corporal based at Princess Royal Barracks in Gutersloh, Germany, I'm becoming increasingly frustrated at having to queue behind officers and SNCOs (not to mention their families) for my food.

When a soldier or JNCO walks into the cookhouse they should be able to relax in the knowledge that there are no superiors sitting over their shoulders listening to the gripes which we all have now and then.

There is a coffee shop adjacent to the cookhouse which sells baguettes, sandwiches and cakes, and has a family-friendly seating area. Why can't officers and SNCOs use this facility instead?

I fully understand the reasoning behind PAYD as I've sat in on many messing meetings, but why should we share our junior ranks' cookhouse with personnel who can eat in their own messes? I'm sure the senior ranks would have a problem if I tried to eat in their mess.

PRIZE LETTER . . .

Overall, I think PAYD is a welcome change, but the Army should introduce segregation at meal times. — **Name and address supplied.**

Brig Mike Griffiths, DPS(A), responds: Much thought was given at a very high level to the policy for mixing ranks in shared facilities. While policy is that the three-mess system is to be maintained, more leeway has been allowed with the junior ranks' restaurant and its equivalents in our other contractors' sites.

There are units in which all ranks positively welcome the opportunity to dine in shared facilities with friends and serving relatives who would otherwise be separated on a mess/rank basis. This arrangement is said to promote a much appreciated "family" atmosphere.

However, the policy advice to COs is that beyond a certain time in the day, the Junior Ranks' Club is not to be used by



SNCOs or officers, as it is recognised that soldiers do need their own space.

I'm sure you appreciate the major improvements that Naafi has made to the catering, retail and leisure facilities. To fund this, the company needs to develop its business and opening up these facilities is one way of doing this. The other benefit is the share of the profits that comes back to units as welfare funds that, among other things, subsidise our sporting and adventurous training activities.

There has been no great groundswell to indicate general dissatisfaction with the current policy, but we will continue to monitor the feedback that we receive.

Keep Kingston upon Thames tidy

THIS is the first time that I have had cause to write to *Soldier* in nearly 12 years of Army service.

I was posted into a job based in Feltham, near Hounslow. Of the quarters available, my new wife and I chose The Keep in Kingston upon Thames.

Our house is a three-bedroom maisonette which has its own garage and driveway. For our first quarter we are very happy with the house and the way in which any problems have been addressed by Modern Housing Solutions (MHS).

However, my complaint concerns the rapidly deteriorating condition of the estate itself. Since the estate manager left, the place has turned into a council tip that I'm ashamed to bring my family and friends to.

There are bins overflowing in the

communal areas, countless household appliances such as fridges and microwaves dumped outside houses and lots of broken glass and discarded beer cans.

The place is an absolute disgrace. It's not my rubbish, but I still have to look at it every day.

My neighbours and I sweep our paths and areas every week and work together to keep our space clean, but I feel something should be done by the Army to tidy up this housing estate.

There are some high ranking foreign officers who live here as well as long serving officers and SNCOs.

We deserve a nice clean housing estate to live on and not somewhere that resembles downtown Pristina. — **Sgt D Clough, 4 Cadet Training Team.**

Nicki Sly, Defence Estates, RAF Brampton, replies: There is now a community action group in Kingston, which has been meeting regularly for a year. The representation on this group includes MHS, Defence Estates, Metropolitan Police, Royal Kingston Borough Council, the Army Families Federation and estate residents.

Issues already addressed include the drawing up of a rota to monitor the pedestrian gate which provides access to the estate. This has significantly reduced the amount of graffiti and no further crimes have been reported since the locking of the gate came into effect.

Every effort, in conjunction with the grounds maintenance contractor, is being made to improve the appearance of The Keep estate.

Holiday headache cures

LIKE many others currently serving on operations, I have not managed to take my full annual leave entitlement.

Commanding officers have the authority to allow soldiers to “commute” leave to the following leave period but in this extremely busy time the leave still goes untaken.

Units are making an effort to ensure soldiers get their entitlement if you stay on that unit’s strength. However, corps soldiers tend to be posted to a new unit after an operational tour and often join during a different training cycle. This makes it almost impossible to take any extra leave and having to carry the burden of granting soldiers time off for previously untaken leave is unfair on the new unit.

Losing leave entitlement due to operational commitments severely affects morale and I believe there are two relatively easy options to alleviate this.

Firstly, soldiers do not start at their new unit until all “carried over” leave is taken. Individuals would then begin their new job

afresh and line managers could confidently utilise the soldier immediately.

Alternatively, JPA could be used as a tool to collate all untaken leave. The system currently calculates Longer Separation Allowance days, so why not unused leave? These days could then be added onto the resettlement period when a soldier decides to leave the Army.

If such a system was put in place and soldiers knew that, somewhere along the line, they would get their lost entitlement back, it would make the pill of missing out on leave a lot easier to swallow. – [Name and address supplied](#).

Brig Mike Griffiths, DPS(A), writes: You are correct that the current operational tempo makes it very difficult for individuals and units to find time to take all of their annual leave allowance. The chain of command is very aware of this and is doing its best to manage the situation. The Armed Forces Pay Review Body also takes it into account

when setting the X-factor (14 per cent), which is added to our pay to compensate for such shortcomings.

With regards to your suggestions, the first is shortly to be implemented. From April 2009, Service personnel will be entitled to 38 days leave. This is not an increase but a fairer way of calculating leave. The apparent extra eight days comes from the inclusion of public holidays, which those on operations often used to miss out on. Of the 38, 28 will be a right (as opposed to a privilege), and the remaining ten will be a privilege.

Units will be required to give soldiers any leave due at the end of each posting before they move to their new units.

Your second suggestion is not new. However the purpose of leave is to allow Service personnel time away from duty and so return to work refreshed. To allow it to be accumulated and added to terminal leave at the end of service defeats the object.

Captive customer con?

I’m currently serving at Camp Souter in Kabul, Afghanistan and am shocked at the price of goods in the Eefi (Naafi) here.

Working on an exchange rate of two dollars to the pound, four Gillette Fusion [razor] blades will cost you £7.50, a Lynx deodorant £2.40 and an 80G Apple iPod £172. I picked up the same iPod for less before deploying even though goods bought overseas are supposed to be tax-free.

The prices in the canteen are also constantly changing. If the soldiers buy a lot of one thing, the prices go up, and if they don’t, the prices fall. When I asked a manager why this was, I was told if I didn’t like it I could go elsewhere. Where exactly?

These organisations should not get away with exploiting what can only be described as a captive market. – [A concerned soldier](#).

Debbie Fazackerley, Naafi, responds: Toiletry prices went up due to a significant rise in costs. We absorbed these increases for as long as possible, but eventually were left with no alternative than to amend our prices accordingly. However, we have recently restructured our overseas services team, and are confident that we will be able to offer improved products and promotions.

The prices of iPods have now been lowered to keep us more in line with our competitors, and the latest range will be sold at the equivalent of the UK recommended retail price.

Our prices should be consistent across



“I shouldn’t say this, but if you go to my uncle Ali’s shop the same iPod is much cheaper.”

theatres. We use, where possible, the same pricing structure as Naafi Germany so that our pricing mechanism is both transparent and consistent. There have been examples where this is not the case, and action has been taken to resolve this.

Naafi operates to generate enough profit to cover costs, reinvest in facilities and return a welfare payment to the military. Unfortunately, we don’t benefit from government subsidies or enjoy the purchasing economies of scale which you experience with major UK retailers.

PS...

IS the Army going to allow personnel to reconsider their choice of Armed Forces Pension Scheme (AFPS)?

When I made my selection I was on a 22-year career and due to leave the Army in October 2009 and therefore my decision was influenced accordingly. I chose the old scheme as it was better suited to my circumstances at that time. However, since then I’ve been offered a 30-year career under Versatile Engagement.

Under my longer terms of service, I believe I’d now be better off with the new pension scheme and would like to reconsider. I feel that I was misled, albeit not deliberately, at the time of making my pension decision. – WO1 D Smith, BFPO 11.

Brig Mike Griffiths, DPS(A), replies: The Offer to Transfer (OTT) to AFPS 05 was a once-only opportunity, a fact which was spelt out in the OTT booklet and other communications.

There are only two circumstances where individuals may seek to revisit their decision – where the personal benefits statement was incorrect (which led to a decision being made on a false basis), or where an individual was made redundant before April 2008. There have been several requests like yours to revisit an OTT decision due to promotion or extension of service – none of these appeals have been upheld.

Seeing red over book deal

As a soldier who has completed 26 years' colour service, four of which are on the Long Serving List, imagine how I feel to be told that I will not be issued a Red Book (AFB 108) for my blemish-free career.

Instead I will receive an A4-sheet of printer paper produced by my unit admin office and embellished with a unit stamp.

What will any future employer think when I produce this as documentary evidence of my time in the Army?

I've seen a lot of changes over the past 26 years but this is disgraceful. Is the MoD so cash-strapped that it has to cut costs to this extent or is it because it thinks so little of the time and effort invested by today's soldiers? – **WO2 M Crowther.**

Maj Matthew Maynard, APC, responds:

Red Books have not been issued since 2007, phased out in readiness for JPA, and in fairness we should not be overly nostalgic for their presentational advantages – they were only red plastic folders, nothing more.

Today's Forces leavers receive three stages of documentation, which are driven by JPA processes.

The first is a Letter of Conduct that replaces the old 108 testimonial. It is no longer issued on a blue form, but



"I don't have time to read all this! What happened to those nice little red books we got in my day?"

should be given to the individual on unit headed paper and signed by the CO. The format is similar to the 108, and the letter should describe the theatres the soldier

served in, their qualifications, skills and personality (specifying their applicability to civilian employment) and a comment on their employability.

If this does not seem to be forthcoming, an individual should chase their unit admin staff to produce it – once they have been discharged it becomes increasingly difficult to produce.

The second stage is a leavers pack generated by the Service Personnel and Veterans Agency, which should arrive with the individual about six months prior to their departure. This includes practical information on medical, terminal leave, travel, resettlement, the discharge process, jobs and housing, access to the Reserves and pay and pensions.

Finally, individuals should receive a record of service just before their discharge. This is a comprehensive (although admittedly functional) set of documents that detail a soldier's career, promotion history and military qualifications and competences.

A combination of all or any of the documents mentioned should be more than adequate as a reference.

Presentational discharge or retirement certificates have traditionally been the preserve of individual regiments.

Meal tickets gave me band camp blues

IN line with London District instructions, the Royal Military School of Music (RMSM) implemented Pay As You Dine (PAYD) in April 2008.

However Sodexo did not roll-out PAYD at RMSM until September 1, 2008. Consequently, to eat at RMSM, visiting units were requested to provide projected numbers for feeding and to purchase meal tickets for the week upon their arrival.

My band visited RMSM for two weeks in May 2008 and again in July for a summer concert. I purchased meal tickets in May and at the end of the two weeks I had some left over which I kept hold of in the

knowledge that I would soon be returning. Unfortunately I was later informed that these meal tickets were only valid for one month and could not be refunded or exchanged for valid vouchers.

I object to having to guess what meals I was going to eat over the course of a week on a Monday morning, without knowing what would be on the menu each day. How can I go about reclaiming the cost of the tickets I didn't use? – **Cpl A Beaumont, The King's Division Band.**

Brig Mike Griffiths, DPS(A), writes: The casual meal tickets purchased between

May and September 2008 only had a validity of one calendar month.

This was made clear to the individual at the time of purchase and was reinforced by the Band Sergeant Major during new arrivals' briefings.

Some visiting personnel purchased casual meal tickets on a daily basis and others like Cpl Beaumont chose to buy them on a weekly basis.

There was a system for refund in place; it is regrettable that the soldier did not avail himself of this facility and return his unused casual meal tickets for refund prior to his departure from RMSM.

Pants uniform? Get Calvin on the case

AS a former soldier who is now working for the Army, I am writing in support of Mr R Nixon (*Talkback*, December), who expressed his dismay at the trend of troops parading in combat uniforms.

The No2 Dress worn by soldiers today is exactly the same kit that I was issued with more than 40 years ago and is very outdated. It never was the most stylish

mode of dress, but I suppose it was better than battle dress.

Gone are the days when a commanding officer comes into the camp and everyone is immediately aware of their presence. When in combats, officers and soldiers all look alike – not very smart.

By its nature and purpose, the combat kit is a scruffy form of dress and should

certainly not be for wearing in public.

I repeatedly hear that Service personnel are being told that they should be seen in public, but when is the British Army going to get a "walking out" uniform that every soldier can be proud to be seen in?

Perhaps the likes of Calvin Klein could get involved in designing something suitable. – **Mr John Worrall, Arborfield.**

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WHEN I signed up to serve in 1995 I distinctly remember being reassured by the recruiter that the Army catered for vegetarians.

Despite this assertion I spent the first few years of my military career on the hunt for the lesser-spotted veggie ration pack, which I eventually bagged in 1998 and found to be damn tasty. However, while on operations or exercises I have come to expect little more than just food as fuel.

So imagine my delight to discover the quality of the veggie option being served up at Forward Operating Base (FOB) Delhi in Afghanistan. Considering what the chefs have to work with, the food is outstanding. I've eaten in some of the best (and worst) vegetarian restaurants in my 21 years as a non-meat eater and can honestly say that I'd happily revisit this eatery if it were on civvy street. My thanks go to Sgt Blades and his team at FOB Delhi.

So there you go, not all vegetarians moan – did you hear that Morrissey? – SSgt Angus Hodge, FOB Delhi, Op Herrick.



"I think Sir's got the only veggie pack . . . and as a compulsive carnivore he can't stand them."

PS . . .

WITH reference to those complaining about not having any medals and no visible recognition of their service, I wish to clarify a few things.

Firstly, medals are awarded for taking part in military campaigns, often in adverse and dangerous conditions, or for acts of gallantry. To suggest that someone deserves a medal for serving in the British Army of the Rhine (may I suggest the "Ski Lodge Cross") demeans those who have or continue to risk their lives on ops.

Secondly, medals don't make the person – no ex-soldier should feel embarrassed about having nothing on their chest. Having worn the uniform and served your country well means much more.

Finally, wearing your regimental headdress or blazer every Remembrance Day and being able to remember those who were not fortunate enough to survive is an honour in its own right. – WO2 M J Dobner, 2 RTR, Bovington.

Will law change cost us our pension payouts?

I AM writing to query the availability of pensions in their entirety after the UK law changes on April 6, 2010.

The new legislation will not allow individuals access to their pension until they are 55 years of age. Is this applicable to the Armed Forces?

And if so, how does it affect individuals who leave after 22 years' service and officers, particularly late entry officers, who are forced or opt to retire at 50? – Name and address supplied.

Brig Mike Griffiths, DPS(A), replies: The change to the age when a pension may be drawn was part of the provisions of the 2004 Finance Act.

Armed Forces Pension Scheme (AFPS) 75 was already a closed scheme when the provisions of the Act came into force on April 6, 2006 and because of this members are protected from the effects of it with respect to access to an Immediate Pension (IP) if they retire early.

When AFPS 05 was designed it was done

so in the knowledge of the forthcoming changes to the law, and as a result the Early Departure Payment (EDP) scheme was developed in place of IP.

EDP is defined in part as a retention incentive to draw people through to the age of 40 (18 years' service) and as compensation for not having a career through to 55. It is enshrined in a statutory instrument entirely separate from the pension scheme rules and is also not affected by the 2004 Act.

PS . . .

HAVING decided to settle in Germany, I bought a property and opted to serve my last posting in the UK unaccompanied. On reaching my unit I was told that I wasn't entitled to the over-37 package because my house was not in the UK. After more than 60 years of having a Field Army based in Germany, this is a blinkered ruling which needs to be addressed. – WO1 Mark Clarkson, SEAE Arborfield.

Brig Mike Griffiths, DPS(A), writes: The advice given to you is correct. It was a conscious decision that, as members of a UK-based Army, entitlement to this provision is only for those who settle their immediate family at a selected place of residence in the UK and then serve voluntarily unaccompanied at their duty station, which could be anywhere across the globe.

Afghan award ambiguity

I'D be grateful if someone could clarify the criteria for the award of the Operational Service Medal (OSM) Afghanistan.

My understanding is that on completion of a minimum of 30-days' service you are awarded both the OSM and a Non Article 5 Nato medal.

Does this 30-day period have to be continuous or can it be accumulated?

My current unit deploys to Afghanistan three to four times a year on various taskings and serves at many different locations across the country. In a 12-month period it is likely that we have accumulated somewhere around 60 days in theatre although our deployments are only two to three weeks in length.

I understand that there are soon to be changes made to the qualifying criteria. What are they and are my colleagues and I entitled to either of the Afghanistan medals? – Name and address supplied.

Lt Col (Retd) Peter Lockyer, SO1 Medal Office, responds: There is no confusion over the eligibility criteria for either the OSM Afghanistan or the Non Article 5 Nato medal Isaf operation in Afghanistan.

For the former, all relevant details can be obtained from JSP 761, Chapter 8, Annex A.

In principle, to qualify for the OSM requires 30 continuous days' service under the command of the UK Joint Task Force commander in the Joint Operational Area, and being within a specific location on a designated operation.

During the early days of deployment there were slight differences to this, which are detailed in JSP 761.

For the latter, Nato rules are somewhat relaxed and the qualifying period is 30-days' continuous or accumulated service from June 1, 2003. There are no plans to change the award criteria.

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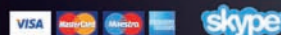
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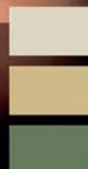
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Lack of heat on 'sunshine' tour

THREE months ago the gas heating and hot water system in my quarter failed and, due to a lack of money, has not been repaired under the infrastructure support contract in Cyprus.

As I have an immersion heater, I am told the boiler will never be fixed and that I should use my immersion to provide heating for the next two years.

However, even though I am left without central heating, I am still expected to pay the top rate of rent.

If the tenants renting my house in the UK had the same problem I would have to replace the heating system immediately, regardless of my financial state. Why does the military not afford my family the same basic right?

While I'm currently deployed in Afghanistan, my wife has to face the winter months without heating and a reliable source of hot water. Why doesn't the military covenant extend to my family? – **WO2 Lingham, 2 PWRR.**



"Another signal from Cyprus, Lingham . . . your wife has been chopping up furniture for the fire again. Tell her it's got to stop!"

Col Iain Wright, Overseas Division, Defence Estates, replies: The infrastructure support contract in Cyprus can deliver any repair work for which funding is available. However, finances

are limited and for that reason we need a robust system of prioritisation to ensure that monies are not expended inappropriately – for instance on buildings which may have limited future life.

These constraints, however, should not have applied to the repair of your heating system, which has been delayed as an unintended consequence of this prioritisation policy.

I entirely agree that the MoD should maintain the services for which you pay through your rent and rightly expect.

Permanent Joint Housing Association and HQ British Forces Cyprus are arranging funding for repair of your heating system and for any others who may have been similarly affected.

The headquarters may also be able to assist if you are able to demonstrate that you have incurred excessive costs through using the electric immersion to provide heating. You should contact S02 Accommodation Services for advice.

Old dog still up to old tricks

HAVING read the article on Reserve Forces retention, "Stepping up the reservist power" (November), I was dismayed that the issue of age was not mentioned.

I served in the Royal Regiment of Artillery for six years before departing the ranks in 1989 as a lance bombardier. On leaving the Army I started a family, began a career as a police officer and, over the past 18 years, have gained many skills and qualifications.

I applied to join the Territorial Army when I was 33, but was told that I could not do so because I was in the police force. This ruling was lifted two years ago, but I'm now 41 and considered to be too old for service by the Army.

I have maintained my fitness to a very high standard and have academically progressed since leaving the Army, so why

is it that I am unable to fulfil a role in the TA? I can assure you that, contrary to the Army's belief, there is plenty of life left in this "old dog".

Surely if there is a problem with the retention of Reserve Forces, it's time to abolish the upper age limit in a bid to widen the net. – **Name and address supplied.**

Maj Derek Saunders, S02 Personnel Services TA, responds: The TA offers ex-Regular soldiers the chance to work with like-minded people while retaining a link to their previous service.

The upper recruiting age is now 43 for those soldiers who have completed their full career, and in certain circumstances this is flexible. In short, any TA unit would consider the writer.

PS . . .

MORE than two years after being promoted, I've just received my parchment warrant for reaching the rank of WO2 and have to confess to feeling let down.

Not only has it taken so long to receive, but it also shows the wrong regiment – The Green Howards rather than The Yorkshire Regiment.

The quality of the parchment itself, a photocopy, is rubbish. I know money is tight but after 20 years of service I think I deserve something a little better, especially as I'm very proud of my promotion and wanted to display my warrant. Having received it, I'm not sure it's worth the cost of getting it framed. – **WO2 Benson, DSM JOTD.**

PS . . .

WHILE I don't doubt that those in the Army Welfare Service work hard and provide a valuable service, I believe the welfare worker who had a gripe about receiving the "grand total of £88" in disturbance allowance, "Disturbing development" (October), should consider those in other trades.

Unlike those serving in Iraq and Afghanistan, Army welfare workers benefit from Service Families Accommodation (even if single), get to wear civilian clothing and don't deploy on ops. – **Name and address supplied.**

Brits' close shave with Hitler?

I ENJOYED your article on the role of the Territorial Army during the First World War, "A Family Affair" (November), but spotted an error.

The feature included a photograph captioned "men of the Royal Engineers working on a tunnel under German lines".

I've no doubt that the men in question are beneath "enemy" lines as they are not only wearing German uniforms, but are from the 16th Bavarian Reserve Battalion, and the man in the centre of the picture is LCpl Adolf Hitler. – **SSgt Jim Hanley, Chicksands.**

The editor writes: While the 'tache worn



by the soldier in question is undoubtedly Fuhrer-like in appearance, we beg to differ. Our source, the Imperial War Museum, tells us otherwise.

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Will they be at home for long?

EVERYONE I have spoken to has welcomed the announcement that our troops will begin withdrawing from Iraq in the spring, subject to successful elections this month.

And while this is undoubtedly good news, it is just a shame that the announcement was not swiftly followed by a statement clarifying where those troops training for Op Telic 14 could expect to go instead.

While the Chief of the Defence Staff, ACM Sir Jock Stirrup, has been quoted as saying that the drawdown should not lead to soldiers being transferred directly to Afghanistan, and *The Sun* reported that "Top brass insist that they will not use the pull-out to switch more soldiers to fighting the Taliban", the picture remains somewhat unclear.

The Foreign Secretary's wavering stance on the subject has not helped. Over the last few months David Miliband has gone from insisting that "as the second-largest contributor of troops in Afghanistan, the first thing we say is that we do not want to bear an unfair share of the burden," to the rather less emphatic "if there are requests for help . . . we will look at them hard".

Mr Miliband even went so far as to refuse

to deny reports that an additional 2,000 British troops would be sent to Afghanistan this year.

This is not a game where you can hedge your bets, tell nobody the full truth and make some last-minute decisions depending on what is grabbing the headlines at the time. These are people's lives.

The headlines declaring troop withdrawals mean very little to the normal Army family who, if wise, have long ago learnt not to take too much notice.

However, I would hate for Joe Public to think this "news" will improve the overstretch constantly felt by our soldiers and their families.

The sooner that Messrs Miliband, Hutton or Brown stand up and clarify what will happen to those troops no longer going to Iraq, the sooner Army families can plan their year.

If we expect politicians to tell the truth, shouldn't our soldiers return the compliment to both them and their senior officers?

There seems to be an unwritten

rule among soldiers never to share their gripes and groans with the top brass and instead tell them what they perceive the officer wants to hear.

But in fairness to senior officers, most that I come across want to hear the truth – they certainly do from me.

If Army spouses learn one thing during the first years of marriage it is that this first rule of smiling brightly and keeping shtum also applies to them.

A friend of mine recently told me about a wife she met socially, who promptly unloaded about how unhappy

she was; and how she felt let down by the Army for sending him on almost back-to-back tours.

The next time the two met the wife apologised profusely for having unburdened herself. But why should she apologise?

Without complaining nothing will ever change. No-one can fix something they don't know is broken and organisations like ours [Army Families Federation] can't apply pressure or influence policy without evidence that something isn't right.

PS – According to a recent study by DEFRA, the amount of British produce being served to military personnel has risen from 43 to 59 per cent, a very positive move that chimes with my green leanings (green as in environmental not Army). But I can't help but wonder where the other 41 per cent comes from. I suspect that thanks to PAYD, checking the back of a Pot Noodle container might provide the answer. ■



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- Look out for the order of your payments. Most card providers put your monthly payment towards repaying transferred balances before any purchases and cash withdrawals, accruing interest at the highest rate.

● Look at how you use your credit card. If you don't spend on it but have a large debt consider zero per cent balance transfer rates. When your deal runs out simply switch again.

● If you do spend on it find an interest-free offer on purchases and repay your debt within that period. If impossible, put a reminder on the calendar to move it over to another zero per cent deal when it ends.

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NO. 806

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TEN details have been changed on this shot from the *Soldier* picture library of Musn Abigail Davis playing during a concert at Kneller Hall.

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A photocopy is acceptable, but only one entry per person may be submitted. First correct entry drawn after the closing date will win £100; the second and third will receive £25 gift vouchers. The results will be announced in the February issue.

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November competition: First correct entry drawn at random and winner of the £100 prize was **Mr Michael Lidster**, Windsor. Runners-up **CSgt J Blackburn**, TA Centre, Workington, Cumbria and **Miss D Thomson**, WRVS, 2 MSQ Wellington Barracks, each win a £25 gift voucher.

The ten differences were: chrome bar on grille; numbers on blue pot lid; ring on finger; yellow packaging; red tube; union flag badge; black cable; stud on combat body armour webbing; rhino on badge; kit in mesh bag.



WITH Twiggy taking his bow on the pages of *Soldier* having been replaced by Kevan Jones as Veterans' Minister and with another outbreak of Ant and Dec-incited jungle warfare still fresh in the minds, selecting the winner of November's caption competition (picture below right) was something of a formality.

So congratulations to SSgt Marie McChesney (HQ 11 Signal Brigade), who wins a copy of Harry Sidebottom's *Fire in the East* for penning: "**Introducing the Army's brand new game show – I'm a civvy, get me out of here!**".

Other Derek detractors included Mr P Clarke of Wokingham, who suggested "**Yes I did get dressed in the dark, why do you ask?**" and Ian Goodwin-Reeves, 150 Recovery Company REME, who offered "**Trinny and Susannah told me that this outfit was so much more me**



Little did Kev know that the crudites were part of Op Carrot and Stick – the 13 Air Assault Support Regiment loggies had a special post-lunch beasting planned for the new Defence Minister.

WIN AN IPOD: Write your own caption for the photo above and send it to us by January 30. The best, in our opinion, will win an Army-branded iPod.

than issue DPM". Equally unimpressed with the former Defence Minister's choice of theatre attire were Angus McBain – "**Who let the SAS in?**"; Paderborn's Gordon Baxter – "**We told you not to put too much Vanish in the machine when you washed that shirt**"; and LCpl O'Brien (MPGS, RAF Linton-on-Ouse) – "**You could tell when R&R was due . . . Cpl Twiggy was always the first into his civvys**".



Picture: Cpl Rupert Freer RLC

Picture: LA Jannine B Hartmann

					
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Army Welfare Service: 01722 436569; www.army.mod.uk/soldierwelfare/supportagencies/aws
Army Families Federation: 01980 615525
British Limbless Ex-Service Men's Association: 0208 590 1124; www.blesma.org
Career Transition Partnership: 0207 766 8020
Children's Education Advisory Service: 01980 618244; enquiries.ceas@gtinet.gov.uk
Confidential support lines: UK 0800 731 4880; Germany 0800 1827 395; Cyprus 080 91065; Falklands #6111; from operational theatres Paradigm Services *201; from anywhere in the world (CSL operator will call back) 0044 1980 630854. Lines open 1030-2230 (UK) every day.
Ex-Services Mental Welfare Society: 01372 841600; www.combatstress.com
Family Escort Service: 0207 463 9249
Forces Pension Society: 0207 820 9988
Joint Service Housing Advice Office: 01722 436575
Medal Office: 94560 3600 or 0141 224 3600
Mutual Support (Multiple Sclerosis support group): 07962 023654; www.mutualsupport.org.uk
National Gulf Veterans' and Families' Association Office: (0900-1700); 24-hour helpline 0845 257 4853; www.ngvfa.org.uk
Regular Forces' Employment Association: 0121 2360058; www.rfea.org.uk
Royal British Legion: 0845 7725 725
RBL Industries Vocational Assessment Centre: 01622 795900; www.rbli.co.uk
St Dunstan's charity for blind ex-Servicemen and women: 0207 723 5021; www.st-dunstans.org.uk
South Atlantic Medal Association: 01495 227577
Services Cotswold Centre: 01225 810358
SSAFA Forces Help: 0207 403 8783; Western Europe 02161 472 3392
Service Personnel and Veterans Agency: 0800 169 2277 (from UK); 0044 1253 866043 (from overseas); Medical Assessment: 0800 169 5401
Victim Support: Germany 02161 472 2272; UK 0845 3030900; www.victimsupport.org
WRVS: 02920 739016, 02920 739016

DEFENCE DIARY

Until further notice: Helmand: The Soldiers' Story – 16 Air Assault Brigade exhibition. National Army Museum, London. Tel: 0207 730 0717.
Until March 2009: Stranger in the House, Imperial War Museum North, Manchester. Go to www.iwm.org.uk/north for details.
Until February 15, 2009: War and Medicine Exhibition at the Wellcome Collection, London. Go to www.wellcomecollection.org for details.
February – April 19, 2009: Women War Artists, Imperial War Museum North, Manchester. www.iwm.org.uk/north

The **WRAC** Association will be 90 years old in 2009. Did you ever wear an **ATS** or **WRAC** cap badge? Come and join us. Details from WRAC Association, AGC Centre, Worthy Down, Winchester SO21 2RG or by email at wracassociation@googlegmail.com

Where are you **Maj Kevin Hogan**, who in 1966 was stationed with the Brigade of Gurkhas in Dharan, Nepal and is possibly now working in the recruiting cell or as an OC Gurkha unit? Gregg Smith, who was based in eastern Nepal with the US Peace Corps, is trying to locate you. Email mgreggsmith@comcast.net

Maurice Rogers is trying to locate all **Junior Leaders Regiment RAC Intake (September 6, 1960)** for a 50th reunion in 2010. Email mauricejohn.rogers@ntlworld.com or call 01254 276128.

Anne-Kathrin Langer is trying to locate **Gwyn Howard Jenkins**, who was born in 1924/25 and lived in Wales. He was stationed in Bad Oeynhausen, Germany in March/April 1948 and was nicknamed "Toughie". He was known by my grandmother Lucia Langer. Contact Anne-Kathrin at Detmilderstr 66, 32545 Bad Oeynhausen, Germany or email alanger@uni-bielefeld.de

Where are you **Jack Walsh** of London, a former storeman of D Company, 2nd Bn East Surrey Regiment? He was demobbed from Lel Ballah, Palestine in 1947. Sam Seller is trying to find you. Contact 0207 940 7296 or 07919 050905 or email sam@trademarkgroup.co.uk

Two ladies are putting together a cookery book to raise funds for Help for Heroes and would like troops to send recipies of the meal that they miss the most when away from home. Send to Janette Cornish and Coral Moore, 4 Nevil Road, Wellington, Shropshire TF1 3DE.

Peter Cardwell is looking for a 1953 football photograph of **No 55 Training Regiment RA**, based in Tonfanau, North Wales. The football team won the Western Command Cup in 1953. **Winston Davies** was one of the players in the photograph. Does anyone have a copy? Contact Peter Cardwell, 6 Jenkins Crescent, Trimsaran, Nr Kidwelly, Carmarthenshire SA17 4DB.

COMPETITIONS

Hiyama: Gavin Exley, Essex. **Answer:** Japan.

Brother in Arms: Hell's Highway: Ms R Williams, BFPO 22; A Paling, Azimguur Bks, Colerne; P Munday, Norwich. **Answer:** 1944.

Hancock/Sony Blu-ray: Mrs S Robinson, Hull. **Runners-up:** Cpl N Tubby, RAF Brampton; Capt Birtle, Op Telic; R Williams, Wilton; Pte S Limbu, Aldershot; WO2 R Avery, BFPO 30. **Answer:** Ali.

Festive fare, £25: C Ward, Belfast; **£15:** Mrs J Foley, Abingdon; **£10:** Mrs B Hathway, Copenacre. **Answer:** 1914.

Xbox 360/Saints Row 2: Mrs Y Birtle, Tewkesbury. **Runners-up:** Cpl P Daniels, London; P Ashcroft, Cheshunt; WO1 P Griffin, 17 Port & Maritime Regt; A Paling, Colerne.

Samba de Amigo: Ms J Barnes, Rochester; G McFadden-Newman, BFPO 17.

REUNIONS

Women's Royal Army Corps: Grand reunion will take place in Blackpool, March 20-23. Details from WRAC Association, AGC Centre, Worthy Down, Winchester SO21 2RG or by email at wracassociation@googlegmail.com

75th Artillery Clerks: Reunion April 24-25 at Larkhill. AGM followed by dinner. Details from Capt Ian Constantine, 19 Regt RA, Bhurtpore Bks, Tidworth, Hants SP9 7AS, 01980 656506, or by email at ian.constantine758@mod.uk

Glosters: WOs and Sgts reunion April 25 at TA Centre, Eastern Avenue, Gloucester. Details from Tim Godden on 01453 835019 or timmy.godden@virgin.net

1st RHA 5th Aden Veterans: Reunion will take place May 15-16 at The Paragon Hotel, 145 Alcester Street, Birmingham B12 0PJ. Phone 0121 6270267 using booking reference **RHA 150509** or call Dave Rogers on 01159 637073/07956 344357 or email drogers229@aol.com

Downside School CCF Centenary Parade: May 22-24. Open to all past students and families. Details from WO1 R Nicholas on 01761 235163 or by email at rnicholas@downside.co.uk

723 (CS) Kings Sqn RM: 1959-60, 50-year reunion. To be held in late spring 2009. Details from Taff Prichard on 02920 790322.

East Midlands UOTC: Centenary in 2009 with events planned for spring and late summer. Write for information giving details of when served, a brief resume and contact information to TA Centre Broadgate, Beeston, Nottingham NG9 2HF or email emuotc@btconnect.com

Infantry Boys Bn and Infantry Junior Leaders Bn Association: Memorial dedication weekend June 6-7. Meet at Rugby Club, Park Hill Camp, Oswestry. Further information from secretary Mr Ken Nichol, 44 Cefn Road, Wrexham LL13 9NH, email KnnthNic@aol.com

Gunnery Career Course 25th anniversary: Reunion June 13-14. Previous attendees of the GCC are invited to attend. Celebrations will include displays, simulators and a curry supper to be held in the RA WOs' and Sgts' Mess. Service of Remembrance in Larkhill Garrison Church. Partners welcome. Contact WO2 Reed Smitheman on 01980 845594; WO2 Carl Williams on 01980 845944; WO2 Al Clark on 01980 845025.

ROADSHOW DATES

THE Army Presentation Team wants to hear from members of the public who would like a personal invitation to attend its dynamic roadshow, which begins with a reception, is followed by a presentation and questions-and-answers session and finishes with a finger buffet. Military personnel will answer all your questions about the British Army. Call 01276 417000 or email your name and address to apt.mod@btinternet.com

January: 13, Macclesfield; 14, Bolton; 15, Manchester; 27, Penzance; 28, Plymouth; 29, Blandford. **February:** 17, Richmond; 18, Scunthorpe; 19, Castleford.

Web watch

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www.baff.org.uk

British Armed Forces Federation, an association aimed at representing staff in the three Services.

www.forcesresources.co.uk

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www.forceshomes.co.uk

Finding homes for military personnel. We organise your mortgage, search for your ideal property, manage the complete purchase, arrange the letting if required, and we pay all your professional and legal fees.

www.sftf.mod.uk

The Service Families Task Force website contains useful tri-Service information.

www.army.mod.uk

The information provided contains practical advice on health-related topics and guidance on how to adopt healthy lifestyles.

www.armywivesunited.co.uk

Free community site with message boards on a vast array of subjects that affect Army wives. Offering advice, friendship and support. Army Wives United has been online for three years and has around 1,000 active members.

www2.army.mod.uk/army_health

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www.soldiermagazine.co.uk/reviews

HELPING HANDS

www.wrvs.org.uk

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www.nivets.org.uk

The Northern Ireland Veterans' Association, providing advice, support and assistance to veterans and families of those affected by the Troubles.

www.blesma.org

National charity for limbless ex-Servicemen and women, their dependants and widows.

www.erskine.org.uk

Erskine, caring for ex-Servicemen and women. The charity is currently caring for more than 1,000 veterans, young and old, throughout Scotland.

www.army.mod.uk/welfare-support/family/default.aspx

The Army Welfare Service provides confidential, comprehensive and professional support to Service personnel and their families.

www.veterans-aid.net

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MOD LINKS

www.army.mod.uk

Official website of the British Army.

www.armyaviation.co.uk

A privately-run forum dedicated to Army aviation. The forum is for ALL cap badges associated with Army aviation and all are welcome. Membership is comprised of mainly AAC personnel but we would like to see more REME faces on the site.

www.armyrugbyunion.mod.uk

The latest information on match reports, fixtures, ticket and equipment sales, and contact details for all Army Rugby Union teams. See how the most popular and successful sports team in the Army is doing.

www.doing-alright.army.mod.uk

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MUSEUMS

www.rememuseum.org.uk

REME Museum of Technology.

www.armymuseums.org.uk

The Army Museums Ogilby Trust website, approved by the MoD as the definitive guide to regimental and corps museums.

www.kingsownmuseum.plus.com

King's Own Royal Regiment Museum, Lancaster.

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5'5" (49), medium build female with short brown hair and hazel eyes. GSOH, a bit mad but in a good way. Enjoys reading, socialising with friends and family, the cinema, concerts, writing letters, beaches, blue skies, DVDs, bottle of wine, staying at home and being with her daughters. Divorced and lives with her daughters, would like to find pen pals and make a new friend. Seeking pen pals who are genuine and honest, any age group. P001

Large bale of aged hay (46), with all her baling twine intact but slightly frayed. Looking for like minded bale of hay/straw to swap letters with and share thoughts on life. GSOH which she needs when it's pouring with rain. Owns a barn and enjoys the comforts which come with this, prefers to be outdoors working with her horses and dogs. Please put pen to paper and let's see if we can fill hay net, any age group. P002

31 year old, single female looking for male pen pals from all over the world. Enjoys reading, socializing with friends, swimming and travelling. Funnily enough she quite likes writing and receiving letters too. Looking forward to hearing from you soon, any age group. P003

Ruthy (24), seeking pen pals to write to, aged 18-29. Enjoys clubbing, history, reading, animals and birds. P004

Samantha 5' (31), small build with dark blonde hair and green/grey eyes. Enjoys target shooting, hunting, keep fit, walks, films, camping, reading, cosy nights in. Kind, caring, GSOH and all letters will be answered. Seeking pen pal, any age group. P005

Sarah 5'8", blonde hair, average figure and blue eyes. Enjoys dancing, films, country walks, tasting different cuisines, travelling and having a good laugh. Looking for a pen pal to make the dark nights go by quickly, 20-45. P006

Blonde single mum late 30s, mature university student seeking pen pals to balance up the load of study to fun! Into the usual music, pubs, DVDs and enjoys travelling, reading, Facebook, spending time with her kids and reliving her childhood. P007

50 years young, petite 5'2", slim to average build, intelligent, GSOH, likes to keep active, loves to smile, caring, considerate and thoughtful. Enjoys the theatre, movies, dining in or out, good wine, gardening, pubs, walking, days out, music (tastes are varied but prefer soul, Motown, R&B and classical) and reading non fiction. Looking for genuine attractive male pen pals, 45-55. All photo responses will be replied to. P008

PEN PAL REPLIES:

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CSD-1161C

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A copy of the draft Scheme can be seen at:

The Army Dependents' Trust, Bldg 43, Trenchard lines, Upavon, Wilts SN9 6BE. Or can be obtained by sending a stamped addressed envelope to Charity Commission Direct, PO Box 1227, Liverpool L69 3UG, quoting the above reference or visiting our website at:

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REVIEWS

A man in a military-style coat and flat cap, looking serious, with a blurred crowd in the background.

HUMAN BOND

007 actor
fights Nazis

BACK TO THE FRONT

Gamers face
Pacific threat

CELEBRITY COMBAT

Great War's
star recruits

Movies

JANUARY REVIEW



Survival instinct: James Bond star Daniel Craig (above) and fellow Brit Jamie Bell (right) portray brothers Tuvia and Asael Bielski in Edward Zwick's Second World War film *Defiance*



Freedom fighters

Belarusia's jews battle to survive the Nazi advance in powerful true story

HOLLYWOOD'S treatment of the Holocaust almost inevitably focuses on stories of survival against seemingly impossible odds.

From *The Pianist's* depiction of Wladyslaw Szpilman's time spent hiding in Nazi-occupied Warsaw to the selfless actions shown in *Schindler's List*, tales of jews being forced to live like savages to evade the Nazi's murderous clutches inspire admiration against an otherwise bleak background.

On the face of it, *Defiance*, released on January 6, follows a similar path. The film tells the story of the Bielskis, three brothers who help a group of more than 1,000 people hide from the Germans in Belarusia's forests for three years.

However, rather than focusing solely on their daily struggles with hunger and cold, the Edward Zwick-directed movie strays from convention by showing the beleaguered forest-dwellers taking the fight back to the Nazis.

The result is a fascinating study into the fine line the oppressed had to tread

between saving lives and taking revenge on the people responsible for turning their entire world upside down.

"The popular iconography of the Holocaust has mostly been one of victimisation," said Zwick. "It's important to add complexity to that notion – to understand that there is a difference between passivity and powerlessness, that the impulse to resist was always present.

"*Defiance* is about those who fought back, but it is also about the enduring conflict between the desire for revenge and the desire to save others."

Current James Bond incumbent Daniel Craig heads up a strong cast as Tuvia Bielski. Billy Elliot star Jamie Bell excels as Asael, while Liev Schreiber portrays hot-headed Zus.

Starting with harrowing scenes of the mass execution of 4,000 jews in the Novogrudok ghetto – including the Bielskis' parents – the film tracks the brothers' progression into leaders tasked with helping their fellow

countrymen escape the horrendous fate befalling jews across Europe.

Under such immense pressure, Tuvia and Zus are shown to be as unsure and as human as those they are trying to lead to salvation, a fact Zwick was keen to get across to viewers.

"The Bielskis weren't saints," said the director. "They were flawed heroes, which is what makes them so real and so fascinating.

"Yet I think they also found within themselves something unexpected and magnificent. They faced any number of difficult moral dilemmas that the movie seeks to dramatise. Does one have to become a monster to fight monsters? Does one have to sacrifice his humanity to save humanity?"

Craig, whose eastern European accent falters only once or twice throughout the 137-minute feature, has done a superb job in encapsulating Tuvia's strengths and weaknesses.

For every rousing speech or tough decision he makes, the eldest of the



brothers is also affected by his internal conflict between survival and retribution.

The 007 star was moved by Tuvia's choice to make saving lives his priority and believes the emphasis on creating a community in such despairing circumstances is the film's key theme.

"I was fascinated by Tuvia's ability to take action and by his willingness to take enormous risks for others," he said. "To make that decision, to say 'okay, something needs to be done here and I'm the person to do it', is mind-blowing."

During the three years they were holed up in the woods, the Bielskis and their followers faced the constant fear of being discovered alongside immediate concerns such as the lack of food, freezing winters and the spread of typhus.

Defiance's achievement in telling each strand in a cohesive manner is remarkable and the story is something the descendants of the 1,200 people to make it out of the woods alive have been waiting a long time to be aired.

"My father always knew the story would not be told in his lifetime," concluded Tuvia's only daughter, Ruth Bielski. "It is bittersweet that he is gone, but I believe this movie will do justice and honour to all their memories." ■



Zulu Wars, out to own on DVD now

THIS fantastic production looks at the rise and fall of the Zulu nation. Narrator **John Hurt** is a superb orator and the visuals are provided by reconstructions filmed on location in South Africa. Expert commentary provided by historians is interesting for audiences both familiar with and new to the subject. Period photographs and eye-witness accounts further enrich the film. *Zulu Wars* is definitely a worthwhile purchase for anybody with an interest in the topic or in history in general.

LCpl Chris MacCallum, 233 MI Section, Int Corps



Che – Part One, in cinemas from January 2

ACADEMY Award winner **Benicio Del Toro's** (*Traffic*) depiction of Cuba's revolutionary hero is delivered with suitable conviction throughout this subtitled epic. Tracking Argentine doctor Ernesto "Che" Guevara's efforts to overthrow the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista, the film follows the campaign from its inception in 1956 right up to the success of the Cuban revolution in 1959. A must see – although viewers should be warned that the feature, which is the first of a two-part series, clocks up a lengthy 137-minute run time.



Defiance, in cinemas from January 9

DANIEL Craig stars in this true story of vengeance and salvation set against the backdrop of the Second World War's Holocaust. As Tuvia Bielski, the Bond actor, complete with a near-faultless eastern European accent, has to battle the Nazis, his brother Zus (**Liev Schreiber**) and his own conscience in order to save more than 1,000 of his fellow Jews. The characters are believable and although their hardships could have been examined in more detail, the feature's many poignant scenes leave a lasting impression on viewers.



Cass, out on DVD now

CASS is in the same vein as other films about football violence such as *Green Street* and *ID* and explores the life of **Cass Pennant**, a Jamaican child fostered by a loving white couple in 1950s East London, who rises through the ranks of West Ham United's hooligan following, The Intercity Firm. Unfortunately, the film has ideas above its station and tries to be something more than a hooligan biopic, but this distracts from the action the audience will expect to see. If you liked *ID*, you'll be disappointed by *Cass*. **LCpl Chris MacCallum, 233 MI Section, Int Corps**



Joe, out to own on DVD from January 12

JOE deals with social issues of 1970s America, specifically the perceived bias against the average citizen. Featuring **Susan Sarandon's** debut as Melissa, it was nominated for an Oscar in 1970 for Best Screenplay. **Peter Boyle** stars as Joe, a factory worker who feels wronged by the system. An unlikely friendship ensues between Joe and Melissa's wealthy father, Bill. The men strike up a friendship based on their distaste for society, resulting in violence reminiscent of *Taxi Driver*. A very watchable film. **LCpl Chris MacCallum, 233 MI Section, Int Corps**



The Riddle, out to own on DVD from January 19

VINNIE Jones has an unlikely role as a journalist trying to get to the bottom of a series of murders in London in this low-budget thriller. A bizarre plot has the football hardman trying to crack a century-old crime hidden in the pages of an unpublished Charles Dickens manuscript in order to solve the modern-day killings. An all-star cast including **Jason Flemyng** (*Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*), **Vanessa Redgrave** (*Atonement*) and **Derek Jacobi** (*Gladiator*) struggles though the laboured story and the film's ending is strange to say the least.

Games

JANUARY REVIEW



Theatres of pain: The Pacific and the Eastern front campaigns feature in Activision's *Call of Duty: World at War*



Back to the front

Stand by to fight fire with fire as the Empire of the Sun casts its shadow

Review: Cliff Caswell and Maj Neil Powell (AGC)

FACING a vicious enemy that did not care whether he lived or died made the Second World War's Pacific theatre one of the most brutal campaigns the world had ever seen.

Emerging from the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, the men of the US Armed Forces found themselves in a bloody campaign to wrestle back territory from a fanatical and determined enemy. The Japanese frequently fought to the last man, laid booby traps and employed tactics such as suicide bombers, inflicting a grievous toll on Allied troops.

For the team charged with recreating the brutal era for the latest instalment of Activision's popular *Call of Duty* franchise, researching the game was a harrowing experience.

In *World at War*, players take a front line role with the US Forces in the Pacific before finally joining the Soviet

Red Army for the push to Berlin.

Having immersed themselves in the history of the period the team, from Santa Monica-based studio Treyarch, quickly discovered that the campaign was fought on completely different terms to the European theatre.

"It was a brutal kind of war," said Noah Heller, the game's senior producer. "The Imperial Japanese Army had a warrior culture and employed Banzai charges and other very aggressive tactics.

"Their troops did not generally surrender, which is why weapons such as the flame-thrower were introduced to burn them out of cover. There wasn't any great need for that type of equipment in Europe because people would give in rather than face fighting on to the death."

Under the guidance of military advisor Hank Keirse, Treyarch's developers spoke to veterans during the making of the game and admitted being shaken by what they heard.

"Unlike the European veterans who are often quite happy to talk about their experiences, we found the soldiers from the Pacific theatre were more guarded," said Heller.

"One of the stories we did hear came from a mortar operator, who at daybreak during one of the major battles found that a guy two foxholes away from him had been killed by having his throat slit during the night."

Heller said the team had aimed to capture the personal anguish of the soldiers and the grim style of warfare in *Call of Duty*. "It has ended up being a different type of game because of what we heard," he added.

From the end product, it would certainly seem that the team's research and affinity for the 1940s period has paid off.

Powered by the acclaimed *Call of Duty 5* engine, the game is as slick as it is well-presented. Even in the early levels the Japanese troops are prolific and attack in an endless stream.



Add the frequent and highly-aggressive bayonet charges and their incredible skill in camouflaging themselves into the mix and you are pitted against a historically-accurate foe.

Rounds fill the air from the first contact and any careless exposure and lack of adherence to personal protection will have you dispatched in double quick time.

The new weapons are also well incorporated into the game. The flame-thrower, a frighteningly devastating piece of kit for both enemy and user alike, is particularly well recreated.

The realism is a credit to the coders, who have accurately shown the way the barrel writhes and bucks as you hold it as well as the horrific devastation it confers on enemy soldiers, surrounding buildings and vegetation.

Overall *World at War* is another strong offering from the *Call of Duty* franchise and continues an excellent run for the series, building on *Infinity Ward's* outstanding *Modern Warfare*.

With intense first-person action, a credible storyline and a keen attention to historical detail, Treyarch have come up with a winner that is certain to further cement the reputation of the series among gamers. ■



T-34 vs. Tiger, PC

A HISTORIC simulation of the armoured battles that raged between the Soviets and Germans during the Second World War, this is as immersing as games come. You control 100 per cent of your vehicle and crew, although your colleagues' artificial intelligence is a little too good at times. The gunner would get a level six on the ranges every time. *T-34 vs. Tiger* features outstanding graphics and sound to put you in the thick of the action and comes with a 34-page manual. This is probably the best tank game in a long time.

SSgt Craig Turner LD



Red Alert 3, Xbox 360, PS3, PS3

AN ingenious and slightly bonkers storyline, a host of celebrities acting as your commanders and a seemingly unstoppable Soviet army can only mean one thing – *Command and Conquer: Red Alert 3* is here. Well-designed and with good visuals, this surreal real-time strategy offering is a fun and challenging game. Slightly camp with *Rocky Horror* star Tim Curry and *Star Trek's* George Takei as two of your commanders, and with Gemma Atkinson telling players which buttons to press, this is an all-rounder.

Anthony Fletcher



Need For Speed Underground, Xbox 360

A POLISHED driving game with impressive graphics, pumping soundtrack and fast-paced action, *Need for Speed Underground* has plenty going on to keep you at the wheel. With a sprawling city to explore, there is plenty of potential for some explosive encounters with the police, and the chases are exhilarating. A credible storyline and a beautifully rendered open world environment are the icing on the cake of this Electronic Arts offering, which should appeal even to fringe fans of driving games. Highly recommended.



Hawx, Xbox 360

FIRST previewed by *Soldier* last summer, Ubisoft's new air combat game looks to be progressing well. We recently sampled the game's co-operative multiplayer option and can confirm that it adequately does the job. *Hawx* casts players in the role of a mercenary pilot tasked with supporting operations around the world, from the badlands of Afghanistan to countering an all-out invasion in Brazil. Licensed aircraft include the A-10 tankbuster, which is useful for bracing up insurgents, and the F-14 Tomcat, a more sensible choice if you need to take down air-to-air targets.



Star Wars: The Clone Wars, Wii

WITH the Wii-Mote transformed into a Lightsabre, gamers are placed into the boots of the Jedi elite for this latest adventure in the *Star Wars* universe. Sporting some impressive graphics and animation, *The Clone Wars* is essentially a fighting game in the style of *Tekken* that makes up in style what it lacks in originality. Like last year's animated film, the story focuses on Obi-Wan Kenobi and Anakin Skywalker's battle with the mechanoids of the Galactic separatists in the years before the pair fell out and came to blows. *The Clone Wars* is a winner.



Wheelman, Xbox 360

SOLDIER was given an early preview of this vehicle-based actioner and was suitably impressed. Starring Hollywood hardman Vin Diesel, *Wheelman* is a curious blend of driving, fighting and all-out mayhem set against an accurately represented backdrop of the Spanish city of Barcelona. Graphics and sound are top notch and gameplay is fluid and slick. Particularly interesting is a feature which allows the player to slow down time, *Matrix* style, in a bid to do the maximum amount of damage to the pursuing bad guys. *Wheelman* will be on the shelves next month and is definitely a title to keep an eye on.

Music

JANUARY REVIEW



Red devils: Red Light Company are confident alternative rock fans who will be turned on by debut album *Fine Fascination*, which has already been hotly-tipped for the top by music critics



Reds riding high

Colourful alternative rock newcomers plan to set the charts alight in 2009

Interview: Heidi Mines

WITH the backing of *Radio One*'s Jo Whitley and *NME* tipping them to be big in 2009, Red Light Company (RLC) could not have had a better launch into the limelight.

Currently touring with the Pigeon Detectives and having enjoyed a stint supporting the Editors, this five-piece alternative rock band are blowing people away with their self-penned lyrics and energetic live performances.

RLC founder and lead vocalist Richard Frenneaux took time out from a sound check at Manchester Academy to talk to *Soldier* about the group's rise from writing songs in a basement to performing at Reading Festival.

"It's been an amazing year for us especially because *Radio One* has been so supportive – it really is great to hear your own songs on the radio," explained the 26-year-old Londoner.

"I suppose it seems like we have come from nowhere, but actually we wanted

to keep the album incubated until we were ready."

Formed in 2007, the band used the internet to land bassist Shawn Day – who co-wrote album *Fine Fascination* with Richard – and timings were tight as the Wyoming guitarist answered the advert on a Tuesday and the band had a gig on the Friday.

However, almost as soon as they found Shawn he was nearly lost again after he was told to return to the United States when he was unable to provide proof of sufficient funds for his intended length of stay in the UK and was detained for six hours at Gatwick.

After one long month back in Wyoming, Shawn sold everything he owned before his visa was finally approved and he could return to the UK to join fellow band members James Griffiths (drums), Paul Mellon (guitar) and Chris Edmonds (keyboard).

Even though RLC, whose name was inspired by a film called *Christiane F*, have already hit the ground running in

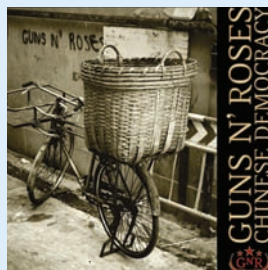
terms of popularity they are not resting on their laurels. They plan to continue to tour as much as possible this year to build on a 2008 gigging run that reached more than 120 venues.

"The highlight for us has been to do our own shows and meet our fans. It's nice to play massive venues but the smaller gigs are great too," said the long-haired frontman, who likens the band's sound to House of Love, Echo and the Bunnymen and The Cure.

"It's easy to say we sound like the Editors," explained Richard regarding the media's comparison to the indie rock band. "I think that is because we were on tour with them when we were first played on the radio."

"We were actually listening to The Cure a lot when we wrote the album and I think they are probably our biggest musical influence."

Modest and easy going, Richard hopes that the band's music will appeal to members of the Armed Forces serving on operational tours.



Chinese Democracy (Guns N' Roses)

IT'S taken **Axl Rose** and **Guns N' Roses** over a decade to get this album – their first release since 1993's *Spaghetti Incident* – into production. Axl is heavier than he used to be, but there are definitely times while listening to *Chinese Democracy* that, if you closed your eyes, you would think you were back in their 80s heyday. Never afraid to mix styles, Guns N' Roses have been experimental to say the least. The flamenco mix with power chords, piano and violins on *If the World* and choirboy intro on *There Was a Time* shows the iconic band's confidence. **Capt David Greaves, REME**



808s and Heartbreak (Kanye West)

AMERICAN boy **Kanye West** has made a massive change in musical direction with his latest album. Gone is the heavy rapping *Gold Digger*, now West is a moody, chilled, synth-driven singer across this distinctive album's 13 tracks. Reflecting, perhaps, the death of his mother and break up with fiancée Alexis Phifer, *808s and Heartbreak* offers an emotionally raw Kanye singing about the dark side of life. It's superb with the Grammy award-winner rapping on just the one track, *See You In My Nightmares*. Fans will undoubtedly want to join the master on the next step of his evolutionary musical journey. **Sgt Charlie Lloyd, RLC**



Expatriate (The Coast)

CANADA is not renowned as a hotbed of musical talent, but **The Coast** are more than capable of going some way to dispelling that. This Toronto-based four-piece offer up a selection of rousing anthems, mid-tempo melodic harmonies and heartfelt acoustic ballads. The resultant album, released next month, is well executed and carries plenty of appeal. There is a definite influence from the likes of **Mercury Rev** and **Smashing Pumpkins** as well as a nod to the UK indie fraternity, which should attract music lovers from both sides of the big pond. As debut albums go there is little to criticise and much to admire. **Sgt Charlie Lloyd, RLC**

"I was always moving around when I was growing up. I lived all over the world but music was the one constant that I had," he said.

"There are a lot of songs on the record that express the feeling of being all alone in a foreign place and I'm sure that is a link to soldiers who are missing their families and loved ones and are somewhere unfamiliar."

However, although Richard comes from a military family, his heart was always set on pursuing a career in music.

"It did cross my mind to join the Army but my asthma prevented me from becoming a soldier and I don't think I'm really cut out for it," said the singer. "The band would definitely consider playing to troops in Afghanistan and Iraq. It's great to be able to take your music somewhere you wouldn't have expected when first penning the songs all that time ago."

Already well-established thanks to their relentless touring and debut single *Scheme Eugene*, the band are expected to grow in 2009 with the long-awaited release of debut album *Fine Fascination*.

For those who can't wait until the record hits the shops, RLC's favourite tracks can be heard on the band's website www.redlightcompany.co.uk ■



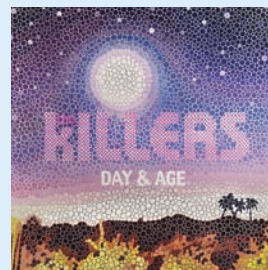
Surreal (Man Raze)

ANYTHING but your average three-piece debut, **Man Raze** is a Frankenstein's monster of a rock band. **Def Leppard's Phil Collen** and the **Sex Pistol's Paul Cook** have teamed up with bassist **Simon Laffy** on this very eclectic mix of songs pulled from a multitude of influences including **Nirvana**, **Bowie** and **The Police**. At times, you could almost be listening to a **McFly** number as the enthusiasm for music jumps out at you. Despite my reservations, I have to admire the punchy guitar riffs and the catchy melodies featured throughout. If you like Def Leppard, you'll love this. **Cpl Tom Robinson, RLC**



Thr33 Ringz (T Pain)

PRODUCER, rapper and singer **T Pain** managed to shift seven million copies of his last album. For his new set he has once again employed the trusty auto-tune effect over his vocals. But while this device is certainly distinctive, it is really a novelty which – by its very nature – has a sell-by date. The gimmicks continue with the blatant misspelling of the title and despite an A-list of collaborators including **Kanye West**, **Chris Brown** and **Lil Wayne**, it is laboured. There is little imagination or depth – just that voice over the top of some flat R&B beats. The novelty is over. **Sgt Charlie Lloyd, RLC**

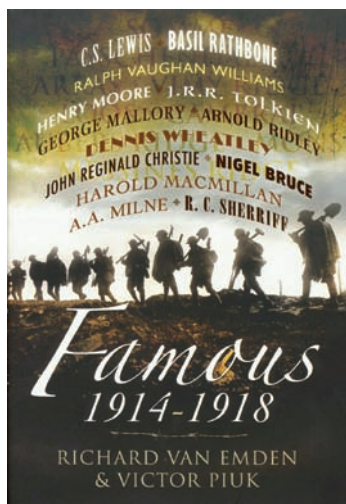


Day & Age (The Killers)

RETURNING with their third studio album, **The Killers** are still struggling to hit the heights of their 2004 debut album *Hot Fuss*. *Day & Age* is a competent record and *Human*, the first single to be taken from it, is without doubt a catchy tune that has gained plenty of airtime nationwide. A sell-out worldwide tour, including several dates in Britain, has shown that the appeal of Las Vegas's finest act has not diminished among its supporters. The album is a definite must-have for all fans and despite not grabbing me from the off, it has slowly but surely grown on me. **SSgt Mo Morris, RLC**

Books

JANUARY REVIEW



Method actor: In a case of art imitating life, Arnold Ridley found fame playing Private Godfrey in BBC comedy *Dad's Army* having served King and country as an infantryman during the Great War



I'm a celebrity...

... get me out there! A tribute to those who found fame after the fight

Famous 1914-1918 by Richard Van Emden and Victor Piuk (Pen & Sword, hardback, £25).

Review: Maj Mike Peters AAC

HOT on the heels of *The Greater Game* (November), which tells the story of some of the sporting heroes killed during the Great War, comes its celebrity counterpart.

Unlike the majority of those athletes who swapped the playing fields for the killing fields, the 21 individuals featured in *Famous* were not necessarily well known before the war and nor did they secure fame as a result of their service. Indeed, the celebrity cult of today would be totally alien to the society that these men were recruited from.

Among the hundreds of thousands of volunteers was the son of Prime Minister Asquith, who joined a mix of actors, playwrights and even those whose actions would lead to infamy rather than fame after the war, such as mass murderer John Christie.

Part of the appeal of this book is the diversity of the men featured in its chapters. Only one, Bernard Law Montgomery, was a Regular soldier at the outbreak of war. The remainder were civilians who volunteered to serve or were later conscripted. Among their ranks were the authors J R R Tolkien (*The Lord of the Rings*) and A A Milne (*Winnie the Pooh*), the sculptor Henry Moore and explorer George Mallory.

The Western Front also attracted two future Prime Ministers in Harold Macmillan and Winston Churchill, the playwright R C Sherriff (*Journey's End*) and medical revolutionary Alexander Fleming, who discovered penicillin.

Lt Basil Rathbone would go on to become the archetypal Sherlock Holmes. During the young actor's time on the Western Front he was awarded the Military Cross and was renowned for his bravery during regular daylight reconnaissance patrols in no-man's-land.

Each subject's war record is studied in detail and is complimented with

personal accounts from diaries and previously unpublished anecdotes from themselves, relatives and comrades. There are also some excellent photographs and, importantly for the battlefield tourist, good clear maps.

One of the most fascinating chapters focuses on the story of Arnold Ridley, who served as a rifleman in the Somerset Light Infantry and went on to make his name as Pte Godfrey in *Dad's Army*. An accomplished marksman, Ridley served at the Somme where he was badly wounded and consequently shipped back to England to face a medical board prior to discharge. The actor recorded his feelings at the time: "I found myself in the presence of an excessively corpulent surgeon general. 'Well, what's the matter with you?' he demanded, anxious to get the matter settled.

"I held out my shattered left hand which was the most obvious of all of my injuries. He took it and twisted it in an agonising grip. 'How did you get this?' he demanded. 'Jack-Knife'.



Probably this was only meant as a heavy joke but I was still suffering from shell shock, blue with cold and in considerable pain. 'Yes sir,' I replied, 'my battalion is famous for self-inflicted wounds and just to make sure I cracked my skull with a rifle butt as well and ran a bayonet into my groin.'

As a result of his flippancy Ridley was not given a full medical discharge and was instead posted to a rehabilitation unit in Ireland.

It is ironic that the aspiring actor would find fame late in his life as a member of the cast of the most successful comedy series on British television. In *Dad's Army* he played Pte Godfrey, an elderly medic and member of the Home Guard platoon commanded by Arthur Lowe's Capt Mainwaring.

The link between Godfrey and Ridley is explored in his chapter; the character served as a conscientious objector during the war but received the Military Medal. Ridley always felt aggrieved that despite being recommended for the decoration he never received it. It is this insight into wartime experiences and the post-war lives of the men featured in *Famous* that makes it genuinely intriguing. ■

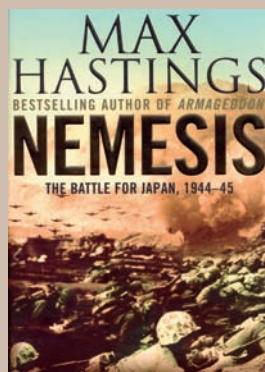
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Forgotten Voices of the Somme by Joshua Levine

DEDICATED to all those that fought there, *Forgotten Voices of the Somme* provides a stark insight into life and death in no-man's-land during a battle which remains a constant reminder of the brutality of modern warfare. Using easy-to-read extracts from personal diaries and letters, the book paints a vivid picture of the bloodiest days in the history of the British Army. The first-hand accounts of those who survived showcase both the terror and lighter interludes of their daily lives. A very good read.

Cpl Dan Jones, Int Corps



Nemesis by Max Hastings

THE latest historical outing from the author of *Armageddon* comes in the form of an in-depth look at the Pacific theatre during the Second World War. **Hastings** makes excellent use of veterans' diaries, scribbles and anecdotes, and presents both the Allied and Japanese perspective throughout. This approach shows how misunderstood both sides were in the eyes of their enemy. Hastings goes on to debate the strategic and moral questions arising from the conduct of the adversaries. A great read.

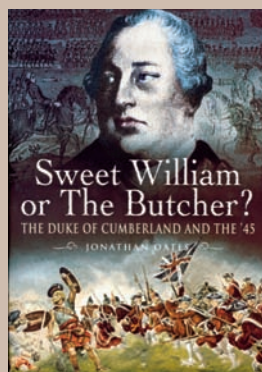
LCpl Chris MacCallum, 242 MI Section, Int Corps



Target Mussolini by Deryck Howell

AS the Allied armies advanced north through Italy, capturing Mussolini before he escaped became a priority. The author was one of a two-man team sent into enemy territory to locate 'Il Duce' and pass information back to the 8th Army's HQ. Offered a unique seat at the unfolding historical drama, **Howell** tells of the tribal in-fighting between the anti-fascists and communists of the Italian resistance in the final stages of the Second World War. An insightful and extraordinarily interesting tale of special operations.

Capt David Greaves, REME



Sweet William or The Butcher by Jonathan Oates

SINCE the Battle of Culloden in 1746 the Duke of Cumberland has been demonised by most who have uttered his name. But does the youngest son of George II deserve such infamy? It's this question, among others, that **Oates** endeavours to answer in this highly engaging and readable account of the Second Jacobite Rising of 1745. There is also an undercurrent of insurgency and counter-insurgency running through the text forcing the reader to contextualise the history with current conflicts.

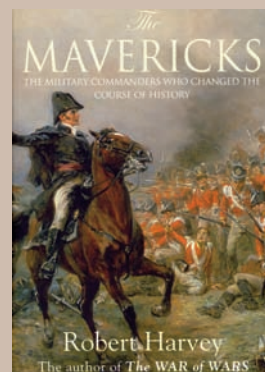
Maj Neil Powell, AGC



The Great War on the Western Front – A Short History by Paddy Griffith

ANYONE who has ever wished for a greater understanding of the war on the Western Front between 1914 and 1918 would do well to invest in **Griffith's** latest offering. Aimed at an introductory level and focusing mainly on the British and American involvement, he is able to combine a strategic overview of events with a tactical account of each of the major engagements. Easy to read, this is an ideal start to anyone's study of the First World War.

Maj Neil Powell, AGC



The Mavericks by Robert Harvey

THIS is an extremely well written book which combines historical analysis with some compelling story telling. The result is a well-crafted series of accounts that explore each of the featured commanders' qualities and the critical decisions they made in battle. A fascinating read that highlights the importance of charisma, personality, and leadership when commanding troops under fire. At £20 it represents very good value for money and its wide ranging subject matter will appeal to all those interested in military history.

Maj Mike Peters, AAC

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SOLDIERSPORT

Fresh approach: Pte Emma Steed (AGC) is one of the new faces hoping to bring success to the fledgling Army women's polo team

Picture: Graeme Main

HORSE PLAY

Lofty ambitions for women's polo team



Equine equality

Dedicated women's team saddle up to transform polo into a sport for all

Report: Stephen Tyler
Picture: Graeme Main

OF all the sports on offer throughout the British Army, few scream “officers only” quite as loudly as polo.

With its long-standing tradition, old-fashioned terminology and specialist equipment – not least of which is a polo pony – the equine activity makes croquet seem like a pastime for yobs.

But put stereotypes to one side and the truth could not be more different. Polo is a fast-paced, thunderous and most importantly inclusive sport which

the formative Army women's team wants to introduce to a new generation of junior soldiers.

Since emerging from the successful AGC side in early 2008, the Army squad has attracted a range of ranks, many complete beginners, and has tasted success against their experienced male counterparts along the way.

Team captain and Army women's polo secretary Maj Gill Shaw (AGC) has been at the forefront of the sport's growth within the military and does not intend to rest on her laurels as the side approaches its first anniversary.

“It is true that polo has been a sport

played predominantly by officers in the past,” said Shaw. “But things are changing and, because of the funding that is now available within the Army, anyone can play.

“We have a budget between us as a team and we have already proved that we can be successful with that amount.”

With a large part of a player's performance based around the ability of their pony, the sport eliminates physical barriers and allows men and women to compete against each other.

The women's team took advantage of the level playing field by challenging the experienced Household Cavalry



Thrill of the chase: The Army women's polo team practise their skills during a training day at Tidworth Polo Club

Mounted Regiment to a match at the Captains' and Subalterns' Cup at Tidworth Polo Club last July.

Anyone doubting the prowess of the fairer sex on the field of play was given a rude awakening as the women cantered to victory against their more highly-favoured opponents.

The team followed up the victory with a runners-up performance at the Ladies' Heritage Cup at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst (RMAS), and has continued to progress under the expert tutelage of RMAS polo manager Barbara Zingg and Tidworth Polo Club's resident coach Sean Dayus.

"We are never going to be England players because we don't get to practise every day," added Shaw. "You want to be classed as equals and we have shown that we can be competitive with the men at our level."

"We admit that the men might be able to hit the ball a bit further, but if you have a good horse and do the training then it counts for a lot."

The women's rapid improvement

is all the more remarkable as most of them only took up polo a maximum of five years ago.

Although the majority of the current squad is made up of officers, Shaw's assertion that she wants more soldiers to sign up has already paid dividends with five junior rank females expressing an interest.

Among the current crop of players helping to drive the team to success is Pte Emma Steed (AGC). The 23-year-old Territorial Army soldier got involved last year after seeing a recruitment poster.

"I would really recommend giving polo a go," Steed told *SoldierSport* during a break from training at Tidworth. "It's a great team sport."

The welcoming atmosphere in the team camp is anything but elitist and, with support coming from the top in the form of Army Polo Association chairman Lt Col Simon Ledger (LD), women's polo looks assured of going from strength to strength.

● Contact Maj Gill Shaw at agcpolo@hotmail.co.uk ■

SPORT SHORTS

NEW players are invited to help the Army women's cricket team reclaim the Inter-Services title in 2009.

The squad emphatically won last year's Twenty20 competition, thrashing the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force in June, but stuttered to a disappointing defeat against the Senior Service in the 50-over tournament.

Now manager Maj Ruth MacGill (AAC) wants fresh talent to attend two pre-season training events being held at Dummer Cricket Centre, near Basingstoke, in the coming months.

The skills sessions, which take place on Thursday, February 26 and Friday, February 27 and Thursday, March 2 and Friday, March 3 are open to players of all standards, especially newcomers to the sport.

For more information, contact MacGill on 94329 4711 or email ruthmacgill@googlemail.com

BUDDING boxers can stake their claim for a place in the Army women's squad at trials in Germany this month.

Team managers Lt Lydia Ratcliffe and Sgt Kelly Morgan will run their eye over trialists during the week-long event, which starts on Monday, January 19 at 2 LSR's boxing gym at Princess Royal Barracks, Gutersloh.

The trials are open to anyone regardless of experience and those picked for the squad could get the chance to represent the Army at the Amateur Boxing Association's national championships in June.

Boxers who make the team are able to improve their skills by entering a full-time training programme at the Army Boxing Association's headquarters at Maida Gymnasium in Aldershot.

For more information, contact Ratcliffe on 0049 05241 843266 or email lydiar@armymail.mod.uk

Morgan can be contacted via email at 5310morga@armymail.mod.uk

THE Combined Services women's ice hockey team are looking for new players to strap on their skates for the outfit's first season.

Since forming last summer, the team has attracted nine players from the Army and the Royal Air Force and tackled its first training session at Gosport Ice Rink, in Hampshire, before Christmas.

With player abilities ranging from complete newcomers to seasoned skaters, the squad makes full use of experienced coaches including Army Blades trainer LCpl Rob Taylor and AAC manager WO1 Stu Girdler who help to develop stick handling, movement and puck control.

New players are always welcome regardless of previous experience. For more information, contact LCpl Anna Gailey on 95551 7217.

Winning formula

***SoldierSport* discusses horsepower, pedal power and the ups and downs of supporting Sunderland with Formula One's Mark Webber**

Interview: Heidi Mines

***SoldierSport:* You took part in the Army Cycling Union's enduro challenge last year (right). How did that come about?**

Mark Webber: I was scrolling through a few biking websites and came across details of the Army Cycling Union's event. I wanted to give it a go because it was a good chance to go out with the guys from the factory who work very hard throughout the year. We have 600 people on our team and a few guys are really into mountain biking, so I said I would get us all away from motorsport for a weekend.

How did you get into motorsport?

My dad had a motorbike shop so I started off on those from a young age. I wasn't really racing so much but just hanging out in the automotive industry and seeing how things worked. My friend had a few go-karts and from the age of 12-13 I got interested in racing those. That started back in 1991.

You've been quite unlucky with mechanical faults. Does it annoy you to see drivers in more reliable cars enjoying more success?

Formula One is the pinnacle of motorsport and there is no denying that it is a very, very tough category for any driver. It takes a lot of hard work to reach that level and when you do get there you need to have the very best equipment at your disposal.

I started in 2002 and have won quite a few championship points. I haven't won a race yet but I have had a few successes along the way and 2008 has been one of the best seasons of my career. You need to be in a position where you can drive for one of the two top teams, but that's very difficult because Ferrari and McLaren are in good shape.

It's hard to predict which team is going to be the best each year and looking back maybe I could have done things a bit differently, but overall I don't have any regrets.

I'm still looking ahead, staying positive and working hard to get better results in the future.



Should Formula One adopt the A1 Grand Prix model and have identical cars for each team?

Not every team prepares their cars to the same level and some mechanics are better than others. That's motorsport – there are always going to be smarter people that can get more out of the cars.

Motor racing is not like tennis or golf, it's a bit like sailing where you have a lot of mechanical influences that affect the performance of the car or the bike.

I have done a lot of categories as a junior where you prove yourself by driving cars with very similar specifications. In Formula One you have to work to be in a position where you can drive one of the fastest.

Do you socialise with other drivers post-race?

We don't see much of each other. The most we mix is on the Sunday morning before the race when we go to the driver's parade. You have different pockets of drivers that don't mind talking to each other. Of course not all of us get on, but professionally we do our job. Once the helmets are on, all of the friendships are put to the back.

What's your favourite track on the Formula One circuit?

I like Spa in Belgium. It's spectacular, very fast and flowing with lots of undulations, climbs and downhill sections. It's amazing in an F1 car.

What's the most difficult part of competing in Formula One?

Concentration is something that we are tested on quite heavily because we are expected to be able to focus on 13, 14, 15 corners every lap for 100 minutes and to push the cars to the limit the whole time. We also have to work with the pit crews to make sure things run smoothly. The heat can be a challenge too so it's physical and mental.

What do you do when the car's in the garage?

I like running, cycling, kayaking, boxing, whatever's flavour of the month really. I like variety and keeping myself conditioned and I enjoy staying in shape as it helps my driving. I've also won the [Formula One] tennis tournament a few times, although F1 drivers aren't renowned for their tennis skills.

What's the worst crash you have ever experienced?

In 1999 I had a very big accident in a sports car in France. It was touch and go and could have gone either way for me. The car took off like an aeroplane at 200mph and I had no control whatsoever. I counted myself as very lucky to walk away from that one.

Crashes are part of the business and as long as you understand why it happened then it's just a case of learning from it.

What do you drive on the road?

At the moment I've got a BMW X5 and a Renault Megane.

Any message for the men and women in the Army?

I've got plenty of friends in the military and while it's not a thankless task, it is one that's very important and incredibly serious. I take my hat off to the men and women that serve for us. I have a lot of time for them.

Rumour has it that you support AFC Sunderland. Why is that?

Yes it's true and [former boss] Roy Keane is why. If you wanted to go to war with someone he would be a good guy to have on your side. I've never met the man but I'm definitely a fan. ■





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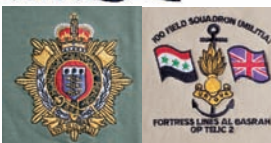
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FIT FOR LIFE | FIT TO FIGHT

Out of Africa

Kenyan rifleman uses international class to fire up Army football squad

Interview: Stephen Tyler
Picture: Graeme Main

FEW players have announced themselves onto the Army sporting stage as spectacularly as footballing revelation Rfn David Etale (3 Rifles).

In front of a crowd including Army first team coach Capt Steve Bates, the Kenyan Infantry player fired home a pin-point free kick from 30 yards to cap a man-of-the-match performance in early 2008.

Etale's blistering display earned him a call up into the Reds' set-up and he seized the opportunity with both hands, scoring twice in his opening two matches and cementing a place at the front of the team's forward line.

The 23-year-old's fast track to the top reflects a successful sporting career in Kenya in which he represented his country and competed in Africa's premier club competition before swapping the pitch for the drill square and signing up for the military.

"I started with a club called Tucker in Kenya and I played in the African Champions League with them," Etale told *SoldierSport*. "I also

represented my country at under 17, 19, 20 and 23 level as well as getting four caps for the full Kenya squad.

"I could have carried on. I have a friend who is playing in France for Auxerre and everyone looks up to him and wants to achieve what he has achieved, but I decided I wanted to move on with my life and so I joined the Army."

He may have swapped his football boots for

footwear more suited to marching, but it did not take long for Etale's on-pitch pedigree to shine through.

While he was still undergoing training at Catterick, the African became the first recruit to be asked to represent one of the training centre's platoon staff teams.

He was then asked to play in the Infantry Cup final – again becoming the first recruit to earn the honour – and made his mark by scoring a hat-trick and taking home the man-of-the-match award.

The rifleman's sizeable talent is matched by an equally large dose of confidence that is easy to spot in his willingness to run at defenders and test the keeper with shots from distance during matches.

"I have all the qualities that a forward needs," he added. "I score goals, hold up the ball and I love to take on defenders. I just do what is needed up front and make sure that I finish the chances the team gives me.

"I'm very confident that I will be successful because I trust and believe in myself and my ability to score goals."

In joining an Army 11 fully-focused on regaining the Inter-Services title, Etale's skills are sure to be put to good use throughout a season that will also see the Reds battle it out for Southern Counties Championship honours.

But despite the weight of expectation on his shoulders, the hotshot hitman believes that the quality of his teammates allied to the support he receives from his regiment will help him fire the Army to glory.

"I would like to thank everyone from 3 Rifles who has helped me to get into the team and come to training and matches," he said. "I am happy with the Army team because it is well-balanced. We have a lot of really good players and the coach and staff are very dedicated.

"They have given me the chance to show myself and what I can do and I am very grateful for that.

"I hope to be able to offer more and more as the season goes on so that I can help my teammates and we have a successful year as a team." ■

"I trust and believe in myself and my ability to score goals"





Generation game

Youthful squad matures into experienced outfit during successful season

THE Army's dominance of Services Rugby Union looks set to continue after the Reds' academy side battered their military rivals in 2008.

After losing the Inter-Services championship in 2007, the Army Under-23s proved their potential in last year's tournament by defeating the Royal Air Force 19-9 and hammering the Royal Navy 34-9.

Both wins were achieved without conceding a try and coaching team WO1 Billy Bragg (RLC) and WO2 Dai Davies (R Welsh) were happy to see their emphasis on stopping the opposition pay off.

"I see defence as a major strength with this squad," said Bragg. "We have worked hard on it all season and we can pride ourselves on our record.

"The system we have adopted works very well, but that is because the guys themselves have bought into it. Our

pack tends to grind the opposition down and our transition into attack is so quick that we score a lot of points on the break."

The dominant Inter-Services performance was not entirely unexpected after the age group side's early-season form.

After easily dispatching the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff, and the city's University, the Army were only narrowly beaten by the budding professionals of Worcester Academy in front of a four-figure crowd at Sixways.

The Reds then stepped up a gear in their annual match against Cambridge University. The prestigious institution's pedigree usually ensures a close encounter, but the students were no match for the Army and conceded 47 points en route to a demoralising defeat.

"Cambridge always produce good sides and the strength of this squad

was no different," said Bragg. "We just played with a lot of confidence and took the game to them and they couldn't cope with it."

With plenty of match practise under their belts, the U23s put the finishing touches to their preparation by attending a conditioning camp hosted by top French club Brive.

During a tough week of training, the soldiers picked up match-winning advice from the club's English contingent, which includes Andy Goode and Steve Thompson.

A practice game against Brive's A team rounded off the week and Bragg believes the hard work put in by his players was a major factor in their Inter-Services success.

"The boys were doing three or four sessions every day, but the result was that they were fitter and stronger than ever before," he said. "It's the second



Red wall: Cpl Kris Chorley (R Welsh, right) hangs on as Army U23 teammate Gnr Kenny Dowding (7 RHA) puts in a big hit on an advancing Brive A player
Picture: Brive Rugby Club

time we have been there and we have a very good relationship with Brive.

"We can't thank them enough because it was a massive boost to us."

With earning a place in the senior squad the ultimate goal for many of the U23 players, the amount of up-and-coming talent bodes well for the future.

Skipper and player of the season LCpl Dave Bates (R Signals) is an imposing obstacle at number eight, while players' player of the season Spr Gus Qasevakatini (RE) has the pace and guile needed to excel at full back.

Fly half Tpr Roko Rokodugni (Scots DG) and second row Cpl Kris Chorley (R Welsh), the man-of-the-match winners for the RAF and Navy games respectively – have also been tipped to make the grade at senior level.

But despite some outstanding individuals, Bragg told *SoldierSport* that the U23's success was built as much on teamwork as it is on solo brilliance.

"I think these boys are superstars," he said. "They are a pleasure to work with and they are always willing to put the extra effort in. Dai and I also owe a lot to our chains of command because without them we would not be able to run this team."

● Brive Rugby Club is offering discounted tickets for serving soldiers. Contact Keith Charge at **keith.charge@cabrive-rugby.com** ■

WINTER SPORTS

FOUR disabled Army skiers have set their sights on gaining international honours after completing an adaptive slalom skills camp in Austria.

Sgt Mick Brennan (R Signals), Capt Martin Hewitt (Para), LCpl Rory Mackenzie (RAMC) and Tpr Steve Shine (2 RTR) underwent the specialist two-week training course on the Stubai Glacier just nine months after taking to the slopes for the first time.

And despite injuries ranging from paralysed arms to missing legs, the members of the newly-formed Combined Services Disabled Ski Team showed enough quality to convince coach SSgt Mark Scorgie (RE) that they could all end up flying the flag for Great Britain.

"They all went on to their various corps' camps in December and will now race in the divisional, Army and Inter-Service championships," he said.

"I am confident that some of them will move up from the British Development Squad, where four currently sit, to gain full British team places next season."

Along with the Royal Air Force's Sgt Ian Harvey, the Army men weaved their way down slalom and giant slalom courses in the Austrian Tirol.

In addition to Scorgie, SSgt Colin "Eddie" Edwards (REME) and civilian instructors Henry Methold and Cath Sibbald provided coaching, while Headley Court rehabilitation physiotherapist Kate Sherman and Royal Navy rehabilitation and physical training instructor CPO Steph Groves were on hand to deal with any physical problems.

The adaptive skiers, who first tried the sport during Exercise Snow Warrior, an adaptive expedition organised by Battle Back in March last year, will now be looking for the chance to compete for the national team.

Another Army athlete, SSgt Steve Hutchinson (RLC) is already on the British team and is being hotly-tipped to earn a place to compete at the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver.

Although next year's Games may come too soon for the rest of the skiers, Scorgie believes it is only a matter of time before the Army increases its presence on the world stage.

"The remainder of the current military disabled team have their sights on the 2014 Games," he said. "If they carry on as they have been doing, this will be very achievable."

Col David Eadie (late QDG), the chairman of the Combined Services Disabled Ski Team, attended the training camp to act as a helper and said the experience was very humbling.

"This was an inspiring fortnight in so many ways," he said.

"The athletes gained considerably more confidence in their skiing and really raised their game."

● For more information about adaptive skiing and racing or any other disabled sport, visit the Battle Back website at www.battleback.mod.uk

Alternatively, contact officer commanding Maj Martin Colclough on 95238 70042 or by email at MartColc@dsc.mod.uk ■

FOOTBALL FOCUS

Massey Trophy – Infantry 2 (Rfn Etale and Cpl Cummings) R Signals 0; RA 2 (LBdr Holliday and Sgt Wilkes) RE 2 (Spr Walsh (2)); RLC 0 REME 2 (Cin Mackenzie and LCpl Payne); AAC 0 AMS 6 (Sgt McEwan (4), Pte Le Bretton and Pte Francis); RA 4 (LBdr Holliday (3), Gnr Kane) Infantry 1 (LCpl Girault); R Signals 6 (Sgt Stephenson, LCpl Latham, Cpl Rizza, LCpl Latham, LCpl Daniels and LCpl Maghee) Int Corps 0; AGC 3 (Cpl Thomas, Cpl Tabi and Cpl Clougherty) AAC 1 (Cpl McCracken); Infantry 1 (Gdsm Culbertson) Int Corps 0; RE 6 (Spr Walsh, Sgt Hannah, Cpr Myles (3) and LCpl Fraser) RLC 2 (Pte Shaw and Cpl Douglas); APTC 2 (Sgt Connelly (2)) AGC 2 (LCpl Nicholson and Pte Rees); R Signals 2 (Sgt Stephenson (2)) RA 0; Infantry 3 (LCpl Walker (2) and Gdsm Culbertson) RLC 1 (Pte Shaw); R Signals 1 (LCpl Bates) REME 0; Int Corps 1 (Sgt Appelby) RE 3 (Sgt Hannah and Cpl Partridge (2)); RLC 4 (Cpl Douglass (2), Pte Shaw and Pte Biggs) Infantry 3 (LCpl Walker (2) and Pte Shinn); REME 5 (Cin Gornall (3), Sgt Kingman and LCpl Charles) Int Corps 1 (Cpl Craig); R Signals 5 (LCpl Bates, LCpl Cameron, LCpl Latham and LCpl Zanone (2)) RLC 0; AAC 2 (Cpl Copeland and ATpr Bancroft) REME 4 (Sgt Ashurst, Cpl Guyatt, Sgt Kingman and Cpl Mavin); Infantry 2 (Cpl Storey and LCpl Cummings) APTC 1 (Sgt Lavelle).

Woolwich Cup – AGC 2 (Own goal and Pte Rees) Int Corps 2 (Cpl Ambler and Sgt Appelby), after extra time. AGC win 4-3 on penalties; RA 2 (LBdr Pollitt and Gnr Murphy) AAC 3 (Cpl McCracken, LCpl Standen and Cpl Price); RE 0 REME 2 (LCpl Payne and LCpl Charles),

after extra time; AMS 1 (tbc) APTC 6 (WO2 Collins, Sgt Beverley (3), Sgt Hill and Sgt Connelly).

Massey Trophy Fixtures – January 9, Division One: Int Corps v Infantry; RLC v R Signals; 16 – Division One: RLC v RA; RE v REME. Division Two: AGC v AMS; 23 – Infantry v REME.

February 6, Division One: Infantry v RA; RLC v RE. 20 – Int Corps v RLC. ■

MASSEY TROPHY – DIV 1

	P	W	D	L	GD	Pts
R Sigs	5	4	0	1	12	12
RE	3	2	1	0	6	7
REME	3	2	0	1	5	6
Inf	4	2	0	2	-1	6
RA	3	1	1	1	1	4
RLC	4	1	0	3	-10	3
Int Corps	4	0	0	4	-13	0

MASSEY TROPHY – DIV 2

	P	W	D	L	GD	Pts
APTC	2	1	1	0	5	4
AGC	2	1	1	0	2	4
AMS	2	1	0	1	1	3
AAC	2	0	0	2	-8	0

Love from home

We asked the families of soldiers from the 1st Battalion, The Rifles, about the challenges of being separated from loved ones on tour in Afghanistan

Kimberley Cherry, sister of Rfn Richard Cherry

I respect my brother for doing such a tough job. I just want him to come home safely. The family copes well while he is away and we support each other and stay positive. I think the Army's idea to gather all the families together for social events is brilliant and I believe they should do it more often. We do worry about Richard but we are all so very proud of him.



Vicki Williams, fiancée of Rfn Richard Cherry

I'm still not used to Richard going away even though he has already deployed to Iraq. It gets harder each time he goes and our eldest child is seven now and she is very aware of what is going on. I find that I follow Afghanistan in the news constantly. I am really proud of Richard and if I'm strong, I believe it makes his time away that bit easier.



Mandy Shapcott, mother of Rfn Clark French

My son has been in Afghanistan for about two months. It was very tough at first but it is something that you get used to. I worry about him but we have regular contact. The Army has been very supportive, we get regular letters from the welfare officer with updates on how the unit is getting on. We plan to have a February Christmas when he returns.



Lorraine Beechener, mother of Rfn Stuart Pearce

Before Stuart, our family had no military experience at all. We have found it quite difficult as it is the unknown for us, but we have had support from the unit welfare officer who explains anything that we are unsure about. Even his grandparents have emailed him to find out how he is getting on. Most importantly we are so proud of him and all he has achieved so far.



Christine Hicks, mother of LCpl Mark Hicks

I am used to Mark deploying but this is his first tour of Afghanistan. He picked up an injury during his pre-deployment training but was determined to go and left just a few weeks after the rest of the unit. The family and all his loved ones are very proud and supportive of him. I think that the Army makes much more of an effort with the families now compared to a few years ago.



Linda Birnie, mother of Rfn Wayne Birnie

I cannot fault the way the Army handled informing the family that Wayne had suffered a leg injury in an attack. We were so well looked after. The staff at Selly Oak were fantastic. Wayne is keen to go back to Afghanistan and I feel worse now that I have seen what can happen. But I do understand that he needs to get back to his friends who are like another family to him.



Lee Gilbert, mother of Rfn Richard Gilbert (6 Rifles (TA))

I always knew that Richard would go to Afghanistan. It's the knock on the door at an unexpected time that worries me. On Halloween trick-or-treaters knocked at the door and I found that very upsetting. My father was a mine clearance diver with the Royal Navy which was a dangerous job, but nothing compares to your own son being away.



Sarah Chambers, mother of Rfn Seth Chambers

The Army has provided us with fantastic support. It's good to get together with other family members because they are the people who understand exactly what we are going through. Now we have text messages and a good network from the Army and this deployment has been a tremendous improvement compared with their Iraq tour in 2006. All I can say is that it would really be good to have some meetings at Wyvern Barracks.

Robert Chambers, father of Rfn Seth Chambers

I spent more than four years as a signaller in the Army so I do have experience of the military, which helps a little. I feel that as a parent you have to keep a brave face. I am concerned but this is what he wants and what he enjoys and we must support him.



Interviews: Heidi Mines Pictures: Mike Weston

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