

SOLDIER

MAGAZINE OF THE BRITISH ARMY

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At Christmas we ask people to send a message of thanks to our Armed Forces community. The response from the public is always incredible.

Every message reminds us: people haven't forgotten those who serve and the families who stand beside them.

And neither have we. We wish you a peaceful Christmas.

And remember, we're here for anyone who's worn the uniform and for their families too.



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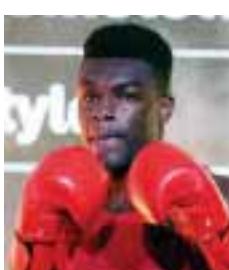
**HELP for
HEROES**

OUR CONTRIBUTORS
THIS MONTH...**A/CPL NICOLE WEBBER, RAMS**

AN ORTHOPAEDIC nurse and reservist of three years, this 37-year-old had to dig deep during underground medical drills on Exercise Paeion Cyclone. Find out what scenarios her team faced on **page 48**

**PAT SMITH,
EX-R ANGLIAN**

THIS former soldier has carved out a comedy niche online with his wry observations on army life – but he's a bit of a Scrooge when it comes to Christmas. Discover why on **page 16**

**GDSM JOSH YOUNG-HASTINGS, GREN GDS**

THE super heavyweight completed a personal revenge mission as the army boxing team defeated the Bahrain Royal Guard. Learn more about an emotional night for the fighter on **page 73**

Time for some Christmas chill

WITH Michael Buble and Mariah Carey in full force on the airwaves, the countdown to another Christmas is very much on – and I can't be the only person wondering where on earth 2025 went.

But then, given the frenetic pace of world events this year, a slight sense of whiplash is perhaps no surprise.

British troops, though, have been ignoring the noise and cracking on with the job at home and abroad, just as the *Soldier* team have been there to document their efforts.

From drone drills in Kuwait in January to last month's mass manoeuvres for reservists in Germany – via Eastern Europe, Brunei and Salisbury Plain – we've done our best to keep pace with the action.

And this edition is no different. Our cover story reveals how army aviators are training to meet modern threats (**page 26**), paratroopers have found some new work BFFs in Japan (**page 32**) and the army sporting community has toasted its top performers in style (**page 64**).

For those craving some well-deserved time away after all their hard work, be sure to turn to **page 52** for a **chance to bag a pair of flights to anywhere on the easyJet network**.

Whether you fancy a city break in Berlin or hitting the slopes in the Alps, the forces-friendly airline has gone the extra mile to help get 2026 off to a banging start for one lucky winner. Entries close on January 9, so don't miss out.

Finally, if you're not feeling the yuletide cheer just yet, check out infanteer-turned-comedian Pat Smith's thoughts on Sodexo Christmas lunches on **page 16**. No doubt some can relate.

We hope you like the issue. And above all, enjoy the festive season wherever you are – you've more than earned it.

Becky Clark • **Assistant Editor**

‘The pace this year has been frenetic’



With thanks to those who serve

Season's greetings from us all at Wex



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Picture: Shutterstock

NEVER ALONE

TROOPS and partners affected by domestic abuse have been urged to get help over the Christmas leave period if they need it.

Around a quarter of women, and one-in-seven men, will experience abuse in their adult lifetime. This could include physical and sexual violence, psychological, economic or coercive control or stalking.

Brig Jim Taylor, the army's head of personnel policy, said victims can be hesitant to come forward but stressed there were several organisations that members of the military community could turn to over the festive period and at any other time.

"If you are in that situation, I encourage you to seek support from your unit welfare team, the Army Welfare Service or a trusted external partner such as domestic abuse charity Aurora New Dawn," he said. *Find details of the people who can help you in our Directory (page 56).*

"If going through the chain of command,

your confidentiality will be respected – unless you are in imminent danger – and it will not impact negatively on your career," the senior officer added.

Brienne Atkins from Aurora New Dawn, which runs a dedicated hotline for forces personnel, said UK support services see a 20 per cent rise in calls around Christmas Day and new year.

"The festive period is meant to be happy, but it's also a time when emotions are heightened," she explained.

"Finances and family dynamics can cause additional stress. Alcohol is also often a factor.

"In the armed forces, troops return home for leave, other services such as the welfare office might be closed and the emergency services are busier too, so there may be an element of not wanting to bother anyone.

"Our opening hours don't change over Christmas. We are here to talk, even if that conversation is just to get it off your chest."

The Aurora team specifically understand the nuances of military life and the barriers to speaking out in a close-knit living and working environment, Atkins pointed out.

Call handlers could also signpost victims towards mental health support or work with them to come up with a safety plan based on their individual circumstances.

"It's completely confidential and nothing has to happen unless there's an immediate safeguarding risk," she added.

"Our main message is to reach out – you are not alone."

Aurora New Dawn's Armed Forces Helpline is open to domestic abuse victims who are in the military themselves or where the perpetrator is the serving member.

Speak to them via WhatsApp on +44 3330 912 527 from anywhere in the world.

Alternatively, log on to aurorand.org.uk for more information about how the charity can support you.

WHERE TO FIND SOLDIER



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**1**

HAWAII

'Walking on the moon'

MOTHER Nature put on an awesome show as Royal Engineers became the first British military outfit to climb Mauna Loa on Hawaii's Island.

The ten-strong team from 14 Geographic Squadron had begun their summit attempt when another volcano erupted some 15km away, sending a plume of molten rock 150m into the air.

LCpl Tom Lawton said the display was "something special".

"It was perfect timing because explosions happen in roughly ten-year cycles," the 22-year-old told *Soldier* after their return to the UK. "Even now it's hard to put into words."

The troops' chosen route also involved crossing a solidified lava flow from a 2022 eruption – an exhausting process that added hours to the climb.

"Every time you took a step you would sink through the crust on top to around knee-depth," LCpl Lawton went on.

"It was the hardest thing you could imagine – I'm not sure how you can train for something like that. It was like walking on the moon."

Following their exertions the troops visited Pearl Harbour and Honolulu before flying home.

2

FALKLAND ISLANDS

Loggies learn the ropes

SOLDIERS were tested to the limits during a series of simulated emergency drills centred on a South Atlantic resupply ship.

The personnel – from 460 Port Troop, Royal Logistic Corps – worked with firefighters and medical pros as they tackled serials such as a mock cargo blaze.

They also rehearsed a defence of East Cove Military Port using urban ops techniques.

Meanwhile, soldiers from 1st Battalion, The Royal Irish Regiment are starting a three-month tenure as the Roulement Infantry Company on the islands – relieving counterparts from 2nd Battalion, The Rifles, now back on home soil.

They wrapped up their time down south with a final exercise that included an amphibious insertion and advance to the heights around Stanley with RAF Typhoons in support.

Picture: British Forces South Atlantic Islands

**3**

TUNISIA

No pain, no gain

ENDURANCE runner Cpl Simon Richardson (R Anglian) overcame injury, extreme heat and severe dehydration to win the punishing Sahara Ultra race.

The soldier posted a time of 10hr 43min to triumph in a field of more than 250 athletes in the gruelling 100-kilometre desert test, which saw temperatures topping 41 degrees Celsius.

It was his first ultra marathon event, although a knee injury two months earlier almost prevented his participation.

"This is the hardest thing I have ever done in my life," Cpl Richardson said. "I wasn't sure I'd even make it to the start line, so to come away with the win is unbelievable."

With fellow runners sheltering from the midday sun on day one, the NCO bravely opted to push on and opened a 14-minute lead heading into the second day. However, the move came at a considerable cost as he collapsed at the finish line with dehydration and heat exhaustion that required immediate medical attention.

"I've done a lot in my life, but nothing will ever come close to what I put myself through to keep the lead and carry on," he added. "It was just me against the heat and my own mind."

Cpl Richardson's effort also helped raise £200,000 for four military charities.

**4**

GIBRALTAR

Rookies rock it

NEW recruits have boosted the ranks of The Royal Gibraltar Regiment as they successfully completed an intensive military skills camp.

Throughout the nine-day course, the would-be soldiers took part in physical conditioning, scenario-based serials and weapon-handling drills, along with various leadership and team-building activities.

WO2 Mark Hitchcock, sergeant major of B Company, praised the group's resilience and commitment. "We are incredibly proud of them – their performance reflects their potential to serve with professionalism and integrity," he concluded.

The rookies' next step is the formation's annual training camp in the UK in February.



CYPRUS

Deep blue sea

TROOPS spent a combined total of 100 hours under water as they completed their dive leader training in the Mediterranean.

Exercise Iron Deep saw 12 personnel enhancing their sub-aqua skills over the course of 188 dives in the seas off Cyprus, covering the likes of risk management, decision-making, planning and rescue drills.

The fortnight culminated in explorations of wrecks such as the Elpida and Zenobia – a 172m-ferry that sank near Larnaca in 1980.

The chance for participants to put their knowledge into practice while navigating car decks and debris had offered a “particularly memorable experience,” said Lt Col Kevan Cameron (RE).

For more info on sub-aqua, including details of course spaces, visit the Army Adventurous Training Group page on Defence Connect.



SPAIN

Hanging around

THE Costa Blanca formed the backdrop for the latest staging of Exercise Spanrock – the Joint Service Mountain Training Centre’s annual overseas rock-climbing deployment.

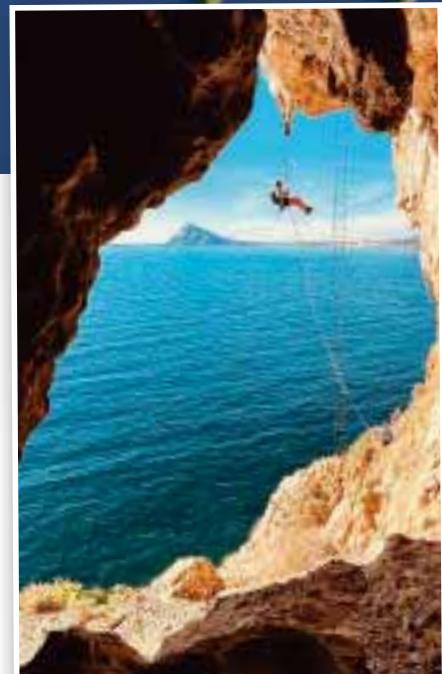
A total of 29 military and civil service personnel took part in the two-week outing aimed at developing individuals and adventurous training instructors.

Rock-climbing multi-pitch training and rock-climbing multi-pitch leader were among the courses delivered at the coastal location’s sea cliffs and crags.

“Every route demanded focus, adaptability, and trust – qualities that lie at the heart of military life,” said Cpl Daniel Irvine (RE).

“I learned new techniques, developed stronger problem-solving skills, and gained a renewed appreciation for the teamwork required to succeed in demanding environments.”

LCpl Abigail Hurrell (RAMS) added: “I joined



as a reservist who was terrified of heights, but adventurous training slowly pulled me from the panic zone to genuinely loving climbing.

“Spanrock pushed that even further, giving me the confidence to step beyond indoor and sport routes into more traditional and multi-pitch climbing.”

‘I’ve never seen British soldiers integrate so quickly with those of another nation’

Paras make new friends in Japan – page 32



GROUND VIEW

Army Sergeant Major WO1 John Miller gives his take on service life...

THE months seem to have flown by since I took on this role – probably because we've all been so busy – so this is a good opportunity to pause, take a breath and thank you all for your hard work.

You have all put in a tremendous effort in dealing with the task we have been set by the chief of the general staff – to double our fighting power by 2027 and treble it by the end of the decade.

When this issue arrives with you, by my reckoning we will have fewer than 400 days left to achieve the first part of that goal.

Given how rapidly the last 12 months have gone, this isn't long at all. But I've been out and about on visits to units, exercises and deployments, and from what I've seen everyone is rising to this challenge and – in particular – my ask that you do the basics well.

It's important that we, as soldiers, focus on the things over which we have control and let the politicians and senior command focus on the bigger picture. They have their remit; we have ours.

The army doesn't stop because it is Christmas. While many of you will be on leave, others will be on duty at home, abroad and on ops.

It goes without saying that all of your efforts are well appreciated.

Finally, I know this time of year can be difficult for some.

Please remember that help is available if you are struggling with your mental health or feeling lonely.

Make sure you reach out if you need support because there are people waiting to help you.

As well as your welfare team and chaplains, you'll find an abundance of useful contact points in the Directory section of this magazine on page 56 too.

I wish all of you a very happy and peaceful Christmas. I hope you are able to enjoy the festivities, wherever you are in the world and whatever you are doing. We shall all regroup in January 2026 for what promises to be a hectic new year.

WO1 Miller's month...

Visits

- Centre for Army Leadership annual conference (page 14)

Impressed with

- NCO leadership standards

Areas of focus

- Maintaining the push on CGS's fighting power targets

Coming up next

- New year visits programme

375 YEARS ON...



Coldstream Guardsmen at Victoria Barracks, Windsor – home of 1st Battalion

Main picture: Graeme Main

THE army's oldest continuously serving regiment is drawing a line under a special year after celebrating its 375th anniversary.

The Coldstream Guards have been involved in various activities to honour the milestone including a summer parade through Berwick-upon-Tweed, a service of thanksgiving, presentation of new colours at Windsor Castle and Trooping the Colour.

Coldstreamer Col Toby Till said that although the regiment was steeped in tradition – such as its annual 'hanging of the brick' ceremony this month to honour heroic actions at the Battle of Waterloo – its people had become known as battlefield innovators who do not "wait to be told" how to modernise by the army.

"Our motto is 'second-to-none' – we pursue excellence," he said.

Afghanistan vet Greg Dunnings (inset) left the regiment in 2014 and hit *Soldier's* pages in October after smashing a Guinness world

record for distance pulling a vehicle in 24 hours.

As well as standards and discipline, he said the regiment's support of troops marked it out – especially in the wake of his battlefield injury on Op Herrick 11.

"If we're honest, we all know we're just a number," he commented. "I am long gone from the army now and have had more years out than in."

"But there's a saying 'once a Coldstreamer, always a Coldstreamer' and that's really stood out for me – the care the lads showed when I got injured and the support ever since."

"This regiment made me realise what I am capable of, so that when I couldn't do the things I wanted in the army anymore, instead of sitting back and getting resentful about it I decided to get out and do things elsewhere."

"If there is potential, the Coldstream Guards will unlock it and, if I'm honest, I still don't think I've found my upper limits."

WEBBER IMPRISONED FOR GNR BECK ASSAULT

A DISGRACED ex-battery sergeant major is starting a six-month prison term after he admitted sexually assaulting Gnr Jaysley Beck, who went on to take her own life.

Bulford Military Court Centre heard how the then WO2 Michael Webber (RA) had touched the 19-year-old servicewoman on the thigh and tried to kiss her while drunk at a social night during adventurous training on Thorney Island in July 2021.

Gnr Beck had rebuffed his advances and told the warrant officer to stop.

She was so afraid of him that she later hid in the toilets and did not feel safe returning to her

accommodation, instead choosing to sleep in her car.

While the junior soldier had reported the matter to her chain of command, it was dealt with as a minor administrative matter by her unit. Webber was interviewed, accepted his behaviour was wrong, wrote a letter of apology and continued with his career, later being promoted.

Gnr Beck tragically took her own life five months after the incident, her body discovered at Larkhill Camp shortly before Christmas.

An inquest found the assault and lack of army action over it "more than minimally" contributed to her death.

Judge Advocate General Alan Large told Webber: "You were a WO2, high in the scale of authority; Gnr Beck was at the lowest end of the scale and you chose your rank and position to assault her sexually."

He said the 43-year-old was of previous good character and had otherwise shown "exemplary conduct" during his military career.

Speaking after the hearing, Assistant Chief of the General Staff, Maj Gen Jon Swift, said the army was "profoundly sorry" for the failings leading up to the death of Gnr Beck, identified during her inquest. "We are determined to make sure the same mistakes don't happen again," he added.

But Gnr Beck's mother Leighann McCready remained angry at the treatment of her daughter, saying in a statement: "She did everything right but was failed

by the system that was meant to support and protect her; we have to stand here without her, a life sentence that nobody should ever have to face."



Pictures: Graeme Main

RECORD BREAKERS

MORE than 500 troops helped smash a world record for the most electrical energy generated by one team in 24 hours using static bikes.

The event, in aid of BBC Children in Need, was held at the Aldershot Garrison Sports Centre where

volunteers from the army, local businesses and sports clubs took on the challenge in timed sessions.

More than £15,600 was raised and the record – previously 72,414 watts – was clocked at 123,413 on the day.

WO2 Tony Lindon (AGC (MPGS)) said of his six-hour overnight stint: "I was surprised how tough it was."



KICKED OUT

THE following service personnel were dismissed from His Majesty's Armed Forces following conviction at court martial between September and October 2025...

■ **Cpl Ben Lucas (1st Regiment, Royal Logistic Corps)**, age 39, was convicted of **two counts of sexual assault** at the Military Court Centre Catterick. Ordered to complete 150 hours of unpaid work and 20 rehabilitation days.

■ **Former WO1 Michael Webber (RA)**, age 43, pleaded guilty to **sexual assault** at the Military Court Centre Bulford. Sentenced to six months in prison, reduced to the ranks and placed on the sex offenders' register for seven years. Read more above.

■ **Air Tpr Shana Walpole (6 Regiment, Army Air Corps)**, age 32, pleaded guilty to **disgraceful conduct of an indecent kind** at the Military Court Centre, Catterick. Ordered to complete 150 hours of unpaid work and 20 rehabilitation days.

To read the full transcripts of the sentencing remarks in the above cases log on to gov.uk/government/publications/military-court-service-sentencing-remarks-2025





Picture: National Memorial Arboretum

FESTIVE REFLECTION

SEE the National Memorial Arboretum in a new light between December 5 and 22 when a 1.5-mile illuminated trail will mark 80 years since the end of the Second World War.

This colourful display, which shows pivotal moments from 1945, is open daily from 1630.

Tickets from £25 at thenma.org.uk



Picture: Air Tpr Dave Allen, AAC

A FEW POINTERS FOR THE BOSS

A REVERSE mentoring scheme that sees junior soldiers advise top officers is likely to be extended in 2026 after a successful trial.

Run by Army Headquarters, the programme pairs up brigadiers with privates or corporals to help them learn more about the

juniors' perspectives.

Sgt Shannon Rogers (REME) from the Army Personnel Services Group set it up after noticing how reverse mentoring had benefitted other organisations, including armed forces.

She told *Soldier*: "We can already see this is something that will endure; the response from everyone involved has been overwhelmingly positive."

The pairs meet online once a month for six-to-eight sessions. And although the main purpose is for seniors to better understand those they command, the benefits run both ways.

"The amount of power people have at brigadier level is extraordinary to me," the senior NCO – shown below – said. "These sessions help them to humanise their decisions."

"For the soldiers, time with seniors is fantastic for their education and growth."

"Troops are often very nervous about being teamed with such high-ranking officers or saying the wrong thing. But no one involved forgets this experience; they've all said it is one of the best things they have done for their careers."

"We give them themes and prompts for the chats, but they can go where they like with it.

"Women, for example, have been able to share experiences of unacceptable behaviour."

'I was worried I wouldn't know what to say'

Musn Holly Eggleton (RCAM) mentored a brigadier...



"IT FELT weird at times having such personal discussions with a brigadier," she said. "I was worried I wouldn't know what to say. But I've really enjoyed it."

The 23-year-old got involved after seeing an advert on the Army Servicewomen's Network.

"My cap badge is quite sheltered from much contact with high-level officers," she explained.

"So it was interesting to hear about the stuff he deals with. I've also learnt a lot about resilience – and it's helped me think more about the bigger picture, too."

69%

OF FEMALES
**SEXUALLY
HARASSED**

IF YOU find this stat on army life shocking, you're not alone. But leaders have been warned they must do more to root out abuse of servicewomen after a poll revealed the true extent of unacceptable behaviour.

A sexual harassment study drew on responses from more than 11,000 regular personnel of both genders.

It was the first of its kind to be carried out in the armed forces, and found 67 per cent of women had experienced at least one form of sexualised behaviour, along with 34 per cent of men.

Females in the army and Royal Navy returned higher rates, however, at 69 per cent.

While more than half of cases involving women were verbal, a third were physical, including unwanted touching.

The experiences of 1,300 reservists were analysed separately, with half of women across all three military branches, plus a third of men, reporting incidents.

Chief of the Defence Staff, Air Chief Marshall Sir Richard Knighton, said he was committed to accelerating cultural change following the survey.

He added some progress had been made in encouraging personnel to call out inappropriate behaviours and report abuse where it was seen or experienced – including a new service complaints app.

But he said the results “show how much more I, and leaders at every level, need to do to stamp out behaviour that has no place”.

“The data from the survey will help us do this and track our progress,” he added.

Read the survey on gov.uk



MAYAN MISSIONS COMPLETE

AIRBORNE soldiers are reflecting on lessons learnt after hitting the jungles of Belize on Exercise Mayan Warrior (above) and Mayan Cyclone (below).

The damp, swampy conditions saw members of 3rd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment tested on contact drills while network engineer LCpl Jacob Wilson (shown right) was put through his paces on navigational training alongside other members of 216 (Parachute) Signal Squadron.

The signallers also trialled new comms kit.

Picture: Cpl Aaron Stone, RLC

WIN

A pair of return **easyJet** flights to a destination of your choice* Turn to page 52 for more



*terms apply



GEN UP ON AI, BOSSSES TOLD

COMMANDERS need to be proficient in artificial intelligence if they want to lead well in the modern era, according to the service's chief digital and data officer.

Speaking at the Centre for Army Leadership's annual conference, Brig Richard Byfield said the principles of AI were all learnable and therefore not something personnel could "opt out of".

"It's no longer acceptable to say, 'but I can barely understand Excel,'" the senior officer told delegates at London's Chatham House. "Foundational AI literacy is a requirement of command, and

the learning opportunities already exist – there's lots of stuff on the digital skills portal and the Defnet SharePoint.

"DSTL provide books and advice and there are tech symposiums and forums like this.

"We're developing training for the army, but most importantly, we must use the serving experts we already have inside defence.

"We have people with master's degrees and PhDs in AI.

"We must learn the functionality behind the product, not just the interface, and be able to critically evaluate outputs."

Expertise was not restricted by cap badge or rank, the officer



Picture: Chris Morgan

Pictures: Graeme Main



went on, and only by properly understanding the tech's capabilities and limitations would commanders be able to ensure it is used effectively and ethically.

Brig Byfield was among 15

speakers and panellists at the AI-themed conference, which explored the evolving relationship between the tech and leadership on ops and in barracks, as well as opportunities and challenges.

Some 400 projects involving AI are currently active across defence, including work to create a new data network that improves targeting precision and decision-making under Project Asgard (*Soldier*, August – pictured).

Army Sergeant Major, WO1 John Miller, said soldiers should view AI as a new teammate who they need to understand, integrate and train. But he stressed leadership would remain essentially human.

“The best leaders in future will see AI as an extension of their senses, not a removal of their judgement, empathy and courage,” he added. “In the next 20-30 years, the most powerful weapon will not be a machine, but the mind that knows how to use one.”

SUPPORT FOR FEMALE TROOPS

ARMED forces charity SSAFA has launched a new project to address the abuse and harassment of servicewomen.

The Safe to Serve scheme offers tailored, confidential advice as well as practical and emotional support to females experiencing bullying or unacceptable sexual behaviours.

Open to all ranks across the regulars and reserves, the two-year initiative is financed by a £100,000 grant from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust.

Call +44 800 260 6722, WhatsApp 44 203 807 4400 or email safetoserve@ssafa-fhs.org.uk to speak to an adviser.

SIKH SACRIFICES

A CEREMONIAL troop has been created to honour the bravery of the Sikh personnel who fought for Great Britain in the First World War.

Members wore period infantry uniforms and carried Lee Enfield rifles for the launch on the parade ground at Wellington Barracks, which was accompanied by music from the Band of the Irish Guards.

Known as The 1914 Sikh Ceremonial March Troop and comprising personnel from the army, Royal Air Force and Royal Navy, they were presented with the 1914 Sikhs standard ahead of a remembrance service for those killed at the First Battle of Ypres.

The troop will march in honour of their forebears to keep their legacy alive for future generations.



Picture: Cpl Danielle Dawson, RLC

STRONGER, SHARPER AND READY

THAT'S what soldiers of 1st Battalion, Welsh Guards say they are heading into 2026, following an intense training stint in Kenya on Exercise Haraka Storm.

Having pushed through weeks of challenging terrain, long days and complex tactical scenarios, the infanteers have returned to home soil better developed after being tested at every level. Follow them on Instagram via [@welshguards](https://www.instagram.com/@welshguards)





PRIVATE JOKER

Soldier-turned-comedian talks Christmas and cracking social media

IF YOU'VE engaged with any military banter on social media, there's a decent chance the algorithm has put Pat Smith on your feed.

From skits on army recruitment to negotiating Christmas as a married couple, the former infantryman's gags have garnered some 285,000 followers across multiple channels.

Having left the army in 2018 after a six-year career in 1st Battalion, The Royal Anglian Regiment, the 34-year-old worked in finance while writing comedy on the side – until redundancy last December freed him up to pursue it full time.

Twelve months on, he's podcasting, writing YouTube sketches and performing stand-up, but it's his online content that pays the bills. He told *Soldier* how he made it happen...



Was a short career always your plan?

No, but I got malaria during a training team deployment in Nigeria. I ended up in intensive care and couldn't walk properly. I realised getting back to full fitness was going to be a push and by then my heart wasn't in it 100 per cent anyway, so I got out.

What is it about military life that makes it ripe for comedy?

Being in the army after Afghanistan wound down gave me loads of potential material. When there's a bigger picture, the higher-ups don't pay as much attention to little rules, but as soon as nothing's going on they get finicky. And the blokes get bored; that's when the ridiculous stuff starts happening. People taking things too seriously

gave me a lot of ideas for my skits.

What was your big break?

I entered a few competitions and one was a comedy version of *X-Factor* run by Jim Davidson for his UStream channel. I won that and the prize was my own special. That spurred me on.

Were you the unit joker?

Only one-on-one with friends; in groups I was a bit more of a grey man. I try to blend into the background when there's too many people about, which is strange seeing as I now stand up in front of hundreds.

Do you get nervous?

Every now and again you get the wobbles but usually it means you'll have a good show.

What's been your most popular clip so far?

One about the difference between morning and evening gym sessions – that got about eight million views on Instagram. You just have to find things that are relatable and hope the algorithm puts it in front of people. I saw a big jump when I started doing army stuff.

What do you miss most about the service?

The laughs. A lot of humour comes from boredom. Also, in the army the potential consequences of the job are so severe that I feel like it's needed to balance it out, which is why the banter is quite dark.

What don't you miss?

I can't stand wasted time – that's a complex I got from the army. You're there for your time to be used as they wish.

What's your perfect Christmas?

I'd be happy locking myself away, getting a takeaway and not being £300 down, which is the opposite of my wife – she likes all the Christmas stuff. I'm trying to get less grumpy. It's a struggle.

Got a festive message for the troops?

May Santa bless you all with biff chits and Rollover Naafi hotdogs this festive season. Psych! Get on that gate, lads, and suck it up.

YouTube: **@patsmithcomedy**

TERROR TEST

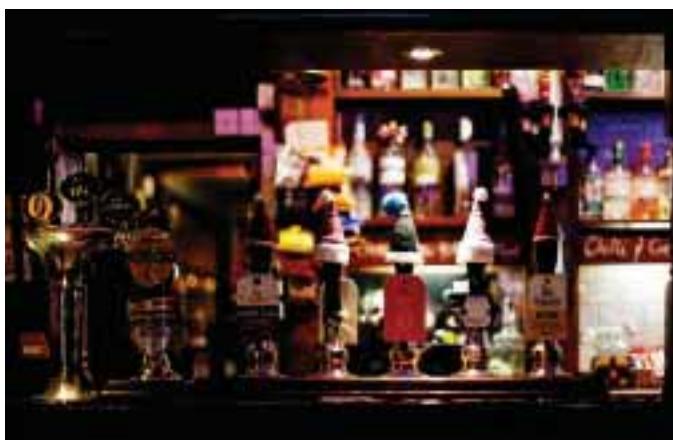
THE army's CBRN and EOD personnel were put to the test during a terror threat scenario exercise.

Troops operated alongside police, paramedics, NHS staff, firefighters and specialist agencies at the former Papworth Hospital in Cambridgeshire.

Dealing with suspect devices, establishing decontamination areas and the deployment of bomb disposal robots were among the tasks ticked off.



Picture: Cpl Danielle Dawson, RLC



Picture: Shutterstock

CHRISTMAS BOOZE MEMO

TROOPS are being warned to go easy on the alcohol this Christmas amid reminders that drunken troublemaking can cost careers.

Commanders say the army's zero-tolerance policy to unacceptable behaviour is seeing some with previously spotless records booted out of the service for offences committed while

under the influence.

In a list of 14 army dismissals published by the Military Courts Service since February, drink was a factor in ten of them.

Criminal records can affect future civvy street employment prospects and there can be heavy losses in terms of pension and other benefits too.

Maj Lance Morris of 1st Battalion, The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment – a former army recruiter – said soldiers needed to consider that excessive drinking could lead to dismissal and loss of good character overnight.

While stressing he was not against troops socialising, he said boozing could also hit personal fitness – a real issue given the chief of the general staff's directive to increase fighting power.

"We need people who are deployable and can go operations if needed," he added.

"Our battalion is at short notice to join Nato's forward land forces in Eastern Europe so we cannot afford to lose personnel – we need as many people in the fight as possible."

Maj Morris said his own troops had shown awareness of alcohol

issues at a recent briefing on addiction by a mental health professional. The discussion had included the financial cost of drinking – which can run into more than £200 for a night out.

However, the briefing suggested many members of the younger generation were less inclined towards alcohol.

This is supported by soon-to-be released figures by the army, which *Soldier* understands will show a significant fall in alcohol-related violent crime.

● **MEANWHILE**, there are concerns partying troops are risking their driving licences by unwittingly being over the legal drink-drive limit the day after.

WO1 Russ Underwood (REME) from the Unacceptable Behaviours Team, who helps organise the unit alcohol adviser courses introduced back in 2019, said booze stayed in the system for far longer than most people realised.

"Drink-driving has actually seen a year-on-year decline in the army but the last figures in 2024 show 242 licences lost, with a number of them down to people getting into the car the day after," he said.

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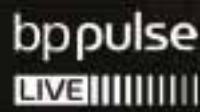
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diary dates

Picture: Graeme Main



4

New sport steps up

THE inaugural Army Padel Championships reach their conclusion in Bordon, where 60 players are expected to take to the court for the two-day competition. The top performers will be invited to form the first army padel team.

9

Christmas carols

FESTIVITIES will kick off at the Royal Hospital Chelsea when the annual Army Carol Service is hosted by the Army Benevolent Fund. The traditional advent service of lessons and carols will take place inside the 1691 Wren Chapel, with music from the renowned Chapel Choir and Household Division trumpeters. For more info and tickets visit armybenevolentfund.org



Picture: Sgt Paul Randall, RLC



12

Adventure ahead

THE army's official crew in the World's Toughest Row make the first strokes in an epic 3,000-mile journey from the Canary Islands to Antigua. In a first for the service, the rowers are all junior ranks from the same unit – 12th Regiment, Royal Artillery – and are being led by skipper Bdr Katie Devine (pictured). Follow their progress via [@forceatlantic](https://www.instagram.com/@forceatlantic) on Instagram



Scarlet and Gold

MUSICIANS of the Household Division will stage their signature Christmas show at the Fairfield Halls, Croydon once again this month. More than 100 personnel will be involved and special guests include Scottish actor James Cosmo, singer-songwriter Matt Goss, drummer Chris Johnson and trumpeter Louis Dowdeswell. Book your tickets at fairfield.co.uk

Picture: Sgt Donald Todd, RLC

UGVs PUT TO TEST

Infaneers on exercise in East Africa discover benefits of the tech on missions where seconds count

TROOPS from 2nd Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Scotland have been exploring the potential of uncrewed ground vehicles (UGV) in Kenya as part of Exercise Haraka Storm.

Acting as the opposing force during the 4th Light Brigade Combat Team package (page 15), members of the anti-tank platoon tested an ARX Robotics' Gereon platform in various recce strike scenarios.

Successful missions included locating an armoured vehicle and transmitting data to

battlegroup headquarters to enable a Helsing loitering munition to hit the designated target.

Carried out under realistic field conditions, the experiment demonstrated how autonomous systems can shorten decision cycles while extending a formation's range and keeping personnel safe.

Platoon commander Capt Nathan McCrae (Scots) explained how he and his team disguised the vehicle with foliage and sent it forward up to 10km, where its camera could discreetly observe 'blue force' units.

"It took about 40 minutes to get it into position with good eyes-on, which is significantly faster than an anti-tank or recce patrol would take," he said.

"As a commander I'd much rather send it into terrain I'm not sure of than eight soldiers whose welfare I'm responsible for.

"It offers the ability to clear ground before you put boots forward and shortens all of our planning timelines, enabling the blokes to get more rest."

The user-friendly operating system had also allowed the platoon to deploy the UGV with minimal training, added the officer.

In addition, once camouflaged, the robot had proved extremely difficult for the opposition to spot.

Already in use on the front line in Ukraine, the Gereon has also been trialled by British



Picture: ARX Robotics and Graeme Main



units in casualty evacuation and resupply scenarios (above) and is part of the multi-million-pound technology accelerator programme known as Taskforce Rapstone.

Capt McCrae said his troops had appreciated the chance to contribute to the procurement phase of potential new equipment.

"Very often in the army, kit arrives and

you don't speak to the manufacturer about why something is the way it is – your only contact is with the delivery team or middlemen," he said.

"This was a brilliant opportunity, especially for the younger soldiers and sergeants, to give direct feedback about what could be added to the specification."

DRAGONFIRE INCOMING

BRITAIN'S DragonFire laser has successfully shot down high-speed drones in new trials.

Testing in the Outer Hebrides saw the directed energy weapon track, target and strike UAVs capable of flying up to 400mph.

A £316 million-contract with MBDA UK was also announced, that will deliver the system to Royal Navy destroyers by 2027.

At just £10 per shot, the laser is far cheaper to operate than traditional missiles and is the first weapon of its kind from a European nation to enter service.



Picture: Jack Eckersley



BUILT TO FIGHT

THE push to boost close quarters battle (CQB) skills across the army is triggering more procurement of rapidly deployable and reconfigurable training kits.

A number of systems offering various set-ups have recently been obtained by the Infantry Battle School, Infantry Training Centre Catterick and other units.

Among them, 2nd Medical Group has employed the gear to mimic trench systems for training Ukrainian personnel on Op Interflex – while 21, 22 and 33 Engineer Regiments have used replica urban settings across a range of exercises.

The Quickblock kit, pictured below, is one option being purchased – designed to be built in around two days with a handful of people and no specialist tools.

"We were able to create quick and effective cover from view and fire by pairing it with new and traditional force protection materials," said SSgt Ross Smith (RE).



Picture: Quickblock

phys

Q&
A

MY WORKOUT

How this new recruit prepped for the army fitness test

NEXT month, Emily Burrows will arrive in Pirbright for basic training ahead of enlisting in the Royal Signals. Having applied to join in January – and with the fitness assessment looming – the 22-year-old dialled up her phys to set herself up for success. Here's how she went about it...

Which areas of fitness did you need to improve?

I've been going to the gym ever since I was 15 or 16 and before that I was a competitive dancer, so I had a background in fitness. But I realised that to be in the army I would need to do more than normal training. Running, especially, is something I have always struggled with.

How did you start?

I reached out to an ex-military PT (Farren Morgan) on Insta. I thought it would be helpful having someone like that write programmes for me that were specifically geared towards the army.

What did he have you doing?

He got me to implement things like 'amrap' exercises – as many reps as possible – and 'every minute on the minute', which I had never done before but is something they do a lot of in the military. And then there was lots of endurance stuff, like sprints followed

by squats. The training is done online and I would upload my results into an app.

What kind of progress did you see?

When I started, the most I could barbell squat was 35kg and now I can do around 55kg, which is my bodyweight. And I had never done deadlifts but now I'm on around 50kg. There have been loads of improvements. My zone two runs and interval runs have got quicker too.

What does a typical week involve fitness-wise?

I go to the gym three or four times a week, depending on how busy I am at work and try to run twice a week. I don't tend to set myself a distance – I focus on time instead.

Do you listen to music while running?

No. I prefer to be with my own thoughts. And I realised they're not going to let you run with your AirPods in the army, so I'd better get used to it.

Do you pay much attention to your diet?

Not really – I kind of eat what I like. I used to be bad at skipping meals but now I make sure I have three meals a day and get the right amount of calories for the gym. I don't want to get really obsessive though, and end up eating only chicken and rice.

How did it go on the day of the army fitness test?

I felt confident, although I was a bit nervous – I always want to be the best I can. I got 3.1m on the 4kg medicine ball throw, 90kg on the mid-thigh pull and 7.2 on the bleep test. Now it's just a case of keeping on top of stuff until January. My goal is to be able to do a pull-up before I start because I currently struggle with those.

Any advice for others taking the test?

Don't put pressure on yourself. Obviously, you shouldn't go in having done no phys at all. But you don't need to be amazingly fit because they'll build you up in basic training. Plus, you'll be with other people who are all in the same boat and you kind of push each other to keep going.



FINALS: British Army Warrior Fitness

SOME of the military's best all-round athletes gathered at Pirbright Camp for a fiercely contested British Army Warrior Fitness competition.

Those taking part faced a barrage of physical challenges, starting with a 6km cross-country run before being put to the

test in the gym and on load-carrying serials. Competitors also thrashed it out on skiing and rowing machines in a Royal Army Physical Training Corps programme that replicated real-world military activities.

Fit to fight – page 38



Picture: Sgt Andrew Grayson, RLC



‘Don’t put pressure on yourself’



Name: Emily Burrows
Age: 22
Prospective cap badge: Royal Signals
Civvy job: Pharmacy dispensing assistant

R Signals role fitness test (entry):
 4kg medicine ball throw: **2.7m**
 Mid-thigh pull: **50kg**
 Bleep test or 2km run: **Level 6.6 / 11min 30sec**

FINISHING ON A HIGH

A RESERVIST has been reflecting on a year that saw him overcome injury to climb the eighth highest mountain in the world.

SSgt Chris Proops (Int Corps) dislocated and fractured his shoulder in a motorcycle crash in May 2024, but this autumn became one of fewer than 200 Britons to have scaled Manaslu, an 8,163m-peak in Nepal.

His fitness journey began in January once he was fully healed and consisted of intense cardiovascular and strength training.

“I challenged myself to run 200km every month alongside weight and resistance exercises, and in May I did the 25km Snowdonia Ultra Trail event with other members of the Intelligence Corps,” he explained.

“I also did an intermittent hypoxia exposure programme at the Altitude Centre in London, as well as renting a machine to use at home.”

The method, which had previously helped the experienced climber prepare to take on Mera Peak and Mount Blanc, ensured his body was already partially accustomed to a low-oxygen environment.

Having sourced high-quality kit through army grants, the 37-year-old arrived in country in September and began acclimatisation training, including negotiating ice walls and crevasses.

The summit attempt itself – enabled by Elite Exped, the company founded by ex-special forces soldier and mountaineer Nimsdai Purja – saw SSgt Proops and sherpa Phuri climb some 3,000m from base camp to the peak in just over three days.

“The second day was incredibly hard – more than nine-and-a-half hours of relentless ascent,” said the NCO. “I adopted a ‘20 steps then rest’ mentality. Breaking it up made it more achievable.

“I summited Manaslu at 0526. The sun glimmering on the horizon, stars fading, clouds below – it was truly indescribable.”

Currently back on home soil, SSgt Proops has dedicated his climbing efforts to raising funds and awareness for suicide prevention helpline Shout 85258.

Follow him on Instagram via **@chrisclimbs2022**



skills



7 WAYS ...TO GET THE MOST OUT OF AI

IT'S A useful tool, one that's increasingly cropping up in workplaces across defence, but you need to know how to use it properly.

This advice from **Jackie Collins** – social media guru at the BFBS Academy – outlines the basic dos and don'ts of working with artificial intelligence, whether you are still serving or looking to make the move to civvy street.

1 Give clear orders

AI responds best when you're specific. Vague instructions produce vague results. Think like you're briefing for an operation: what's your end state? What exactly do you need? The clearer your orders, the better the output.

2 Don't treat it as if it's the CO

AI can generate ideas and draft work, but it makes mistakes. Always apply your own experience and judgement. Use it as your thinking partner to save time, not to replace your brain.

3 Know its limitations

AI can't access real-time information and struggles with specialist or niche topics. Don't expect it to know your unit's latest procedures or what's happening on the ground right now.

4 How you phrase your request matters

Ask for step-by-step breakdowns, specify what format you need, give examples. Small changes in how you communicate can dramatically improve results. Keep experimenting.

5 Use it to eliminate admin

AI is brilliant at the repetitive graft: drafting emails, organising paperwork, sorting research. Let it sweat the small stuff so you can focus on the decisions that need a human brain.

6 Keep operational security tight

Don't feed sensitive information into public AI platforms. Understand the data privacy implications. Stay switched on to potential bias in outputs. Responsible use keeps you and your mates protected.

7 Stay ahead of the curve

Technology moves quickly. Even small amounts of time spent learning new tools will pay off. Digital capability matters now, whether you're in or out of uniform.

The BFBS Academy is launching a fully funded AI skills programme for military partners in January 2026, combining flexible online learning with live webinars and workshops across UK bases and Cyprus. Find out more at sms.bfbs.com/form/ai-for-military-partners



HITTING A HIGH NOTE

A BUGLER from 5th Battalion, The Rifles has been crowned the Infantry's top musical soldier.

Sjt Sebastian Yaseen emerged as winner of the Cutler's Sword following a close-run contest in which buglers, drummers and flautists battled it out across a series of military and musical challenges.

Sponsored by the Worshipful Company of Cutlers, the annual competition sees troops demonstrate their fitness and marksmanship skills, before completing solo recitals and sight-reading tests with their instruments. Their ceremonial turnout is also scrutinised.

Sjt Yaseen, who has since taken over as his battalion's bugle major, was presented with his prize – an engraved sword – during the Lord Mayor's Show in London.



Pictures: Ben Turner and Pte Dan Simon, R Anglian

BREAKING THE ICE

Think your colleague is in the wrong? Here's how to tackle it while staying professional...

IT CAN be awkward if you disagree with how something's being done at work – especially if the person responsible is your boss.

But the point isn't to prove someone right or wrong, it's about exploring alternative options.

Keep these tips in mind to help the conversation go well...

Choose your moment

Timing and setting matter. A quiet word, tactful question, follow-up chat or even an email might work better than raising an issue immediately.

Be professional

Focus on the problem, not the person. Try and encourage conversation and mutual understanding.

Communicate clearly

Explain why you see things differently. Keep it simple and to the point.

Don't delay

If something is unsafe or goes against values and standards, don't wait. Raise it as soon as you can.

Respect the outcome

Challenge doesn't always lead to change. If your point isn't taken on board, stay professional. Know when to move on and when to escalate the problem through the proper channels.



Picture: Peter Davies



Report: Cliff Caswell Pictures: Graeme Main, Sgt Sam Terry and Cpl Vincent Price, both RLC



HUNTERS' HOMECOMING

It may feel like the Cold War has returned – but the Army Air Corps are rehearsing for a very modern conflict in Europe's skies

THE Apache gained a fearsome reputation when it made its debut with the British Army over Afghanistan in 2006. But amid fighting with the Taliban, few noted this was not the conflict for which the airframe was originally designed. While its Hellfire missiles, rockets and 30mm cannon proved devastating against bunkers and during air support to troops locked in close-quarter battles, the blueprint was drawn up for an altogether different purpose.

'Mosquitoes', as insurgents often dubbed them, were created to prowl the European countryside, seeking out and destroying Warsaw Pact armour.

So it was something of a symbolic moment when its menacing silhouette appeared over Wattisham at the start of Exercise Pinion Titan – a simulation of conventional warfare in Europe and a return to Apache's core business.

With the world changing vastly in the three decades since the fall of communism, however, not least with advances in tech, comms and equipment, the attack helicopter is returning to its ➤



Previous page **Army Air Corps helicopters line up ahead of the 'elephant walk' show of force**
Below **Chinooks were one of the four helicopter types taking part** Left **2 Para troops practising mounting onto aircraft; British and French helicopters being prepared for lift off**

Exercise Pinion Titan



» roots on different terms.

But the first all-up outing of 1st Aviation Brigade Combat Team shows how pilots and ground crews are adapting to emerging threats.

With the new Apache E-model, Wildcat and other helicopters configured for the digital battlespace, the transformation - and accompanying changes to doctrine and tactics - is a credit to the personnel who have made it happen.

"This marks the end of a modernisation programme started when we formed in 2020," commander Brig Nick English (pictured right) remarks as a 25-strong formation of Army Air Corps Apaches and Wildcats, plus Gazelle gunships from France, fly across the Suffolk airfield.

"Now, every one of our soldiers, vehicles and helicopters is going into the field for us to test our capabilities together.

"We'll be working closely with the Royal Air Force and our French and United States allies while integrating technologies such as drones and advanced communication systems."

It is an impressive sight as the aircraft slowly advance in a so-called 'elephant walk' and show of force.

Concluding as this issue hits desks in December, the month-long exercise is a seminal outing for the British brigade and a stern test for the Nato crews preparing for conflict against what is a well-matched adversary.

And they will not only be pushed

to the limits with enemy contacts: working in the depths of winter, conditions promise to be gruelling with heavy rain, snow and high winds forecast.

But the personnel - who have limited knowledge of how the test will unfold - are committed to dealing with whatever comes their way.

Divided into two battlegroups led by 3 and 4 Regiments, Army Air Corps, they are moving from Wattisham to bases in northern England, with commanders coordinating sorties from the Scottish Highlands to Salisbury Plain.

As a proven reconnaissance platform, Wildcat aircraft from 1 Regt, AAC are tasked with gathering information on simulated adversaries with teams of Apaches providing the strike force.

Joined by French Gazelles from 3e Regiment d'Helicoptères de Combat, likely outings will include strikes against artillery positions deep in hostile territory while escorting Chinooks carrying troops.

Meanwhile, planners from 4 Regt, AAC along with US allies from 12th Combat Aviation Brigade will work on mission details. And a raft of comms experts, technicians and other ground crew will support.

While the manoeuvres promise to be a tough undertaking, troops say they are looking forward to the challenge and being involved with the brigade at a pivotal moment.

Air Tpr Ellis Sumner (AAC), who will be working in forward locations and helping to run replenishment points for Apaches, believes soldiers are going to learn a huge amount. »



Below **An Apache being prepped at Wattisham airfield**
Far right **A Wildcat takes to the sky**

IN NUMBERS
Ex Pinion Titan

50

Airframes taking to the skies

2,000

Personnel involved

4

Weeks running

» Working in a multinational environment will hone the protocols required for large-scale operations, the ground-crewman adds.

"I've been in the army for three years but Pinion Titan is definitely an important milestone, with several different mission types," he continues. "Along with colleagues, I'm going to be setting up in rural and urban areas to refuel and rearmed the helicopters - I know that it'll be demanding."

"The pressure on us is likely to be nonstop but we are well prepared for the role - I am seeing things from a new perspective too as I am soon promoting."

Fellow crewman LCpl Adam O'Donnell (AAC) is equally enthusiastic as he prepares to move north.

As an aviation comms specialist, he is responsible for ensuring critical information between pilots and those on the ground keeps flowing.

"Pinion Titan marks an important moment for us - it's the first time that the brigade has

come together in this way," the junior NCO says.

"Importantly, it will be a real test for the logistic chain - and we will likely find the weather an issue at this time of year."

"To be honest, this is the only job I've ever wanted to do since I joined the army and the exercise is an opportunity to focus, learn and be prepared for what might be coming."

"I'm with 661 Squadron, based at Yeovilton, and we will all develop as individuals during this."

Aircrews admit that flying is going to be a real challenge - particularly in busy, simulated combat conditions and with an array of mission types in store.

French pilot Capt Maxime Weber (pictured left), however, is looking forward to working in a Nato team and conducting joint sorties.

Normally found at the controls of an NH-90 Caiman - a helicopter similar in type to the RAF and Royal Navy Merlin - he will be acting as a liaison officer during Pinion Titan.

"I'll be providing advice to the British commander, helping them understand the capabilities of the French," he reveals.

"I've been flying for the last four years, and this is my first time on an exercise of this type - it will be a great chance to all come together as one force here in the UK."

The exercise certainly proved to be a huge opportunity for all elements concerned.

As the threat has changed, and new tech such as UAS has exploded - planners have had to reassess the role of the helicopter in the contemporary battlespace.

But reorganised from the ground up, the Army Air Corps and its Nato allies are proving that they have the crews, kit and tactics to succeed in the digital skies. <<





At a glance: Pinion Titan

Location: Across the UK

Led by: 1st Aviation Brigade

Commander: Brig Nick English

Forces: 1, 3 and 4 Regiments, AAC;

Royal Air Force; personnel and assets from French Armee De Terre; US 12th Combat Aviation Brigade

Aircraft: Apache and Gazelle attack helicopters; Wildcat, Chinook

GETTING THEIR FIX

WHILE aircrews prosecuted mock missions, colleagues on the ground were working flat-out to keep them in business.

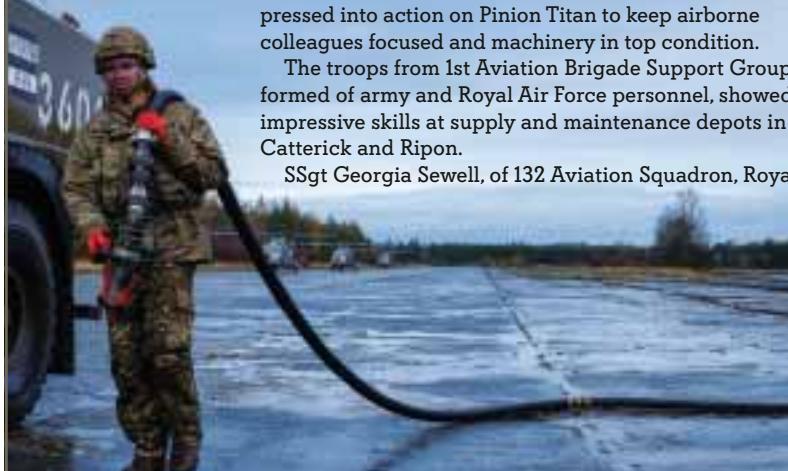
Professionals – from engineers to armourers – were pressed into action on Pinion Titan to keep airborne colleagues focused and machinery in top condition.

The troops from 1st Aviation Brigade Support Group, formed of army and Royal Air Force personnel, showed impressive skills at supply and maintenance depots in Catterick and Ripon.

SSgt Georgia Sewell, of 132 Aviation Squadron, Royal

Logistic Corps, described her unit role as “an Amazon for Apaches”.

The senior NCO added: “We stock everything from rations to rotor blades – it’s a vital job and our moto is ‘there’s no fly without supply’.”





Report: Becky Clark and Gareth Palmer Pictures: Cpl Aaron Stone, RLC

HYPER VIGILANCE

Paras have a blast on Japanese partnering exercise

Left **A soldier from 2 Para observes his arcs alongside a host-nation sniper**
Right **A paratrooper from A Company packs away his Japanese parachute**



WINTER has made its mark early on Hokkaido – the snow falls silently, blanketing the forest as a pale sun filters through the trees. In the distance, the volcanic dome of Mount Eniwa is capped in pristine white.

It's a scene worthy of a Christmas card, but today at least, peace on earth is an illusion.

Without warning, the quiet is shattered by the crackle of rifle fire and barked orders as soldiers from 2nd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment mount a determined attack on their counterparts from the Japanese Ground Self Defence Forces.

The drill is part of Exercise Vigilant Isles, a now regular bilateral training package aimed at increasing interoperability between the two nations.

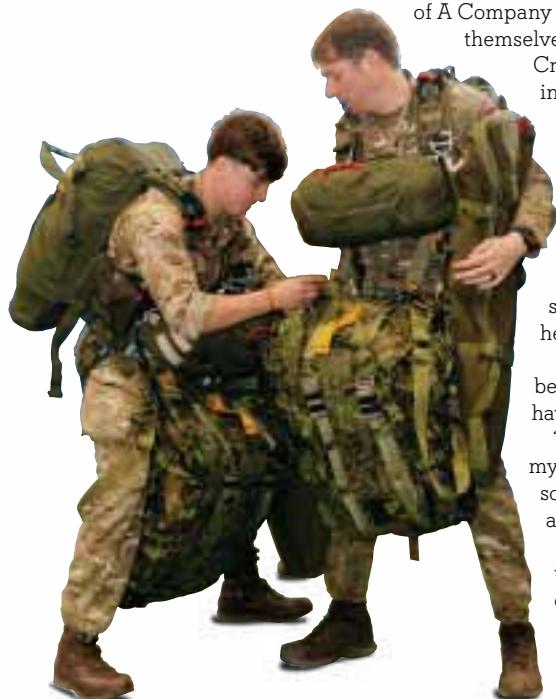
Staged over two weeks at the Minami-Eniwa training area – on the northernmost of Japan's main islands – it has seen members of A Company and the hosts' 5th Brigade familiarising themselves with each other's equipment and tactics. Crucially for the British infantry, this included completing parachute jumps under Japanese canopies from Air Self Defence Force Hercules aircraft – a much sought-after opportunity to gain a partner nation's wings.

With the basics squared away, they have now deployed on a simulated mission to repel an invasion in a dynamic serial that saw them inserting via air, helicopter and amphibious landing craft.

Unit boss Maj Eddie Brecht (Para) says he's been impressed with the speed at which troops have got on the same page.

"I've visited more than 15 countries during my army career and never have I seen British soldiers integrate so quickly with those of another nation," he observes.

"Cultural exchanges, multinational training serials and parachute jumps have ensured that we know each other intimately before we are tested against a live enemy on what will be a complex and arduous training exercise." **»**



HOKKAIDO HIGHLIGHTS

2 Para personnel on the standout moments of Exercise Vigilant Isles

"It's an interesting experience to use another country's parachute system. Their kit is quite different to ours but the skills are the same and it was easy to quickly get the hang of it."

LCpl Liam O'Brien, Para



"Working with different armies is always interesting because you get to see how others do the same job. We can learn and adapt to improve how we operate – and help our allies do likewise."

LCpl Maxwell Morley, R Signals



"It's my first time in Asia, and it's been fascinating to come and experience the culture. The Japanese are proud and disciplined people and have been very welcoming and friendly towards us."

Bdr Liam Davis, RA



Exercise Vigilant Isles



» "This will see the force deploy by four different insertion methods – a fantastic opportunity for all ranks and cap badges."

"The exposure to Japanese procedures and doctrine will enable us to consider ways to both test and improve our own high-readiness concept of employment."

As well as conducting joint tactical airborne ops together for the first time, the officer says comms have been more closely integrated, with UK Istar (intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance) systems identifying enemy assets for Japanese fires to strike with precision.

Supporting this effort on the British side are Puma uncrewed aerial platforms from 32 Regiment, Royal Artillery and a light electronic warfare team from 14 Signal Regiment.

Now in its fourth iteration since 2018, Exercise Vigilant Isles has evidently developed into a mutually beneficial arrangement for both sides – as well as for wider security in the Far East.

And as the only country to conduct bilateral drills in Japan, it's a privilege UK troops do not take lightly, explains Maj Brecht.

"It manifests a genuine opportunity to increase our warfighting preparedness, while also reaffirming our shared commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific," he says.

"This has also been a fantastic experience for our soldiers to develop their skills, while building enduring friendships at the same time."

Once the package winds down and calm returns to the snowy landscape of Eniwa, something lasting will remain.

The UK and Japanese personnel will part not just as colleagues, but as comrades – members of an airborne fraternity that is ready to step up when it matters.

In the season of goodwill, reciprocal strength and respect are gifts worth exchanging. «

Below British troops observe a ground missile being launched during a demonstration by Japan's 1st Airborne Brigade



"We did a 'show and tell' session with the Japanese medics and it was good to compare how we would treat the same casualty. There are a lot of similarities in kit and procedures, but the biggest difference is the type of pain relief they use and how they administer it."

Cpl Tom Merrill, Para



"This has been the friendliest exercise that I've been on. The Japanese have been very open and hospitable, and I've been impressed with their professionalism."

Cpl James Shaw, Para

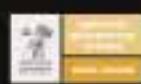


LEVEL
PEAKS | 



Merry Christmas
and
Happy New Year

Wishing our serving personnel near and far a
Very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

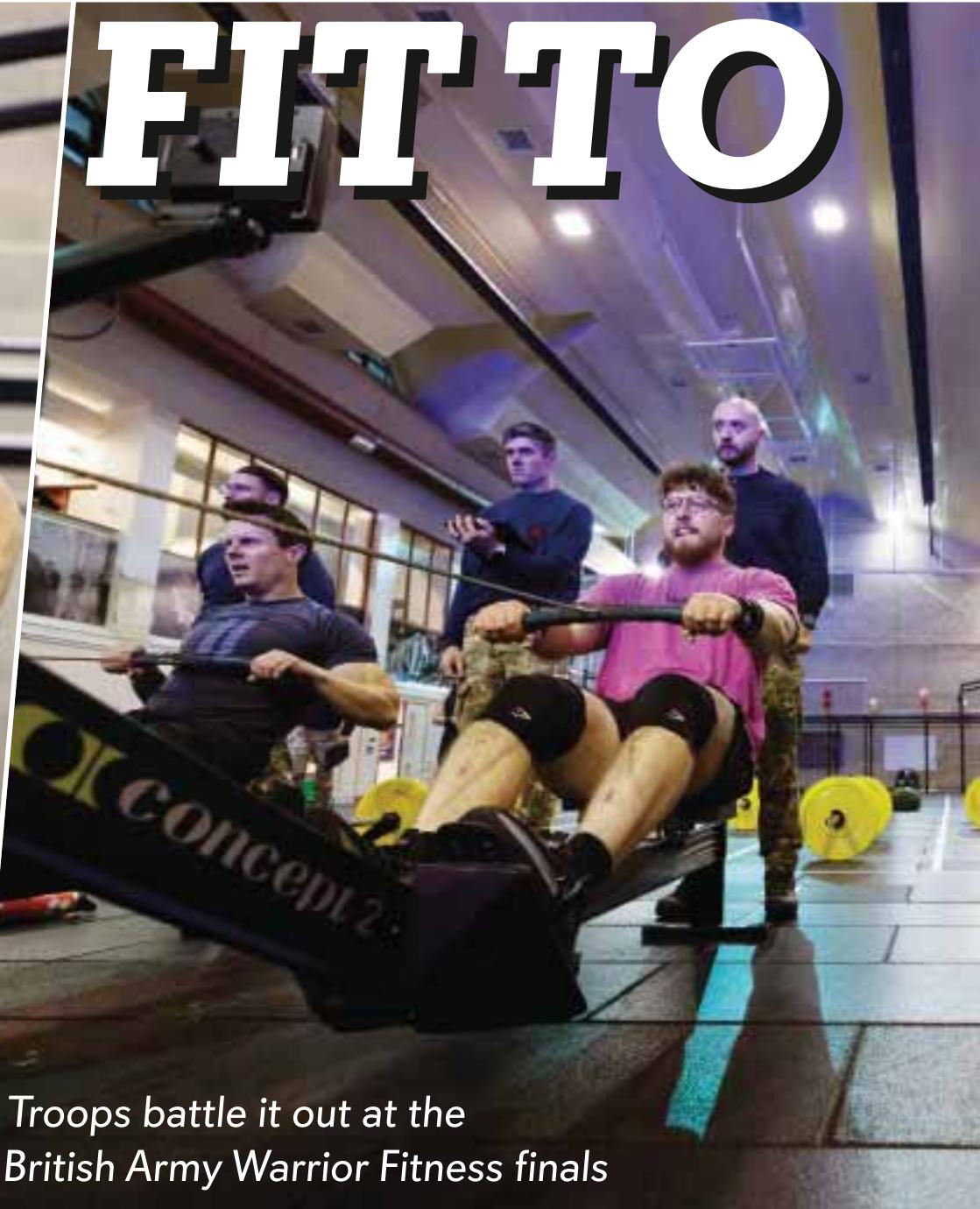


Always Delivering the Advantage

The BAWF test workout includes...

6.6km Trail run 1,000m SkiErg 30cal BikeErg

FIT TO



Troops battle it out at the British Army Warrior Fitness finals

THE winter weather set in on Pirbright as the service's top all-round athletes hit the start line for the British Army Warrior Fitness (BAWF) finals.

Conditions were bitter during an opening six-and-a-half-kilometre trail run - but troops' resolution remained as hard as the frost as they steeled themselves for the physical and mental battle ahead.

A clean-and-jerk ladder with progressive

load carrying was followed by simulated skiing, cycling and other disciplines in the camp gym amid a full-on barrage of challenges for the athletes involved.

The programme, which remained a closely-guarded secret until the day, was devised by the military's top PTIs to test strength, stamina and endurance.

"The standards among those taking part have been high," said organiser WO2 Alex Rees (RAPTC), who was a competitor in the first four BAWF finals after the launch of

the contest in 2021.

"It's like any new event - as people understand it better, they learn how to train more effectively."

"I also think we've seen something of a culture shift with activities in the civilian world - you are finding more people doing things such as Crossfit and Hyrox and this is reflected in the recruits we are bringing on board."

The BAWF outing has certainly proved popular in its short history.

Hex bar deadlift 500m Row 30m Sandbag carry

FIGHT



Report: Cliff Caswell | Pictures: Sgt Andrew Grayson, RLC



Introduced in the wake of the Covid pandemic and on the heels of an already well-established team event, the individual competition is based around exercises making up the components of military phys. And it has one simple aim – to find the service's fittest man and woman.

Competitors must first submit video footage of three workouts. PTIs then assess the uploads to establish the best-of-the-best to call forward for the finals.

This year, 16 men and ten women were

invited for the main event plus five troops aged 37-45 for a masters' competition. An equal number participated in a veterans' field for older personnel, and there was also a scaled version for newcomers.

"We had 200-plus people enter this year – those selected to go forward were the strongest, fittest and best-equipped to deal with the demanding programme of the final," WO2 Rees continued.

"They did not know the exercises until the day so needed to ensure they had a

good all-round training routine.

"While you could put a lot of effort into, say, gym-based exercises, you'd get caught out if you found yourself facing a swimming or running event so everyone has had to work on all aspects of fitness in their preparations."

The programme leaves little time to draw breath. But seeing the contenders go toe-to-toe was particularly satisfying for WO2 Rees, who won the first three BAWF finals and was a runner-up last year.

»

NORTHERN POWERHOUSE

Male BAWF champion chats to *Soldier*

TAKING the men's title was the fulfilment of a dream for ex-Team GB powerlifter Pte Joshua Greenfield (R Yorks, below) – who had his eyes on the prize when he joined up three years ago.

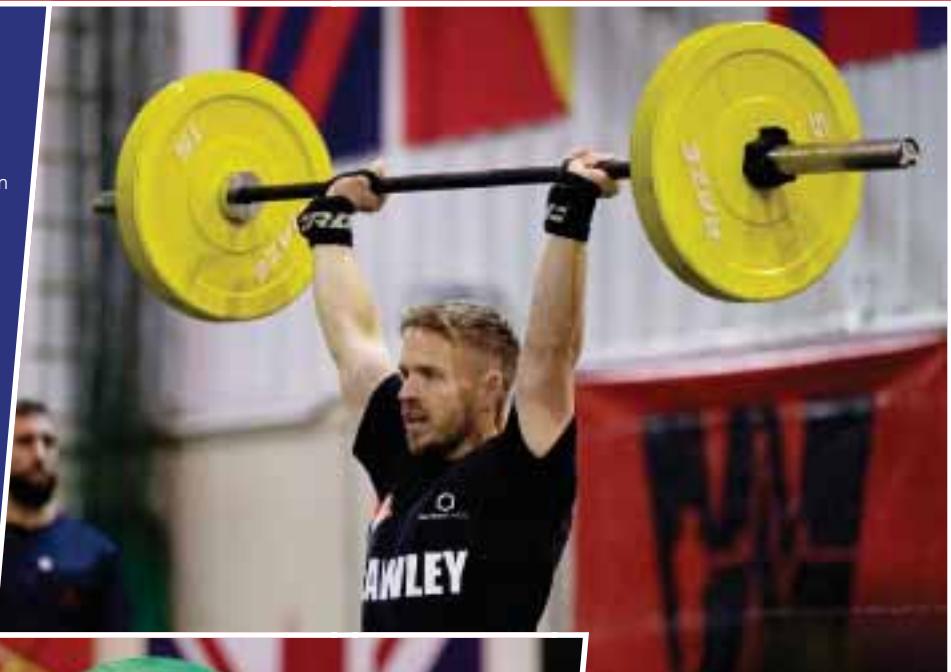
Having enlisted later in life at the age of 28, the former elite sportsman and Catterick-based infantryman admitted he had needed to bolster his all-round fitness to compete. But he said the hard work and support of his battalion had paid off as he battled the opposition in frigid conditions at Pirbright.

"The run at the beginning was the hardest task for me," added Pte Greenfield, who is looking at selection for the Royal Army Physical Training Corps.

"Honestly, there was one hill involved that was so steep, I was going up on my hands and knees – I knew that I needed to win the other events after that."

Pte Greenfield said army life was more than living up to expectations.

"In Team GB I was proud to wear that Union flag on my shirt – and it is the same serving King and country," he added.



» The senior leader brought all of his experience to bear in the running of the latest contest.

"It has been great to be involved in this way, but it is obviously not the same as taking part," the Aldershot-based 38-year-old, who enlisted as a combat medical technician with the Royal Army Medical Corps in 2006, admitted.

"Having seen everyone compete, I would honestly like to get back out there and be among them next year – being in the final is

a fantastic experience."

While it is undoubtedly punishing, there is certainly a huge affection for this event as it continues to develop with each annual competition.

And it is helping the army to meet the challenge that the chief of the general staff has set to double the service's fighting power by 2027 and treble it by the end of the decade.

A fit and deployable soldier is truly the service's greatest asset. <<

BAWF 2025: THE RESULTS

RX comp (main event)

MEN: Pte Joshua Greenfield, R Yorks
Runners-up: Sgt Richard Cummings, Ranger; Capt Jack West, RAMS

WOMEN: LCoH Jemma Dickinson, RHD/D

Runners-up: WO1 Kay Howells, RLC; Bdr Alice Miell, RA

Scaled comp

MEN: Sgt Bobby Maskell, RLC
Runners-up: SSgt Alan Nosworthy, RLC; WO2 Tommy Yeates, AAC

WOMEN: Pte Simone Pipe, AGC (SPS)
Runners-up: WO2 Laura Best, AGC (SPS); SSgt Carly Howard, RLC

Masters

MEN: SSgt Ashley Pechey, R Signals
Runners-up: SSgt Nick Cawley, RAPTC; Rfn Christian Stokes, Rifles

WOMEN: Maj Rachel Pearson, RAMS

Runners-up: Lt Col Jess Beck, AGC (SPS); Capt Annie Aspin, AAC

Veterans

MEN: WO2 Brett Gunning, SG
Runners-up: Rev Stewart Mackay, RAChD

WOMEN: Lt Col Nicola McCullough, RAMS

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'We can test just about everything the army is interested in'

MUD & GUTS

Inside the innovative world of the Army Trials Unit



FOR a moment, it appeared as if we'd stumbled across the forest stage of a motor rallying event.

The low-slung vehicle tore down the narrow dirt track between the trees at a ferocious pace, the driver inducing a Tommi Mäkinen-inspired Scandinavian flick to take it sideways round a tight bend before disappearing into the distance in a shower of mud and spray.

What we'd just witnessed was not motorsport but a test run of a remarkable piece of military kit called the All-Terrain Electric Mission Module (Atemm) - in essence, a huge battery pack on wheels.

And if the speed and agility of the platform was surprising, the variety of roles it can be used for is simply astonishing.

The Atemm can recharge soldiers' radios and dismounted situational awareness tools; power a field hospital or command post for more than three days continuously; provide silent electric drive for a lead wheeled vehicle or boost its performance (which we'd witnessed); and be detached and operated remotely as an uncrewed ground vehicle to carry cargo or be a weapons station.

This remarkable platform is just one of a large number of cutting-edge pieces of

Report: Steve Muncey Pictures: Graeme Main

» kit currently being evaluated by the Army Trials Unit (ATU) – a team at the very forefront of developing the next generation of hardware for the service.

"We are in the middle of the most significant modernisation process for decades and the ATU is right at the centre of it," explains commanding officer Lt Col Paul Cooper (Mercian).

"We can test and properly evaluate just about everything the British Army is interested in using – from gloves and boots to the Challenger 3, artillery systems, trucks, drones and potential replacements for the SA80."

"The only things we don't trial are comms kit, electronic warfare tech, crewed aviation and medical tech, as these are done by specialists elsewhere in defence."

The recent amalgamation of the army's five trials and development units to form the ATU under the umbrella of the Experimentation and Trials Group (ETG) makes complete sense when you consider the multi-cap badge use of new technology.

All kit that Army HQ deems worthy of trialling properly – with a view to potential procurement by the MoD – has to be evaluated from every conceivable angle, including reliability, safety, compatibility, endurance and even through-life servicing and maintenance.

"In previous years, kit such as Atemm would have gone through several trials managed by different teams," says ATU's WO2 Simon Piper (QRH).

"But what's the point of driving a vehicle in one place to test its off-road ability, then taking it somewhere else to examine its recharging performance and somewhere else again for gauging how it combines with in-service platforms?"

"We can do all these tests simultaneously now and creating the ATU has, without doubt, streamlined the trials process."

With the army now being encouraged



to experiment and innovate at all levels as part of the drive to multiply lethality and enhance survivability, Lt Col Cooper believes units should consult with the ETG at the earliest opportunity to ensure the best test methods and save valuable time.

"There is the Knowledge in Defence (KiD) app on Defence Gateway where personnel can see the process for bringing kit into service, but there is still a lot of leeway in the detail of how it's done – there is no one set process for evaluating whether a piece of equipment is suitable for the British Army."

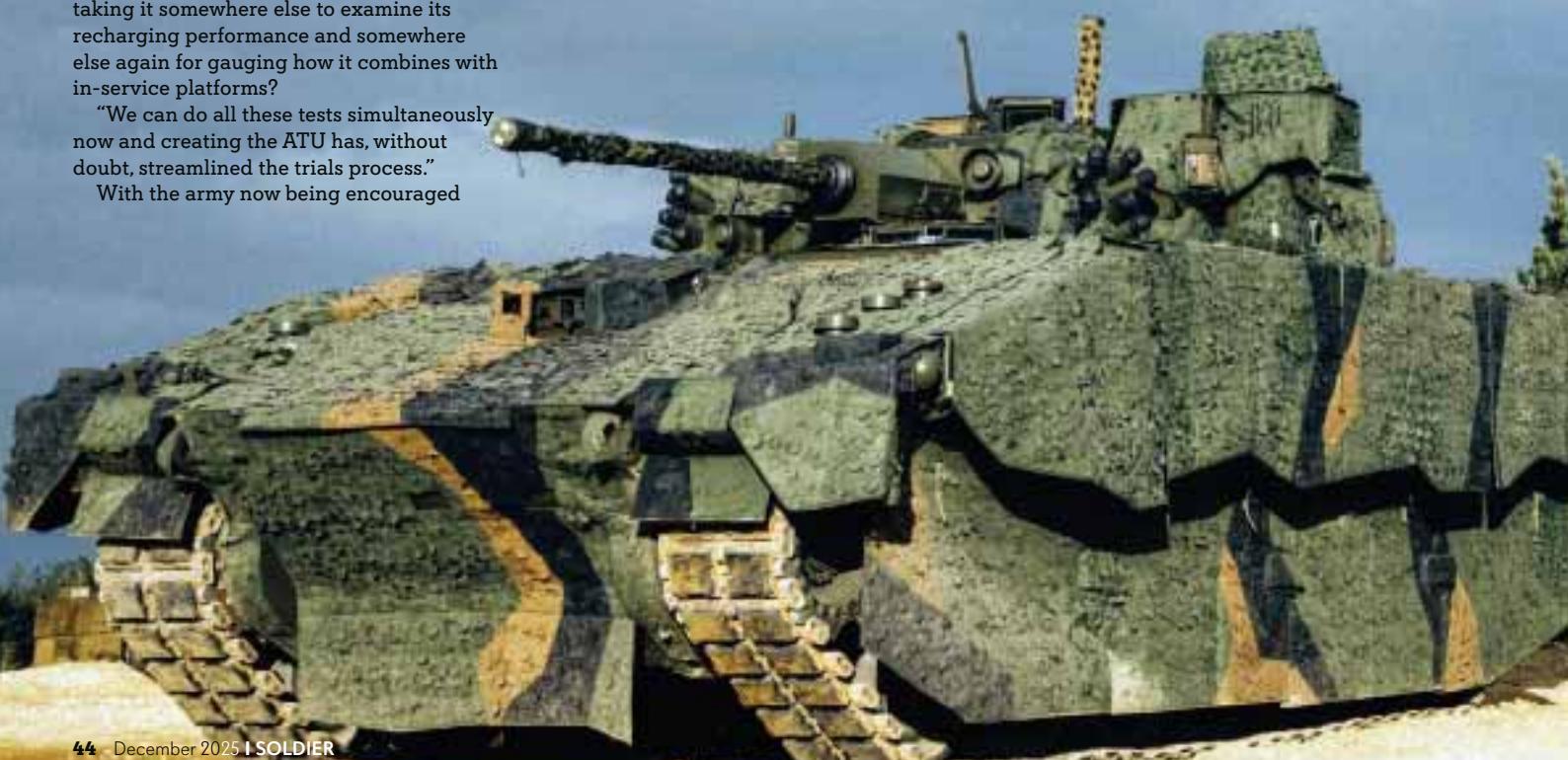
Trials and evaluations are generally put together on a case-by-case basis.

Boxer was given a different path to Ajax, for example, with Millbrook Proving Ground

selected as the best place for evaluation because while it still had to be confirmed it could meet certain British Army requirements, the vehicle was proven to a large degree thanks to around 1,800 units already in service with Germany, Australia, the Netherlands, Lithuania and Ukraine.

Ajax, meanwhile, was brought to Bovington for extensive trials because the ATU had access to soldiers who could test it in realistic conditions. As a new design it required a thorough evaluation of its all-round performance.

"We don't do just acceptance trials, we have the capacity to involve users in the design process to influence outcomes," explains Lt Col Cooper.



"We work closely with the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory and Defence Equipment and Support - we have strong relationships with those organisations. And being part of ETG means that our trials are cohered with the army's wider experimentation activity."

"We can do comparative trials using opposition kit, or with other possible options for procurement, and we also do reliability growth trials - we'll drive a platform round and round, for example, thrash it to see what breaks and if a piece does constantly we know a change is required."

"Then we'll find out if the modified piece causes other elements to break."

"With Ajax, we have driven it for more than 40,000km, tested its gun and sighting system for software bugs, and investigated and resolved around 2,000 issues in total."

The ATU team took Ajax to Sweden for cold-weather trials and Saudi Arabia for hot-weather evaluation because "where your trial equipment is absolutely critical", notes WO2 Piper.

"We test with troops in realistic environments such as exercises or staged scenarios that we call battlefield missions because our job is to provide the user perspective," he adds.

"At ATU we have numerous warrant officers or senior NCOs covering every expertise we require."

"Among others, we have two Small Arms School Corps warrant officers, our own highly qualified military diver, a master gunner, a master driver, and one of only two artificer sergeant major recovery mechanics

in the whole of the army."

ATU also conducts through-life trials to explore how to improve and keep established kit in service longer.

Currently the team is appraising modifications to the Panther vehicle (pictured left) that could lead to a button being installed which, when pressed, blows open its heavy doors using pneumatic pistons - just one measure designed to make the platform safer and extend its service life by a decade to 2035.

And in a few years' time, when personnel jump out of the modified Panthers wearing their snug next-generation boots, they can thank the ATU, which recently fitted out 300 troops of every conceivable size to trial a proposed new design for the next standard issue footwear.

Primary tests included gauging grip levels on various surfaces, including the sheet metal surfaces of a vehicle, and foot comfort in hot and cold conditions after marching several kilometres a day for two weeks solid.

The user feedback being collected, and the ATU's very detailed trial report that will follow, will help inform the MoD's final procurement decision.

The staff at ATU, like every soldier out there, know that every piece of kit, however humble, deserves the closest scrutiny because even the most humdrum items can prove just as vital to battlefield missions as the space age tech that grabs the headlines.

As former chief of the general staff, Gen Sir Patrick Sanders, once put it: "You can't cyber your way across a river." >>

5 LOCATIONS

The ATU's 160-strong team are found in

Bovington

- Headquarters
- Mounted Close Combat Trials and Development Group (MCC TDG)
- Support squadron

Warminster

- Dismounted Close Combat Trials and Development Group (DCC TDG)
- Uncrewed Aerial Systems Trials and Development Group (UAS TDG)

Larkhill

- Joint Effects Trials and Development Group (JE TDG)

Aldershot

- Combat Service and Support Trials and Development Group (CSS TDG)

Minley

- Military Engineering Trials and Development Group (ME TDG, below)



THE PIPELINE

The ATU tests a huge range of proposed equipment as well as modifications to in-service kit. Recent projects include...

Counter-UAS laser

ATU's WO2 Matt Anderson (SASC) from the Mounted Close Combat TDG was the trials manager for the recent and well-publicised test of the high-energy laser weapon mounted on an armoured vehicle. It successfully destroyed several drones in flight. And he remains the only person in the army to have set up a laser range for testing such technology.

"It was a potent 15-kilowatt weapon that is hazardous out to more than 3,000km," he tells Soldier. "We didn't fire above the horizon, as a result.

"Fire it into the sky and it could damage aircraft or even satellites, including those orbiting far out. If you damage another nation's asset it could be considered an act of war.

"We had to monitor our test drones

very thoroughly too because any shiny surfaces had the potential to deflect the laser beam in an unpredictable way and its energy doesn't dissipate in the way that a bullet's does – it can still be dangerous many hundreds of miles out.

"It was a fantastic experience to run the trial but one of the most difficult jobs I've ever done."



Long-range Javelin

The effective range of the Javelin weapon system is currently 2.5km but teams from the ATU recently became the first to fire it out to 4.2km while testing whether new and improved optical sights could increase its capability. The trial was on Salisbury Plain Training Area.



Remote-controlled Smash

WO2 Anderson is leading trials to evaluate the performance of the Smash Hopper – an upgraded version of the counter-UAS gun sight that's already in service. It has been made into a semi-autonomous remote weapons system that can be controlled and fired by a soldier via a tablet. It can operate from a tripod (pictured), fixed mast or lightweight vehicle mounting.



Jackal modifications

The ATU has its own highly capable workshop containing 3D printers, laser cutters, lathes and advanced automatic milling machines along with expert civilian staff for operating them. It can fabricate almost any small part. For Project Vanaheim, a recent

counter-UAS experiment conducted with US forces, the workshop produced a prototype coupling bracket that enabled an experimental radar mast to be mounted on a Jackal, thus enabling a proper evaluation of the technology to take place.

They also produced a special mount positioned at the crew's side for the Jackal's first ever two-channel radio system. Previously, when it was a one-channel device, it was located behind the seats as the crew didn't need access to switch from one to another.



Electric mission module

“The All-Terrain Electric Mission Module is not a sexy looking bit of kit but it's damned useful,” says SSgt Sam Spearpoint (REME), an ATU project manager.

“With the right adaptations to the lead vehicle it can provide hybrid or even silent stealth power, controlling drive and on-board systems.

“This big battery on wheels can also turn into

a remote-controlled UGV and each axle can steer while the wheels can crab 90 degrees, which is useful for manoeuvring on urban operations.

“In the near future, we are looking at installing electric ‘jerry can’ batteries to go on its back that charge up on the move and can be removed to provide power to dispersed troops for their devices.

“Power supply

innovations like this are vital to the army. When we deploy out everyone takes the largest generator they can, we burn lots of fuel and then we have the logistical challenge of refuelling them.

“We suffered loads of casualties in Afghanistan when people were doing fuel runs and if you can reduce fuel usage we are going to enhance our survivability as well as efficiency.”

Next-gen camo

ATU teams have been testing a removable camouflage ‘jacket’ for army vehicles that pulls off and on quickly and has a thermal fabric inside that reduces the vehicle's heat signature, reducing the threat from lurking enemy drones. The teams found the effectiveness of the Velcro used to fix the cam sheets was reduced when they became plastered in mud, so if and when the kit is procured, they recommended magnetic plates be used instead, or a combination of magnets and Velcro.



**'It was about
reducing
signatures and
maximising
survivability'**



**UNDER
SURVEILLANCE**



LESSONS from contemporary operations were at the fore as reservists from 215 (Scottish) Multirole Medical Regiment tested their skills on Ex Paeion Cyclone.

The two-week programme saw 83 personnel from the unit - along with counterparts from 2nd Medical Group, Joint Hospital Group and 30th (US) Medical Brigade - travel south for their annual continuous training, the main focus of which involved establishing a role two hospital at Copehill Down village.

This included emergency, surgical, intensive care and general ward beds and allowed them to treat a high number of casualties in what has become a familiar scenario on current exercises - troops performing a front-line screen against an invading, peer-on-peer enemy.

A full range of specialities were deployed - from combat medical technicians to consultants - and commanding officer Lt Col Gareth Cole told *Soldier* they embraced a new way of working in an urban

Below near **Basement windows helped make troop movements more discreet**
Below far **Hospital departments were split between buildings to reduce signatures and maximise survivability**



» environment. This primarily saw the hospital split into separate departments across different buildings, instead of being housed under one roof.

"It was about reducing signatures, maximising survivability and thinking about how we deploy medical care and treatments," he explained.

"We are now starting to operate in spaces that are no longer defined as secure, so our ability to move and survive will be key.

"We were working in cellars and basements – nothing was above ground – and there were groups of soldiers in houses who did not see other people for six days.

"Not having that freedom of movement was a particular challenge, but it was one they overcame."

Personnel also had to think about comms signatures, with kit such as field phones becoming more prevalent, while innovation and experimentation was encouraged.

A surgical station was established on the back of a MAN SV truck with the thinking it would provide an initial capability while main facilities were being set up. The same

role was performed on departure.

UAS were also incorporated through the demonstration of a flatpack-style precision payload delivery system aimed at helping medical logistics and resupply.

"It has a 3kg delivery load, is no bigger than a pizza box and can be launched from a ramp," Lt Col Cole explained.

"GPS can guide it to within ten metres and it is not trackable. It has been used in Ukraine, and we were looking at it in terms of resupply for bloods – it could be a huge game changer moving forward."

A robotic dog capable of delivering supplies between locations was also trialled, while personnel got hands on with the Moves SLC oxygen concentrator during a stop at Beckingham Camp in Lincolnshire, enroute to Salisbury Plain.

"We have to make the best use of our resources and think in different ways about our clinical priorities," Col Simon Johnson, 215 Regt's clinical director concluded.

"Medicine is medicine, that is our day job but being able to do it in a contested urban environment is what troops will take away." ◀



View from the ground

ACTING Corporal Nicole Webber, age 37, joined 215 Regt three years ago. In her day job she works as an orthopaedic scrub nurse in Dundee and she deployed on Ex Paeion Cyclone in the theatre department. Here, she shares her experiences from Copehill Down...

How did it compare to previous exercises?

I've only done one medical exercise before but we were in a harbour area doing things like section attacks and sentry duty. A lot of time was spent on the actual set-up, but the nature of this meant we weren't moving around as much, and it was far more tactical. It was nonstop.

What were the challenges of being restricted to a single building?

It was the feeling of being cooped up – I'm not great with that. I was one of those who would go out for supplies every morning – it was the highlight of my day. We were with the intensive care unit, so it was a bigger group, and there was a personality in there who kept morale high.

What was the working environment like?

We were on shift patterns, so there was a lot of sleeping at random times. We are all accustomed to working shifts in the NHS, but I found it hard to be strict with myself. Then there would be a drone attack during my downtime, so I never knew when I would be getting some proper sleep. Making sure I rest when I can is one of the big things I've taken from this.

Describe some of the scenarios you faced

An ectopic pregnancy and appendicitis. On other camps we've had gunshot wounds, but here we were in a civilian environment, so they wanted us to think about potential civilian casualties. It was dealing with patients, triaging appropriately and considering the logistics of getting them to wards in other buildings. We were passing stretchers through windows to make the moves more discreet. There was also a big focus on reusing kit and adapting what we had in case we ran out.

How did the situation in Ukraine influence things?

As a medical facility we are no longer protected, we are a target. You have to be mindful of that. With the drone threat, we were in trouble if we didn't follow protocols properly – people were pulled up for not wearing body armour. It was also my first time using field phones. Everything was going through one system and if someone else was on the line you had to wait. That was difficult, particularly when I was on drone sentry and tried to call in a strike.



C O M P E

HAPPY CHRISTMAS FROM SOLDIER

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HOW TO ENTER

Send your name, rank, unit and daytime telephone number to comps@soldiermagazine.co.uk by midnight on January 9.

You can also post your details to *Soldier* Christmas Comp, Ordnance Barracks, Government Road, Aldershot, Hampshire GU11 2DU. Only one entry per soldier.

We will draw a winner and contact them during early January and publish their name in our February issue.

Not in uniform? Turn to page 57 where you will find our regular How Observant Are You competition, open to all readers and this month offering the chance to win a Majority turntable.

Good luck!

Scan to enter



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 4. The Flights may be used 4 weeks after the prize notification date at the earliest.
 5. The Flights cannot be used on UK Bank Holidays or during UK School Holidays.
 6. If a Winner cancels one or both of the Flights, no alternative or further Flights will be provided.

7. The Winner and their travel companion must travel together on the same Flights.
 8. Each Entrant acknowledges that any costs not explicitly referred to in these terms and conditions as being part of the Flights shall be borne by the Winner. For the avoidance of doubt, the Flights exclude travel insurance, spending money, accommodation, and transfers to and from the airport.
 9. The Winner will be responsible for ensuring that they, and their travel companion, are available to travel and

hold valid passports, any necessary visas and travel documents for the Flights.
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TALKBACK

mail@soldiermagazine.co.uk WhatsApp +447973 614 782

YOUR letters provide an insight into the issues at the top of soldiers' agendas... but please be brief. Messages must include your name and location (although we won't publish them if you ask us not to). We reserve the right to accept or reject letters, and to edit for length, clarity or style. Before you write to us with a problem, you should first have tried to obtain an answer via your own chain of command.

Seeing red over court report



Picture: Graeme Main

I WOULD like to bring to your attention the way I feel you have let down soldiers who've been unfortunate enough to have been abused by other personnel and the system.

In November's edition you wrote a piece about the court martial of Pte Samuel Hodgetts for sexual abuse of a female.

You put a small report on page 11 of the issue, hiding it away and making it look like another normal article.

Why did you not make more of your report? It should have been made into a larger, more in-depth investigative-style piece, covering a full page of editorial at the very least and placed on the front page.

Not only that but your first paragraph saying "Troops guilty of sexual abuse should expect no mercy" could have been

much larger in size so that other soldiers would take note.

You should also have listed the many other abuse cases listed on the gov.uk page that included the report of this hearing.

– Name and address supplied

Steve Muncey, managing editor, replies: There are many factors that determine how much space we devote to any one article and the way we present it.

These include – among many others – the volume of information we have at our disposal, image quality and balance of subjects within each edition.

We have a finite number of pages and a wide spectrum of topics to cover so we cannot write about everything in the army sphere in every issue.

In addition, when it comes to coverage of courts martial,

we are legally obliged to ensure our reports appear in the next practicable issue.

This can sometimes leave us with very little time to add any sort of analysis or investigation between getting the information and our next deadline.

We certainly take the topic you mention very seriously, as I think is evidenced by our three-page report on the fall-out from the Gnr Jaysley Beck inquest in the March 2025 issue and numerous advice articles we've published around bullying, harassment and mental health in recent months and years.

Far from "hiding" this report on page 11, it appeared in the leading Update section with an eye-catching red headline.

The editorial team always welcomes direct approaches from personnel on any subject and we do not shy away from writing about controversial issues, as our record shows.

If people contact us with their personal experiences, we will follow it up.

'YOU PUT A SMALL REPORT ON PAGE 11, HIDING IT AWAY'

APC why?

IT'S widely known there is a retention and recruitment problem in the service.

Yet the Army Personnel Centre willingly posts people to jobs that aren't on their preference proformas, thus sparking notices to terminate.

Units then have gapped posts that should have been filled by qualified and experienced persons.

What makes things worse is the fact these jobs will now be gapped for over a year when they could easily have been filled and the terminations prevented.

This is coupled with the absolute inflexibility of the boarding process within some desks, even when solutions are presented. Meanwhile, other desks can seemingly bend jobs and positions to their will, as no doubt many have witnessed.

It definitely leaves a sour taste in the mouth after dedicating decades to the country and establishment.

– Name and address supplied

Get on your bike!

WHY does the army not offer the cycle to work scheme?

I hear the nebulous argument that it pays an allowance for cycling to work but in reality how many people actually claim this? I am sure cyclists would prefer 40 per cent off a new bike.

If we are serious about getting fit, saving the planet and want a better lived experience for us all then let's get on our bikes.

– Name and address supplied

DIRECTORY

Bite-sized data to keep you in the know

WELFARE

If you have a problem, your chain of command and unit welfare teams are a good starting point. They may also be able to help you find local support groups not listed below. Padres can provide individuals with pastoral care and moral guidance, whatever their faith. Here are some other national organisations that can offer help:

Army HIVE

These centres provide information for the whole military community on a wide variety of topics affecting their everyday life, including relocation, accommodation, health and wellbeing, finance, non-UK nationals, education, employment, deployment, resettlement, military discounts and local area information.

army.mod.uk/hives

Forcesline

A free and confidential telephone helpline and email service for regulars, reserves, ex-forces and their families.

0800 731 4880

ssafa.org.uk/get-help

Army Welfare Service

Contact directly via rc-aws-iat-0mailbox@mod.gov.uk or **01904 882051/2053**

Forces Connect

A free, simple, advert-free and confidential app that signposts soldiers, veterans and families to local and national organisations that can help them with everything from crisis support to business advice or housing. No personal information required.

forcesconnect.co.uk

ALCOHOL AND SMOKING

If you are concerned about someone else's health or your own you can get confidential, free advice from your medical officer during routine hours, or your unit duty officer.

Drinkline

A free, confidential helpline **0300 123 1110**

NHS support

Various information can be found at nhs.uk/livewell

BULLYING/ HARASSMENT/ DISCRIMINATION

Army Mediation Service

0306 770 7691 or

mil 96770 7691

army-mediation-0@mailbox@mod.gov.uk

Army Speak Out Helpline

0306 770 4656 or **mil 96770 4656**

army-speakout@mod.gov.uk

COMPETITIONS

**October 2025 winner
HOAY 1001 (MAJORITY ELIAS SOUNDBAR)**

Anna Fletcher, York

RULES: Winners chosen at random from valid entries. Unless stated otherwise, competitions are open to readers aged 16 or over only. We have no responsibility for incorrect, incomplete, lost or delayed entries. Any winner will be bound by our terms and conditions. Where we are unable to contact a winner within one month, or any prize cannot be taken up or is declined or returned undelivered, a substitute winner may be drawn. At that point, the original winner shall cease to be eligible. The judges' decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. *Soldier* is compliant with the Data Protection Act. We will not pass your details to a third party without your prior consent. Automated entries, bulk entries or third-party entries will be disqualified. Competitions are not open to *Soldier* employees, competition sponsors or anyone else connected with the competition, or the immediate families or agents of the foregoing. We have the right to verify the eligibility and identity of any entrant. Prize winners acknowledge and agree that neither *Soldier* or any competition sponsor(s) or any of their employees, agents or subcontractors shall have any liability whatsoever in connection with the winner's use and/or possession of the prize.

Defence BHD Helpline

Confidential, freephone and outside the chain of command
0800 014 2381

DEBT AND MONEY PROBLEMS

These can be a considerable burden, made worse by dealing with them alone. The following organisations can provide support.

Forces Pension Society

A not-for-profit, independent military pension watchdog and enquiry service
020 7820 9988
forcespensionsociety.org

Joining Forces Credit Union

Saving and affordable loans for the armed forces community from not-for-profit financial cooperatives
joiningforcescu.co.uk

Money Helper

Government-backed money and pensions guidance with a wealth of in-depth guides, tools and calculators
moneyhelper.org.uk

National Debtline

A charity that can talk through your options and help you take back control
0808 808 4000
nationaldebtline.org

StepChange Debt Charity

The UK's leading debt charity offering free, confidential advice
0800 138 1111
stepchange.org.uk

GAMBLING

National Gambling Helpline free information, support and counselling for problem gamblers in the UK
0808 8020 133

GRIEF

Cruse Bereavement Support
0808 808 1677
cruse.org.uk

SSAFA supports people who have been through a similar tragedy, giving you the opportunity to talk through your emotions with an understanding group
supportgroups@ssafa.org.uk

RESETTLEMENT

Career Transition Partnership employment fairs help support the transition to civilian life by providing resources, networking opportunities and direct access to forces friendly employers. To book your place at an event visit modctp.co.uk

Wrexham - December 4

Newcastle - February 5, 2026

Lincoln - February 25, 2026

Bristol - March 19, 2026

Maidstone - April 23, 2026

HOUSING

Single living accommodation

Faults and issues must be reported to the local contractor – Vivo, Mitie or Vinci or your unit quartermaster, depending on location. Check common areas for posters detailing local procedures. Inform your chain of command if you believe repairs are not being properly dealt with.

Pinnacle Home Services Team

The primary point of contact for families for housing, the allocation of SFA and details of local housing officers
UK 0800 031 8628
Overseas +44(0) 161 605 3517
pinnacleservicefamilies.co.uk/contact-us

Forces Help to Buy

For home ownership support visit gov.uk/guidance/forces-help-to-buy

Single Persons Accommodation Centre for the Ex-Services

01748 833797
spaces.org.uk

Veterans Gateway

A first point of contact for veterans seeking support
veteransgateway.org.uk

INJURY/SICKNESS

Personnel Recovery Centres

These centres can be found across the United Kingdom. To find out more about your local service, speak to your unit welfare team, search for Army Recovery Capability on Defence Connect or send an email to rc-pers-arc-0@mailbox@mod.gov.uk

LONELINESS

Armed Forces and Veterans Breakfast Clubs

A network of clubs to enjoy breakfast and banter, while combating social isolation
afvbc.world

Samaritans

Someone to talk to, night or day, for free and without judgement

116 123 samaritans.org

The Royal British Legion

Contact the friendly team for information about local groups and support services
0808 802 8080
britishlegion.org.uk

MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

There's always someone you can talk to. Speak to your friends or family, boss or padre, unit welfare staff (details above), medical officer or GP. Charities and other organisations also provide support, including...

Combat Stress 24/7 Helpline

0800 138 1619

Headspace

All British Army personnel and civil servants can access this mindfulness app for free with an @armymail.mod.uk or Modnet email address. To try it out visit
work.headspace.com/britisharmy/member-enroll

Mind – The Mental Health Charity

0300 123 3393 mind.org

NHS

General mental health support
nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters

Op Courage

A specialist NHS service for armed forces leavers, reservists, veterans and their families. Search for "Op Courage" on nhs.uk to find your local team

Samaritans

116 123 samaritans.org

The Ripple Pond

A self-help support network for relatives of physically or psychologically injured troops and veterans
0333 900 1028
theripplepond.org

Togetherall

A safe, online community where people support each other anonymously
togetherall.com

RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN/ABUSE**Aurora New Dawn**

Safety for survivors of domestic abuse, sexual violence, stalking
02394 216 816
aurorand.org.uk

ManKind

Support for male domestic abuse victims
01823 334244
mankind.org.uk

Relate

Relationship support
relate.org.uk

SEXUAL OFFENCES

Anyone wishing to report an incident can do so in multiple ways. It does not matter if your allegation is not recent, or if you believe there's no evidence. There is no need for anyone to speak directly to their chain of command.

The **Defence Serious Crime Command** is responsible for investigating crimes such as sexual assault and harassment within defence and operates independently of the three services. Contact them 24/7 via the Service Police Crime Bureau on 02392 285 170

Crimestoppers can be reached at 0800 555 111

Alternatively, complaints can be reported directly to the **civilian police**.

To discuss victim support contact the **Victim Witness Care Unit**, which operates independently from the chain of command, on 07974 074259 or via people-dscc-vwcu@mod.gov.uk. Your information will be treated in confidence and you can discuss your options for reporting any allegations.

Further support can be found on the **Defence Connect Call it Out Hub** or via the **Speak Out Helpline** on 0306 770 4656 or army-speakout@mod.gov.uk

STAFF NETWORKS

The following groups are open to regulars and reservists and civil servants.

LGBTQ+ Network

elizabeth.corbett117@mod.gov.uk

Multicultural Network

priscilla.quansah100@mod.gov.uk

Parents Network

armypers-parents-network@mod.gov.uk

Servicewomen's Network

samantha.dodge733@mod.gov.uk

NCO ACADEMY**Development Days 2026**

Feb 19 – Kinloss (39 Engr Regt)
Mar 25 – Grantham (150 RLC)
May 13 – Brancote (30 Sigs)
May 21 – MoD Lyneham
July 8 – Edinburgh
Sept 16 – Thorney Isle (16 RA)
Oct 21 – MoD Lyneham
Oct 26 – Chepstow (1 Rifles)

Search for the NCO Academy on Defence Connect for more information.

SEARCH

Paul Borres is trying to trace a member of the **Royal Army Medical Corps** who was based in Soest, Germany in 1971 named Shirley. Email paul21_b@hotmail.com

UKSF BRIEFING COURSE

This six-day package is the first step for anyone wanting to attempt selection for UK Special Forces – regular or reservist. For more on 2026 courses search **UKSF** on Modnet or Defence Connect.

Course name	Date
1/26	Feb 1-6
2/26	Mar 8-13
3/26	Apr 12-17
4/26	May 10-15
5/26	Jun 7-12
6/26	Sep 6-11
7/26	Oct 18-23
8/26	Nov 15-20

HOW OBSERVANT ARE YOU?**... A Majority Stylo TURNTABLE!**

TEN details have been changed in this image of The Band of the Irish Guards performing at London's Marylebone Station in the run-up to last month's Remembrance Day.

Circle all the differences on image **B** and send the panel to HOAY 1003, Soldier, Ordnance Barracks, Government Road, Aldershot, Hampshire GU11 2DU, along with contact details, including email address, by December 31.

A photocopy is also acceptable but only one entry per person may be submitted.

Alternatively, email a photograph of the image highlighting the differences to comps@soldiermagazine.co.uk

The first correct entry drawn after the closing date will win this compact Bluetooth-enabled Stylo record player worth £165, courtesy of our friends at Majority and available to buy on Amazon.

Featuring an Audio-Technica AT3600L cartridge, RCA output and a die-cast metal platter, this kit is designed for vinyl enthusiasts who are seeking modern connectivity and classic sound quality. Good luck!



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B

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REVIEWS

★ BOOKS ★ MOVIES ★ GAMES ★



Pictures: Felix Clay and Steve Dock

Sharpe's Storm

Swashbuckling literary hero returns for 25th instalment

BOOK

WHEN Bernard Cornwell conjured up Richard Sharpe in 1980, little did he imagine his scrappy, straight-talking infantryman would still be sticking it to Napoleon's troops 45 years later.

From Seringapatam in India to the muddy fields of Waterloo, via the Iberian Peninsula, Sharpe has fought his way through some of the most infamous campaigns in British military history.

Now marching forth for his 25th exploit – *Sharpe's Storm* – the officer finds himself back in Southern France in 1813, charged with keeping a reckless admiral

alive during a daring ground reconnaissance mission.

With his trademark combo of action and meticulous historical detail, Cornwell once again serves up the kind of ripping yarn that has seen his work adapted for screen – in addition to the hugely popular *Sharpe* series, fronted by **Sean Bean**, his Anglo-Saxon saga *The Last Kingdom* became a global Netflix hit.

And as the 81-year-old told *Soldier*, he has no plans to lay down his literary sword just yet...

What can readers expect from the new book?

Classic Sharpe. A return to the days

when he's at his best, fighting the French.

How difficult is it to get back into his head after a break?

Frighteningly easy. I sometimes feel he lives in my head. I've been writing him for over 40 years now and he's always there somewhere, lurking around, being grumpy.

What is it about his character that has such enduring appeal?

I wish I knew, but the only answer I can ever come up with is that he sort of embodies the part of us that wants to cut through our difficulties. People feel harassed by officials, employers, taxmen and so

on, and wish they could give them two fingers and tell them to bugger off. Sharpe does that for them.

Is it challenging to write for different cohorts of readers – both those who have been with Sharpe since the start and newer audiences?

I never think about that. I always take the view that we write for ourselves. You write the kind of books you want to read and you just hope that other people want to read them too.

You've previously said Sharpe was inspired by the *Hornblower* series – what other historical fiction do you read?

I try not to because I spend all day writing it, but I love Hilary Mantel's work, and Maggie O'Farrell, who wrote *Hamnet*, and also C J Sansom's *Shardlake* books.

With such an extensive back-

catalogue, how hard is it to avoid continuity errors when returning to an earlier time in Sharpe's life?

It's actually quite difficult because he has a chronology which makes some sort of sense, but the books weren't written in order. So I'm continually messing it up and I really did on *Sharpe's Storm* – the grand ending had to be abandoned because I realised he would have had to have been in two places at once. And in the original books, I said that Sharpe learned to read when he was in the Seringapatam dungeons, but when I came to write that story maybe ten years later, I realised he was only in there for about four days. So I had to fudge that. I also feel terribly sorry for his women because later on he meets some wonderful heroines, who have to be killed off because they weren't in the earlier books. But on the whole, my readers are very kind and forgive me for these errors.

Three of your series have been adapted for TV – how do you feel when the film plots diverge from the source material?

Oh, I'm entirely sympathetic to them – they have different constraints than I do. I also worked in television for ten years, so I have some appreciation for what they're having to do. And I think they get round it very well. I'm just grateful they're making the series at all.

Who would win in a fight, Sharpe or Uhtred from *The Last Kingdom*?

Well, Sharpe has a rifle and he knows how to use it. But I think they'd settle it over a pint of beer somewhere.

Do you have a favourite war film?

I don't go out of my way to watch them but I'd have to say *Lawrence of Arabia*. It's a magnificent movie.



Sharpe's Storm by Bernard Cornwell is published by HarperCollins and priced £22. To hear more about the book and other projects check out the author's interview on the BFBS *SiteRep* podcast

Interview: Becky Clark, *Soldier*

Which historical figure would you most like to meet?

Oh, it has to be The Duke. Although Wellington would dislike me intensely. He always said he couldn't abide authors.

Would you rather have been in the infantry or the cavalry in Wellington's army?

The infantry. I share Sharpe's prejudice that in the cavalry, it's the horses that have all the brains.

Do you have a strict writing routine?

Lord, yes. I mean, it's a job like any other. I'm usually at my desk by 0800 and work through till 1800, five or sometimes seven days a week. Although some of it is staring into space or walking the dog.

Do you suffer from writer's block?

I don't really believe in it. A nurse can't get nurse's block and not come into work, so what right do I have to say, 'I can't do it'? There are days when it doesn't go well, but that's just telling you you've taken the story in the wrong direction.

You have a very loyal fanbase – do you ever worry how they will receive a book?

Well I go back to what I said earlier about who you write for. If it lives up to my expectations then I assume readers will come along with me because experience tells me they like what I like.

Will you stop reading a book if you're not enjoying it?

Absolutely – or skip to the last chapter to find out what happens. Life's too short to sit and read a book that's boring you.

You've made no promises about another Sharpe book – what else are you working on?

I'm actually writing another Uhtred story, which I once said I'd never do but I've found a gap in his history that could be filled nicely. I'm not entirely convinced it's a good idea, but I'm rather enjoying it so maybe it will work out.

MOVIE

The Wild Geese 4K restoration edition

Out this month



THE 1970s and early 80s – much like today – were a politically unsettled time around the world, and this is well reflected in the dystopian cinema of the era.

Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* gave audiences one of the first big-screen reflections of the Vietnam war while Ian Sharp's *Who Dares Wins* provided one of the first cinematic glimpses of modern UK special forces.

Wild Geese, directed by Andrew V McLaglen, also pushed the boundaries, exploring the motivations and murky backgrounds of a group of grizzled ex-soldiers-turned-mercenaries on a job in sub-Saharan Africa.

Originally released to acclaim in 1978, the film has now been given a 4K restoration and after a limited cinema run in November is available on ultra-HD 4K, Blu-ray and DVD formats this month. There are also box sets featuring a raft of extras. These include a UHD and Blu-ray pack with audio commentaries and interviews with key personalities plus a couple of featurettes. You can bag one for yourself in our comp below.

Soldier is happy to report that the remastering gives the movie a definite lift while the story, with exceptional performances from a cast led by **Richard Burton**, **Richard Harris** and **Roger Moore**, has lost none of its impact in a half-century. This should be at the forefront of any war film collection.



Review: Cliff Caswell, *Soldier*

WIN

WE HAVE a 4K UHD and Blu-ray combi set plus two DVD copies of the film to give away.

Just tell us which character from the Wizarding world **Richard Harris** went on to play in the Harry Potter series.

Send your answer to comps@soldiermagazine.co.uk
Closing date is December 31. All the usual rules apply.



Overleaf – our top review picks of '25

TOPS PICKS OF 2025

Santa's on his way but don't panic – Soldier's review team have got the stocking-filers sorted...

BOOKS

Victory '45

by James Holland and Al Murray

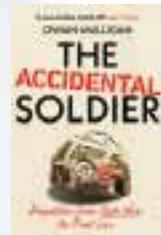


EIGHTY years on from the end of the Second World War, podcasting duo James Holland and Al Murray discuss eight key moments in the Axis Powers' surrender. Delivered in their customary accessible style, this gives the reader a riveting fly-on-the-wall look at how history unfolded and the actions of major players on both sides. Definitely one for the Christmas wish list.

Capt Mike Owens, RE

The Accidental Soldier

by Owain Mulligan



THIS hilarious, self-deprecating account of the author's unexpected journey from teaching to service life captures the quirks, chaos and camaraderie of the army with pinpoint accuracy. Whether you've served yourself or just enjoy a well-told tale of military mishaps, the book offers entertainment in spades. A real gem that you'll want to recommend and re-read.

Lt Victoria Carr, Int Corps

Arnhem: Black Tuesday

by Al Murray

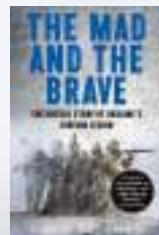


PUBLISHED in paperback earlier this year, this innovative and thought-provoking study of 24 hours in the 1944 battle for Arnhem is my nomination for the top read of 2025. Just when you thought that there was nothing more to be said about Operation Market Garden, along comes Al Murray and proves otherwise.

Mike Peters, ex-AAC

The Mad and the Brave

by Colin Freeman



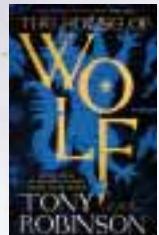
AS negotiations to end the war in Ukraine continue, this solid journalistic offering sheds light on the foreign fighters who answered

Volodymyr Zelensky's call to arms when Russia launched its all-out invasion in 2022. Through interviews with International Legion troops – a diverse group if ever there was one – the author reveals a fascinating, previously untold side to the human story of the conflict.

Cliff Caswell, Soldier

The House of Wolf

by Tony Robinson



NATIONAL treasure and lifelong history buff Sir Tony Robinson turns the clock back to 9th century England for his debut adult novel. Think *Succession* but with shield walls, mead and Vikings as King Alfred battles for the throne. Fusing action and intrigue with in-depth knowledge of the Anglo-Saxon age – with flashes of his signature wit throughout – one wonders what took him so long. Becky Clark, Soldier

Console killers

VIDEO-GAME guru **L Sgt Ashley Ryan (IG)** has been reviewing for Soldier over the past year – as well as giving his thoughts live on streaming site Twitch. Here, he offers us his three highlights of 2025...

GAMES

Ghost of Yotei

Available on PS5



IF GAMING had a royal court, this would definitely be on the throne. It made me feel like a dignified Samurai right up until I fell off a cliff because I was too busy admiring the view on horseback. An addictive photo mode means I now have more pictures of virtual sunsets than real ones, while combat is smooth enough to have its own skincare line.

Sniper Elite Resistance

Available on PC and consoles

LIKE a silent bullet, the latest instalment of this Second World War actioner really hits the mark. The slow-motion kill-cam remains the most educational anatomy lesson I never asked for. It's the only franchise where you can fail every objective, blow your cover in



under 30 seconds and still feel like a tactical genius because you made one long-distance shot. Subtle? No. Satisfying? Absolutely.

Kingdom Come: Deliverance 2

Available on PC and consoles

OUR third-place winner for this year answers the age-old question, 'what if medieval life was painfully realistic and everyone smelled vaguely of disappointment?' This masterpiece lets you live the true peasant experience – getting lost, getting insulted and getting punched by a drunk guy you accidentally looked at for too long. Combat feels like two exhausted blacksmiths arguing over who gets the last ham bone but I've honestly never been so entertained while being so thoroughly bad at something.



JOIN THE 2026 TEAM

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SOLDIERSPORT



BEST IN CLASS

Gdsm Manuqalo Komaitai (IG) on the charge against the RAF



Gdsm Thando Dlamini (SG) at the Army Championships

SPORTS AWARDS

COMMONWEALTH soldiers scooped two of the big prizes as the service toasted another year of athletic achievement at the Army Sports Awards.

Sensational form in army colours and on the international stage saw Gdsm Manuqalo Komaitai (IG) named sportswoman of the year – becoming the third rugby union player to receive the accolade.

The soldier only started in the sport five years ago but has made rapid strides and was named player of the tournament at the 2025 Inter-Services Championships.

That form earned Komaitai a call-up to the Fiji squad for the Oceania Championships, where the back row forward came off the bench to score on her debut against Tonga. She then started in the final against Samoa, which the team won 24-20.

From there, attention turned to

the World Cup and the 29-year-old started all three games as Fiji exited at the pool stage.

However, Komaitai scored in a narrow loss to Scotland before the squad ended their campaign on a high by beating Wales.

Her achievements were rewarded on her return to the UK, when she signed with Premiership Women's Rugby outfit Harlequins.

Komaitai beat England masters hockey ace Lt Col Nic George (R Signals) and Cpl Paige Atwell (RLC) – who has starred in ice hockey and strongwoman – to the award.

"This means a lot to me," she said. "It is a great honour."

"If it wasn't for the army I would not have been able to join the Fiji squad – they really opened that for me."

A medal-winning return to the taekwondo in 2025 – including a bronze at his home national championships in Eswatini – helped Gdsm Thando Dlamini

(SG) secure the sportsman of the year crown.

The soldier was also victorious at the Liverpool and Wales Opens and went on to claim the middleweight honours at the army championships, while achieving top-ranking status in his country.

Dlamini's success came on the back of a two-year break from the sport as he battled cancer, only receiving the all-clear in the spring (*Soldier*, August).

St Lucia sprinter LCpl Mavric Pamphile (RE) and England clay target shooter Maj Rob Vincent (RTR) were the other nominees.

"I'm so surprised," Dlamini said as he received his award. "Take nothing away from the other lads, what they have been doing is so impressive. I am lucky to get this."

A newcomer to the army tennis scene, OCdt Milly Wood (East Midlands UOTC) has enjoyed a stellar season on court.

Victory in her debut outing at the Army Tennis Championships (pictured below) saw her head to the Inter-Services as the number one seed and she claimed back-to-back victories at Wimbledon – one of which came from an epic tussle with the Royal Air Force's AS1 Eve Brady.

These results saw her collect the rising star award ahead of time trial cyclist LCpl Jack Smy (HCR) and Capt Megan Davis (RAMS), who has excelled in both athletics and triathlon.

The official of the year accolade went to boxing referee SSgt James Battle (RAPTC).

Pivotal to the delivery of boxing at all levels in the army, the 34-year-old is the youngest national standard referee/judge in England.

In the past year he has officiated at more than 60 competitions – including finals in all age groups at the England Boxing Championships.

Judo coach Cpl Sarah Barritt (AGC (RMP)) and army smallbore team captain Cpl Stephen Mitchell (REME) were also shortlisted.

An inspiration behind British Nordic skiing and biathlon for 50 years, Lt Col (Retd) Mark Goodson received the lifetime achievement award.

In that time he played a role in every aspect of the sport. He skied with 4th Royal Tank Regiment between 1967 and 1985 and inaugurated the Royal Armoured Corps Nordic Championships a year later.

The ex-officer was chair of Army Nordic Skiing for five years and was instrumental in the founding of the International Biathlon Union in 1993 and British Biathlon Union in 1996.

In these roles his focus was on opening pathways for soldiers to compete at Olympic level, while enabling thousands more to sample the sport as novices.

Elsewhere, 13 Air Assault Support Regiment, Royal Logistic Corps collected the major units prize, with 9 Theatre Support Battalion, Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers taking the minor units' equivalent.

165 Port and Maritime Regiment, RLC and Combat Manoeuvre Centre, Bovington were the reserve and training unit winners respectively.

And Cdt RSM Jonathan Opoku-Anoye was crowned cadet sportsperson of the year after medal-winning performances in football, athletics, orienteering and rugby.

AWARDS BY NUMBERS

5 Wins at military athletics events for Capt Megan Davis (RAMS) this year

7 Successive Inter-Services titles for the army women's netball team

5 Years as chair for Army Nordic Skiing for Lt Col (Retd) Mark Goodson

6 Tries by Gdsm Manuqalo Komaitai (LG) in this year's forces clashes



COURT STARS NAMED ARMY'S TOP TEAM

SPORTS AWARDS

A SEVENTH successive Inter-Services title as well as victory against the Republic of Ireland in a two-test series helped propel the army women's netball squad to the team of the year accolade.

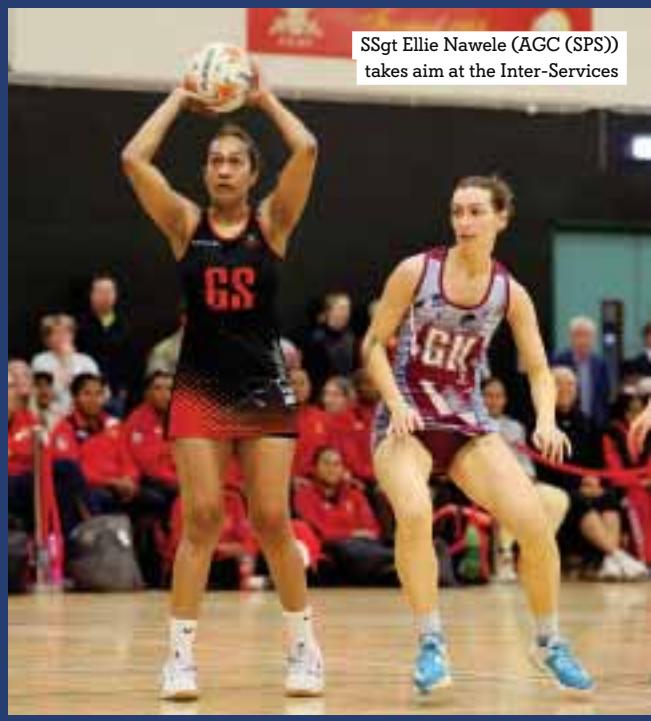
In a hectic 12 months, the soldiers also defeated under-21 teams from Netball Super League outfits Team Bath and London Mavericks, faced the world's seventh ranked nation in Malawi, played a curtain raiser to an England Netball international series and featured in the army's national recruiting campaign.

"We've spent a couple of years trying to get this award but didn't think we'd receive it," said skipper SSgt Ellie Nawele (AGC (SPS)).

"Everyone was really excited to receive the news."

"We have been building as a team for such a long time and the girls have been driving on, season after season to retain

'THE GIRLS HAVE BEEN DRIVING ON'



the Inter-Services trophy.

"We have been lucky to play such high-level netball and I think we deserve this honour."

The presentation was made a week after the players returned from a tour to Fiji, where they won all but one of the seven matches played.

The trip started with victory in a tournament staged on the country's western side – where they triumphed in all three pool matches, as well as the semi-finals and final.

A 48-36 defeat to the Fiji Pearls selection team followed before they ended on a high with a 46-26 success against the Fiji military.

"The match against the Pearls was so fast paced," Nawele, a former Fijian international, continued. "Around 80 per cent of their team had just come back from the under-21 world cup, so they were high-class opposition."

"It was a very important tour for us and added to our preparations for the next Inter-Services campaign."

"I was also proud to take the girls I have been playing with for 20 years to my home country and meet my friends, family and netball sisters."

SSgt Ellie Nawele (AGC (SPS)) takes aim at the Inter-Services

Cpl Jack Barber (RAMS) leads a UKAF attack



Pictures: Graeme Main

FRENCH ENJOY FINAL FLOURISH

KENTISH
CUP FINAL
UKAF 0 V FRANCE 2



Maj Joe Collins, R Signals

FOOTBALL

HEAD coach Maj Joe Collins (R Signals) completed his services footballing CV as he took charge of the UK Armed Forces in the Kentish Cup.

A 3-1 victory over their Dutch counterparts saw the defending champions start the campaign on a high but a 2-0 defeat to the French saw the trophy travel back across the Channel with the victors.

Army players Cfn Alfie Rogers (REME) and Cpl Jack Barber (RAMS) both lined up for what was a new-look UKAF side in the final, while there were another three soldiers on the bench, and Collins believes the experience will prove vital moving forward.

"We bled six or seven new players and only started five from the team that won it last season," he told *SoldierSport*.

"There were a lot of lads from the under-23s who were getting their first taste of the Kentish Cup, so that is a positive.

"We managed to work out the Dutch shape early and were able to cause them problems.

"Against the French, we have to hold our hands up and say they were better on the day.

"Alfie and Jack did fantastically well and will be great additions to the army senior squad in the future.

"This experience will live with the players for a long time and seeing the French celebrate at the end will hopefully inspire them for next season."

Collins also reflected on the personal achievement of leading UKAF in what was the latest step in a stellar coaching career.

He said: "I've coached the army youth, under-23s, seniors, masters and reserve teams, so UKAF was next. I'm immensely proud to have worked through the system to get here."

The team went on to face the German Bundeswehr in a remembrance fixture and will play the Irish Defence Force in Dublin on December 10.

BFBS SPORT

BFBS Forces News has launched a new platform for its coverage of services sport.

Inside Military Sport can be found on the BFBS Forces News YouTube channel, with videos on football's Kentish Cup, skateboarding and esports among the content already uploaded.

Personnel and families based overseas can also watch via BFBS TV catch-up and BFBS MiPlayer.



Picture: Graeme Main

MEDALS MOUNT AT MASTERS MEET

SWIMMING

THE army team claimed an impressive prize haul with a strong showing at the Swim England Masters Championships in Sheffield.

LCpl Tia Ward (REME) led the charge in the 18-24 age group as she secured gold medals in the 50- and 100-metre backstroke, as well as the 100-metre individual medley. She also added a silver in the 200-metre medley.

A further silver followed for Capt Olivia Pollard (RAMS, pictured) in the 50-metre butterfly of the 25-29 age bracket, while the women earned bronze in the 4x200-metre freestyle and 4x100-metre medley relays.

Beyond the podium, the eight-strong squad achieved 18 top-ten finishes and posted nine personal bests, reflecting the strength of the army programme across the ranks.

Further civilian meets are planned for the new year.

The team is looking for new members of all abilities to join the fold - from seasoned performers to those returning to the pool - with structured training and competitive opportunities available.

For more information contact the army swimming team through Defence Connect or follow **@britisharmyswimming** on Instagram.

FOOTBALL

THE Army Football Association was rewarded for its community engagement work at the 2025 County FA Recognition Awards.

The body's Supporting Football in a Challenging World project triumphed in the special recognition category at the Wembley ceremony.

Led by Army FA chair Col Dave Jones (pictured), the initiative has helped develop the grassroots game in some of the most difficult countries in the world, including Iraq, Afghanistan and Kosovo.

In addition, it has supported the homeless in Birmingham.

The officer flew over from his posting in North Macedonia to attend the event, before returning the next morning.



Picture: Graeme Main

MIGHTY MUSTANGS



AMERICAN FOOTBALL

THERE was disappointment for the Army Jackals in the concluding fixture of the 2025 Inter-Services American Football Championships as defeat to the Royal Air Force Mustangs saw the title slip from their grasp.

With both teams defeating the Royal Navy earlier in the competition, their clash at Abingdon's Tilsley Park was a winner-takes-all affair and the RAF made a flying start with a touchdown in the first minute.

A second score followed to stretch the lead to 14-0 before Maj Drew Newiss (R Signals) crossed to reduce the arrears to 14-6 at the interval.

The second-half started in a similar fashion to the first with a quick strike from the Mustangs - this time in the shape of a 69-yard touchdown run from ASI Elliott Knight. Capt Jacob Shotton (RRF) gave the army hope, but their rivals held firm to claim a 20-14 victory.

Picture: Eddie Keogh/Allign Photography

REMEMBRANCE RUGBY UNION

ARMY V US MILITARY
31 12



Pictures: Graeme Main

REDS PREVAIL IN US TEST

RUGBY UNION (MEN)

THREE first-half tries without reply paved the way for what proved to be a hard-fought win for the army men's senior team in their remembrance clash with the US military.

Scores from LCpl Michael McDonald (RE), Rfn Vereimi Qorowale (Rifles) and Lt Dylan Morris (RLC) saw the Reds surge into a 19-0 lead at the break – efforts that appeared

to lay the foundations for a resounding victory in the mould of their 47-17 success last season.

But the tourists held firm in the second period, when an increase in possession and territory saw them match the soldiers' attacking output as the game ended 31-12 – much to the delight of the near 1,000-strong crowd at the Army Rugby Stadium in Aldershot.

The hosts opened the scoring in the tenth minute as a smart

sidestep from LCpl Jack Johnson (RE) sparked an attack from the half-way line.

LCpl Oni Nayagi (R Yorks) then punched through the defence with a strong carry, leaving McDonald with the task of stretching to the line from close range.

A quick tap penalty from scrum half McDonald set the platform for Qorowale to score the team's second, and he was also heavily involved in their third try.

His chip over the top was expertly gathered on a slick surface by Johnson, who popped the ball up to the supporting Morris to cross in the corner.

Hooker Ryan Leonard reduced the arrears in the 43rd minute as he pounced on a loose ball at the lineout, before Nayagi hit back with a deserved score following a storming run from number eight SSgt Matt Dawson (Int Corps, pictured above).

A prolonged spell of US pressure on the army line was rewarded as prop James Irey

crashed over on the hour mark but hopes of a comeback were dealt a crushing blow moments later as Sam Follensbee fumbled a box kick, allowing Pte Adriu Muritoki (Scots) to run clear from inside his own half.

"We did not have much time together in the build-up, so we just focused on our attack," army skipper Bdr Pete Austin (RA) told *SoldierSport* afterwards.

"That second half was a big test for us, and while we hadn't worked on our defence, we showed the passion we have for that red shirt."

"Their forwards were brilliant and physical up front, which has given us a lot to think about moving forwards."

"We have a clear direction in terms of what we need to focus on and they did a fantastic job in stepping up."

"This is more than just a game. Playing against the US makes it a patriotic occasion and there was so much shouting and screaming in the crowd – it is what military rugby is all about."

Pte Adriu Muritoki (Scots) breaks free for the fifth try



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NEW CHAMPIONS AT CORPS CLASH

NETBALL (WOMEN)

A NEW name was added to the roll call of winners at the Inter-Corps Netball Championships as the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers finally lifted the division one trophy.

A 15-14 win over the Royal Logistic Corps in the final saw the team secure the title – ending a 20-year wait for glory in the competition.

The match was a repeat of last season's showpiece, which the Loggies won by just one point, and the result formed a rich reward for the efforts made to improve REME netball in recent seasons.

"I'm really proud of the resilience of our girls, especially the slightly older ones, to keep coming back year on year," Lt Col Laura Ellis, the team's coach and goal shooter, told *SoldierSport*.

"Up until three years ago we were bottom of the rankings, losing by scorelines of 20-0.

"But we had three new players come in and they have made a real difference. They were identified at 8 Training Battalion and all three have

gone on to make army squads, with two representing the UK Armed Forces."

Of the three, LCpl Shema Wright and LCpl Torika Soso played in the tournament and assumed starring roles in what was a tough two days on court.

"Numbers were down as people are busy, but the calibre and standard – particularly in division one – was very high," Ellis, who is also chair of REME netball, continued.

"We trained with our men's team in the build-up, and that helped. They are a fledgling outfit; we have the inaugural men's corps championships coming up and hopefully we can enter a squad."

There was another close encounter in the division two final as the B teams of the Adjutant General's Corps and Royal Army Medical Service faced off, with the former winning 9-7.

'WE WERE BOTTOM OF THE RANKINGS'



Picture: Cat Gory/Alligin Photography

SSgt Amanda Potgieter (REME) in action for UKAF at Lord's



Picture: Graeme Main

SOLDIERS DELIVER ON TOUR OF NEPAL

CRICKET (WOMEN)

THE UK Armed Forces women's cricket team posted a 100 per cent record in their tour of Nepal – winning all six matches staged in the country.

Led by skipper Capt Connie Cant (RA), the personnel defeated Bagmati Province in their opening fixture as an unbeaten 54 from Cpl Eve Alder (RAMS) steered them to an eight-wicket victory.

Pokhara District formed the opposition for the next five games, with Cant claiming

figures of 3-6 and SSgt Amanda Potgieter (REME) top scoring with 35 not out in their first win.

The latter top scored again in the penultimate game, this time finishing 52 not out as UKAF won by eight wickets, while Alder and Cant both posted half centuries in the final match of the tour as the team closed on 155-5 from 20 overs.

Pokhara were all out for 67 in reply, with army bowlers LCpl Shema Wright (REME), SSgt Emily Wall (R Signals) and Cpl Abbie Steele (RAMS) among the wicket takers.

RUGBY UNION (MEN)

THE next generation of army rugby union talent slipped to a narrow defeat in their opening game in the Inter-Services Under-23 Championships.

The Royal Navy opened a 10-0 lead as the sides faced off in Portsmouth, before Lt Woody Facey (RLC) bundled over to reduce the arrears.

The senior service stretched the advantage to 13-7 prior to Cfn Rowynn Turner (REME) going in under the posts for a converted try that edged the Reds ahead. However, George Edson dashed their hopes as his third penalty of the night condemned them to a 16-14 loss.



Picture: Mark Deller/Alligin Photography

'WE WANT PEOPLE WITH THE RIGHT ATTITUDE AND ETHOS'



LIFTERS MAKE GAINS DESPITE SERVICES SETBACK

WEIGHTLIFTING

ARMY weightlifting captain Cpl Alex Parkes (RE) believes the team is closing the gap on the Royal Air Force – despite their rivals claiming a fourth successive Inter-Services crown.

The soldiers headed to Portsmouth in confident mood following a pre-tournament training camp in Sweden, but the competition's dominant outfit formed too big a hurdle on the day.

"There was a time when we had an extremely strong team of regulars and reserves," Parkes (pictured) told *SoldierSport*.

"But we have

haemorrhaged competitive lifters in recent times, whether that's through deployments and exercises or people leaving the service.

"We have not been able to replace them, strength for strength, but are not far off.

"In contrast, the RAF have had consistent athletes available over the years.

"Our approach now is to get people in who have the right attitude and ethos and then develop them.

"We had three novice females who were lifting for the first time at the Inter-Services. Representing the army on that platform, they did what we needed them to do – that is the mindset we want."

While Parkes missed out in the forces showdown he has achieved notable success throughout the year.

The reservist, who served as a regular for 11 years before leaving in 2015, was victorious in the 73kg ranks at the British Masters in February – breaking two records in the process. A bronze medal followed at the European Masters, a feat that was matched at the World Masters in Las Vegas.

"I felt confident about medalling at the British Masters – but I didn't think I'd break records that had stood for 13 years," he said.

"The Europeans were the most intense competition

I have been involved in and the guy who finished first had competed at the Commonwealth Games twice.

"That is the level, and I was over the moon to medal there.

"As soon as we knew the Worlds were in Las Vegas we had to go. It was another level up, and the lifters who took gold and silver were both Olympians.

"To walk away with three medals from three major competitions having had no expectations was amazing.

"We just wanted to push army weightlifting and get our name out there. Hopefully we can feature in the masters scene long into the future."

STARTING IN STYLE



Spr Marley Devitt (RE) in action
against the Home Counties

Pictures: Graeme Main and Cat Goryn/Alligin Photography

LCpl Raja Asif (R Signals)



BOXING

A REVITALISED army boxing team made a storming start to the new season by claiming victories in their first three shows of the campaign.

The fighters emerged with a 100 per cent record as they faced rivals from the England and Wales select squads in their debut outing, with Pte Lucas Forinton (R Anglian), LCpl Raja Asif (R Signals) and LCpl Jack Lorja (Mercian) all triumphing in Stoke-on-Trent.

The action then switched to their Aldershot base, where the soldiers downed the Home Counties 5-3.

A busy run then concluded with a 4-2 success against the Bahrain Royal Guard at ITC Catterick - a result that saw

them avenge their loss to the same opposition at the venue last year.

Head coach Sgt Chez Nihell (RAPTC) has obviously been thrilled with his team's efforts to date, with a number of factors contributing to their early positive displays.

"Winning our first home show of the year on the back of how well we did at Stoke gave us great momentum," he told *SoldierSport*.

"The start of last season was quite tough and then it got better, but this time round we have started with a bang.

"I'm now doing all the match making, with support from my assistant coaches, particularly Sgt Liam Jones (REME).

"We have clubs ringing up all the time and he works with them

on the matching up.

"It means we can be more tactical. We want hard but competitive bouts and it is all about performance.

"If they do not get the decision, we need to see if the boxers have listened and fought to the best of their abilities.

"I'm also in my second season as coach and I learnt a lot during that first year in charge.

"We have now taken control of the strength and conditioning programme and have seen improvements in physicality and robustness – as a Royal Army Physical Training Corps instructor that is my trade.

"It could not have gone any better. You are never going to win every bout, but to get victories from the first three shows is brilliant."

Sig Alfred Clark (R Signals) and Cfn Zack Kaminski (REME) gave the army the perfect start against the Home Counties, while a second-round cut above the eye failed to deter Forinton as he took his 60kg bout via a split decision.

Pte Dylan Swales (RLC) and Spr Marley Devitt (RE) added further wins to seal the honours, while Asif, Pte Kasharna Williams (RLC) and team captain LCpl Leon Moulds (REME) all impressed in narrow defeats.

The latter bounced back in style a week later in Catterick, where he defeated Bahrain's LCpl Prakash Limbu Ljam via a unanimous verdict in a display that saw him named best boxer on the night.

Cpl Felicity Johnstone (RLC) triumphed in the only female bout on the card, while Swales maintained his fine form as he beat Pte Abdullah Alabdullah on

BOXING TEAM EARLY SEASON RESULTS

ARMY	V	HM COUN
5	V	3
4	V	2

a split decision.

Super heavyweight Gdsm Josh Young-Hastings (Gren Gds) secured the result with a unanimous decision against Pte Augustine Issac.

"We are in a very strong position, and everyone is performing well," Moulds, pictured below, said of the start to the campaign.

"People are putting the effort in during training, morale is high and the gym is buzzing."

"Personally, I thought I had done enough against the Home Counties; it was a good performance, but I lost 3-2 on a split decision."

"In Catterick I faced the same opponent as last year and won again. It was a lot closer last time and he was a game kid, but I got the result I deserved. Being named boxer of the night was the icing on the cake."

"I love those shows and it is a great atmosphere with so many people watching. The aim now is to keep as busy as I can and produce more performances."

"I am fitter and stronger, my boxing is developing and I feel more relaxed in the ring."

Members of the army team were facing a further test against the Royal Guard in Bahrain as part of the UKAF squad as this issue went to press.

BOXING BY NUMBERS

3 Support bouts staged by the First Fusiliers boxing team in Catterick

5 Army fighters named in the UK Armed Forces line-up for Bahrain

6 Development squad members who have joined the senior ranks this year

2 Bouts this season for Welsh ace LCpl Niamh Brookes against England



REVENGE GAINED IN CATTERICK WIN

BOXING

VICTORY at ITC Catterick represented a triumphant redemption story for Gdsm Josh Young-Hastings (Gren Gds) after he suffered one of the low points in his fledgling career in the same ring 12 months earlier.

Then, the super heavyweight was knocked out by Pte Augustine Issac to give the Bahrain Royal Guard a 4-2 victory over the army – a result that left the fighter desperate for a rematch.

That wish was granted in the teams' latest encounter, where Young-Hastings defeated his rival via a unanimous verdict as the soldiers completed their revenge mission in style.

"I could see that our coach was not sure about it – but I really wanted that fight," he told *SoldierSport*.

"Last year he knocked me out in the third round, with my mum watching on, but this

time round I destroyed him. I was stronger than him and was the more aggressive fighter, I just wanted it – nothing was going to get in my way.

"We could have tied that show last season but my result meant we lost 4-2, so I had to right the wrongs."

"I had a bit of a cry afterwards as there was a lot of pressure going into the fight."

"It was an ecstatic but emotional moment."

Victory means Young-Hastings has won five of his six fights this season – his only defeat coming in the semi-finals of the England Boxing National Development Championships.

"I was disappointed with that," he said. "I worked hard to get there and had no byes in what was a tough competition."

"Hopefully I can have a few more bouts before the end of the year. I try not to plan too far ahead and worry about tomorrow, tomorrow."

"I do what I need to do to improve every day. It is about the little tweaks I can make to better myself."

"I came sprinting out of the door this year and have to maintain that as there is always somebody better out there."

**'I HAD TO
RIGHT THE
WRONGS'**



Greatest hits

We asked troops for their highlights of 2025

Interviews: Cliff Caswell and Sgt Murray Kerr, RA Pictures: Graeme Main and Sgt Kerr



Going on exercise to Finland was a real challenge – I learnt a lot from that. It has been a full year in terms of training. I work as ground crew for the Apache, helping to refuel and rearm the aircraft, and I am just about to be promoted – that will be a big high point.

Air Tpr Ellis Sumner, AAC

I help look after the green fleet at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst and have had a full year. Among other things, a highlight for me was receiving a CO's coin for a project in Germany.

LCpl Yahkeem William, RLC

My unit, Yeovilton-based 661 Squadron, has been busy and my ability to lead has developed as a result. This has been big for me, especially as I was promoted in 2024. I'm an aviation communication specialist and have just been on a major UK exercise, Pinion Titan (see page 26), so my year isn't over yet.

LCpl Adam O'Donnell, AAC

Getting promoted is my big achievement of the past 12 months. The first advancement in the army is huge for me and brings new opportunities to help others.

LCpl Dipesh Thing, QGE



Insertions and extraction via Blackhawk on Exercise Northern Strike in America was a highlight. Cutting across the treetops with the doors open, and the night extraction, were standout memories and something I never thought I'd get to experience in the reserve.

Pte Jacob Skelton, R Yorks



Completing junior Brecon as a reservist was one of the most challenging yet rewarding experiences of my life. It pushed me to new limits physically, mentally and as a leader. The sense of pride I felt passing the course, alongside likeminded soldiers who refused to quit, is something I'll carry with me through my career.

LCpl Roberto Brennan-Vaccaro, R Yorks



Discovering the benefits the reserve brings to ex-regulars has been positive. I transferred in January after 24 years. As well as the bounty, reserve service days and adventurous training opportunities, staying in touch with similar people was a big driving force. It has kept me occupied and in the military family.

WO2 Paul Barker, R Yorks





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