

SOLDIER

MAGAZINE OF THE BRITISH ARMY

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SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME

Army shake-up helps troops glimpse future



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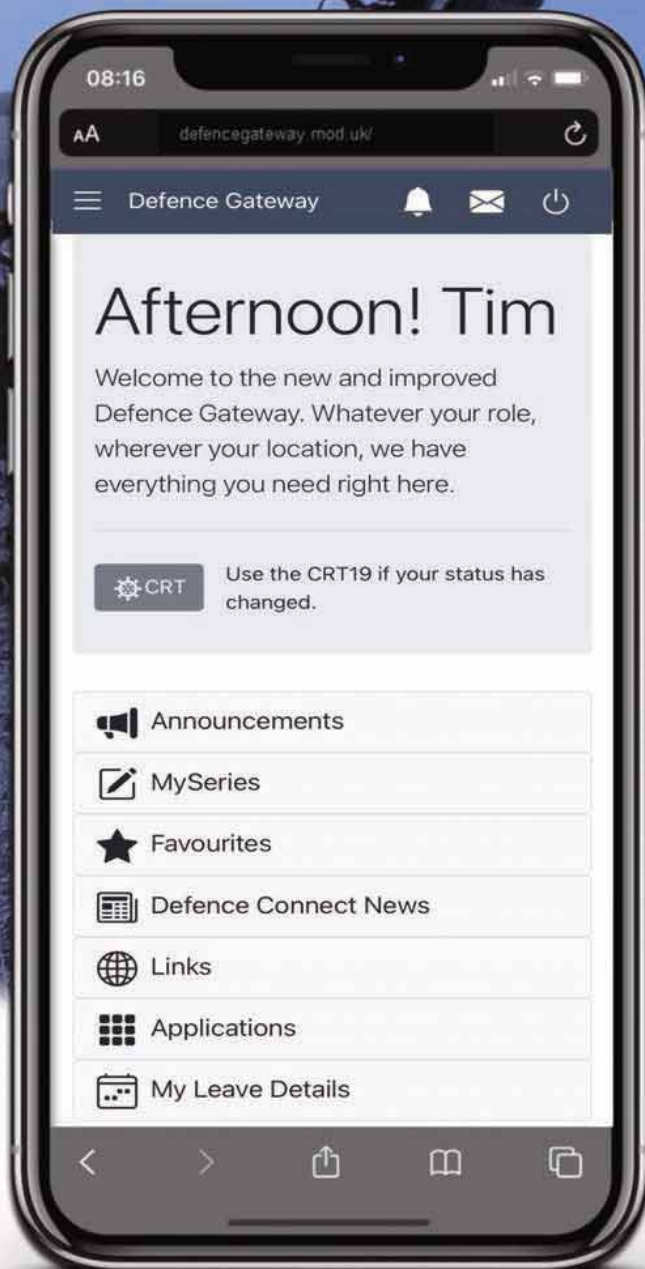
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It doesn't cost
a corporal less
to buy a box of
cornflakes than it
does a brigadier
”

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The future starts now



ANYONE who's been kicking round the Army for a while will probably have winced at last month's news of

another defence review.

But the sweeping changes announced by Secretary of State Ben Wallace won't involve redundancies (page 7). And they are likely to affect the future experience of every single soldier – from how regularly you deploy, to the kit you will operate and the career opportunities you get.

Turn to page 10 for an overview of the big plan, and please contact *Talkback* (page 51) with any views or questions that your chain of command can't answer. We are your magazine, run by and for the Army.

Also this month, we find out about the little-known Reserve scheme helping troops to continue service when civvy work takes them overseas (page 44).

And we get the lowdown on an innovative new urban training facility that is not just sharpening troops' skills but dodging the nightmare of exercise admin too (page 28). Happy days all round.

Sarah Goldthorpe • Editor

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Picture: Cpl Nicholas Egan, RAF



Time to pack our Bergans

Defence overhaul could mean troops are about to see more of the world

SWEEPING changes to the structure and capabilities of the Armed Forces – the most significant since the end of the Cold War – have been announced by Defence Secretary Ben Wallace.

The integrated review of foreign and defence policy will see £23 billion spent on making the Army more cutting-edge and lethal.

It will result in a more expeditionary force which will operate globally on a more persistent basis.

The Service's structure will reorganise into seven "brigade combat teams". These differ from brigades because they will have more of their own supporting elements such as artillery, engineering and surveillance.

A security force assistance brigade and a special operations brigade will also feature in the line-up.

This will all mean that more soldiers are deployed across the globe for more of the time, making better use of existing bases in Oman, Kenya, Brunei, Belize and Germany.

However, this will happen with fewer personnel – a new force size of 72,500. This is 4,000 below current levels and 6,000 less than the fully manned figure.

Unlike previous restructures, though, there will be no redundancies or loss of cap badges.

Introducing the plan in Parliament, Wallace – a former Scots Guards officer – said: "The Army's increased deployability and technological advantage will mean that greater effect can be delivered by fewer people."

He explained the change was needed

as potential adversaries modernised. But he insisted the government had taken a considered approach to ensure the right balance.

"In defence it is too tempting to use the shield of sentimentality to protect previously battle-winning but now outdated capabilities," he said.

"This, coupled with over-ambition and under-resourcing, leads to even harder consequences and endangers the lives of our people, who are truly our finest asset."

Electronic warfare, air defence, uncrewed aerial surveillance and offensive cyber will all get more cash and troops. And a raft of fresh kit will include new long-range rocket systems.

Chief of the General Staff, Gen Sir Mark Carleton-Smith, described the changes as a "transformative opportunity" for the Service.

"What's being announced is the blueprint of a world-class British Army," he added.

The Service's most senior Reservist confirmed the plan would see the voluntary contingent remain at 30,100 and become "even more capable".

"This is an inspiring and stimulating time for the Army Reserve as it prepares to take a greater role in UK defence," Deputy Commander Field Army, Maj Gen Celia Harvey, said. "It will be an extremely effective organisation, fit for purpose and playing to its strengths, leading on UK resilience operations, supporting overseas deployments and providing specialist expertise to combat hostile competition." ■

“It's the blueprint of a world-class British Army”



INTEGRATED REVIEW

Turn to pages 10 and 11 for a breakdown of the **structure, manning, equipment and capability** changes



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GLOBAL SITREP

1. TEXAS

IRON DIVISION HEADS STATESIDE

RESOLUTE troops have been busy going through their final checklist of preparations in readiness for a major multinational training package in America.

More than 1,000 soldiers from 3rd (UK) Division will take part in the Warfighter command post exercise in the coming weeks alongside US and French allies.

They were in a ramp-up phase as this issue went to print with participants isolating and undergoing testing in line with stringent Covid-19 safety measures.



Picture: Graeme Main

2. CAYMAN ISLANDS

NEW UNIT TAKES SHAPE

PARTS of the Caribbean are better equipped to deal with natural disasters thanks to the efforts of UK personnel.

A short-term training team (STTT) from across the Household Division delivered a two-week basic soldiering package to Reservists of

the newly-formed Cayman Islands Regiment – which was set up with MoD backing to boost the region's hurricane response capability.

As well as humanitarian relief, the course covered medical skills, pistol shooting, navigation, kit care and drill, before ending with a pass-out parade for the 47 new recruits.

Together with 50 graduates from a previous STTT and a group of officers who trained at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst last year, they bring the unit's strength to 108 – more than half its eventual size.

Maj Cameron Proudfoot (SG, pictured second from right), who headed up the 14-strong UK team, said future deployments would also start to develop the formation's NCO cohort.

"We are incredibly proud to be working alongside our Commonwealth allies in order to increase capabilities within the region," he added.



1. TEXAS

2. CAYMAN ISLANDS

IN NUMBERS

175

Approximate final strength of the Cayman Islands Regiment. Training for a similar sized unit in the Turks and Caicos Islands will start later this year

Picture: Adam Gerritsma

3. GIBRALTAR

SCHOOL OF ROCK



PERSONNEL from the Household Cavalry Regiment converged on the British overseas territory for a comprehensive shakedown of core skills and drills.

The troops, formed around D Squadron, set out to both test and refine disciplines, including urban warfare protocols, at the Buffadero Training Camp during March.

Having fought a mock enemy above ground, the cavalry troops ventured into the

legendary tunnel system – where the fighting in Exercise Daring Rock took on a new dimension.

Meanwhile, troops from The Royal Gibraltar Regiment have been rotating back to the UK for weapon drills at Hythe ranges in Kent (pictured inset).

Ex Jebel Tarik saw the soldiers rehearse firing on targets at different distances as a prelude to a forthcoming battlegroup-level training package.



Picture: Cpl Connor Payne, RAF



INTELLIGENCE FOR THE ATLAS?

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6. CYPRUS PATROLLING FOR PEACE

TROOPS from Thirk-based 6 Regiment, Royal Logistic Corps were heading for a seven-month stint on Op Tosca as this issue went to press.

Their final preparations for the peacekeeping tour saw them don the iconic blue berets of the United Nations during a parade at Nesscliffe camp in Shropshire.

The soldiers are replacing colleagues from 6th Battalion, The Rifles, who were returning home.

The loggies have been observing strict Covid safety measures during their training and deployment – including a period of quarantine.

While in Cyprus they will be focused on maintaining the peace along parts of the 112-mile buffer zone between the Greek and Turkish sectors.

4. ESTONIA

ALLIED CARGO FINDS SAFE BERTH

UK AND French Army equipment has arrived by sea at Paldiski port as the latest rotation of Nato's enhanced forward presence battlegroups continues.

British Warrior and Bulldog vehicles, along with French Leclerc tanks, were among the consignment, which had travelled 2,000 nautical miles from La Rochelle in France.

Describing the challenges of unloading the convoy on time and moving it to the headquarters at Tapa, Lt Jon Caulder (RLC) said: "The UK, Estonia and France have different regulations and policies for doing this, but we work together to get the best solutions."

The platforms will be used by

personnel from 1st Battalion, The Mercian Regiment, who have taken the helm of the battlegroup over from colleagues from 5th Battalion, The Rifles.

Around 300 French troops will also bolster the formation as part of their year-long deployment.



Picture: Estonian Defence Force

5. MALI READY TO ROLL



ARMOUR manufacturer NP Aerospace has re-engineered Ridgback and Mastiff protected patrol vehicles for use by troops serving on Op Newcombe. The upgrades, driven by an urgent capability requirement, have increased safety and mobility, as well as improved driveline, suspension, steering, brakes and tyres. The first wave was delivered to theatre in just over 80 days.

TROOP LEVELS DOWN TO 72,500

■ THE strength of the Army will be reduced to 72,500 personnel by 2025.

Describing the change, Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said that while some colleagues liked to “play top trumps” with force numbers, there was no point boasting “when you send them to war in Snatch Land Rovers”.

The figure sounds like a big drop from the current 82,040. But the Service’s actual manning level has fallen short of this for some time – currently standing at 76,350 trained soldiers. So the MoD is well on the way to meeting its target already.

Redundancies will not happen and there will be no loss of cap badges.

The politician explained how technology and more deployability would mean greater effect could be delivered by fewer personnel in future.

However, the change has still been met with some concern.

Senior US military figures have previously urged the UK not to reduce its military headcount further. And questions have also been raised about whether a British Army of 72,500 could do another operation like Afghanistan, if required.

Jack Watling, a land warfare research fellow at the Royal United Services Institute think-tank, said the move could have “a very tangible impact” on how many operations the UK can sustain in future.

Questions also remain over division of workload in a force where junior officers are often covering multiple posts and juggling high levels of paperwork.

But the *Future Soldier* publication, which sets out how the Army will modernise to meet this vision, says “continuous improvements” will be made to management of personnel.

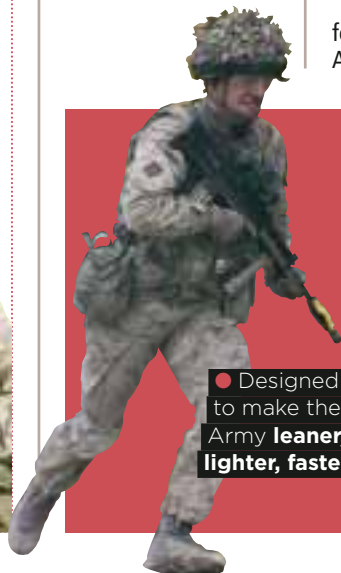
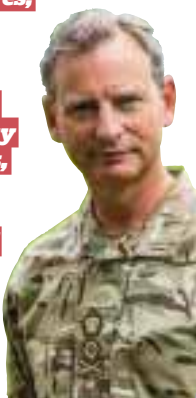
Read more about the changes by searching *Future Soldier* on Defnet, Defence Connect or the Army website



FROM THE TOP

“The Army will be leaner, lighter, faster to respond, and more effectively matched to current and future threats. This will be delivered by more productive integration of the Reserves, increased lethality of weapon systems and survivability of platforms, and a more specialised workforce.”

Chief of the General Staff, Gen Sir Mark Carleton-Smith



● Designed to make the Army **leaner, lighter, faster**

New force structure

Personnel will reorganise into seven ‘combat brigade teams’

THE Integrated Review shapes the Army for a battlespace where threats are diverse and evolving.

At the heart of the picture is a so-called “grey zone” between peace and conflict, where adversaries use tactics such as cyber attacks and fake news to further their interests.

The planned revised structure addresses this new status quo – while also setting up troops to stay ahead of the game in the war-fighting arena and diverse worldwide taskings.

Ensuring assets from across the Armed Forces are fully networked and able to provide a consistent picture to commanders will also be crucial.

The new-look Army focuses on seven so-called “brigade combat teams” – two light, two heavy, one deep recce strike, one air manoeuvre (16 Air Assault Brigade) and one combat aviation.

In addition, there will be a new security force assistance brigade to help build the capabilities of the UK’s partner nations.

A special operations brigade will further bolster these efforts by operating alongside partners in high-threat environments.

This will be based around four new Ranger battalions, established from the Specialised Infantry Group.

These are the 2nd Battalions of The Princess of Wales’s Royal Regiment and Duke of Lancaster’s Regiment, 4th Battalion, The Rifles and 1st Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Scotland.

Providing a global response force for conflict and crisis handling, 16 Air Assault Brigade will be bolstered with



Infantry troops will remain at the centre of operations

more sharp-end troops and uprated attack helicopters.

And the Infantry will be made leaner and more specialist, restructured around four divisions.

The 1st and 2nd Battalions of the Mercian Regiment will merge into a Boxer-equipped force.

Meanwhile, the war-fighting capability of 3 (UK) Division is being reworked around 148 upgraded Challenger tanks and a range of Ajax and Boxer vehicles.

These forces will be supported by new air defence and cyber capabilities plus a raft of new kit.

A war-fighting experimentation battlegroup focusing on hybrid and conventional threats will also be created in the future-facing line-up.

MODERNISATION

the changes at a glance...

● New structure, with

SEVEN
brigade combat teams



● Reserves will remain vital and stay at the same number



Existing Army bases such as Belize will be made use of for training

Picture: Steve Dock

Gearing up for global outlook

PERSONNEL can look forward to the prospect of increased overseas opportunities as the future vision for the Service, set out in the Integrated Review, takes hold.

The plan is to have more soldiers deployed across the globe more of the time, with the focus on a persistent forward presence in the places that are deemed to matter most to the UK.

It is hoped this will enhance the ability to anticipate events, providing the necessary warning that will allow the Army to recalibrate, come together and transition to a war footing when it is required.

The international approach will also offer reassurance to allies and deter potential adversaries.

With this in mind, the Army will capitalise on its network of bases in

Oman, Kenya, Brunei, Belize (pictured) and Germany, with other destinations also in the mix.

Armoured units will continue to deploy on Op Cabrit and European exercises as part of the enhanced forward presence, while light and mechanised forces can also expect to deploy for several months at a time.

The newly formed special operations forces will be tasked with supporting and conducting discreet missions in high-risk environments, while security force assistance battalions can expect to be posted across the world to train, assist and partner conventional armies.

Speaking about the new outlook, Chief of the General Staff, Gen Sir Mark Carleton-Smith, said: "This is an Army that is more global, more expeditionary and more rapidly deployable."

“
Old
capabilities
aren't
necessarily
redundant
”

EQUIPMENT GOES DIGITAL

■ THE Army's £23 billion spending plan over the next ten years will result in a range of platforms able to communicate and work together through digital networks, harnessing the power of collective situational awareness and creating coordinated actions.

The nucleus will be made up of Ajax armoured reconnaissance platforms, Boxer mechanised infantry vehicles, Challenger 3 heavy tanks, AH-64E helicopters, long-range precision fires and a new variety of drones.

These assets' capabilities have influenced the new structure to an extent – for example, the deep recce strike brigade will use Ajax's formidable sensors to coordinate deep fires, something previous generation vehicles were simply not equipped for.

Such attacks could be provided by the guided multiple launch rocket system, which is receiving a £250 million upgrade with more accurate long-range missiles.

More than £800 million is also being invested in an automated mobile fires platform, while £200 million is going into enhanced electronic warfare capability.

"Old capabilities aren't necessarily redundant, just as new technologies aren't always relevant," Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said in announcing the measures. And so it proves as £1.3 billion has been committed to upgrading 148 Challenger battle tanks – the core of the two heavy brigades.

But the Army won't be upgrading Warrior, and it remains in service only until Boxer arrives. Meanwhile, the air manoeuvre and combat aviation brigades will benefit from a new medium lift helicopter and the incoming AH-64E Apache.



● Vehicle upgrades – Challenger 3, Ajax, Boxer



4,000

fewer troops than current
manned levels

● More investment in electronic warfare, air defence, unmanned systems, cyber



● More expeditionary

MAJOR GENERAL GUILTY OF SCHOOL FEE FRAUD

■ A MAJOR general has been found guilty of dishonestly claiming £48,000 in school fees.

Retired Assistant Chief of the General Staff Nick Welch, 57, who left the Service in 2018, is thought to be the most senior officer to face a court martial in 200 years.

His four-week trial heard how the Serviceman applied for the continuity of education allowance (CEA) on the basis he and his wife were not living close to his children's schools in Dorset. But his wife actually spent most of her time there and not in London.

Welch's barrister, Sarah Jones QC, said the CEA system and its rules were a "mess".

He was convicted of fraud at Bulford Military Court and was due to be sentenced as this issue went to press.

In a separate case, Maj Lloyd Hamilton (RE), 47, was convicted of fraudulently claiming £12,964 in school fees for two of his children and was dismissed from the Army, given a three-month jail sentence, suspended for 18 months, and ordered to carry out 150 hours of unpaid work.

"Doesn't the Army want us to fight climate change?"

Car-charging carp, page 54



Picture: Freepik

SANDHURST FEMALE FIRST

■ A TRIO of Servicewomen became the first female officer cadets from their respective countries to pass out from the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst.

Chuki Wangmo from Bhutan, Firushana Thaufeeq from Maldives and Midya Masti from the Peshmerga Force of Kurdistan in Northern Iraq walked up the iconic steps of Old College at the end of their eight-week commissioning short course. The parade was inspected by Maj Gen Celia Harvey.

OCdt Masti (below), who serves as a doctor in Kurdistan, said: "I would never have thought I could finish a course such as this. I'm honoured to have graduated from here."



The changes to LOA mean rates will be fairer to those in overseas locations

Picture: Graeme Main

“The argument against a rank-based system is simple”

Overseas allowance overhaul

- * LOA no longer based on rank
- * Payments tailored to troops
- * Updated rates published in June
- * 'Not a money-saving move'

NEW rates for the local overseas allowance (LOA) will be "fairer and more transparent", the Army has reassured troops.

From July, payments will no longer be based on rank and will instead be tailored more to soldiers' individual living circumstances.

For example, the part of the old LOA package that supported all personnel in running a private vehicle abroad has been removed and will instead be claimed only by those who own a car.

The changes mean that some troops' payments could increase, while others might receive less or not see much difference.

Lt Col Jonny Hooper (RA), from the Army's remuneration policy team, emphasised that the review, which began in 2015, was not intended as a money-saving exercise.

"It aims to ensure the tax-free allowance remains justifiable against the public purse, now and in the future," he said.

"The argument against a rank-based system is simple: it doesn't cost a corporal less to buy a box of cornflakes than it does a brigadier.

"We listened to concerns about the requirement to entertain.

"But it is important to remember that LOA is there to contribute to the cost of living overseas, not to cover everything associated with the career choices individuals make in opting to serve abroad."

Due to be published in June, the updated rates will be calculated using commercial data on employment conditions in different parts of the world, as well as Office for National Statistics figures on the average cost of shopping.

"This means they can be adjusted more quickly to account for fluctuations, rather than being wedded to a military LOA review, when teams travelled between locations to compare the cost of common items," added Lt Col Hooper.

In February the MoD announced that personnel will retain the ability to split their pay between UK and overseas bank accounts without incurring charges.

● **Globe-trotting Reserves, page 44**



The role is an opportunity to help struggling troops

Welfare workers needed

TROOPS with the aptitude to help Service personnel and their families deal with difficulties in their day-to-day lives are being sought.

Top brass have launched a recruitment drive for Army welfare workers, who are able to provide independent and confidential advice to those in need.

The specialist job falls under the remit of the Staff and Personnel Support branch of the Adjutant General's Corps. Successful applicants, who will deal with referrals from individuals or unit welfare officers, must be at least a corporal aged 25 or over.

Aldershot-based WO1 Mark Whittington, a senior soldier with the Army Welfare Service, said the role was a good opportunity for those who wanted to help others.

"You have the satisfaction of knowing someone has been able to

take a step forward because of the assistance you have given," he added. "If you're keen on this type of work you aren't going to get a greater chance.

"In addition, there are still deployment opportunities available – I joined the Army to make a difference, and it's a real privilege to be able to do this for soldiers."

New arrivals must knuckle down to the specialist welfare worker course at the Defence College of Logistics, Policing and Administration before taking up the role. The eight-month package includes a residential phase at Worthy Down and a supervised sharp-end placement in an Army Welfare Service team.

Postings are available in UK garrisons as well as overseas in places such as Brunei.

Search Defence Connect for full details and the application process.

“It’s a real privilege to do this for soldiers”



Building a profile

THESE eye-catching silhouettes could be appearing at a base near you soon. Standing with Giants found success at Blenheim Palace in Oxfordshire last November, when the two-week showcase raised £40,000 for The Royal British Legion. Now its creator, community artist Dan Barton, is looking for other worthy locations around the UK to host his 2,000 hand-cut soldiers – which are made with donated building materials. Get in touch via standingwithgiants.co.uk



Q&A
Army welfare worker
Sgt JP Kastein
(AGC (SPS))

Why did you apply for this role?

I'd been a dental nurse since joining the Army, which I loved. But I felt an inner calling to do more for people. The job was the obvious choice – I've been in post four years now and it's the Army's best kept secret.

What is the most satisfying element of the job?

All the people we see come to us on a referral. They are often at a low ebb. It is great to see them, a few sessions later, with their own goals and feeling more empowered.

Tell us about the skills you need

You have to be good listener and empathetic. Applicants must have Army experience in the first instance and be at least a corporal. This is important as you will be allowed into people's lives and what are some very difficult situations.

Tell us about the issues you deal with

They are pretty wide ranging. Mental health is quite a big area as is bereavement – but these are only two examples.

Has the Covid pandemic made life busier?

Absolutely – people have felt very isolated and many have lost friends and relatives to the disease. Our teams have also had to learn to work remotely, conducting meetings online.

IN NUMBERS



4

– years since rugby union stars Capt Gemma Rowland and Bdr Beth Dainton (pictured, both RA) last played for Wales. The duo are set for a Six Nations return this month. Read more on page 68.

WIN
A £500 Outwell tent for six



LAST month's spine line clues were inspired by our coverage of Joint Hospital Group (South East) based at Frimley Park Hospital.

(SSgt Julie-Anne) Fulford, (Maj Adam) Hughes, (Capt William) Preece and (Pte Holly) Thompson all opened up about their tough experiences at the sharp end of the Covid-19 battle while serving with the unit.

This month we have teamed up with Outdoor World Direct (outdoorworlddirect.co.uk) to offer one lucky reader the ultimate in camping luxury – the Outwell Vermont six-person tent.

Jam-packed with innovative features, including an integrated groundsheet and darkened inners for a better night's sleep, this sturdy piece of kit is bound to make the prospect of a UK-based summer more enticing – especially for those with families.

To be in with a chance of winning, tell us what links the clues on the spine of this magazine. Answers, including phone number, to comps@soldiermagazine.co.uk by April 30.

SPINE LINE COMPETITION

REUNITED AT LAST



Picture: Royal Star and Garter

■ THERE were emotional scenes in military care homes as the go-ahead on indoor visits meant veterans got to hold hands with loved ones for the first time in a year.

This image shows the moment former Household Cavalryman Alan Heath was reunited with his wife Judi at the Royal Star and Garter home in High Wycombe.

The ex-soldier, who suffers from dementia, described it as "lovely". Mrs Heath added: "It's been absolute hell not being able to touch him."

Covid guidelines now permit one single home visitor if they wear PPE and take a lateral flow test.

“I’m looking forward to meeting my followers”



SSgt McLean films for his YouTube channel in Queen's Avenue, Aldershot with help from Cpl Keith Cupid (AGC (RMP))

Picture: Graeme Main

Move over Joe Wicks...

A TOP Army sports coach has taken his skills to cyberspace in a bid to keep the public mentally and physically agile.

SSgt Reagan McLean (AGC (SPS)) created a raft of fitness videos on YouTube – where hundreds have been following his regime.

It might not be the millions that tuned into TV body coach Joe Wicks, but the soldier is nevertheless looking forward to meeting his new audience in face-to-face sessions when Covid restrictions lift.

"I have provided the service at no cost – it is my way of giving something back to the community and helping people improve their mental health in particular," SSgt McLean, who mentors the Army cricket team, told *Soldier*.

Before moving online the NCO, who hails from St Vincent and the Grenadines, had been running fitness

classes for military colleagues while helping would-be recruits from the Commonwealth prepare for the selection process.

He later opened the sessions to members of the public, but had to rethink the plan when lockdown hit.

"I had been doing outdoor classes in a field in Cove, near Farnborough, up to three evenings a week," the veteran of Afghanistan explained.

"Then when lockdown came I had people messaging me about starting some online training."

The Sunset Fitness YouTube channel covers a wealth of workout tasks, as well as demonstrations of more demanding military activities.

But its 40-year-old star hopes his real sessions can resume again soon.

"I'm really looking forward to meeting up with my followers, as well as new friends, when lockdown lifts," he added.



BEHIND THE BLOCKBUSTER

■ A METAL movie star is to take centre stage when the Tank Museum in Dorset celebrates the real-life role of a Second World War armoured workhorse. Movie buffs will be given the opportunity to see Sherman M4E8 – the vehicle used in the 2014 Brad Pitt feature *Fury* – at two experience days. They will see how the tank played a pivotal role in the Allied victory while getting the inside track on the hit film. The events are set to take place on May 14 and October 15. Visit tankmuseum.org for further details.

SIERRA ALPHA VICTOR ECHO



PUMA ECOBOOST MILD HYBRID

PROUD TO OFFER CURRENT AND FORMER MILITARY
PERSONNEL SAVINGS ON SELECTED VEHICLES.



**BRING ON
TOMORROW**

Model shown is a New Puma ST-Line X 1.0 155PS Mild Hybrid Electric Vehicle (MHEV) Petrol 6 speed manual with optional LED Headlights and Driver Assistance Pack. Fuel economy mpg (l/100km) (Combined): 47.9 (5.9). CO₂ emissions 135g/km.

Vehicle shown may not reflect latest UK specifications.

Figures shown are for comparability purposes only; they only compare fuel consumption and CO₂ figures with other cars tested to the same technical procedures. These figures may not reflect real life driving results, which will depend upon a number of factors including the accessories fitted (post-registration), variations in weather, driving styles and vehicle load.

Search: Ford Military Sales

ford.co.uk



Ground view

Army Sergeant Major, WO1 Gav Paton, offers his take on Service life...

WE ARE in April already: the months are flying past and the pace of work shows no sign of letting up yet – but none of this will stop me from celebrating my 42nd birthday.

As I put another year on the clock I have just booked into Brecon, where I'm presenting awards to troops from The Rifles. They have just completed their junior NCO cadre and, for me at least, being here is probably the best present I could have been given.

Driving over from Andover, it was not lost on me that I have now spent well over half my life in the Service. And while it was a long time ago, I can remember my first steps on the promotion ladder clearly enough to know how hard these personnel have worked to prove they are leadership material.

Life on these courses is difficult at the moment – even before you start on the business of living and working in the field. Coronavirus restrictions mean that soldiers cannot go home and have to stay away for weeks to finish the training.

The troops in Brecon have been learning about command in battle – the type of which I saw as

an infanteer on Op Herrick. But over the past year we have seen our personnel adapt these skills to a different kind of campaign.

This was evident as I continued to visit testing and vaccine centres in Glasgow and Manchester, which are supporting our National Health Service colleagues on Op Rescript.

The way young leaders have applied skills and drills normally used in conflict has been particularly impressive.

Some, for example, have adopted the same trauma risk management system (Trim) we used in Afghanistan after each shift to take care of the mental health of those under their command.

Elsewhere, our younger soldiers have brought a bunch of new disciplines with them – not least their instinctive use of technology. And the last 12 months have also seen several remote working innovations, keeping our business going by holding even large gatherings online.

With light at the end of the tunnel in the Covid pandemic, we must consolidate our learning and look at how we can apply that in future. Flexibility is, after all, one of the Army's great strengths. Let's play to it.

“
Life on these courses is difficult
”

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL



Picture: Freepik

Q Describe your best birthday celebration

A This year's came close... a day in Brecon presenting awards to troops, then coming home to watch the rugby with my wife and son. You could say, if Carlsberg did birthdays...



Army personnel at the 2019 Pride in London event

More to do for LGBT+ troops

WHEN I look back on my quarter-of-a-century of Army service, I always find it extraordinary that it was illegal for soldiers to be gay when I first signed on the dotted line.

Although we have come a long way in the two decades since the ban on homosexual personnel was lifted, there is a great deal of work still to do. I want all of our people to be able to bring their whole selves to work.

And so, along with our

RSMs, I recently held an online forum – where we heard from several LGBT+ troops – to help keep us informed on the current state-of-play.

As always, we will provide feedback to our senior leaders.

During the discussions I was struck by the reflections of one soldier who, having come out as gay soon after joining, now wanted to offer support and be an inspiration to others.

Such selflessness is always humbling.

Saluting our civvy colleagues...

■ IT HAS been a tough year for our Army, facing the demands of overseas ops and supporting the NHS at home – and we could not have managed without one group of people. Our MoD civilian staff work closely alongside us at all levels, and their efforts have helped deliver the goods during these extraordinary times. So I would like to take this opportunity to thank our friends for their huge contribution. We are, in the end, all one Army.





Picture: Graeme Main



Pension step change – for some

REGULARS and Reserves who were in the Armed Forces pension scheme (AFPS) on or before March 31, 2012 and on or after April 1, 2015 could benefit from a rule change.

Eligible personnel who were transferred from legacy schemes (AFPS 75 and 05 for Regulars or FTRS 97, RFPS 05 and NRPS for Reservists) will automatically be placed back into those plans for their employment during the period of April 1, 2015 to March 31, 2022.

At the point benefits are paid, such as retirement, they can then choose which scheme's benefits they want for those seven years – legacy or AFPS 15. Not all personnel will be better off opting for the earlier version.

The change has been introduced following a consultation on removing age discrimination, which occurred

because public sector workers with less than ten years to go until pension age had been allowed to remain on their previous schemes.

In 2018 the Court of Appeal found this to be discriminatory against younger judicial and firefighter members and, as a result, the government agreed to amend pensions across the whole public sector.

All Armed Forces personnel who remain in active service from April 1, 2022 onwards will be moved into the reformed scheme.

Lt Col Hawthorne Lockwood (AGC (SPS)), from the Army remuneration policy team, said: "Those affected shouldn't contact Defence Business Services or unit HR staff yet as the implementation of this is still being worked through, but further details will be sent out in the coming months."

“It is still being worked through”

IN MEMORIAM

Sgt Gavin Hillier, WG

DIED MARCH 4, 2021
CASTLEMARTIN RANGES, UK

COLLEAGUES of an outstanding senior soldier have been reflecting on his life and many achievements following his death on Castlemartin Ranges in Wales.

Sgt Gavin Hillier, 35, of 1st Battalion, Welsh Guards died in a training incident. Dyfed-Powys Police and the MoD are investigating.

The NCO – who was married with two sons – had served in Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan during a distinguished career.

Much loved by troops of all ranks, fellow personnel highlighted his sense of humour and dedication to duty as standout qualities.



Sgt Hillier – who was the motor transport colour sergeant – had received the Long Service and Good Conduct Medal and was also an accomplished rugby player.

Welsh Guards CO Lt Col Henry Llewelyn-Usher said the death had sent shockwaves across the battalion.

Regimental Sergeant Major WO1 Dan Cope added: "He did everything with a smile on his face – I am lucky to have served with him."



SPECIAL OBSERVER CALL

THE Army's long-range recce experts are looking to boost their ranks with a fresh intake of determined recruits.

Personnel serving with 4/73 Special Observation Post Battery, 5th Regiment, Royal Artillery operate unsupported and in small teams deep in the battlespace, where they set up hidden positions to gather information on enemy activities.

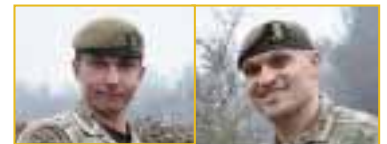
The next ten-week selection course will start in September, with a build-up package due to take place in July.

Corporals and below, from any cap badge or Service, can apply.

Those who qualify for the demanding role will become part of an elite team – only around 300 personnel have earned the right to wear the unit's green triangle tactical recognition flash since it was established in 1982.

For more information contact 01748 875639 or email the unit via

5ra-473bty-recruiting@mod.gov.uk



WHEN CAREERS COLLIDE

TWO lifelong friends have seen their careers converge with the handover of regimental sergeant major duties in Catterick.

WO1 Jamie Pearson (shown left), the outgoing RSM of 1st Battalion, The Yorkshire Regiment, passed on the baton – or pace stick – of responsibility to childhood pal WO1 Chris Barnes (right).

The pair have known each other since being next-door neighbours in Rotherham 32 years ago and have served in Estonia and Iraq together, as well as both playing on unit football teams.

"He's been like an older brother and mentor to me," said WO1 Barnes of his mate and colleague.

GREAT AND GLORIOUS MUSIC

BANDS of the Household Division have joined forces on a new album.

Great and Glorious is a collection of classic tunes performed in central London during a lull in the national lockdown last autumn.

All proceeds will go to the Household Division Charity.

Visit householddivision.org.uk for more information.



LANDMARK REFLECTIONS

■ FOUNDED members of the Military Wives Choirs have been reflecting on the healing power of singing ten years on from their UK number one single.

Nicky Clarke and Caroline Jopp wrote to Gareth Malone about their Catterick choir in 2010, with no idea that by the following year their story would feature in a BBC documentary and result in the chart topper – *Wherever You Are*.

The movement eventually spawned a network of 72 choirs and also inspired a film starring Kristin Scott Thomas.

Speaking in a podcast by ABF The Soldiers' Charity, Clarke said it wasn't about glitz and glamour, "but the joy of bringing women together to sing and support one another".

IN NUMBERS

14,000

Members of the military community supported by online mental health platform Togetherall since it was set up more than nine years ago. Formerly called Big White Wall, the tool offers anonymous and immediate peer support to serving personnel, veterans and families. Visit togetherall.com



BIRTHDAY BOOST

■ A SOLDIER who deployed to a Worcester hospital as part of the military's support to the NHS during Covid-19 celebrated his 18th birthday on his first day in the job.

Pte Brandon Dean was among 12 troops from 1st Battalion, The Yorkshire Regiment (pictured) to offer their services at the Worcestershire Royal and Alexandra Hospitals, where they have carried out general duties.

As personnel cannot perform public-facing roles until they are 18, it was his first operational task.

"Anything we can do to ease the pressures on nurses and doctors, who are working incredibly hard, makes this worthwhile," Pte Dean said.



“They have returned feeling more empowered”

”



Picture: Graeme Main

Trust calls for troops

Volunteers needed to deliver confidence boost

SOLDIERS willing to act as positive role models are being sought for a charity initiative that helps disadvantaged young people develop their confidence.

More than a dozen troops have already been on secondment with the Prince's Trust team programme – assisting individuals including the unemployed and past offenders.

But more are now being sought for the 12-week schemes when they resume in the autumn.

Capt Sean Clarke (RLC, pictured left) – who is leading on the Prince's Trust for the Army – said: "I have sent 18 soldiers over the last five years and all of them have returned feeling more empowered and confident.

"They have additionally had the

satisfaction of acting as role models for young people who benefit from these courses and the life skills they develop.

"Helping out has proved a particularly useful experience for those looking towards promotion and the likes of junior NCO cadres."

The programme gives young people aged 16 to 25 a taste of adventurous training, while also learning life disciplines such as CV writing and interview skills.

Soldiers wishing to take part will first need a Disclosure and Barring Service vetting check and must give a commitment of 20 days.

Efforts will be made to base them at a centre close to their homes.

For more details on the programme email sean.clarke426@mod.gov.uk

TECH BARGAINS GO LIVE AS SCHEME SAYS THANK YOU

■ SOLDIERS, veterans and those who work in the wider military community are being offered exclusive offers on leading tech brands courtesy of the Defence Discount Service.

Savings of up to 40 per cent can now be made on products from the likes of Garmin, Sky, Apple and O2 as part of the initiative's bid to thank those who have been involved in the fight against Covid-19.

"We are always blown away by the efforts of everyone working on the front line, but the past 12 months have really highlighted their commitment and dedication to keeping us safe," said the scheme's CEO, Tom Dalby.

Accessing the deals is straightforward. Service personnel and their spouses just need to be able to prove their identity via the registration form at defencediscountservice.co.uk

A privilege card can be purchased for £4.99 which gives access to discounts in high street stores, restaurants and venues and is valid for five years.



Picture: Graeme Main



Sights set on improving range safety

THE Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) has launched the second phase of Respect the Range – a major campaign to protect soldiers and members of the public and safeguard Army training.

Initially focusing on Salisbury Plain and Aldershot before a wider rollout, the initiative aims to raise awareness of the risks to personal safety when using military land.

The message has been highlighted in a short film, along with local radio adverts and social media posts, that feature the perspectives of the military personnel and civilians who use such areas for recreational activities.

In recent years training estate staff have reported an increase in visitors straying from public footpaths and rights of way, endangering their own lives as well as anyone who is with them, including children and pets.

Recent Covid-19 restrictions have made it more likely that people are risking their safety as they look to

discover their local area as part of their daily exercise.

Brig Jonathan Bartholomew, the DIO's head of overseas region and defence training estate, said: "The MoD supports access to military land and respects the public's enthusiasm for wanting to explore it.

"In return, this campaign asks everyone to respect the very real dangers associated with doing so. Whether they're dog walkers, mountain bikers or ramblers, everyone must stick to public access routes and check live training and firing times before heading out.

"If a red flag is flying then access to that area is prohibited.

"Everyone has a part to play in helping to ensure that we can all enjoy the land safely, and the military can train uninterrupted."

For more information visit gov.uk/guidance/safe-access, while the film can be viewed at youtube.com/defenceheadquarters

“Everyone has a part to play”



Picture: Owen Cooban



● PRIME Minister Boris Johnson has asked Gen Sir Nicholas Carter to extend his tenure as Chief of the Defence Staff until the end of November.

The move will allow the experienced officer to oversee the implementation of the Integrated Review, which was published last month (page 7).

Gen Carter said he was pleased at the opportunity to oversee the document – which will set out the military's direction of travel in the coming years.

FEARLESS FUNDRAISING

Grinding it out

HAVING deployed across Greater Manchester on Covid-19 testing duties, personnel from The Royal Lancers showed further support to the community in a running and cycling fundraising challenge. In their free time, 50 soldiers from B Squadron ran 2,200km in ten days, while 20 counterparts in C Squadron each ran 26km in one evening. Cpl Damon Toyne added a further 356km to the team's total following a 16-hour stint on a turbo trainer. "Being able to put back into the community is incredibly important," said Lt Nicolas Ozanne (pictured), of B Sqn.



Hard as Rock

TWO Royal Engineers were gearing up for an excruciating ten-kilometre leopard crawl in aid of a sick relative as this issue went to press. Together with fellow sergeant Liam Aschettino, Glenn Jones is raising money to help his terminally ill sister-in-law, Lauren Olive, make memories with her two children and close family. The pair were expecting to take between ten and 12 hours to complete the gruelling route around the perimeter fence of Rock Barracks, Woodbridge. To support them visit justgiving.com and search "crawlforlauren"

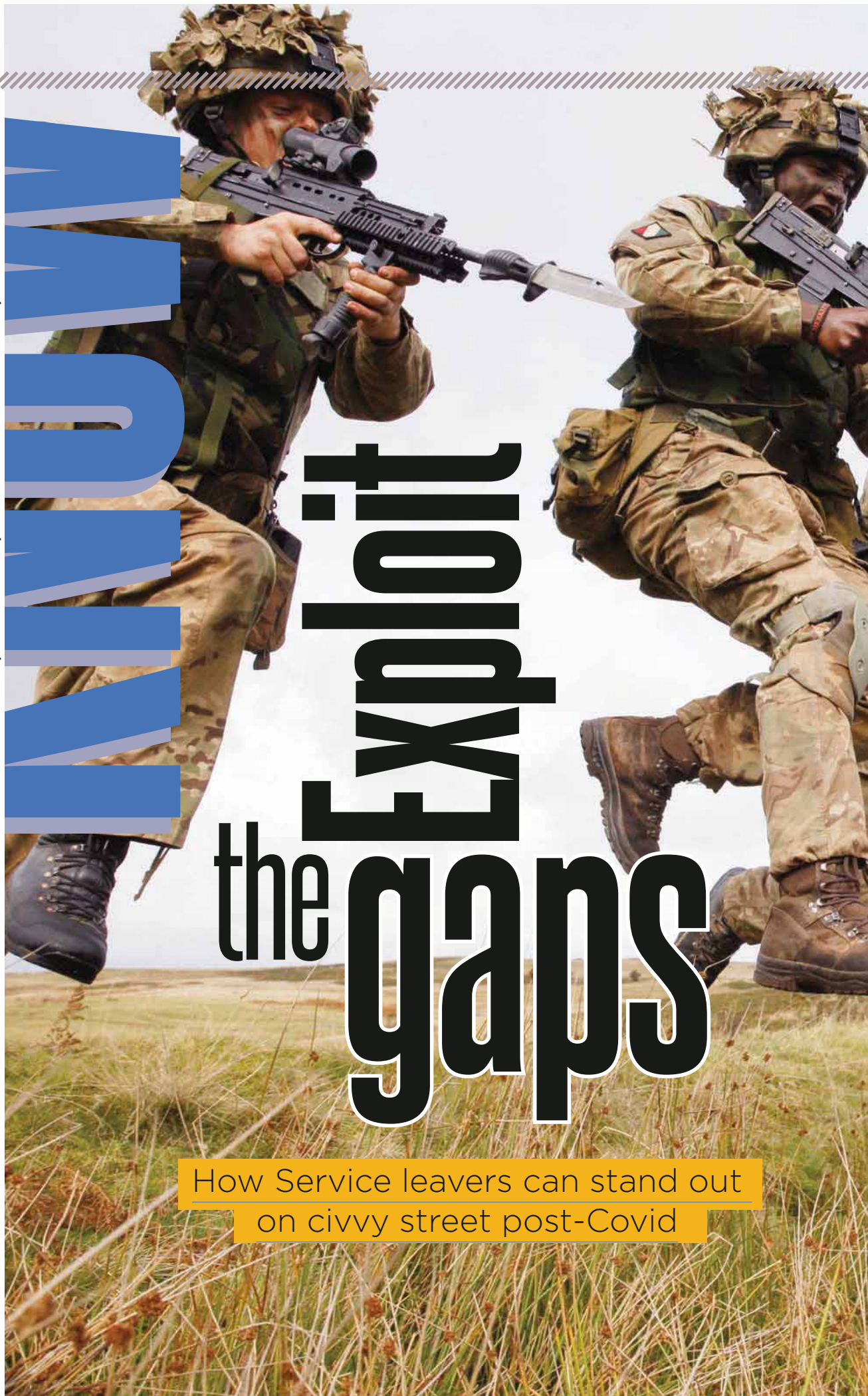
NEED TO

KNOW

NEXT STEPS / HEALTH / SKILLS & DRILLS / MENTAL HEALTH

the Exploit gaps

How Service leavers can stand out on civvy street post-Covid



► THE pandemic has seen a rise in UK unemployment, but soldiers considering careers after the Army shouldn't be put off by the grim statistics.

That's according to Garrath Williams from veteran recruitment website JobOppO, who says that there are opportunities for ex-military personnel despite the downturn.

Here, the former major tells *Soldier* why he believes they bring something special to the table for prospective employers.

How has the pandemic affected the jobs market in your view?

While many organisations have frozen recruitment, several sectors have grown over the last 12 months and there is little to say this will cease or reverse. Energy and resources, logistics, construction, transport and health have all shown an increase in opportunities during Covid-19. In addition, Brexit and the subsequent reduction in European worker numbers in agriculture, manufacturing, warehousing and hospitality will also create openings.

Why is this good news for veterans?

Soldiers are taught to exploit gaps. Employers will be looking for adaptable, lateral thinking, hard-working new hires to fill any vacancies perhaps left by restructuring. Service leavers should therefore think about what experience they might be able to draw attention to in job applications or during interviews. Put yourself in the prospective employer's shoes and show how your skills, knowledge and attitude can easily make up for any perceived lack of "real" experience.

How can they do this?

Ask yourself what employers may want and make sure you have really unpicked your own experiences. Be clear on how you can add value. When preparing for interviews – either remotely or in person – have everything in place, know your ground and stay focused. Don't be afraid to talk yourself up and sell yourself – as jack as that may feel. Be humble. Be confident. Be proud.

Do you have any top tips for writing a CV?

Never have just one CV. Have bits that you can cut and paste or tailor as relevant to the application you are making. Break down your military experience and try, where possible, to liken it to a civilian equivalent. Think projects, not patrols, people not platoons. Use plain language, particularly in any personal statements.

What is your role at JobOppO?

It's about helping Service leavers and veterans find meaningful and sustainable work that benefits them and their employers – *the* job, not just *a* job. There are many good people with vast amounts of experience leaving the military every week and a growing number of veteran-friendly organisations keen to employ them. I want to support JobOppO's mission and bring these two groups together.

● A fourth-generation soldier, Garrath Williams served in The Duke of Wellington's Regiment before transferring to the Australian Army. He is the director of veteran engagement and development at JobOppO (joboppo.co.uk). Email him on garrath@joboppo.co.uk or follow @UKAusVeteran on LinkedIn or Twitter



Downstairs dramas

Marking bowel cancer awareness month, *Soldier's* Cliff Caswell urges troops to tackle warning signs head on



I CANNOT remember ever feeling either so mentally hammered or physically unwell.

My body is dog tired, aching and sweaty. Dull waves of pain are intermittently exploding through my stomach and up into my chest.

The Salisbury Plain Training Area has never felt so far from home – my usual high enthusiasm for reporting on live firing has long since evaporated.

It is a humid mid-June day, the sky electric blue. But every so often it feels as if the summer world is darkening and bleeding colour.

A wandering mind – desperate to avoid thinking about serious illness – is trying to blame this on the stress of elderly parents needing a new depth of care.

I'm wrong – although at this stage I have no way of knowing that a tumour is obstructing my large intestine.

It will be another three weeks of worsening symptoms before I stumble into casualty, anaemic and vomiting.

At this stage my abdomen will be terrifyingly swollen and I'll require an emergency op.

Subsequent complications will result in my near death from sepsis. And when a painkiller-induced hallucination that I'm on a US Navy aircraft carrier patrolling the South China Sea eventually subsides, the surgeon will inform me that the mass he removed was malignant.

As I write this, I am 18 months on from surgery and a course of chemotherapy to reduce the risk of the cancer reoccurring.

My daily routine has changed and accompanying a scar running from breastbone

to groin is my brand new physical feature – an ileostomy.

This has been created by pulling my small intestine out of my belly – forming what is known as a stoma – while a bag collects the upshot of what is now a serious appetite.

Together with outstanding NHS medical support, my recovery has been helped by a wonderful second family at *Soldier* and support of many Army colleagues. Every day I feel blessed to have such people around me.

But the experience nonetheless remains a deep shock and a psychological burden – at 46, I did not expect to be hit with a condition associated with those of more advanced years.

And with April designated bowel cancer awareness month, I'm suggesting we all have a regular sitrep on our guts and report anything amiss.

The cold stats show this disease – which is the second largest killer in the UK after lung cancer – is affecting younger people with more than 2,500 individuals under 50 diagnosed each year.

It seems some do not receive a particularly rapid diagnosis while others – like myself – develop life-threatening complications before they are aware there is anything else wrong.

There are only a few basic warning signs to look out for, so it is worth making a

IN NUMBERS: Bowel cancer

42,000

People diagnosed each year

2,500

Of them under 50

268,000

People in the UK with bowel cancer

16,000

Deaths annually



mental note of them.

Some featured in the build-up to my drama, but were casually put down to lifestyle – years of being a newspaper reporter had seen me working long hours at strange times of the day and night, with a corresponding appetite for chilli-laden kebabs and lager.

In retrospect, I'd felt bloated after eating even modest amounts for some time before I ended up under the knife.

Going out for a drink or two seemed to trigger stomach cramping and sometimes an unpleasant acid reflux.

Occasionally there was even blood after getting up from the toilet. All are classic cancer signs that were put down to the side effects of diet choices.

Please do not make the same basic error. It is important to contact your medical officer sooner rather than later if you are experiencing any symptoms in the panel.

The disease is far more treatable – and the means of dealing with it less severe – at its early stages.

Do not be stopped by embarrassment either – talking about messy bodily functions is all part of core business for our health professionals and they will want to ensure concerns are squared away.

It is not lost on me that I am extremely fortunate to be here to tell this story. Having nearly been killed by sepsis, I am living with new enthusiasm even given the stress of six-monthly scans to check for any possible cancer reoccurrence.

But the traumatic path to a new me might have been avoided had I picked up the warning signs – make sure you listen to your body and act on its advice.



Know the symptoms...

They can include:

- ✓ Bleeding from your bottom or blood in poo
- ✓ **A persistent and unexplained change in bowel habit**
- ✓ Unexplained weight loss
- ✓ **Extreme tiredness for no obvious reason**
- ✓ A pain or lump in the tummy

For more information visit
bowelcancer.org.uk

REMOTE CONTROL

How to direct ops from thousands of miles away

► **AFTER** more than a year of remote working, the practice has become embedded in Army business.

Even so, a deployment to Texas has seen Maj Emma Allen (R Signals) take the concept to extremes.

Despite isolating in readiness for Exercise Warfighter, she was able to continue her role as officer commanding military co-responders – the team helping the NHS and South Central Ambulance Service on Op Rescript.

Here she shares her tips for staying at the helm far from home...

Understand your role

It might sound obvious, but you must have a total grasp of your operating model before you begin working remotely. We've been fortunate in the co-responders as we learnt a great deal during the early stage of the pandemic in March 2020 and our lines of reporting are now well established. I effectively deal with all the admin around where our teams are based and organise the duty rosters. My husband James, a Royal Artillery officer, and fellow signaller Maj Marcus Joiner lead the op on the ground.

Know the etiquette

Ministry of Defence-approved online tools such as Microsoft Teams have proved a game changer, but chairing an online gathering of 80

or more participants can be challenging. Make sure you have the right processes to deal with meetings and that everyone is singing from the same hymn sheet.

Stay flexible

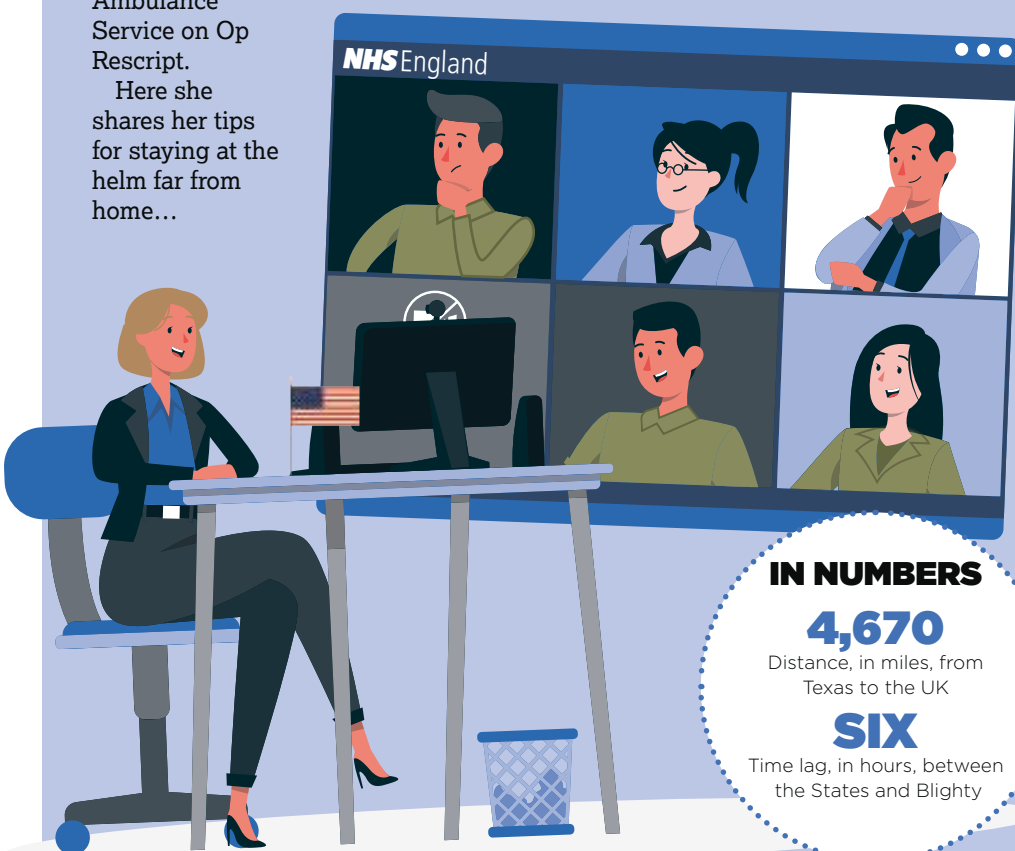
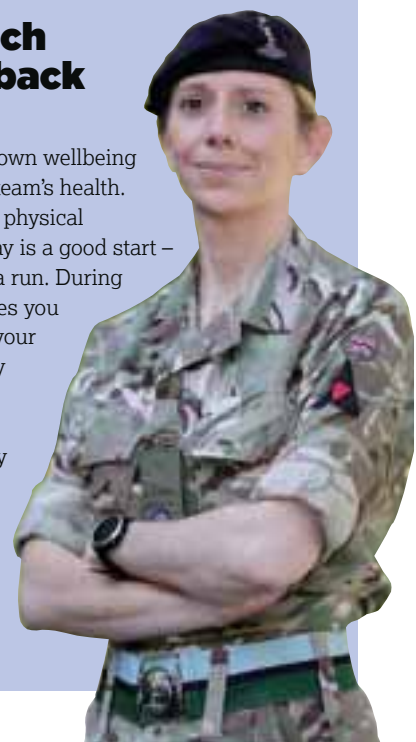
Be open to adapting your own working patterns. Here in Texas, my day has been completely turned on its head as we're some six hours behind the UK. I start at 0330 so I can catch the co-responder update back home, then return at 0700 for the British afternoon to attend the South Central Ambulance Trust commander's brief. Later I focus on sorting out the relevant preparation and admin work for the following day.

Maintain trust

It is important that you know the individuals in your team before you start to work remotely. Trust in those you are working alongside and have the confidence to delegate particularly if – like me – you are far from home.

Have each other's back

Look after your own wellbeing as well as your team's health. Making time for physical exercise each day is a good start – I love going for a run. During video conferences you can pick up on your colleagues' body language if you know them well enough – so stay fully attuned to spot any potential problems.



IN NUMBERS

4,670

Distance, in miles, from Texas to the UK

SIX

Time lag, in hours, between the States and Blighty

Can't **stop** scrolling?

6 signs lockdown has left you with a smartphone addiction... and what to do about it

► WE'RE probably all aware that we spend too much time glued to our electronic devices, but endless months of pandemic-induced house arrest may have tipped some people towards a full-blown addiction.

Here's how you can tell if you have developed a problem...

1 You can't sleep

The blue light emitted by phones and other devices messes with melatonin – the hormone that makes you sleepy – making it harder to drift off

2 You feel anxious

Just because you check your phone a lot doesn't mean you are addicted, but if the mere thought of not having it to hand worries you, this could indicate you've become dependent

3 You're stressed out by social media

Constantly scrolling through your news feed means you're more likely to compare yourself to others, feel like you are missing out or get annoyed by what you see and read

4 You can't stop checking your phone

A classic sign of addiction is feeling compelled to look at your phone every time you stand still or sit down, while eating dinner and even during activities where it is dangerous to do so – such as driving

5 You lose time

If you find yourself coming back to reality after a scrolling session and wondering where the last hour has gone, it could indicate you have a problem

6 You text more than talk

You may find yourself communicating with people via text more often than face to face. This can, in turn, increase feelings of isolation

Did you know?

Smartphone addiction has become so prevalent that it even has its own name – **nomophobia**, short for “no mobile phone phobia”



How to break the cycle...

Try a social media fast – set a time limit to stay offline and stick to it

Track your usage. Apps such as *Moment* and *BreakFree* help you monitor the time you spend scrolling. You might be quite shocked by the results

Instead of texting your friend, arrange for a chat or a socially distanced coffee

Power down during every meal and definitely turn your phone off while driving. Even better – put it somewhere well out of reach, like the boot

Exercise more. It sounds simple but every moment spent working out is a moment not wasted online. Physical activity also releases endorphins which improve your mood – bonus!



ABF

THE SOLDIERS'

CHARITY

The Army's National Charity

FOR SOLDIERS FOR VETERANS FOR FAMILIES FOR LIFE

As the Army's national charity, we're here for the Army family when you need us.

In a typical year, we help 70,000 people by awarding grants to individuals and 89 other charities and organisations that support the Army family. Our support is here at the start of your career and continues for life - long after service has ended.

These are just some of the 89 charities and organisations we supported in the 2019-20 financial year:



SUPPORTING
70,000
INDIVIDUALS &
89
ORGANISATIONS

SEARCH **ABF THE**
SOLDIERS' CHARITY
TO FIND OUT MORE

SUPPORT US
AND YOU SUPPORT
THE WHOLE ARMY FAMILY



THE
NOT FORGOTTEN
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CHARITY



Royal Star
& Garter
Care with courage




ssafa | the
Armed Forces
charity



stoll | housing and
helping Veterans





Report: Sarah Goldthorpe Pictures: Graeme Main and Cpl Rob Kane, RLC

ROOMS FOR MANOEUVRE

This sophisticated urban training facility is set to take 16 Air Assault Brigade's high readiness to another level



SOME military skills can take an entire career to perfect. Others are demanded at pace, where failing to nail things first time could be the difference between life and death.

Urban warfare may have casually drifted in and out of pre-deployment training programmes in recent years. But in 2021, with more than half the world's population inhabiting towns and cities, this type of battle is pretty much a dead cert for future combat operations.

The skills required to negotiate these confusing environments, therefore, cannot be left to chance – especially not for a high-readiness formation like 16 Air Assault Brigade, the Army's Air Assault Task Force.

For these soldiers, the odd trip to a training area shoot-house is no longer good enough. If they are to fulfil their brief of being able to engage the enemy, or conduct rescue missions, anywhere in the world at a moment's notice, only the sharpest close-quarter fighting skills will do.

With that premise in mind, the brigade has installed its own state-of-the-art, interactive urban training facility at Merville Barracks in Colchester.

And its on-base location means the impressive structure can be used to hammer out drills as regularly and intensely as junior commanders want.

Maj Murray McMahon, the Serviceman responsible for

sourcing the kit, explained why it would make such a difference to troops deploying at home and abroad.

"Unfortunately, statistics tell us that going into a room where someone is waiting for you means someone is getting shot," the officer commanding of C Company, 2nd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment said.

"Getting in there accurately to neutralise a threat, make it safe, and secure civilians is absolutely vital – and you can do all of that in this place."

Built by UK training simulation company 4GD, using defence innovation fund cash, this is now the most sophisticated equipment of its kind outside the elite forces.

Its impressive features include moveable walls, interactive smoke, light and sound effects that can be controlled from a tablet device in real-time, a CCTV system and an after-action review suite that scrutinises soldiers' every move in some painstaking detail.

Hundreds of different layouts and scenarios can be set up, from bustling shopping centres to dark, deserted office blocks with confusing corridors.

And all of this can be switched around on-the-spot by a single person thanks to the kit's lightweight material.

For the users, all of this creates agile, fast-paced training that mirrors the quick thinking required of troops when they move and fight through buildings. »



“
It’s like a
playground for
commanders
”

URBAN WARRIORS: PERSONAL PROFILES

CPL ASH COLCLOUGH

Age: 29 Years of service: 11



Ops served:
Herrick 13, 2012 Olympics

Career high:
My first tour – Herrick 13. I passed out of training then went straight on operations

Steepest learning curve:
My first promotion course, the drills and duties course at Pirbright, when I was making the jump to lance corporal

Biggest disappointment:
The sausage rolls in the packed lunches – cat’s arses we used to call them. They’re bad

Top high-readiness tip:
Make sure your kit is packed and ready to go. When I lived in the block I used to keep it by my bed so that when we got the call, even if on a dummy run, I was good to go

SGT JASON SATCHWELL

Age: 36 Years of service: 13.5

Ops served:
Herrick 13, Op Ruman hurricane relief in the Caribbean

Career high:
Herrick 13 – it was my first operational tour

Steepest learning curve:
I’d say senior Brecon

Biggest disappointment:
Covid-19, without doubt

Top high-readiness tip:
Let the other people in your life, like your family, know if you are being held at high readiness so they can be prepared for it as well





Cpl Ash Colclough, an experienced section commander in C Company, is enjoying regular stints inside.

"The guys love it," the NCO explained. "It's like a playground for commanders.

"You get to a four-way corridor junction and you think 'oh God, what do I do here?'. But we really could be facing stuff like that when we are deployed, so this sort of facility was much needed.

"I have been in nearly 12 years and it's about time.

"When people higher up the ranks see this, they will surely want to build them up and down the country."

Maj McMahon added: "It is all about pushing the basics into advanced close-quarter battle skills.

"We wanted something that we could go into with our guys and do repetitions – room after room after room, then the following week change the structure.

"It's about a really immersive experience and helping soldiers create that muscle memory for these operations.

"Corporals can tap into all sorts of different effects during their scenarios, too.

"Before the guys go into a room you can add the sound of someone screaming, or gunfire – all of which adds to the confusion and stress."

The officer said he believes the effect on real-life soldiering skills would be felt in his company alone within weeks. Platoon sergeant Jason Satchwell, who has spent time instructing Para recruits at ITC Catterick, agreed.

"When you train in depot, everything is so fast," the 36-year-old told *Soldier*.

"But with this new facility, you can take a recruit from basic skills to advanced drills in a morning.

"The way you can change it to be op-specific too, rather than just going into an old hangar, is brilliant.

"Even the newest recruit can learn the layout of one of those within a day.

"But this keeps training up to a higher standard."

Being on their doorstep means any skill fade can be tackled almost immediately.

"It works really well with our everyday life and our routine in camp," Sgt Satchwell continued.

"We can be running in the morning, then shower, change and head straight to the armoury before getting inside.

"Ammo is here, as is food and accommodation.

"You can basically do a two-week urban exercise on your doorstep, without having to pack bags."

The paratroopers explained how the equipment was also helping to integrate section commanders back into urban drills, rather than have them observing from the sidelines.

Cpl Colclough said: "I can go in and do the serials with them now, because the after-action review shows what everyone did.

"In real life that is what I would be doing, so that's perfect.

"It makes them stay switched on as they know they have nowhere to hide." »»»

Of course, there can be no actual substitute for real-life operational experience.

But with such a significant boost to their preparedness, Maj McMahon believes high-readiness personnel will now have the upper hand before they even take to the skies.

"If you give this facility to a company commander for a week, you are probably going to see a 30 to 40 per cent improvement in their experienced guys, and a huge improvement in junior troops," he revealed.

"But the key thing is that everybody will be doing things the same way after a stint in here; this stuff should be muscle memory for them.

"When I was a platoon commander in 2008 we made urban training up ourselves.

"This will make soldiers better, more precise.

"And it will undoubtedly save lives when they have to do it for real." ■

“The way you can change it to be op-specific, rather than just going into an old hangar, is brilliant”

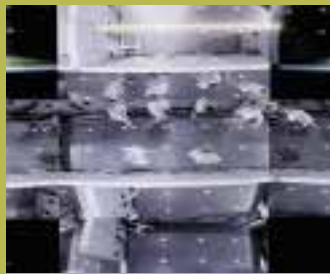
CLEAR THE ROOM!

Inside Colchester's urban training facility...



SimWall panel system

– allows the layout to be reconfigured in hundreds of different ways. Panels can be safely and quickly moved by one person, meaning sections or platoons can modify it between serials.



Video monitoring system

– provides a near-perfect top-down view of the entire facility. In the after-action review this means soldiers can understand how the whole team performed and get a better understanding of the tactical picture.



Special effects suite

– filters in background effects as well as battle simulation. It features immersive audio and lighting.



Intelligent facility management system

– controls the whole site and is easy to operate so personnel can run their own serials. Operated through a portable dual tablet display that gives control from anywhere inside.

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HIGH-PERFORMING

RESERVES from The Royal Yeomanry and 103 Battalion, Royal and Electrical Mechanical Engineers had a lot to prove as they deployed on Op Cabrit at the end of last September.

Operating under the command of 1st The Queen's Dragoon Guards, they represented the largest element in the first ever Regular-Reserve hybrid squadron to fulfil the British Army's Nato commitment in Poland.

"There was a lot of uncertainty and concerns around this tour, particularly in force generation and preparedness," states Maj Ben Matthews (QDG), officer commanding Cassino Squadron, the hybrid sub-unit in question.

"Those concerns weren't unreasonable. This had never been attempted before and as a mounted force on the Jackal and Coyote platforms there were some obvious capability gaps that needed addressing before we got to the start line."

Since the spring of 2017 the UK has been providing a rotating reconnaissance element for the Enhanced Forward Presence Battlegroup Poland, under command of the US 2nd Cavalry Regiment, a Germany-based Stryker Brigade formation.

For this deployment, some 130 British troops would serve alongside counterparts from the US, Polish, Romanian and Croatian forces.

Around 80 of the British contingent were Reservists, with



HYBRID

Cabrit troops reflect on the bonuses of an unusual paired deployment to Poland

roughly three quarters of those supplied by The Royal Yeomanry and the rest from 103 Bn REME, along with 152 and 167 Regiments of the Royal Logistic Corps.

"We provided three sabre troops and individuals into the headquarters, as well as helping on the logistics side of things," explains Sgt Matt Henley (RY).

"But our paired regiment, the QDG, took on certain specialist roles in addition to the command element, including an anti-tank capability because we had no one qualified in those jobs.

"We simply couldn't have done this on our own."

However, what many personnel – Regulars and Reserves alike – did manage to do during their time in pre-deployment training

at home in the UK, and out in Poland, was upskill themselves and, where possible, start filling some of the capability gaps that had been identified.

"We trained up quite a few of our people in certain areas, such as the Javelin anti-tank weapon, supported by the QDG," continues Sgt Henley.

"Six of the Royal Yeomanry completed the course at Swanton Morley and came out here a month later."

With Covid restrictions in the UK and Poland stymying all the scheduled rest and recuperation breaks, training and professional development – including a potential NCO cadre and the cold weather operators' course led by the Royal »



» Marines and Army Arctic warfare instructors – became central to maintaining morale and focus when personnel were in camp.

“It was a real shame we missed out on the many adventurous training opportunities and cultural visits Poland usually offers, but one real highlight has been being able to smash out our courses – and for a Reservist that is awesome,” says Cpl James Mashiter (RY), a property developer from London.

“You don’t get that unless you deploy and during PDT I completed my corporals’ light cavalry tactics course, which I needed to become a Jackal commander. Also, in Poland I gained live-firing range qualifications, which rarely come up for us back at home.”

Tpr Hugh Maitland-Jones (RY) was another who took the chance to develop his military credentials.

“I only finished my basic training just before we started preparing for the tour and I think it’s fair to say that the last year has been worth three or four standard years as a Reservist,” he tells *Soldier*.

“You gain so much in terms of experience – I did the defence train-the-trainer course that many more senior guys back home haven’t had a chance to do yet.

“It’s pretty rare for troopers in the Yeomanry to have this under their belt so I feel I’ve come out ahead.”

But the benefits didn’t only flow one way, and according to Maj Matthews some of the Reservists’ civilian-bred talents proved invaluable during the tour.

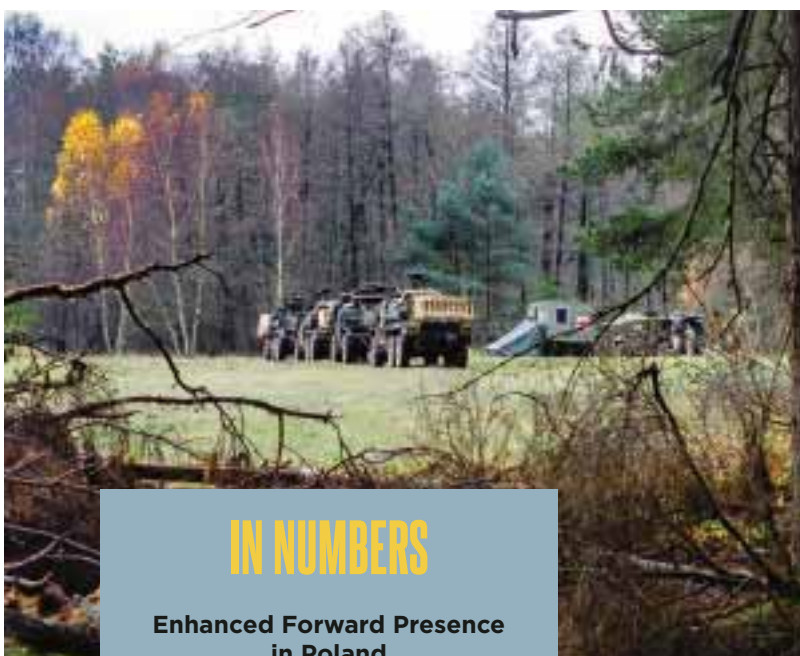
“One of the Royal Yeomanry guys said the other day that it was great watching the QDG soldiers during an attack because they reminded him to do his low-level skills better, things that hadn’t become second nature to him yet,” the officer explains.

“But on the flip side, the Regulars’ way of doing business is not always ideal.

“Among our Reserves are nuclear engineers, management consultants, builders, project managers, NHS staff and senior civil servants. This bright bunch provided us with some fresh approaches to certain challenges.

“One example was 103 Bn REME, which has personnel who manage ambulance fleets for the NHS.

“They identified inefficiencies where vehicles were coming in three or four times during each tour for different maintenance requirements. A huge amount of work was put into altering the servicing schedules so the whole fleet – Jackals and Coyotes



IN NUMBERS

Enhanced Forward Presence in Poland

4

Nations in the battlegroup, which is
attached to the Polish Army

80

British Reservists deployed

FOUR

Years since Nato started basing
troops in Poland, Estonia, Lithuania
and Latvia

366

Course qualifications achieved by
130 deployed personnel

3

Nato exercises undertaken

included – should now come in only once for servicing during each rotation.

“That project took a lot of workforce hours to enact but fundamentally changed our processes in theatre and will benefit future rotations significantly.”

Another notable moment was the creation of a new training package – one that has now been adopted by the commanders of the lead US Army formation. And again, the Reservist contribution was key.

“We instigated a multinational combined arms live-firing package,” explains Maj Matthews.

“It produced numerous firsts for the tour, including the integration of digital fires and the Romanians using their anti-aircraft systems, as well as pulling the whole battlegroup and Polish artillery support into a coordinated exercise.

“It’s been viewed as a great success by the brigade, the US battlegroup commander, and Nato, and has become a template for regular live-fire exercises here in future.

“But we were only able to make all that happen because we had training safety officer, Capt Darren Dalton (RY), on board with us. ”



“

This has turbocharged the relationship between paired units

”





“He completed 24 years in the Regulars, with The Royal Lancers, and had previously delivered similar exercises for the Army, namely in Op Herrick pre-deployment training. Without him the package wouldn’t have been possible.”

So have the concerns surrounding Reserve capabilities been abated with this deployment? And has the paired regiment concept been proven to work?

“I think it’s taken it to the next level,” says Sgt Henley. “Trust has been built up across the span of ranks and we know each other really well so if and when we work together again we won’t have to worry about spending time finding our feet and dispelling preconceptions.”

Tpr Joshua Hellyar-Jones (QDG) also believes deploying as a hybrid unit has benefited both Regular and Reserve personnel.

“The Royal Yeomanry in particular have gained some good experience from us and learnt by watching how we do things, while those of us who maybe saw some stigma around working with part-time soldiers can see what they’re really like – it should have changed the way they think about Reservists,” he adds.

And with 1st The Queen’s Dragoon Guards set to deploy to the USA, Kenya and Mali this year, there is real value in having experienced and trusted Reserve counterparts, says Lt Alastair Coombe (RY).

“The QDG can spread themselves that wide because, as this Poland tour has shown, there are part-time personnel able to assume their role and do a highly professional job on real deployments,” he adds.

When a hybrid squadron dominated by Reserves will deploy again is impossible to predict but confidence in taking this route is now much higher.

“They all performed really well, there were no personnel issues – everyone here is a soldier first,” says Maj Matthews.

“Importantly, this tour has turbocharged the relationship between the paired units, the RY and the QDG, added capability through the training of 103 Bn personnel on additional platforms and, importantly, proved that our Reservists are able make the hybrid construct work.” ■

Polish highs and lows



“ We normally train on Stanta or Salisbury Plain but here we’ve had the chance to drive through real villages, towns and farms during exercises so that made things more real.”

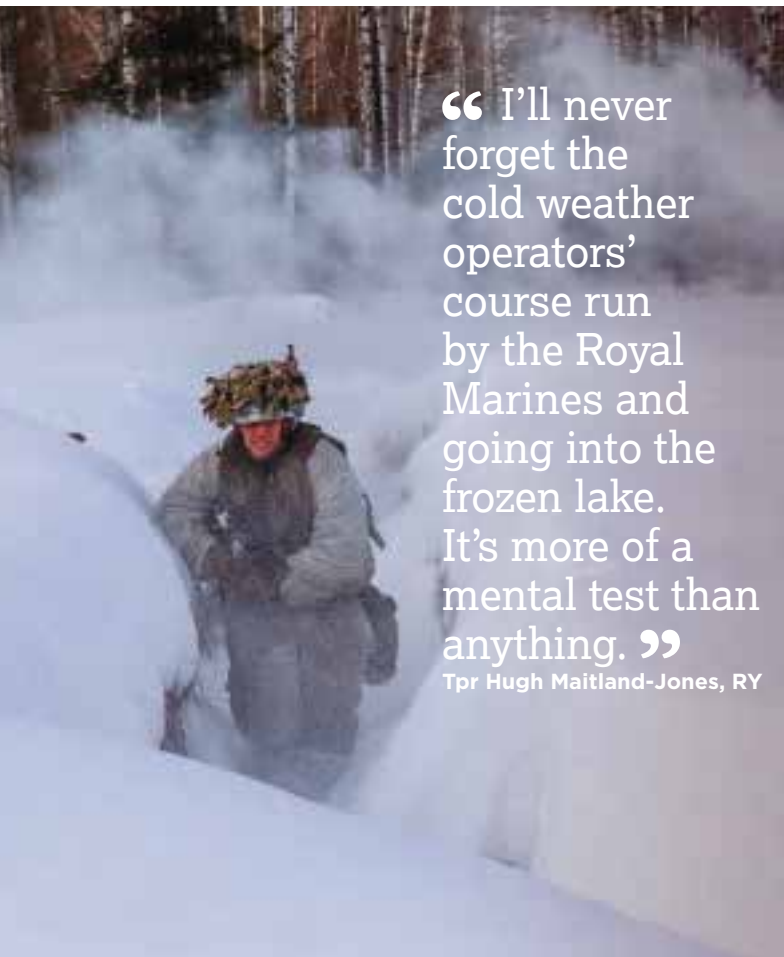
Cpl James Mashiter, RY



“ I clocked a temperature of minus 23 degrees in my Jackal which felt pretty horrendous at 30mph in an open vehicle.”

Sgt Matt Henley, RY





“ I’ll never forget the cold weather operators’ course run by the Royal Marines and going into the frozen lake. It’s more of a mental test than anything. ”

Tpr Hugh Maitland-Jones, RY



“ Christmas in camp due to Covid was a low point for some. We had to collect our food in a takeaway container and go back to our rooms, but most of us dealt with it okay. ”

Tpr Joshua Hellyar-Jones, QDG



“ The live-firing package was the highlight. I’d never done a platoon attack with heavy weapon support, NLAW firing and Polish Hind helicopters overhead – it was the sort of experience I came out here for. ”

Lt Alastair Coombe, RY



“ On the cold weather course we did a night navigation task and it was great to see the soldiers develop and get more confident. We also had all our food taken away so we had to find it ourselves, dispatch it, and cook it on a fire we hadn’t yet made; it was really enjoyable in a masochistic sort of way. ”

Maj Ben Matthews, QDG



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DRIVING FORCE

Preserving the ability of troops to respond to any situation at home or overseas has been critical for commanders during the Covid crisis. »

AMID a pandemic that has forced the near-shutdown of the country for the last 12 months, mobility has remained the key to the Army's core business. Without troops qualified on the vehicle fleet, tasks ranging from assistance at vaccination points to deployments in Estonia would rapidly grind to a halt.

In the emergency, it has fallen to exercise planners to keep soldiers moving with creative and efficient training.

And despite lockdown restrictions, a team at Longmoor have been helping them stay on the right track.

They recently took a small-scale course for the Army's

Land Rover fleet and transformed it into a two-week engine of opportunity for Royal Engineer Reservists.

The package – appropriately dubbed Exercise Bogged in Sapper – was supercharged to include truck conversion courses plus a range of other serials. And it aimed to rapidly help personnel broaden their highway horizons.

"It was certainly a test to put this all together," admitted SCpl Bill Lindsay (HCR), currently serving with 131 Squadron, 24 Commando Engineer Regiment, who began planning the programme at the height of the latest lockdown.

"Originally, we had six soldiers down to do their training on

“Soldiers were coming in from all corners of the country”



**SPR MEREDITH
RICHARDS, RE**

Age: 24

Unit: Royal
Monmouthshire
Royal Engineers

Years of service: 2

Civvy job: Private tutor

Operational experience:
Op Rescript, UK



**CPL TIM
OLIVIER, RE**

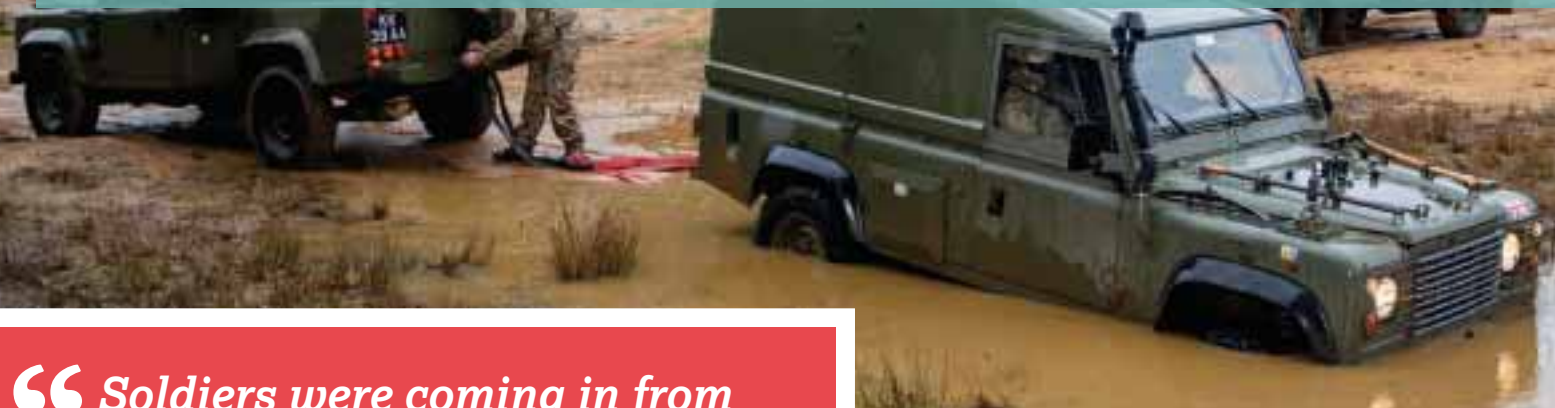
Age: 39

Unit: 23 Parachute
Engineer Regiment

Years of service: 7

Civvy job: Geothermal
and structural monitoring
specialist

Operational experience:
Op Trenton, South Sudan



Land Rovers but in the end we expanded to take more than 100 and offer several qualifications.

“Soldiers were coming in from all corners of the country – and some of them from places as far afield as the Channel Islands – to take part in the exercise.”

Instructors at the event – which was organised under the remit of 8 Engineer Brigade – pooled their extensive knowledge to show participants the finer points of vehicle handling. The syllabus offered activities from provisional licence level to trucks of up to 15 tonnes.

Some students also had the chance to perfect their skills on plant machinery – such as excavators – as well as climbing behind the wheel of minibuses. In addition, a course on hazardous materials handling was part of the line-up.

“During our planning we steadily built on the programme,” SCpl Lindsay added.

“We gave soldiers the opportunity to learn all kinds of different tasks, as well as disciplines such as driving in night vision goggles for extra realism.

“The hazmat course was also well subscribed – including with a few Regulars.”

The experienced NCO pointed out that the exercise was delivered with counter-coronavirus measures in place.

Soldiers and staff had to wear masks while accommodation was adjusted for fewer occupants.

Cookhouse procedures were also changed to cap table numbers – and those finishing scoff had to leave the dining area immediately.

“Normally we would be looking at putting troops up at 30 to a room but this number was cut in half during the exercise,” highlighted SCpl Lindsay.

“We also had to make sure that participants observed the two-metre distancing rules – fortunately this was easier as there were already fewer people on camp.”

Despite the restrictions, personnel embarking on the training were pleased with the experience and the different opportunities on offer.

The chance to have several disciplines squared away during the two weeks would pay off in future, they said.

“The exercise was a great opportunity for Reservists,” Spr Meredith Richards, of the Royal Monmouthshire Royal Engineers, told *Soldier*.

“During the first week I was signed off for driving military green fleet vehicles – and progressed onto trucks in the second week.

“There was a plant tasking too – a lot had been condensed into the package, which was great as I had travelled across from Jersey to take part.”

Fellow sapper Cpl Tim Olivier of 23 Parachute Engineer Regiment was equally impressed with the training standards and slick delivery.

“I did the Land Rover course, as well as some other work on awareness of hazardous materials,” the NCO said.

“Everything was soundly organised and I came away with a lot learnt.”

Despite the continuing challenges of Covid-19, exercise planners are ramping up opportunities to ensure troops are ready for any eventuality.

With soldiers a critical asset to both home front and overseas efforts, ensuring their skills are kept fully up-to-date is key to success. ■





BROAD HORIZONS

A Reservist scheme is helping retain personnel whose civilian jobs take them overseas

WHEN Musn Max Honiball (Rifles) accepted a job working for a prestigious law firm in Ontario, the Reservist didn't feel as overjoyed as he might.

His contract required him to work full-time in Canada for at least two years and the 25-year-old knew that while a new chapter was opening up in his civilian life, it probably meant closing the book on his military one.

"It felt like a mixed blessing," he says. "I love the Army and was drawn to the Service while studying at Exeter and joining the University Officers' Training Corps before linking up with the Salamanca Band and Bugles of The Rifles in Devon."

"Later I moved back home to the Beaconsfield area and really enjoyed playing with the Waterloo Band and Bugles of 7 Rifles, based in Abingdon."

"But I thought this job offer meant an end to all of that because my unit wouldn't be able to keep me on, being away for such a long period of time."

But he was wrong.

Thanks to some assiduous research by a senior officer in his unit, a relatively unknown scheme called Reserve Forces foreign service arrangements (RFFSA) was gratefully unearthed.

It sets out how part-time troops whose civilian jobs require them to be employed in Canada, Australia or the USA on a temporary basis, can apply to serve with a similar Reserve unit in the country they are moving to.

Applicants have to be supported by their chain

of command and both the British Army and foreign unit must agree to a defined period of service – usually between one and three years.

During this time the home regiment covers the soldier's pay. Musn Honiball applied last year and, with the paperwork complete, is now a bona fide member of the Canadian Army's Royal Hamilton Light Infantry band.

"It's been great so far," he told *Soldier*. "I've been able to attend training weekends with the unit and the manner and content of work is very similar to what I've experienced in the UK."

The Serviceman is unsure how long he will stay in Canada, but for the time being the scheme is allowing him to keep his British Army Reserve career alive.

"My work permit expires at the end of February 2022 and as I approach that point I'll reassess my position, consult with The Rifles, and decide whether I'll be staying out here in the longer term or coming back," he explains.

"The British Army has been very flexible, understanding and accommodating of my situation so far."

It's been a similar story for Lt Dan Heydenrych (RA), who moved to Vancouver last year to support his wife's career. He heard about the RFFSA through the Army grapevine and did some online research to find out the facts.

"Once I knew the basic details I was able to dig out the relevant standing order and begin discussions with my chain of command," he says.

"I was desperate not to leave the British Army and I suppose if this option had not been available I could have tried to return to the UK a couple of times for annual camps and other training to keep myself ticking over, but it would have been difficult."

Through the scheme he was placed with Canada's 15th »

“It’s been so good to see a different perspective on things”

» Field Artillery Regiment, where he mentors new soldiers as they progress through basic training and trade courses, as well as assisting other troop commanders with the development of training programmes.

“I’m very grateful to my colleagues at 265 Battery, 106 Regiment for approving the attachment and making things a lot easier for me,” he adds.

“Thankfully, there are now useful discussion forums and other resources on Defence Connect that share information on this arrangement, so anyone looking to request an attachment should start there.”

Retaining membership of the British Army was a crucial factor for Capt Tessa Muir (RAVC) of 1st Military Working Dog Regiment, too.

Thanks to the programme she recently hooked up with Australia’s 3rd Health Support Battalion after landing a veterinary contract in Victoria. And she is looking forward to gaining fresh experience and skills that will benefit her military career when she returns to the UK.

“The unit have been incredibly welcoming, and I feel privileged to have been given a platoon command role already,” the officer told *Soldier*.

“It’s going to allow me to understand more about the structure, operations and capabilities of the Australian military and then hopefully perform my role in the British Army Reserve to an even higher standard later on – particularly if I’m involved in multinational operations.

“The Australian forces use military working dogs and I’m eager to learn about the roles they perform and the policies related to them.

“I want to expand my knowledge in this area so when I return I can contribute directly to the British military’s continuing efforts to strive for the highest possible welfare standards for its working animals.”

Her sentiments are echoed by Maj Keiron Francis (R Signals), who was posted to Washington DC by his civilian employer in July 2020.

Through the scheme he joined the National Guard’s 56th Stryker Brigade Combat Team – and he’s scheduled to serve with them until 2023.

They have already used his signals expertise to help provide security at the presidential inauguration earlier this year (*Soldier*, February 2021) and, like Capt Muir, Maj Francis believes the opportunities on offer can be gilt-edged both for the Service and the individual.

“I would have left the British Army two years ago if it hadn’t been for this scheme,” he says.

“The experience has been fantastic and having Reservists in National Guard units will only strengthen our defence relationship and interoperability because, realistically, the UK will now very rarely deploy or work without counterparts from the US military close by.

“I get to use and train on a larger variety of their equipment, weapons and vehicles and it’s expanded my knowledge of how the reserve forces work over here and what they contribute to the bigger picture.

“For example, they do not train midweek like UK units, but for a full weekend once a month.

“They have to attend the majority of these weekends and an annual two-week deployment or they do not qualify for the numerous financial, medical and educational benefits open to them. The cheap medical cover, for example, is hugely important as there’s no organisation like the NHS over here.

“Also, National Guard units are on a defined five-year cycle to go overseas for a tour of up to 12 months, so they expect to deploy fairly regularly – and that’s a huge attraction for many people.

“It’s been so good to see a different perspective on things and it has opened my mind to other ideas.”

There are currently around 20 UK Reservists serving abroad on RFFSA terms, with more applying as awareness grows and Covid-19 travel restrictions ease.

There are also several part-time personnel from those partner nations attached to the British Army Reserve thanks to bilateral agreements with Australia and Canada that have been in force since the late 1990s. The USA has been a partner since 2015.

But with such soldiers arguably more crucial than ever to the overall effectiveness of the Army, the Service’s top brass are now looking to raise the profile of the scheme.

“The agreement has proved brilliant for retaining talent that we might otherwise have lost,” says Lt Col Robert Tomlinson (RE), the international Reserves lead in the Directorate of Engagement and Communications at Army Headquarters.

“It also allows these personnel to maintain training currency, gain valuable knowledge and insights from partner nations, while maintaining formal links to their units back in the UK.

“All the feedback we get is that participants come back more internationally aware and equipped with new skills, experience and knowledge, so all sides benefit hugely.” ■



THE BACKSTORIES

Lt Dan Heydenrych, RA

How long have you been in?

I joined as a Regular in 1998, serving with 21 Air Assault Battery initially. I left in 2004 and joined the Reserves in 2007. I've been with 106 (Yeomanry) Regiment since 2012 and completed my officer commissioning course in 2014



Civvy occupation?

After leaving the Regular Army I worked in security for government, private and NGO organisations across the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. In 2008 I was also a close protection officer for the British Embassy in Kabul. Currently, I am director of community security for the Jewish Federation of Greater Vancouver, conducting risk assessments, coordinating with local law enforcement agencies, delivering training workshops and developing security plans for community events

Any operational experience?

Op Tosca 2002, Op Telic 2003

When are you returning to the UK?

My RFFSA attachment runs until September 2023 but I might be back before then for the junior officers' tactics awareness course that I need to progress to captain

Capt Tessa Muir, RAVC

How long have you been in?

Since 2017

Civvy occupation?

Veterinary surgeon, currently specialising in anti-doping measures to ensure clean competition in equine sports



Any operational experience?

I haven't deployed per se, but have spent time with MWD Cyprus Troop of 1st Military Working Dog Regiment

When are you returning to the UK?

To be confirmed, but probably within the next three years »



Maj Keiron Francis, R Signals

How long have you been in?

I joined in 1994 and was with 71st (City of London) Yeomanry Signal Regiment but am now held on the strength of the Royal Signals Corps Headquarters

Civvy occupation?

I work for a South African defence contractor as a sales director to the American military and the United Nations – hence being posted to Washington

Any operational experience?

Bosnia 2000, Kosovo 2001, Iraq 2003, Op Rescript 2020

When are you returning to the UK?

I'm due back in late 2023 and this attachment is confirmed for three years

Musn Max Honiball, Rifles

How long have you been in?

I joined in 2014 thanks to being in the Exeter University Officers' Training Corps. I had a very positive experience there and heard how great the Reserve was through friends at university

Civvy occupation?

Lawyer

Any operational experience?

None so far, but my fingers are crossed

When are you returning to the UK?

Not before 2022, when I will review my priorities



Over but not out

What Reservists heading abroad need to know...

1

The **RFFSA application** process should start before Reservists move overseas.

2

Candidates need the **support of their unit commanding officer**, who has to confirm the applicant has the qualities and character to act as an ambassador for the regiment and wider Army.

3

Use the new **Army Command Standing Order application form** – which replaces LFSO 1226 this month – to apply to the Army International Engagement branch, who will work with the partner nation to find a suitable host unit. The process usually takes six to ten weeks.

4

The British Army Reserve unit **continues to hold the individual on strength, pay Reserve service days (RSDs) and provide administrative support.**

5

The home unit allocates a maximum number of RSDs to the applicant. It's then **up to the individual to work out a training plan** with the host unit.

6

Qualifying for certificate of efficiency and annual training bounty is discretionary and the home unit's **CO needs to confirm the soldier has performed equivalent training tasks**, and the required number of RSDs overseas to meet the criteria.

7

Attachments normally last from **nine months to two years** but may be **extended to three years on request.**

8

The scheme **cannot be applied to secondments, loans, or exchanges.**

9

Search for **"Reservists Resident Abroad Network"** on **Defence Connect** for more information.



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Fury over huge property fine

I RECENTLY left my Service family accommodation (SFA) to buy my own house and before I moved out I spent hours sprucing the place up, including painting some of the walls.

The next day the housing officer was all over them like a gecko. I explained that the patch painting was there when I moved in but she went into full traffic warden mode – “I’m just doing my job” – and slapped me with a £1,300 fine.

That sum equates to our mortgage and bills for a month – just because we painted four rooms in magnolia.

When I complained about it, she told me I shouldn’t paint anything myself and to “chalk the fine up to experience”.

Amey and its property officers are really poor in my opinion – my inspector was actually an Army wife but wouldn’t advise or help me out at the time.

This kind of thing really gets Servicemen and women down. Senior officers bang on about mental wellbeing, but they let civvy staff do us out of thousands of pounds.

My advice to others is make sure you do your 14-day observation report after you move in, photograph the property, don’t patch paint and don’t trust housing officers. They will tell you they are doing their best to help you but they are not.
– Name and address supplied

Kieron Mullen, Deputy Head, Estate Services, Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO), replies: Thank you for your letter and we are sorry

to hear of your negative experience with the service Amey provides.

While painting walls in your SFA may make it feel like home and help create a sense of ownership – which is encouraged – be aware that changing the decor will require you to undertake certain steps to ensure your home meets the required standard before leaving.

This is discussed at your pre-move out meeting so you can avoid costs being issued on final inspection.

At move out time Amey’s officers inspect the property and assess it against criteria set out in **JSP 464**.

Defects are discussed with the occupant and, if appropriate, barrack charges applied. These are collected on behalf of the MoD by the DIO and not returned to Amey.

While patch painting is permitted, it should be of a consistent colour and extended to an appropriate natural break. If this results in more than half of the surface area, or more than two walls, then the complete interior of the room should be redecorated.

You have the right to challenge any barrack charges with the DIO and if insufficient evidence is provided by the service provider, Amey, the charge will be overturned.

We encourage all occupants to accurately record any issues with their property at move in using the 14-day observation report.

“Don’t trust housing officers”

YOUR letters provide an insight into the issues at the top of soldiers’ agendas... but please be brief. Emails 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 get an answer via your own chain of command.

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‘CRIMINAL’ CLAIMS

● MARRIED quarters are in short supply and there is a reason for this – there’s not enough scrutiny of the applications made for such housing.

Some people are lying about how many family members are going to live there or being married when they are not in order to get the larger properties.

No one should be able to play the system like this. It results in families with legitimate requirements for extra space struggling to get what they need.

Regimental headquarters staff should be closely involved in the application process to ensure that claims are legitimate and necessary.

I can think of at least ten examples of this type of fraud in my garrison area alone so there must be hundreds more across the wider Army. – **Name and address supplied**

Liam Wilson, Corporate Management, Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO), replies: During an application for Service family accommodation (SFA) all personnel must sign a declaration that the information contained within it is accurate.

If we become aware of any discrepancies we refer the application back to the chain of command for investigation. In addition, we carry out random checks against information recorded for individuals in JPA.

The reasons for a betterment move are scrutinised as far as possible to ensure they are sound.

There are several reasons – medical, for example – why a family may apply for a larger property, but they are all subject to availability and, if approved, the tenants are charged the appropriate amount for the type of SFA subsequently occupied.

Those seeking extra space because they are in a long-term relationship have to satisfy a strict set of criteria, including having their circumstances scrutinised by the individual’s unit. The DIO is not involved in this process.

Any concerns can be reported in total confidence to the MoD’s fraud team (contact details are on gov.uk). We regularly support investigations and, where allegations are proven, SFA can be subsequently withdrawn.



Picture: Steve Dock

An empty street of housing policy shame?

WHY do we stick rigidly to policy rather than use common sense?

I am applying for housing at my new duty station, having been told I cannot keep my current Service family accommodation (SFA), where eight out of 12 units have been empty for two years.

My new job involves a near one-hour commute from where I’m living now but I work from home regularly.

The property at my new duty station is substitute Service family accommodation (SSFA), which is in short supply. As a result, it’s highly likely I will be offered the nearest SFA location, 30-minutes away.

Given that, I would have thought remaining in situ would be sensible as it would save the MoD money.

Receiving home-to-duty allowance is a cheaper option compared with relocation allowance and removal costs, but I’ve been told this is unlikely to happen.

Why, if it saves the MoD money and I am offering to remain in an area where a lot of accommodation is standing empty?

The whole process should be assessed on a case-by-case basis. – **Name and address supplied**

Liam Wilson, Corporate Management, Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO), replies: I don’t know all the circumstances in this case, but I do find it surprising that permission to remain in your current property cannot be agreed given the number of surplus units you say there are.

Retention of SFA at the old duty station requires an extension of entitlement, and approval can be given if certain criteria are met.

These are set out in **JSP 464**, so you may wish to double check the policy.

Secondly, if the criteria are not met, you may be allowed to remain in your current property on something called a surplus licence, as long as there is enough spare SFA at the site. There are downsides to this – one of which is, potentially, receiving only 28 days’ notice to move out if the unit is required by an incoming family.

It is possible that the impact of the pandemic and an increase in working from home may lead to changes in policy, but the DIO will always apply it fairly and openly to ensure all Service families are treated equitably.



‘PARAS COULD FREEFALL’

● WILL the new Ranger battalions prove to be the death knell of The Parachute Regiment?

I can’t see how they will recruit or retain troops as well as they used to with the new Special Forces support role given to some of the Royal Marines and new Ranger battalions.

The Paras have lost out in this respect and I think they’ll have a lot of trouble attracting or keeping the best personnel because they will want the status of being a Ranger.

– **Gerard Buckley (ex-Para), Harrogate**

“It saves the MoD money”

PLASTIC NOT ‘TASTIC

● IS there a team somewhere in defence dedicated to reducing the use of plastic in the military?

Working in a unit company quartermaster role, I regularly witness how we usually get this so wrong.

We seem to be using too much plastic – which is very difficult to recycle – when we could be utilising other forms of packaging.

This would reduce the volume of such waste across all MoD sites and that would surely benefit the environment as a whole.

In the current climate we should be looking to achieve this and provide a better future for us all. – **SSgt David Hughes, RE**



Picture: Steve Dock

Maj Mike Pomfrett, Land Domain Headquarters, Defence Equipment and Support, replies: My organisation is working closely with all suppliers to drive down the amount of plastic packaging and, where possible, is encouraging the use of more sustainable materials.

However, many items held in the military supply chain have a shelf life expiry date far greater than in the civilian chain due to the less predictable nature of demand.

In order to guarantee this extended shelf life and reduce the risk of wholesale disposal and waste, more robust forms of packaging are required and plastic remains the most practical and cost effective method to achieve this in many cases.



Picture: Shutterstock

‘Electric plans need a boost’

WITH government and public appetite high for tackling climate change, what is the Army doing to promote this and, more specifically, encourage Service personnel to purchase electric vehicles?

It seems to me that we would be at a distinct disadvantage if we switched to this type of travel at the moment.

I’ve seen no charging points on any barracks and know of none anywhere else after questioning several friends.

Secondly, those living in Service family accommodation cannot have home charging ports as the dwellings are controlled by Amey.

The company refuses to allow the kit to be installed on its properties, which means, before moving out, we would have to remove them and make good at considerable personal expense.

Doesn’t the Service want to encourage its people to go electric and help fight climate change?

If so, where are the initiatives that pave the way for the Army to promote going green with real commitments and not just empty words? – **Capt Andrew McEwen, RE**

Donald Johnstone, Directorate of Basing and Infrastructure, Army Headquarters, replies: The government has issued direction to all departments that they are to change their fleet to ultra low

emission vehicles by 2030, with a quarter switched for electric equivalents by 2022.

In the Army, this applies to the large, so-called white fleet – or non-military assets.

The project is currently in its first phase and approximately 600 vehicles are due to be changed over this year – supported by electric stations across the estate.

The MoD is also looking at providing car power points for personnel occupying single living and Service family accommodation.

At Army Headquarters there is a pilot project to deliver charging gear and a solar car port this year, allowing visiting MoD cars to plug in for free and staff to pay for charging their personal vehicles at the site.

Phase two of the programme will involve similar measures at a further six sites across the UK as well as three garrisons.

This experience will help shape the MoD’s electric vehicle charging policy, which will include supporting employees wishing to charge their own cars on its estate.

Furthermore, four solar farms are to be trialled at the Defence School of Transport in Leconfield, Baker Barracks in Thorney Island, Rock Barracks in Woodbridge and Duke of Gloucester Barracks in South Cerney.

“What is the Army doing?”



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Veterans into Logistics CIC is a not-for-profit organisation based in Greater Manchester dedicated to training and supporting ex-military personnel for new careers within the transport and logistics industry. It recently received a £10,000 grant from the National Lottery Community Fund to continue its work. Visit veteransintologistics.org.uk

Linx Security Training is offering a 20 per cent reduction on 28 courses for serving and former personnel through the MoD-approved Defence Discount Service. The courses on offer range from technical skills to management with industry-approved qualifications. For more details visit linxtraining.co.uk

The Recruit for Spouses coaching programme, which helps Army partners get back into employment, has received a funding boost to reach more husbands and wives. To apply for a six-week course of one-hour sessions email coaching@recruitfor spouses.co.uk

Forces Families Jobs is a new platform designed to help partners into meaningful employment. Visit forcesfamiliesjobs.co.uk to see the site, which is free to advertise on for employers who have signed the Armed Forces Covenant.



SEARCHLINE

Hollie Badrock is looking for partners of personnel who served between 1990 and 2011 to take part in a research programme for her masters degree. The interviews will take approximately one hour and will cover life in the military community, the impact of frequent relocations and experiences during times of conflict. To participate in the project email hbadrock1@sheffield.ac.uk

Retired Royal Air Force Serviceman Andrew Clark is a collector of British military tokens used in Iraq and Afghanistan and is seeking examples of pre-2007 issues to boost his collection. If you have any items of interest email amcpapermoneyman@aol.com

The Air Training Corps, now part of the Royal Air Force Air Cadets, is celebrating its 80th anniversary this year. To help mark the occasion, they would like to identify those who were cadets when the formation launched in 1941 and interview them to capture early memories. Email al.munns@btinternet.com

The Royal Signals Amateur Radio Society is looking for newcomers to join the fold. Open to all cap badges of the British Army, it currently has 500 members but is looking to boost numbers. In addition to serving and former soldiers, the society also welcomes cadet force and Nato personnel, as well as MoD civilians. Email p25@sky.com for details or visit rsars.org.uk

Anita Louise Watson is trying to trace her father, James Watson, who served as a lance corporal in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers during the 1970s. Anyone with information should email anitawatson164@gmail.com

Hugh Corby is trying to trace the military medals and citations of his late father, Capt Eric Corby (RA), who served as a forward observation officer during the Second World War. Anyone with details should contact 07961 606766.



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ABF The Soldiers' Charity:
020 7901 8900;
soldierscharity.org

Armed Forces Buddhist Society:
Chaplain 020 7414 3411;
afbs-uk.org

Armed Forces Christian Union:
01793 783123;
afcu.org.uk

Armed Forces Muslim Association:
Chaplain 020 7414 3252;
afma.org.uk

Armed Services Advice Project:
0808 800 1007;
adviceasap.org.uk

Army Families Federation:
01264 382324;
mil 94391 2324;
aff.org.uk

Army LGBT Forum:
armylgbt.org.uk;
chair@armylgbt.org.uk

Army Libraries:
01252 340094

Army Ornithological Society:
armybirding.org.uk

Army Welfare Service:
01904 882053;
army.mod.uk/welfare-support

Big White Wall, now Togetherall:
togetherall.com

Blesma, The Limbless Veterans:
020 8590 1124;
blesma.org

Blind Veterans UK:
(formerly St Dunstan's)
020 7723 5021;
blindveterans.org.uk

Care After Combat:
careaftercombat.org

Career Transition Partnership:
020 7469 6661

Children's Education Advisory Service:
01980 618244;
dcyp-ceas-enquiries@mod.uk

Combat Stress:
24-hour mental health helpline for Service personnel and their families
0800 323 4444;
combatstress.org.uk

Erskine:
0141 814 4569;
erskine.org.uk

Family Escort Service:
020 7463 9249

Felix Fund – the bomb disposal charity:
07713 752901;
felixfund.org.uk

Forcesline:
UK – 0800 731 4880;
Germany – 0800 1827 395;
Cyprus – 080 91065;
Falklands – #6111;
from operational theatres –
Paradigm Services *201; from
anywhere in the world (CSL operator

will call back) – 0044 1980 630854

Forces Pension Society:
020 7820 9988
forcespensiosocietys.org

Help for Heroes:
0845 673 1760 or
01980 846 459;
helpforheroes.org.uk

Heroes Welcome:
heroeswelcome.co.uk

HighGround:
highground-uk.org.uk
07951 495 272

Humanist, Atheist and Non-religious in Defence network:
defencehumanists.org.uk

Joint Service Housing Advice Office:
01252 787574

Medal Office:
94561 3600 or
0141 224 3600

Mutual Support (multiple sclerosis group):
mutual-support.org.uk

National Gulf Veterans' and Families' Association Office:
24-hour helpline 0845 257 4853;
ngvfa.org.uk

Poppyscotland:
0131 557 2782;
poppyscotland.org.uk

Regular Forces' Employment Association:
0121 236 0058;
rfea.org.uk

Remount: 01451 850 341;
remount.net

Royal British Legion:
0808 802 8080;
britishlegion.org.uk

Royal British Legion Scotland:
0131 550 1583;
legionscotland.org.uk

RBL Industries Vocational Assessment Centre:
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rbli.co.uk

Scottish Veterans' Residences:
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svronline.org

Single Persons Accommodation Centre for the Ex-Services:

01748 833797;
spaces.org.uk

SSAFA: 0845 1300 975;
ssafa.org.uk

Stoll:
020 7385 2110;
stoll.org.uk

The Not Forgotten Association:
020 7730 2400;
nfassociation.org

The Poppy Factory:
020 8940 3305;
poppyfactory.org

The Royal Star and Garter Homes:
020 8481 7676;
starandgarter.org

The Veterans Charity:
01753 653772;
info@veteranscharity.org.uk

Troop Aid:
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troopaid@icloud.com;
troopaid.info

uk4u Thanks!:
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uk4u.org

Veterans Welfare Service:
0808 1914 218 (from the UK);
0044 1253 866043 (from overseas);
gov.uk/government/groups/
veterans-welfare-service

WVRS: 02920 232 668



ROADSHOWS

These events may be subject to delay or cancellation due to the coronavirus pandemic – check relevant websites

The Forces Pension Society is staging a number of roadshows as well as FAR (financial aspects of resettlement) briefings. See forcespensionsociety.org/news-events/events for the latest dates.

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REVIEWS

MOVIES

EMPEROR

Historical drama brings daring escape from slavery to life

➤ TEN months since the murder of George Floyd sparked a global reckoning with racial discrimination, a timely tale of one chapter in black history is coming to the small screen in the UK.

Emperor draws its inspiration from the story of former slave Shields Green, one of the participants in the 1859 raid on Harpers Ferry – an event often credited with lighting the fuse on the American Civil War.

Led by abolitionist John Brown, the group briefly seized control of the government arsenal in the Virginia town, hoping that slaves would rise up in support.

But while Brown's name entered collective memory – even becoming a curse word in old fashioned US vernacular – Green faded into relative obscurity.

Indeed, the lack of definitive information on his background left him somewhat of a blank space in the annals of history.

Perfect fodder, then, for a reimagined telling of his journey from shackles to co-conspirator in a righteous, if doomed, mission to free his fellow slaves.

Writer and director **Mark Amin** (*Frida*, *Eliza Graves*) told *Soldier* how the project stemmed from his lifelong interest in the Civil War era.

"I'm originally from Iran and I moved to the US in my last year of high school," explained the self-confessed history buff.

"I became fascinated with the conflict but also the institution of slavery in America in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, which hadn't been practised on such a massive, industrial scale since the Egyptian and Roman times."



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BOOKS

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GAMES

MOVIES



● *Emperor* is out now on DVD and digital



"I thought about how if I was a slave, I'd spend 24 hours a day working out how to run away and when I researched, I found out there were many who tried and around 100,000 made it, escaping to the northern states or Canada.

"So I wrote this story about a slave who runs away and succeeds. Shields Green could have lived happily ever after, but instead he made the pivotal decision to join this suicide mission for the sake of humanity rather than his own interests."

According to Amin, Green is known to have been enslaved on a plantation in Charleston, South Carolina, where he had a five-year-old son.

What happened between then and meeting prominent abolitionist and fellow-escapee Frederick Douglass – and joining Brown's posse – is less clear.

The film's version, however, has him embark on a nerve-shredding odyssey during his bid for freedom, helped and hindered at turns by a host of colourful characters.

Some familiar faces – if not household names – feature in a strong supporting cast, including Brit **Ben Robson** (*Animal Kingdom*, *Vikings*) as bounty hunter Luke McCabe and **James Cromwell** (*The Young Pope*, *The Green Mile*) as Brown, with cameos by **Mykelti Williamson** (*Forrest Gump*, *Ali*) and **James LeGros** (*Point Break*, *Living in Oblivion*).

Relative newcomer **Dayo Okeniyi** (*The Hunger Games*, *Shades of Blue*) leads as Green.

Having spent years as a producer, Amin was turning his hand to directing for the first time, aged 70 – a process he described as "exhausting".

"My biggest worry was could I get good enough performances out of the cast," he admits.

"We had quite a small budget and some known actors turned me down, but in hindsight we got lucky because Dayo knocked it out of the park and I really think this could be a career changing movie for him."

As this issue went to press Okeniyi had been



Pictures: Kaleidoscope Home Entertainment

Picture: Seth F. Johnson

nominated for best breakthrough performance in a motion picture in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Image Awards – with *Emperor* also in the running in the outstanding independent film category.

However, while the reception among critics has been positive, some reviewers highlighted the historical deviations in the plot, in particular around the closing scenes.

But Amin (pictured on set above) is unrepentant on that front and explained that the ending was based on feedback from screening focus groups.

"It's not a documentary," he continued.

"We filmed two versions of the end and went with the one the audience overwhelmingly voted for. We wanted people to relate to it, especially African American viewers.

"The truth is Green succeeded in escaping, whether he died or lived. The historical accuracy is not nearly as important as the overall message."

Although it was filmed well before last year's Black Lives Matter protests, Amin believes the renewed interest in black history worldwide has seen *Emperor* given a warmer international reception than it would have otherwise.

It may have only captured the zeitgeist coincidentally, but it feels like relevant viewing for these times.

And if it helps keep the conversation going about the centuries-old legacy of racial injustice, then so much the better. ■

INTERVIEW: BECKY CLARK, *SOLDIER*

DIGITAL/DVD RELEASES



Against the Tides

EXTREME swimming isn't your usual topic for a documentary, but that's not to say it doesn't come with a heart-warming story.

★★★★★

This fly-on-the-wall film follows recovered ME sufferer and formerly wheelchair bound British ultra-swimmer **Beth French** as she attempts the so-called Ocean Seven Marathon – crossing all the major open water straits in one year, while avoiding sharks, jellyfish and shipping lanes. The story starts with her successes, but she runs into difficulty when trying to swim from mainland Japan to Hokkaido. A rather abrupt finish leaves you with numerous unanswered questions like 'why did she do it in the first place?'.

Cpl Scott Roberts, Rifles



Take Back

THIS is a predictable offering about the past catching up with the main protagonist – Zara (**Gillian White**).

★★★★★

When her daughter is kidnapped by Patrick (**Mickey Rourke**) she and her husband set out to get her back. Unfortunately, the film is marred by too many slow-motion atmospheric scenes. It is sluggish in getting going and never seems to pick up any speed, lacking drama and suspense throughout. Coupled with wooden acting and unconvincing characters, this is something to turn to only after watching the whole of the Netflix catalogue.

Andrew Cranston, ex-REME



Fukushima 50

TEN years on from the worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl, the heroic story of the 50 plant workers who remained on site at Fukushima after a huge tsunami is finally being told, hour by hour.

★★★★★

Ken Watanabe (*Batman Begins*, *The Last Samurai*) leads the way as the surrounding area is evacuated and reactors start exploding, while people selflessly step up and take control, knowing full well it could cost their lives. Delving deep into Japanese culture, where the shame of failure still casts a deep shadow, you can't help but feel for those involved. You're left in a vacuum of suspense not knowing what setback will befall the workers next, hoping that they pull through.

Cpl Scott Roberts, Rifles

PICK OF THE MONTH:

BEYOND

A story of the red star in space

► WHEN news broke that the Soviet Union had successfully launched a man into orbit on April 12, 1961, it rocked an edgy American public to their very core.

The Russians had already humiliated the US in a battle for the cosmos at every step, including flying the first satellite and crashing a probe into the lunar surface.

Now Yuri Gagarin's Vostok 1 mission was a terrifying new development – the weaponisation of space seemed a real and imminent threat.

But while full-scale war mercifully never came to pass, the fight for prestige between the superpowers changed the course of history.

After the first US astronaut, Alan Shepard, completed a risky though technically less impressive 15-minute suborbital flight just under a month later, US president John F Kennedy threw down the gauntlet, committing his country to landing a man on the Moon by the end of the decade.

Some 60 years on, the story of the early space race still remains one of history's less told tales.

Stephen Walker, however, has set out to redress the balance with *Beyond*.

Scrutinising the period though the perspectives of both sides, the academic has sifted a mass of archive material while interviewing surviving

American and Russian witnesses.

The result is a fascinating picture of a unique episode, the significance of which has arguably yet to be fully understood.

At the centre of the narrative is the enigmatic figure of Gagarin himself – a capable Soviet fighter pilot drawn into the secretive and fledgling space programme.

Little was known in the West about the 27-year-old major – who died in a fast jet accident in 1968. But Walker delves into his background to explore a tragic childhood under Nazi occupation

through to military service and selection in his country's first cadre of cosmonauts.

He is used as a springboard to explore the wider US and Russian programmes and political masters behind them, while shining a light on the brilliant – yet often contentious – individuals who made the dream a reality.

The American establishment turned to the exceptional Dr Wernher von Braun – who had been the brains behind the German V2 rocket programme in the Second World War.



● *Beyond*, by Stephen Walker, is published by William Collins and priced £20

Picture: Zoonar GmbH / Alamy Stock Photo



Q&A Author, academic and documentary maker, Stephen Walker, gives *Soldier* the inside take on *Beyond*

How did you come to this project?

Some years ago there was a diary published by an individual involved in the Soviet space programme that suggested there was some unseen camera footage. I went to Russia – unsuccessfully as it happened – to try to find it, thinking it might make the basis of a good film. While I was there I interviewed some of the surviving players of the early space years and in the end they formed the starting point for what was to become *Beyond*.

How does the book fit in with your other work?

In some ways it represents a continuation of my previous book *Shockwave – Countdown to Hiroshima* about the creation and dropping of the first atomic bomb. Some of the characters who feature in it carry through to this era.

Was researching the Russian perspective a challenge?

Yes, in the sense that you find there are multiple versions of the same story – alternative facts, to quote a current phrase. You have to try to ascertain the truth from the myth and propaganda. There is not the same issue with the US side, where establishing reality is much more straightforward.

How rewarding was the process?

It was wonderful – at its heart the story of the first man in space is a tale about the Russian soul. The Soviet Union had been devastated, losing 27 million people in the Second World War, yet here they were two decades on throwing everything at a space endeavour – something that carried huge risk.

What is the significance of Gagarin's flight,

60 years on?

There is now a huge interest, once again, in all things space. We have talk about returning to the Moon and missions to Mars. In the future, as we travel further and further, people will be asking how it was all possible.

Gagarin was the first man to escape the biosphere where all life had hitherto existed for three-and-a-half billion years.

Were there any defining characteristics of the first men to fly in space?

Yes – first and foremost they all had military backgrounds, a great spirit of adventure and all were willing to take the necessary risks in the service of their country. But they weren't really as concerned about the contest between their two nation states as much as boiling competitiveness they had with each other.



BOOKS

Picture: Science History Images / Alamy Stock



Recruited by the Americans at the end of the conflict, his charismatic persona belied a darker past life as an influential SS officer and allegations of the brutal use of slave labour on his projects.

The Soviets' efforts, meanwhile, were masterminded by the genius of chief designer Sergei Korolev.

Widely regarded as a father of practical aeronautics, his leadership kept the state's programme at the cutting edge for years.

But it was pursued at great risk and a loss of life hidden from the outside world. A devastating explosion during one rocket test – at Kazakhstan's Baikonur cosmodrome in October 1960 – killed scores of workers.

Walker builds this raw material into a compelling narrative which, while maintaining its focus on Gagarin's orbital adventure, skilfully weaves in the wider context.

The result is a beautifully structured and evocative piece of writing, told with empathy for the era and a corresponding eye for detail.

Beyond sums up a moment in time that warrants more weight than it has thus far been given – particularly in an age when space is once again a platform for nationalistic, as much as scientific, agendas. ■

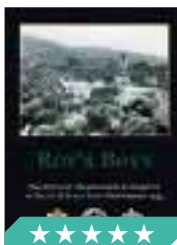
VERDICT:

An outstanding study of early space travel

★★★★★

REVIEW: CLIFF CASWELL, *SOLDIER*

BOOK RELEASES



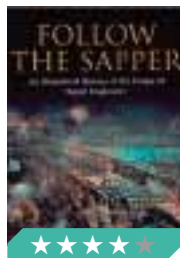
Roy's Boys

by Christopher Jary et al

THIS exceptionally well-written title highlights the history of one of the British Army's most effective formations, 231 (Malta) Brigade. After three years of siege in Malta,

the outfit's troops re-rolled as fighting infantry. Commanded by Brig Roy Urquhart, they completed three assault landings, forging a reputation as a capable combat force. Packed with maps, photographs and insightful personal accounts, this is essential reading if you are interested in the Sicilian and Italian campaigns.

Mike Peters, ex-AAC



Follow the Sapper

by Gerald Napier

FIFTEEN years after its first iteration, this classic text on all things Royal Engineers has been republished to reflect the corps' extensive contributions to operations

in Afghanistan and beyond. An additional two chapters, a new foreword and a revised note from colonel-in-chief, the Queen, bring the second edition up to date. While the coffee table format does not allow for an in-depth study of the sappers' 300-year-plus history, this beautifully presented volume is a must for any self-respecting Royal Engineer and those with an interest in the corps.

WO2 Mike Owens, RE



The Ocean Dove

by Carlos Luxul

DAN Brooks is the new guy in MI5, who finds his face doesn't fit when he starts questioning the tracking data of a ship's deadly sunken cargo. With

his colleagues more focused on their own careers and office politics than the threat at hand, he is forced to go under the radar while he investigates a plausible terrorist plan to strike a major city. The true strength of this debut novel lies in a good mix of action, realistic plot and believable characters. It is a fast-paced page turner that demands a sequel.

Sgt Adam Jackson, Para

PICK OF THE MONTH:

BLIZZARD ARCADE COLLECTION

Nineties gaming trio get modern makeover

► BACK in a time when ops meant the Balkans and Challenger I was still the Army's tank of choice, downtime was dominated by a golden age of video games. The 1990s console era of the Sega Megadrive and Super Nintendo Entertainment System heralded a heyday for players.

A few drinks with mates at home often meant intense sessions on the likes of *Sonic the Hedgehog* and *Crash Bandicoot*. With great graphics and improved sound, gaming was fast entering the mainstream world.

Many of the titles from that era have aged so well that they still remain fun three decades later. And in the same way that vinyl is being rediscovered by a new generation of music lovers, older games have been making a comeback too.

Selections of everything from early coin-op classics to past console legends are currently proving popular.

Now the *Blizzard Arcade Collection* – a pack of three retro titles presented in original and reworked forms to coincide with their developer's 30th anniversary – has become the latest addition to enter the fray. And while light on quantity, the bundle delivers in quality.

All acclaimed 1990s games from a firm with an exemplary track record, the trio represent different genres but all provide solo and multiplayer fun.

Of the three, *Rock n Roll Racing* undoubtedly leads the pack. The 1994 classic puts players in the hot seat of futuristic stock cars in a galactic off-road series.

Vehicles in this *Wacky Races*-style contest are armed to the teeth with a weapons suite ranging from rockets to mines. Winning is rewarded with cash to carry out even more destructive upgrades, while persistent failure leaves losers as easy prey.

As well as an all-new version providing a full-on four-player experience, the title's crowning piece de resistance – a heavy metal soundtrack with tunes from the likes of *Deep Purple* and *Black Sabbath* – is rendered in full glory.

The Lost Vikings is next up – a platform outing in which players take control of three cartoon Norse warriors who somehow find themselves abducted by aliens.

GAMES RELEASES



Dry Drowning For Switch

A PRIVATE investigator with a murky past and officials from an extreme regime knocking on the door — paranoia sets in from the outset of this visual novel. Inspired by film

noir, this offering from Studio V casts players as Modred Foley — a PI recently acquitted of planting evidence on two executed murder suspects. Out-of-the-blue, he finds himself with an offer of work from the government. A point-and-click story ensues, largely focused on scouring crime scenes for clues and interrogating characters. Artwork is superb and fans of the genre will no doubt enjoy. But the pace feels sluggish and the text-heavy narrative is a tad wearisome.

Cliff Caswell, Soldier



Kingdom of Amalur: Re-Reckoning For Switch

PLAYERS have the opportunity to indulge in yet more fantasy hack and slash gameplay while vastly outnumbered in this

role-playing game re-master. With the promise of a new expansion pack available later this year, *Kingdoms of Amalur* certainly looks the part on its enhanced form with slick combat and a well-paced story. It's good fun, but the RPG genre has moved on since the title was originally released in 2012 with the likes of *The Witcher*, for example, redefining the Switch experience.

David McDougall, civvy

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Each of the three has unique attributes — strength, speed and a trusty shield — which players use to survive a bizarre ordeal aboard a spacecraft.

It works well, although puzzle-solving acumen — as well as dexterity — is required.

Blackthorne — the griciest title and arguably the most dated — is a two-dimensional actioner that casts players as a shotgun-wielding mercenary charged with liberating an occupied people.

Despite often sluggish gameplay, it will fill a few hours and rewards those who persevere.

Gamers — among them this reviewer — who are old enough to remember these titles the first time round will find their second coming equally fun.

But newcomers, too, should find plenty to enjoy

as quality prevails over age here.

The package also includes a raft of extra features including developer interviews, artwork and music tracks, making the collection an interesting piece of history as much as an entertaining game line-up. Turning the clock back has never felt so good. ■

VERDICT:

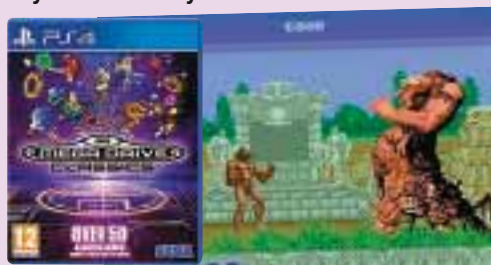
Retro gaming at its best

★★★★★

REVIEW: CLIFF CASWELL, SOLDIER

Tempted by the Blizzard pack?

Try these already available...



Sega Megadrive Classics

An outstanding collection of games from the heyday of the Japanese giant's iconic console, this should be on the hit list for gamers of any generation. With a line-up including *Sonic the Hedgehog* plus outings from the side-scrolling *Streets of Rage* series, retro fans will be entertained for hours.



Capcom Beat 'Em Up Bundle

A compendium of titles from the days when virtual gangs ruled the streets, this is a must for those who want to immerse themselves in down and dirty fighting. Fronting this collection is the outstanding *Final Fight*, a multiplayer brawl from 1989 that remains every bit as playable now as the day it was first released.

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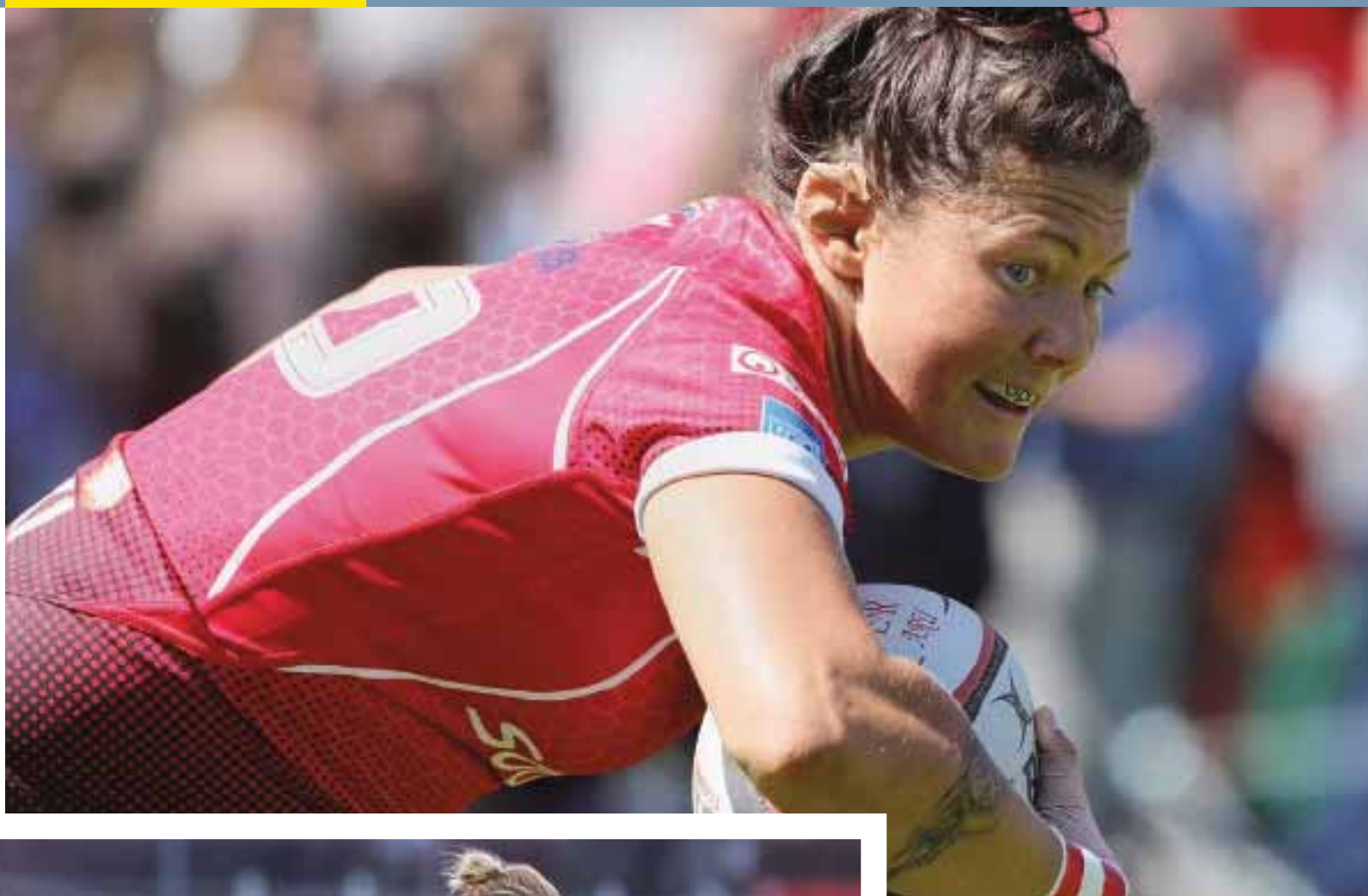
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SOLDIER SPORT



REDS RETURN >>

ARMY players Capt Gemma Rowland (pictured right) and Bdr Beth Dainton (both RA) last played for Wales in 2017. However, they are in contention to resume their international careers after being called up for this month's Six Nations. Read more on pages 68-69...



BACK IN THE BIG TIME

REDS DUO RETURN TO INTERNATIONAL STAGE AS WALES PREPARE FOR SIX NATIONS SHOWDOWN

AFTER seeing this season's Inter-Services Rugby Union Championships fall by the wayside, Army players Capt Gemma Rowland and Bdr Beth Dainton (both RA) have switched their focus to the international stage.

The soldiers have been named in an extended Wales training squad ahead of this month's Six Nations campaign and the duo will be looking to make their mark in what promises to be an exciting year.

The continuing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic means the tournament will have a different feel this time round, with Wales facing pool matches against France and Ireland instead of the traditional round-robin format, but the Service stars have it all to play for with a World Cup looming in 2022.

Rowland's inclusion marks a first call-up in four years and the officer is relishing her return to the elite stage after what was a self-imposed absence.

"I last played for my country at the 2017 World Cup," she told *SoldierSport*.

"I knew I was playing well enough to get selected at international level, but there were areas of my game I wanted to focus on.

"So I took myself out of the set-up for a while. I felt like I was not giving my best and I didn't want to get to the end of my career and think 'I have not fulfilled my potential'.

"One of things I had to look at was my attacking versatility. I've always been able to run, kick and pass but it is about making the right selection – you can only do that by getting the repetitions in and playing on a

regular basis.

"The other element I had to address was the psychological side of the game and having the belief that I've got what it takes to succeed.

"I knew I was not producing the level of performance I was capable of and that knocked my confidence. So I wanted to go back and build my skills, as well as my self-belief."

Rowland (pictured right) worked on her development at club side Wasps, and it was her form in the Premier 15s that helped earn a recall.

She has since joined top-flight rivals Bristol Bears – a move that has cut lengthy weekly trips to training from her Newport base – and the versatile back now feels the time is right to return to the international fold.

"It's really exciting," the 32-year-old, who has 17 caps to her name, added. "A new head coach came in at the beginning of the season and he wanted to rebuild the squad with some fresh faces and maximise the talent pool available.

"I have been at the elite level for a while, and I think he wanted to bring some of that experience into the group.

"France are a tough outfit, and that match will be a real test of everything we've been working on in terms of skill and physicality. Wales/Ireland is always a good game and it will probably be decided by the team that keeps its head for the full 80 minutes.

"We always aim for top spot; we have a winning mentality and anything other than that is not good enough."

Like Rowland, Dainton (pictured near left) last played



"IT WAS ABOUT HAVING THE BELIEF THAT I'VE GOT WHAT IT TAKES"

for Wales in 2017.

Since then she has had to overcome her fair share of injury problems, as well as the challenge of converting from flying winger to powerhouse back-row forward.

"It was totally unexpected," the 31-year-old said of her call-up. "I've had two surgeries since I last played and have switched positions, so I thought my time was done.

"The back row for Wales is really strong and I didn't think I had a chance. It was a case of keeping my head down and working hard for my club, Harlequins; it has all been a bit of a shock really."

Dainton was in contention for a place in the Welsh squad at the last World Cup before injury ruled her out and she is now determined to make the most of her second chance ahead of next year's tournament, which will be held in New Zealand.

"That is my main aim," she added. "I was gutted not be with the team last time.

"World Cups are what you play rugby for so fingers crossed I can make it.

"I'm fortunate to now be training on a full-time basis at Quins and I have to thank my commanding officer for giving me that opportunity.

"We've got a new coach who has come in with fresh ideas and I'm training every day with international players, which has been really beneficial.

"I'm happy with the way things are going, but there is so much I still have to learn." ■



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LOOKING AHEAD

WHILE certain outdoor pursuits have now been given permission to resume as part of the roadmap out of lockdown, the Army is maintaining a cautious approach in terms of its return to sporting activity.

At the time of going to press there was no definitive direction on when representative fixtures may go ahead but the Army Sport Control Board (ASCB) did reveal that, for planning purposes only, it will not be before step three of the government's exit strategy which is currently scheduled for May 17.

However, it also stated that unit-level sport is likely to start before this date.

SoldierSport is aware that various disciplines are working up plans for a return to action but these cannot be activated until permission is received from the relevant authorities.

"The resumption of Army sport at representative level will be authorised and communicated by Army Headquarters, informed by the recommendation of Director ASCB and will be conditions based," explained the ASCB's chief of staff Lt Col (Retd) Paul Leighton.

"It will only resume, and continue to be authorised, in accordance with the government and devolved administrations, the latest national governing body guidelines and the Service's current force health protection instruction."

Further details will be published on armysportcontrolboard.com ■



SPORT SHORTS



SSAFA signs up

THE Army Cycling Union (ACU) has signed a three-year sponsorship deal with military charity SSAFA.

The agreement was officially announced at the culmination of the set-up's latest e-race series, which attracted more than 430 riders.

"The ACU brings people together to challenge themselves, improve their wellbeing and achieve excellence – we share the same values and goals," explained the charity's CEO, Lt Gen Sir Andrew Gregory.

For more details, including how to join, visit armycycling.org



Vikings rout the Raiders

THE Army men's rugby league team may have missed out on a place in the Challenge Cup due to Covid-19, but the Service was still represented in the competition's opening round.

Cfn Urai Naulusala (REME, pictured), Pte Emosi Nadaubale and LCpl Eparama Boginisoko (both RLC) lined up for the West Wales Raiders in their clash with Widnes Vikings.

Naulusala gave the hosts, who boasted the attacking talents of former Welsh rugby union international Gavin Henson, an early lead but their rivals went on to run in 11 tries on their way to a commanding 58-4 victory.



THE men's Inter-Services Twenty20 Championships will have a new home in Arundel this season after efforts to stage the competition at its traditional venue of Lord's proved unsuccessful.

Organisers worked tirelessly with administrators at the home of cricket in a bid to get the event on but its allocated date in June was ultimately deemed unviable.

"They did their best to try and accommodate the fixture but significant pressure on their overall programme, including test and county fixtures, has constrained their freedom of manoeuvre," said Lt Col (Retd) Mike Thornley, secretary of the Army Cricket Association.

However, Lord's has agreed to stage the contest again in 2022 and, in the meantime, the soldiers can look forward to facing their Forces rivals at the West Sussex ground on September 10.



READY TO RUMBLE: ANYONE INTERESTED IN JOINING THE ARMY BOXING SET-UP SHOULD EMAIL JAMES.ALLEN785@MOD.GOV.UK – ALL EXPERIENCE LEVELS WELCOME, SUBJECT TO A TRIAL



ROADMAP SPARKS AIR OF OPTIMISM IN REDS' CAMP

HAVING spent more than a year away from the sport they love, the Army's boxers are hoping the country's roadmap out of lockdown will finally spark a return to the ring.

The fighters were just a week away from the annual UK Armed Forces Championships when the Covid-19 pandemic brought their preparations to a crashing halt in March last year – and they have not been back in the gym since.

But with the government mapping out an exit strategy that could see all aspects of society reopen by June 21, there is now a feeling of optimism sweeping through the Reds' camp.

"With Covid everything is still up in the air, but after looking at the plan we're presuming boxing will be fair game – that will be massive," Army head coach Sgt James Allen (REME, pictured right) told *SoldierSport*.

"The governing body, England Boxing, will have to publish a

return to boxing strategy and on the back of that they'll need to produce a competition calendar.

"Hopefully they will want to run the national championships later in the year. There were no champions at all in 2020 and there is a suggestion it may happen before Christmas.

"So things are starting to look more positive."

Given the close contact nature of the discipline, boxing was not listed among the Service sports that were allowed to make a brief return last summer and it has been a prolonged absence that few could have predicted.

"We thought it would be a short-term thing," Allen explained. "We were running remote training packages in the belief that we would be returning in the summer, with boxing from September onwards.

"We had strength and conditioning programmes in place and were holding Zoom



**"WE
HAVE
LIGHT AT
THE END
OF THE
TUNNEL"**

sessions for shadow boxing twice a week.

"But when the second wave came all that started to peter out – and that's when a lot of frustration came in. The dark nights had set in and everyone realised this is for the long term.

"We now find ourselves a year in, but we have light at the end of the tunnel."

However, the time away from the gym has been spent productively as the team has pushed ahead with a recruitment drive that has identified a host of boxers who could potentially filter into the system at either elite or development level.

"If we were to form up in September, they would give us some healthy options," Allen said. "Around five or six of those have been internationals at youth or junior level.

"This period has allowed us to become more aware of what people are joining the Army. The

strategic recruitment of ready-made boxers means we can maintain an influx of new talent into the squad."

At the same time, the set-up's more established members have been able to return to their units and gain valuable experience in the day job via operations and exercises – with a number involved in the Service's Covid support effort.

Allen added: "It is good for them to pick up their Army careers and we have actively encouraged involvement in regimental life.

"As long as they are keeping themselves fit and ticking over, we are happy. Even though we are hoping for an August or September return anything can happen, so it's important they keep their options open.

"You can have a boxer who has been on the team for three or four seasons, which may lead to a sense of entitlement.

"I'm hoping they'll come back in with a new lease of life, appreciating the fact the Army pays them to box full-time.

"I know some of them are itching to get back into the swing of things.

"We've had people with injuries and niggles who have been able to recover, and it has been a great opportunity to rest properly so we can return in full health." ■



BOXING IN NUMBERS

FIGHTERS IDENTIFIED WITH POTENTIAL TO JOIN THE ARMY SET-UP DURING A RECENT RECRUITING DRIVE

30

EUROPEAN BOXERS REMAINING IN THE GAMES QUALIFYING EVENT – WHICH HAS BEEN DELAYED SINCE MARCH 2020

176

WOMEN'S WEIGHT CATEGORIES IN THE CONTEST – ARTINGSTALL WILL FIGHT IN THE 57KG RANKS

5

LENGTH OF ROBERTS' SERVICE CAREER, IN YEARS

30



ROBERTS MAKES HIS MOVE

WHILE the Army boxing team has enjoyed little in the way of in-ring action in recent times, there have been developments away from the sport's Aldershot base.

After a lengthy military career, referee Maj Chris Roberts (RAPTC, pictured) has taken over as chief executive of Boxing Scotland and will officially leave the Service early next month.

During his time in uniform, Roberts spent more than two decades as a member of the Army Boxing Association executive committee and has officiated at the Elite GB Boxing Championships and was international federation liaison officer at last year's European Olympic qualifiers.

"I am privileged to have been able to indulge my passion for the sport throughout my career in the Armed Forces and believe the experiences I have gleaned will enable me to lead

amateur boxing in Scotland to a prosperous future," the Serviceman said.

Roberts has also been named as chairman of the international governing body's referee and judges committee – an appointment Army Boxing secretary Nathan Pearce described as a "huge step forward" for the UK sport.

He added: "We are exceptionally proud of his progress and wish him well. We know he will not be a stranger in this post.

"In fact, I hope this will help the Army and UK Armed Forces to be more involved in boxing in Scotland."

Elsewhere, Team GB boxer Gnr Karriss Artingstall (RA) has been given a date to work towards as she looks to realise her Olympic dream.

The International Olympic Committee has confirmed the European qualifying event for the Games will be held in Paris from June 4 to 8. ■



I'm a Reservist living in Jersey. I recently mobilised for Op Rescript and normally I'd have to return to the UK to do this, but our troops were able to mobilise digitally. Tech cannot replace the physical, hands-on approach you need for many Army tasks, though.

Spr Meredith Richards, RE



So much of the Army is about practical stuff. But you could save a lot of time on courses – particularly for Reservists who have civvy jobs – by teaching the theory components online. You could then come together and focus on the elements where a physical presence is needed.

Cpl Tim Olivier, RE



I'd like to carry on with troop-level training remotely but the reduction in sport has been negative and I'm looking forward to playing football again.

Tpr Liam Pemberton, QDG



I've been doing PT at least once a week remotely; it would be good to carry on with that. I have just arrived from phase two training and I really didn't like the online learning part, though, so this is something I'd prefer to move away from.

Tpr Luke Duffy, QDG



I've been conducting physical training in my own time and I'd like to continue that. However, we need collective squadron-level PT so we can benefit from a competitive environment.

Tpr Kyle Clifford, QDG

I think we're going to see a hybrid way of working beyond the pandemic. We'll use Microsoft Teams to engage digitally – which is great. But from my perspective, I miss the mix of people in the office and I'm looking forward to that dynamic coming back in.

Sgt JP Kastein, AGC (SPS)



To Zoom or not

We asked troops what part of their job works well remotely – and what they would rather do face-to-face...

We've been doing meetings online using Microsoft Teams – they have worked really well and I can see us taking this approach more in future. But the social scene is simply not the same without face-to-face contact.

SSgt Reagan McLean, AGC (SPS)



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