

MAGAZINE OF THE BRITISH ARMY

SOLDIER

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DE PRIDE PRIDE
RESPECT RESPECT
TY DUTY DUTY
COURAGE COURAGE
Y LOYALTY LOYALTY
BRAVE BRAVE



ARMY



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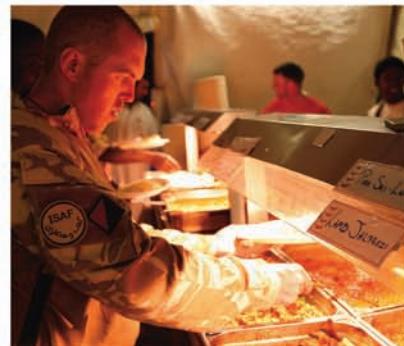
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Cooking onion bhajis



Sri Lankan pork curry at Camp Bastion

...to everyone who took part in Big Curry both in the UK and abroad. Despite commitments, your culinary skills and amazing generosity have already helped to raise over **£130,000** for the Army Benevolent Fund – for that we are truly grateful.

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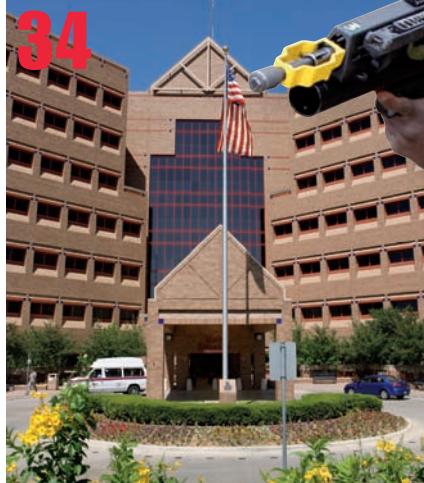
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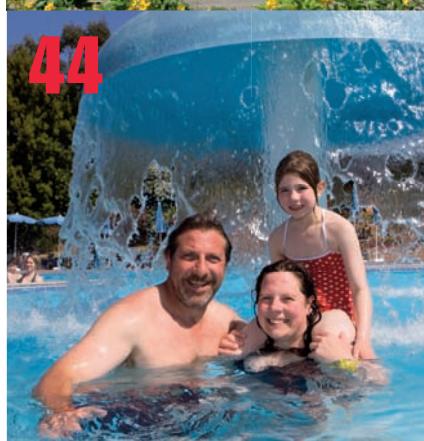


Cover picture (left): Homosexual soldier
Tpr James Wharton Picture: Steve Dock

Background image: Hitting the slope
during the Combined Services Disabled
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Parsons House, Ordnance Road,
Aldershot, Hampshire GU11 2DU.

ALL ENQUIRIES: TEL 01252 347353
(Ald Mil 94222 2353)
Fax: 01252 347358 (2358)

Email: mail@soldiermagazine.co.uk

Website: www.soldiermagazine.co.uk

Managing Editor: Andrew Simms

EDITORIAL

Editor:

Stephen Tyler 01252 347356 (2356)
styler@soldiermagazine.co.uk

News Editor:

Cliff Caswell 01252 340753 (5753)
ccaswell@soldiermagazine.co.uk

Assistant Editors:

Heidi Mines 01252 340462 (5462)
hmines@soldiermagazine.co.uk

Joe Clapson 01252 347154 (2154)
jclapson@soldiermagazine.co.uk

Editorial Assistant:

Doreen Cadwallader 01252 347360 (2360)
dcadwallader@soldiermagazine.co.uk

DESIGN

Art Editor:

Tudor Morgan 01252 347169 (2169)
tmorgan@soldiermagazine.co.uk

Graphic Designers:

Chris Sell 01252 355080 (8080)
csell@soldiermagazine.co.uk

Kath Lee 01252 347361 (2361)
klee@soldiermagazine.co.uk

PHOTOGRAPHY

Chief Photographer:

Mike Weston 01252 347357 (2357)
mweston@soldiermagazine.co.uk

Photographers:

Graeme Main 01252 347357 (2357)
gmain@soldiermagazine.co.uk

Steve Dock 01252 347357 (2357)
sdock@soldiermagazine.co.uk

MARKETING AND ADVERTISING

Business Manager:

Andy Clarkson 01252 347351 (2351)
aclarkson@soldiermagazine.co.uk

Advertising:

Heather Shekyls 01252 347352 (2352)
hshekyls@soldiermagazine.co.uk

Subscriptions:

Stephen King 01252 347353 (2353)
sking@soldiermagazine.co.uk

Distribution:

Patricia Lampert 01252 347354 (2354)
plampert@soldiermagazine.co.uk

ARCHIVE

Archivist/Information Manager:

Ruth Kusionowicz 01252 355056 (8056)
rkusionowicz@soldiermagazine.co.uk



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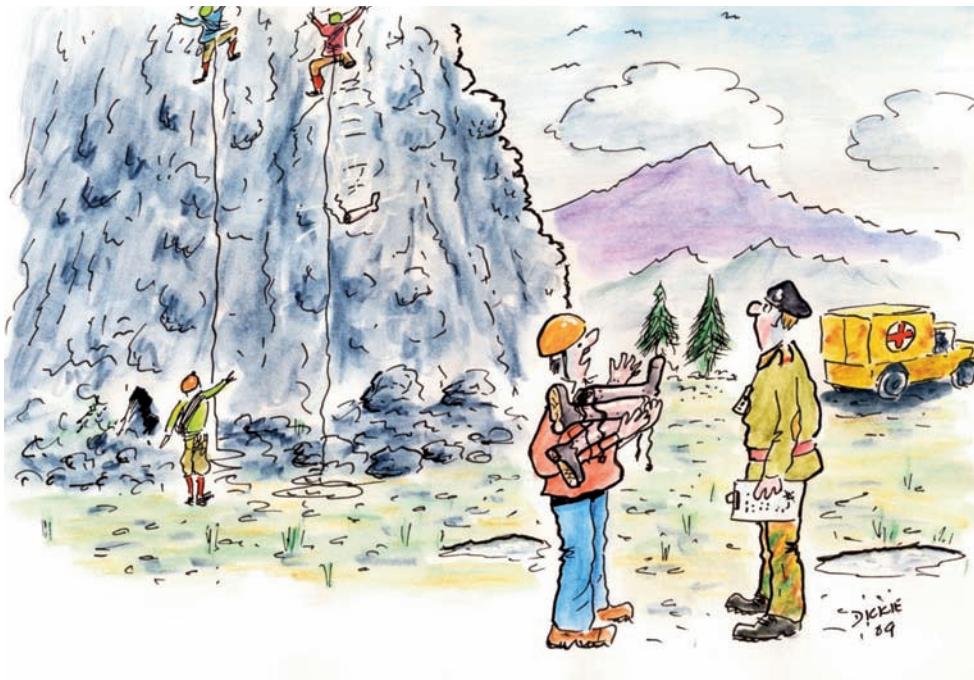
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SOLDIER - Magazine of the British Army



"This physical therapy lark may be a good idea, Sir, but all I seem to be doing is retrieving dropped legs and things!"

● Battling back – Pages 34-39

Ordinary soldier

SO, just who is the mysterious soldier gracing this month's front cover and, more to the point, what has he got to be so proud about?

The man in question is Tpr James Wharton and just like every Serviceman and woman, he is proud to serve his regiment – in this case The Household Cavalry.

As the medal on his chest suggests, and again in line with his comrades, Tpr Wharton is also proud to have tested his skills on operations having deployed on Op Telic 10 in 2007.

But there is one area where the young soldier has a different reason than most to be proud. Tpr Wharton is a gay man and the fact that his sexuality has no bearing on his ability to serve Queen and country means the Wrexham-native is a happy person.

What's more, he is not alone. Since the rules on allowing homosexuals into the Armed Forces were relaxed in 1999, scores of gay men and women have been able to take their place on the front line and do a first-class job away from the prejudices of the 20th Century (Pages 23-27).

It is only thanks to the hard-working personnel running the Army's equality and diversity wing that gay troops can contribute to the Service's success and their efforts have been recognised by national charity Stonewall, which recently named the Army as Britain's 400th Diversity Champion.

The title is well-deserved and it is not

just for the giant leaps made in helping homosexuals to feel welcome and valued.

Female soldiers are now able to pick from more career paths than ever before, in many cases heading to the very front lines of Afghanistan alongside their male counterparts (Pages 56-59).

The courtesy is also extended to injured personnel, and projects such as the Battle Back adaptive skiing programme mean that Service life is more inclusive than ever (Pages 34-39).

And when things do go wrong, it is comforting to know that a giant book of welfare policy is constantly being updated to deal with everything from debt problems to catering issues (Pages 41-43).

Elsewhere in this month's magazine, we take a closer look at Op Entirety, the newly-introduced focus on operations in Afghanistan which is revolutionising the way recruiting, training and fighting is carried out by bringing the British Army onto a campaign footing (Pages 52-53).

An all-singing, all-dancing Afghan village on a Norfolk training area is among the first steps taken down this road, but Entirety highlights to every soldier being asked to deploy on Op Herrick that those at the top are doing everything they can to make troops' lives easier (Pages 54-55).

Finally, after a long losing run, *Soldier* has rediscovered its winning ways in this month's *Media Ops* (Pages 61-63). Maybe it's time for some tougher challenges... ■



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Contact: Saved by Osprey's ceramic plates



Battle scars: Bruised but otherwise uninjured



Back on his feet: LSgt Daniel Collins (1 WG)

Picture: Cpl Rupert Fere

Decisive deflection

Osprey saves soldier's life as bullets fly in firefight with Taliban insurgents

A RELIEVED soldier has spoken of the moment when his Osprey body armour saved him from a high-calibre Taliban round.

LSgt Daniel Collins of the 1st Battalion, Welsh Guards was left with just bruising after the bullet smashed into his back while serving on operations in southern Afghanistan.

The fire support section commander recalled how he was kneeling down to take cover during a contact with gunmen when he was hit.

"We were coming under sporadic fire from insurgents to our rear as our section moved back to the company rendezvous point at the end of the day's clearance operation," he said.

"I knelt down in an irrigation ditch in partial cover when I was hit in the back by a single shot.

"The round knocked me down in an instant, it felt like being hit by a sledgehammer at full swing. I slammed into the dirt face down.

"At this point everybody was on their belt buckles in the ditch, the shot had initiated very accurate machine gun and small arms onto our position. We were pinned down."

The Taliban attack was eventually suppressed by mortar fire before LSgt Collins – in severe pain from the wound in his back – was airlifted to Camp Bastion's hospital.

"The bullet hit the very bottom right-

hand side of my ceramic body armour back plate, literally right at the edge," he said. "Any lower and the doctor said that it would have gone straight through me, hitting my kidneys."

Since his near-death experience, LSgt Collins has been full of praise for the life-saving ceramic kit.

"I think it was a 7.62mm round – that's a high-calibre bullet but it shows you that the body armour works," he said. "I wouldn't be sitting here now if I wasn't wearing it."

"Thank you to whoever designed the body armour. If I ever meet them, I'd like to buy them a pint."

● **Helmand heroin heist – Page 9**

QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY HONOURS

KCB: Lt Gen N R Parker, late RGJ; Lt Gen P A Wall, late RE.

CB: Lt Gen J Cooper, late KOSB; Maj Gen C C Wilson, late RA.

CBE: Col K T Haugh, late Staffords; Maj Gen A Hawley, late RAMC; Maj Gen D McDowell, late R Signals; Brig C J R Parker, late RAMC.

OBE: Lt Col B L Baldwin, Para; Col R J Carruthers, ACF; Col N J Dalton, late AAC; Lt Col B G De La Haye, Scots; Lt Col F E Hargreaves, R Signals; Lt Col F M Lawrence, DLR; Col D A McAvoy, late REME; Col N P McRobb, late RA; Lt Col A

G Parker, RE; Lt Col J C Price, Yorks; Lt Col P A Stanworth, RAMC (V); Lt Col G C Wilson, Scots.

MBE: Maj M D Bairstow, AGC(ETS); Maj J R T Balding, RLC; Maj H J Bardell, R Signals; Maj E J Bengtsson, RA; Maj A E C Benn, RE; Lt Col R G Bishop, AAC; Maj P J Blakesley, DLR; Maj M W Bower, Yorks; Maj D S Clarke, RA; Maj P J Clayton, R Welsh; WO1 S D Cook, AGC(SPS); Maj J S Devitt, RAMC; Capt M Griffiths, Rifles; Maj G Gurung, RGR; Lt Col A H Hay, RE; SSgt J L Herbert, R Signals; Maj R J Hewson, RE; Maj J Howell-Walmsley, R Signals; WO1 P J Hurry, AAC; Maj R C Jones, ACF; Capt A T Keeling, RAMC; Maj M R Legh-Smith, RA; WO2 N G MacDonald,

RA; Maj B H MacIntyre, RLC; LCpl D A Mair, R Signals (V); Capt T Malloy, Para; WO2 I Martinez, RG; Maj J S D McCrann, RLC; Maj J M McMaster, RAMC (V); Lt Col R A McPherson, RA; Sgt P T Moody, RA; Capt P M Nicholson, REME (V); Lt Col J J Oliver, RAMC (V); Maj N J Painter, RE; Capt C P Pawlowski, Rifles; Capt R A Peters, Para; Maj V C Reid, RLC; WO1 I S Richardson, REME; Capt I J Robinson, R Anglian; Maj J C Roddis, Scots; WO2 N Royston, Rifles; Lt Col N J Rynn, Yorks; Maj S J Shepherd, RA; Maj R H Sinclair, SG; WO1 N J Smith, RLC; Maj D J Stubbington, REME; WO2 M W Thomson, REME; Maj M C R Thorp, RRF; Maj M Torbica, London (TA); Lt Col J S Walker, QRH; Capt R G Waygood, LG.

Further fatalities in Helmand ambushes

Commanders pay tribute to the fallen as British take battle to the Taliban

PERSONNEL serving on the front lines of Op Herrick have been reflecting on the loss of four respected colleagues who were killed during a difficult seven days in Afghanistan.

Fus Petero Suesue (2nd Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers) and LCpl Kieron Hill (2nd Battalion, The Mercian Regiment) died in separate actions in Helmand in late May.

Days later LCpl Nigel Moffett (Light Dragoons) and Cpl Stephen Bolger (The Parachute Regiment) were killed while serving on an op with 19 Light Brigade's Reconnaissance Force.

Fus Suesue, who was 28 and from Fiji, was killed when he was shot during a foot patrol in the Sangin area on May 22. He had been attached to the 2nd Battalion, The Rifles Battlegroup.

The married infantryman joined the Army in 2002 and had already completed tours of Iraq and Afghanistan. He was also a keen sportsman who had represented his battalion at rugby.

Lt Col Rob Thomson, CO of 2 Rifles, said the loss of an experienced colleague had been felt by the whole battlegroup. He added: "Fus Suesue was a legendary soldier, awesomely tough and full of character and Pacific island charm – his



● Fus Petero Suesue



● LCpl Kieron Hill



● LCpl Nigel Moffett



● Cpl Stephen Bolger

wife, family and friends are at the centre of our thoughts and prayers."

LCpl Hill died following an explosion during an op near Garmsir on May 28. The Nottingham-born soldier had been working with an Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team.

The 20-year-old joined the Army in 2006 and had already served in Afghanistan. His leadership potential had been recognised with swift promotion.

His CO, Lt Col Simon Banton, remembered the young soldier as a team player. He said: "LCpl Hill was exceptionally proud of serving his country, and his family, in turn, were exceptionally proud of the path that he had taken."

LCpl Moffett and Cpl Bolger had

been scouting a route during an operation near Musa Qala on May 30 when they were caught in an explosion.

Belfast-born LCpl Moffett joined the Light Dragoons in 2003 and had already completed tours of Iraq and Afghanistan. The 28-year-old, who was described as being supremely fit, had volunteered for the Brigade Reconnaissance Force.

Lt Col Gus Fair, commanding LD, said: "LCpl Moffett wanted to see as much of the world as he could and experience everything it had to offer – he was one of the best."

Cpl Bolger was remembered as "an extraordinary man who embodied a life of service to others". No further details have been released.

Rifles regroup after enemy action claims two

SHOCKED soldiers from 2nd Battalion, The Rifles have been coming to terms with the deaths of two men from the same platoon during operations in Afghanistan.

Rfn Cyrus Thatcher and 10 platoon commander Lt Paul Mervis were killed in explosions as Taliban fighters stepped up their activity over the summer months.

Rfn Thatcher died following a blast while on patrol near Gereshk on June 2.

The 19-year-old joined The Rifles in 2007 and had impressed superiors with his potential. He won a battalion award for valour at the end of his first exercise and had been selected to mentor recruits at the Infantry Training Centre in Catterick.

Originally from Caversham, near Reading, Rfn Thatcher had completed a tour of Kosovo last year before beginning his pre-deployment training for Afghanistan.



● Rfn Cyrus Thatcher



● Lt Paul Mervis

Lt Mervis, who was 27 and spent his early years in Wimbledon, was one of the first officers to be commissioned into the newly-formed Rifles two years ago.

The philosophy graduate had already travelled widely before joining the Army and had worked with magazines including *The Spectator* and *The Week*.

Lt Mervis also served on operations in

Kosovo last year, and had shown great courage and leadership during his first deployment to Afghanistan.

Lt Col Rob Thomson, CO of 2 Rifles, acknowledged that the loss of both men had been a bitter blow but said his soldiers would not be deterred in the fight against the Taliban.

He said of Lt Mervis: "He adored platoon command. He would want nothing more than for us to get back up on the ramparts, with the bugle sounding, and to let the enemy know that we are coming back."

Of Rfn Thatcher, Lt Col Thomson added: "He lapped up the skills we require for this place and, under the most demanding of circumstances, was standing tall. He had a rucksack full of potential and knew that he was making a difference for the benefit of the Afghan people."



Picture: Cpl Rupert Fine RLC

Counter narcotics: British personnel have been supporting counterparts from the Afghan National Army in successful actions targeting heroin production

Targeting drug lords

Huge Helmand heroin seizure deprives enemy leadership of crucial funds

NSURGENTS in Afghanistan have suffered a further blow to their funding after British troops fought their way into huge drugs factories deep in Helmand province.

In the strikes, 450 soldiers from 3rd Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Scotland landed by helicopter before helping unearth and destroy more than 5,500kg of opium paste.

The Black Watch troops were supported by IED detection experts from the Royal Engineers during the Afghan National Army-led action.

Nato fast jets, including aircraft flown from USS *Eisenhower*, provided top cover and were guided to their targets by British forward air controllers.

Lt Col Stephen Cartwright, CO of 3 Scots, said his soldiers had to battle their way through intense machine gun and RPG fire when they landed in the Upper Sangin Valley.

But they managed to fight off the assault and moved on to the factories in the villages of Nangazi, Banekza and Sar Puzeur, 20km south of the major settlement of Kajaki.

The troops fought into the following day in searing temperatures before they were relieved. A second airborne raid

was launched three days later, with the combined action netting a haul of narcotics and firearms.

Lt Col Cartwright added: "This has been an important operation against the illegal narcotics industry in Afghanistan and represents a significant setback for the insurgency.

"The Jocks of the 3 Scots Battlegroup

provided the wider security to the Afghan Forces who have destroyed a significant amount of narcotic material."

Links between the Taliban and opium production were well proven, with income from the sale of drugs used to fund their campaign of violence against Afghan civilians and Nato soldiers, concluded Lt Col Cartwright.

Eye spy's millennium mission

A BRITISH surveillance aircraft which provides crucial intelligence to ground forces has clocked up a milestone mission in southern Afghanistan.

The Hermes 450 Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) has flown the equivalent of 12 times round the world during 1,000 top-secret assignments, providing real-time video pictures of ground activity.

Since its first expedition 24 months ago, the high-tech kit has notched up a total of 8,500 flying hours, covered 500,000 kilometres and has saved countless lives with the intelligence beamed back.

Sgt Gavin Ruck of 32 Regiment Royal Artillery, which operates the aircraft in Afghanistan, said: "This was a momentous

occasion and is a milestone in the operational use of the Hermes 450.

"It definitely adds value to what can be provided to the troops on the ground and gives everyone a warm and fuzzy feeling."

The Hermes can be controlled by either computer or manually with a joystick, providing top cover for soldiers on operations in uncharted areas.

An MoD spokesman added that the UAV capability was invaluable. "The video pictures form a crucial part of the Intelligence Surveillance Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance organisation," he said.

"Detailed video images of ground activities filmed in real-time, are a vital asset in support of the security forces."

UNDER Big Ben

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

Overstretch is being alleviated, says peer

BRITISH troops are under less pressure from the pace of operations, according to a senior member of the House of Lords.

In an interview with *Soldier*, Field Marshal The Lord Bramall, a former Chief of the Defence Staff, said he had been concerned about overstretch but believed the situation had improved with the drawdown in Iraq and acceptable recruitment and retention rates.

Lord Bramall added that the arrival of thousands of extra American troops in southern Afghanistan's Helmand province would give a huge boost to the British-led operation.

Herrick battles: The insurgency in Afghanistan remains "resilient" although progress has been made, outgoing Defence Secretary John Hutton told the Commons.

He said the majority of people could go about their daily lives but admitted that there were still problem areas, particularly in the south and east.

Hutton added: "Afghanistan faces a serious security challenge from within and outside its borders, and this threat will continue for the foreseeable future."

Bent coppers: High levels of corruption and low levels of literacy are continuing to dog the Afghan police, MP Bill Rammell has admitted. Responding to a question from Shadow Defence Secretary Liam Fox, Rammell revealed that there were now more than 81,500 police officers, but that their capability was varied.

Water force: The MoD is fully geared up to help with any instances of domestic flooding, Defence Secretary Bob Ainsworth said. He told the Commons that response mechanisms to deal with the threat had recently been improved following the publication of Sir Michael Pitts's review of the UK flooding two years ago.

Terror boss dies in raid

Top Taliban leader netted in Allied surgical strike

BRITISH troops have dealt "another serious blow" to the Taliban by eliminating one of their most dangerous leaders in a helicopter attack.

Mullah Mansur, suspected to be the brains behind suicide bomb attacks against British and Afghan troops, was killed in an early morning swoop by Apache gunships.

The attack is also believed to have killed or injured a number of other prominent insurgent leaders.

According to military intelligence Mansur was responsible for coordinating the two attacks in Gereshk which resulted in the deaths of Sgt Ben Ross (RMP) and Cpl Kumar Pun (1 RGR).

He was also believed to be behind the deaths of nine Afghan policemen and two civilians.

Task Force Helmand spokesman Lt Col Nick Richardson said the gunship attack was expertly carried out.

"UK forces conducted a successful precision strike against one of the most dangerous men in Helmand, and what we consider to be the most dangerous man in the central area around Lashkar

Gar," the senior officer explained.

"Mullah Mansur's illegal activities included the supply and construction of Improvised Explosive Devices and planning IED attacks in an area stretching from Lashkar Gar to Gereshk."

Lt Col Richardson went on to say that the operation was targeted at eliminating Mansur without endangering coalition or civilian lives.

"The attacks he helped plan and execute have probably killed or wounded hundreds of people," he said.

"This operation was the culmination of months of effort and the strike itself was carefully coordinated and checked to ensure no civilians were in the area."

The death of Mansur is the latest in a series of actions targeting prominent commanders and signals another serious blow to the insurgency.

The successful operation came just days after a major strike against the Taliban in northern Helmand, in which soldiers from 2nd Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers pushed the enemy further away from the villages surrounding Musa Qaleh.

Scots mourn courageous colleague

COMMANDERS and colleagues of a young soldier killed in action during an operation in Helmand have praised his courage in battle with the Taliban.

Pte Robert McLaren, who was serving with 3rd Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Scotland, died during close quarter fighting with the enemy on the morning of June 11. He had only been in theatre for four weeks.

The Black Watch soldier, who was 20 and from the Isle of Mull, enlisted in the Army in 2007 and originally served in the Royal Engineers. He had completed his Infantry training in Catterick in April and was immediately deployed on Operation Herrick.

Lt Col Stephen Cartwright, CO of 3 Scots, praised Pte McLaren for his bravery during his time in Afghanistan and said he

had made an immediate impression. He recalled that the young soldier had already played his part in major operations against the Taliban and had been involved in intense action on the day he died.

Lt Col Cartwright explained: "The battalion was conducting an offensive operation against the insurgents. His company had been engaged in close combat for several hours and Robert displayed enormous physical courage for one so young."

"He gave his life for his friends with selfless commitment, moving forward in the face of a ruthless enemy."

Lt Col Cartwright added: "Any death in this close-knit battalion delivers an emotional body blow, but the loss of this young man so soon after joining us has hit us particularly hard."



● Pte Robert McLaren



Picture: Andrew Linnell

Off the lead: Personnel serving in Afghanistan are now better protected and more mobile following the arrival of upgraded vehicles on the front line of Helmand province. Around 300 modernised Ridgback and Mastiff troop carriers have arrived in theatre sporting a host of new features including enhanced armour, improved axles and suspension and more sophisticated night vision kit for crews. Crucially both vehicles also have a redesigned interior to allow more passengers and kit to be carried. Pictured is a Mastiff 2 on public display for the first time at the Defence School of Transport, Leconfield, near Hull.

United we stand

Soldiers heading for Helmand will benefit from Allied approach to training

PRE-DEPLOYMENT packages for Op Herrick-bound British troops are to take on an increasingly multinational flavour, according to the commander of the Operational Training and Advisory Group (Optag).

Speaking as a new mock Afghan village at the Stanford Training Area in Norfolk opened its gates to the press for the first time, Col Richard Westley said that British Army units had already been joined on exercise by American forces.

With thousands of extra US troops arriving to bolster the Nato mission in Helmand province, Col Westley believed that cooperation in training was vital to future success in Afghanistan and would enhance Britain and America's joint military capabilities.

"We currently have three advisers from the US Marine Corps at Optag and we will be attending their exercises in California later this year," he said. "Our relationship with the US and joint experience in Afghanistan also allows us to help other nations in the coalition."

The inclusion of authentic friendly

forces in mission-specific exercises, is one of a series of improvements introduced by Optag to better prepare soldiers for the realities of theatre. Special emphasis is also being placed on countering IEDs, with troops being drilled in how to recognise and neutralise devices.

Col Westley told *Soldier* that without

Optag's evolutionary approach there would be "many more repatriation ceremonies". He said: "If the enemy is using a new tactic, procedure or piece of equipment, then our people are going to die if we do not respond to it quickly."

● **Theatrical dreams – Pages 54-55**

Sun sets on Op Oculus deployment

THE last British troops have finally pulled out of Kosovo, ending the UK's involvement in the long-running Balkans mission.

The few remaining soldiers on Operation Oculus left the former war-torn region without fanfare but were commended for a successful ten-year deployment.

Jubilee Barracks – the last British camp in the capital Pristina – is now occupied by 290 soldiers from the Portuguese Tactical Reserve Manoeuvre Battalion.

An MoD spokesman said the UK would still provide backing to Kosovo despite the military withdrawal.

"The Nato mission is not yet over, and the UK's commitment is focused on non-military support," he explained. "However, without the efforts, and for some the ultimate sacrifice, of the men and women of the UK Armed Forces and supporting civilian agencies, the people of Kosovo would be facing a very different future today."

The operation in the Balkans state began in March 1999 after international concern at a Serb crackdown against ethnic Albanians. At the height of the Nato-led operation 50,000 personnel from 39 countries were working in theatre.

● A MILITARY charity has won a prestigious award for an initiative that allows wounded Service personnel to spend time with loved ones.

SSAFA Forces Help took the accolade at the Charity Awards for its work in setting up a home-from-home near Headley Court in Surrey and another close to Birmingham's Selly Oak Hospital.

The converted houses provide a comfortable venue for recovering personnel and their families.

● CHILDREN with mums due to deploy on operations can learn more about their parent's line of work courtesy of a newly-released book.

My Mummy Is A Soldier is the latest title in a series written by Army wife Gerry Waters and is designed to assist parents preparing their kids for when they head off on tour.

Most of the proceeds from sales of the book are being donated to the Afghan Appeal Fund. Visit www.afghanappealfund.org

● **SOLDIER** scooped a trio of accolades at the British Association of Communicators in Business Awards at a ceremony in Birmingham.

Editor Stephen Tyler was judged best in class for his feature *Basra City Life*, a snapshot of the British Army in southern Iraq, while Graeme Main took the best picture award for his dramatic depiction of endurance motorcyclist LCpl Kalem Hicks (RLC).

Steve Dock won an award of excellence for *Claret, Blues and Bubbly* – an image of author and Army enthusiast Cass Pennant.

● FORCES charity Help For Heroes has served up a winning recipe for success after enlisting more than 100 celebrities and soldiers to provide details about what they would serve their role models at a dinner party.

The *Help for Heroes Cookbook* features contributions from the likes of First World War veteran Harry Patch, former PM Tony Blair and Forces sweetheart Dame Vera Lynn, each of whom reveal their personal heroes and their chosen recipe. Further details are available at www.foodforheroes.co.uk

● **SOLDIERS** absent as a result of being sick must remain under the supervision of their COs, an Army General Administrative Instruction has confirmed. The updated sickness absence management policy guidance makes it clear that commanding officers are responsible for managing personnel who are sick or injured, whether they are at home, on leave or on operations.

Army fights climate war

Personnel commit to the battle against emissions

SOLDIERS from across the Army showed they had green credentials in abundance after taking part in an international event geared to combating climate change.

This year's World Environment Day saw troops showing off a new fleet of sophisticated fuel-efficient vehicles, celebrating record recycling rates and helping to maintain an important nature reserve in Yorkshire.

David Gray, who coordinated HQ Land Command's green effort, said that the occasion had been well-supported by soldiers.

Land Command recently took on more than 50 new Toyota Prius hybrid vehicles for use as staff cars, which were available for test drives during World Environment Day.

The vehicles, which are powered by an electric motor and a more traditional petrol engine, offer excellent fuel efficiency and fewer emissions.

Gray said: "Our event was very suc-

cessful, with more than 20 people turning up to take our cars out. But World Environment Day was also well supported around the wider Army with several different activities.

"Personnel from 5 Division had the opportunity to attend a screening of Al Gore's film *An Inconvenient Truth* while troops from Catterick Garrison helped in a nature reserve."

The centrepiece event was held at MoD Main Building in Whitehall, London, with a lunchtime seminar focusing on the implications of climate change attended by Met Office experts and senior figures within the department.

Gray believed that becoming more environmentally friendly could help the Army save money in the long term, which would ultimately be of benefit to other projects.

"Ultimately if we waste energy then we have to pay for it," he added. "By making savings we can invest that cash usefully elsewhere."

Ainsworth takes the reigns at MoD

FORMER Armed Forces Minister Bob Ainsworth (pictured) has become the new Defence Secretary following a cabinet reshuffle by PM Gordon Brown.

He replaces Labour colleague John Hutton, who resigned from the post last month.

Ainsworth, who has been Armed Forces Minister for the past two years, said he was honoured to accept the role "at such a critical time for defence". He added: "There can be no compromise in our commitment to operational success in Afghanistan and elsewhere."

In two further changes at the top levels of the MoD, Bill Rammell is taking over Ainsworth's old role while Lord Drayson is now Minister of State for Strategic Defence Acquisition Reform. Lord Drayson, who previously held the portfolio for Defence Procurement, will lead on the reform of Defence acquisition, Defence Research and Development.

He will also be tasked with championing new military technologies.

Quentin Davies remains as Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State and Minister of Defence Equipment and Support.

As well as his responsibilities for the Defence Equipment Programme he will assume the leadership of the high level working group with the French Government on equipment cooperation.

Baroness Taylor, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State and Minister for International Defence and Security, and Kevan Jones, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State and Minister for Veterans, will both continue to serve in their current jobs.

However, Taylor has also been appointed Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office where she will liaise with the MoD on security and defence policy issues.





Picture: Graeme Main

Gender issue: Women already serve in the heat of battle in a variety of roles but remain excluded from joining Infantry regiments or serving as tank crew

Front line review

MoD considers whether women should be allowed to serve in Teeth Arms

A POLICY that excludes women from roles in which they would be required to engage the enemy in close combat is being reviewed.

Servicewomen are currently prevented from taking up jobs where there is a requirement to deliberately attack and take the life of the enemy.

But European Community law makes it clear that the MoD must review this arrangement every eight years under the Equal Treatment Directive.

The last probe, in 2002, concluded that employing only men in certain close combat roles should remain as policy.

But Defence Secretary Bob Ainsworth hinted that ops in Afghanistan could lead to a change in thinking.

“Women are now serving in more posts on the front line than ever before and their contribution to the Armed Forces is essential,” he said.

“This review will include a thorough assessment of women’s roles in recent operations. It will also examine the attitudes of Servicewomen and men and

those of the commanders on the ground to assess the potential impact of mixed-gender teams on combat effectiveness.

“We will take account of all the experiences we have gained in Afghanistan and Iraq to help determine whether our policy should remain the same.”

However if the review found that employing woman in close-combat roles could reduce the “effectiveness” of the Armed Forces it would be lawful to rule it out.

● **Jobs for the girls – Pages 56-59**

Troops receive equality guidance

THE Army has updated its *Basically Fair* booklet as part of its commitment to fostering respect.

The refreshed document emphasises the need to promote equality and diversity within the Army in order for it to function as an effective force.

The latest incarnation of the booklet is intended to be more accessible than previous versions and will be available to all soldiers across the Service.

Lt Col Mike Valenzia said: “The new booklet gives really useful information in terms of how soldiers can expect to be

treated and how they should treat others.

“There will be 80,000 copies distributed across the Army, so each unit will have plenty of access to them.”

Addressing Army personnel, Adjutant General Lt Gen Bill Rollo added: “I hope this booklet will play a useful part in educating our people in what is acceptable behaviour and what is not. However, it will only do so in the context which you set, by your own attitude and behaviour and by your reaction to unacceptable conduct.”

● **Equal partners – Pages 23-27**



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Packer's peak performance

Charity climb helps RMP raise mountain of reddiess

An officer paralysed in a rocket attack in Iraq has successfully climbed the 2,307-metre El Capitan mountain in the United States.

Maj Phil Packer (RMP) completed the unbelievable feat – the equivalent of doing 4,250 pull-ups – three weeks after finishing the 26.2-mile London Marathon and just months after he was told he would never walk again.

Prior to the climb and taking to the capital's streets, the fearless Redcap had already successfully rowed across the English Channel.

As a result of the three challenges, Maj Packer, who is a patron of Help for Heroes and an ambassador for The Prince's Trust, has eclipsed his sponsorship target of £1 million.

Speaking to *Soldier* days after hauling himself up the sheer rock formation in the Yosemite National Park in California, the 36-year-old said the climb marked an important milestone.

"It was absolutely fantastic to get to the top because although I'd already reached the target, it felt that completing this challenge marked the end of raising the million pounds. It was the last of the three big challenges.

Physically the climb was the most demanding – more than the marathon, but emotionally it was a lot easier. It was just the five of us on the mountain working towards our goal, whereas with the marathon I did feel emotional pressure because of the immense daily support



Million pound man: Maj Phil Packer (RMP) takes a breather during his ascent of El Capitan in California

from the media and the public."

The inspiring Serviceman, based in London, explained that his sole focus now is building the profile of disabled sports. He said: "Since I got the £1 million, although I am still fundraising, my focus has been all about raising awareness for disabled people in sport.

"I know that if I did not have the massive support around me I would not have been able to do the things I have done, so I want to help others to get that support," he added.

Despite losing the use of his legs Maj Packer refuses to be beaten and returned to work on July 1.

"I never left the British Army, I just carried on. I'm not sure what my role will

be yet, but I just want to keep working."

The mindset of the determined soldier was characterised by his persistence on the mountain.

"The hardest moment of the climb was on the first night when we were on a ledge after we had been climbing since 0500. We were just across from a waterfall with the wind blowing the water on to us. I've no ability to control the temperature of my legs and could not move, so I got increasingly cold. I just gritted my teeth and dealt with it – it wasn't so much a case of 'mind over matter' as thinking 'why am I here, why am I doing this' and getting on with it."

● www.philpacker.com

Fun-loving sapper falls in Sangin

THE death of a 22-year-old combat engineer in southern Afghanistan has left a "big void" in the lives of fellow soldiers, friends and family.

Spr Jordan Rossi (25 Field Squadron, 38 Engineer Regiment) died following an explosion near Sangin in Helmand province on May 23.

The charismatic soldier was part of a Royal Engineers' search team tasked with clearing IEDs which posed a lethal threat to British Forces and the Afghan population.

Spr Rossi had deployed to Northern Ireland and Kenya before his posting to Helmand as an advanced searcher within the Joint Force Explosive Device Disposal Group.

Those who served with the "fine man" spoke highly of his professionalism and



● Spr Jordan Rossi

morale-boosting antics. Lt Col Roger Lewis, commanding officer of 38 Engineer Regiment, said: "Spr Jordan Rossi was a hardworking, professional soldier with a natural ability to relate to others."

"Full of character, his outgoing personality and ever present humour touched the lives of everyone he met."

He added: "He was a fantastic soldier, a regimental personality and I enjoyed his comradeship immensely."

Spr Rossi's mother, Theresa Rossi, said: "I have just lost my precious, fun-loving son."

"He was doing a job he loved and was proud to be a soldier."

"He was a tremendous son, grandson, brother, uncle and friend. There will be a big void in all our lives."

IN BRIEF

● THE MoD has revised its repatriation policy to include all Servicemen and women who die on overseas operations. Former Defence Secretary John Hutton, who outlined the changes in a written ministerial statement, announced all Service personnel are to be afforded a ceremonial repatriation regardless of the manner of their death.

● FAMILIES of serving Foreign and Commonwealth citizens could benefit from new legislation implemented by the Home Office. Established unmarried and same-sex partners of military personnel can now be granted limited leave to enter or remain in the UK. In addition spouses, civil partners, unmarried and same-sex partners of Service personnel will be able to apply for settlement providing that the soldier, sailor or airman has completed at least five years' continuous service. Applicants should visit www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk to check eligibility criteria.



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Men of valour: Nepalese veterans who fought in the Second World War are the focus of a striking set of images from Robert Hollingworth. The photographer teamed up with The Gurkha Welfare Trust to visit the former soldiers in their native country during a six-week assignment. While the veterans are now in their 80s and 90s, Hollingworth said they still regarded the Army as the biggest part of their lives. "It was amazing how they snapped into military postures as soon as the camera was pointed at them," he said. The pictures are being exhibited at the Pound Arts Centre in Corsham, Wiltshire from September 2.

Recession busting

Survey cites 'insecure' civvy street as key reason for staying in uniform

THE current economic climate has prompted military personnel to stay in the Armed Forces rather than opt for civilian jobs, according to the findings of an MoD study.

The 2008 Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey (AFCAS) found that many soldiers felt civvy street was insecure and offered far fewer opportunities than the military.

In comparison with the 2007 report, significantly more personnel were concerned with the jobs market outside the Services and positive about the pay and allowances offered by the Forces.

"This finding was consistent with the deepening economic recession at the time of the 2008 survey affecting perceptions of the security and benefits of civilian employment," the AFCAS reported.

Pensions, healthcare provision and career development opportunities were also cited as influential reasons to remain in the Services.

Answers to questions, which aimed to discover the "attitudes, opinions, and circumstances of Service personnel", showed that more than 70 per cent were

proud to serve Queen and country and that they had a "willingness to put themselves out". It was also noted that a significant majority of personnel felt valued by their Forces employer.

But in terms of personal equipment it was clear that troops saw room for improvement, with 32 per cent of other

ranks unhappy with some of their kit.

And while figures showed 54 per cent of personnel believed the morale of the Services "as a whole" was low, nearly half also stated that their personal morale was high.

● Ready recruits – Page 106

Soldiers warned of online spies

CONCERNED officials have told personnel to think before they post anything on the internet amid concerns that Taliban insurgents are watching.

Intelligence experts believe that 80 per cent of information sought by the enemy is being gleaned from material on the web and there are fears troops are now prime targets to be pulped for information.

The concerns have prompted the release of a video, which is currently being distributed to units, to warn soldiers of the dangers of being indiscreet online.

Charting a few days in the life of a fictional Pte Jenkins, the film shows how he care-

lessly leaks sensitive data without thinking about the potential consequences.

An Army spokesman told *Soldier*: "Although no specific incident has prompted this video, a trawl through social networking and media sites can reveal tactics and procedures, weapon and vehicle capabilities, camp layouts and more."

"We have identified that a lot of soldiers are posting information and photographs. They need to realise the potential implications of what they are doing."

"The old phrase 'careless talk costs lives' is still as applicable today as it was in the Second World War."

Prodders gets the nod

Personal mine extraction packs to preserve lives of province personnel

SOLDIERS deploying to southern Afghanistan are being issued with pocket-sized packs containing everything they need to safely prod their way out of a minefield.

Developed in reaction to an Urgent Operational Requirement identified by British troops serving in one of the most mined regions in the world, the Personal Minefield Extraction Kit (P-Mek) contains plastic mine markers, lumes, a tripwire feeler and a prodder.

More than 9,000 of the packs, which include a step-by-step user guide, are already in theatre, with a further 25,000 due to arrive in the coming months.

WO2 Robert Stevens (RE), from the UK Mine Information and Training Centre (MITC) in Camberley, told *Soldier*: "This basic kit gives troops the confidence that they have the necessary equipment available to extract themselves safely from a minefield.

"It also raises awareness of the legacy



mine threat on operations and allows them to rehearse the extraction drills prior to and during their deployment."

A vehicle extraction version of the kit and pack to mark helicopter landing sites are also available.

For further information contact the MITC on 01252 863623.

● **Media Ops – Pages 61-63**

IN BRIEF

● AN INQUIRY into UK involvement in the Iraq conflict has been set up by the Government. Following advice from the Cabinet Secretary, Prime Minister Gordon Brown has modelled the analysis of the Franks Inquiry on the investigation that followed the Falklands War. Sir John Chilcot, former top official at the Northern Ireland Office and a former staff counsellor for the security and intelligence agencies, will chair the inquiry and the process is expected to take one year. In a message to Service and MoD civilian personnel Chief of the Defence Staff, Sir Jock Stirrup and Permanent Under Secretary, Sir Bill Jeffrey said the MoD will "cooperate fully" and witnesses will be heard "in private".

● LOVED ones of Britain's oldest former member of the Territorial Army have been remembering a life lived to the full following his death at the age of 105. Edwin Cooper passed away peacefully in his sleep on June 5 at the nursing home where he had been living in Abergele, Conwy. Cooper enlisted in the TA in Oldham, Lancashire, aged 20 and was immediately called to duty and mobilised on the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. As a member of the Royal Army Medical Corps, he saw service in North Africa in an Army Field Ambulance unit with The Duke of Wellington's Regiment and later fought on the Italian Peninsula with the First Army.

'Devoted' boss dies in blast

A MUCH-LOVED officer of the 1st Battalion, Welsh Guards was killed on a routine patrol in southern Afghanistan when an IED was detonated against his vehicle.

Father-of-one Maj Sean Birchall was caught in an explosion while delivering supplies to his men near Lashkar Gah in Helmand province. Another soldier was also injured in the blast.

Despite immediate assistance from the patrol medic, the 33-year-old OC of 9 Company, 1 WG could not be saved and died en route to hospital on June 19.

Maj Birchall's wife, Joanna – mother of their 18-month-old son Charlie – spoke of the athletic guardsman's pride at serving in the Armed Forces.

"Sean was a wonderful husband, a doting father and a much-loved son and brother, who cared deeply for his family and friends," she said.

"He has been described as 'devilishly fit, stylish and energetic' and he was so very proud to be a Guards officer.

"He was also thrilled to have the opportunity to lead a newly-formed company in Afghanistan and despite spending such a short time with his guardsmen, he was utterly devoted to them.

"He leaves behind his adoring family, the regiment he loved, and his loyal friends. They will miss him terribly."

Of South African-born Maj Birchall, his CO Lt Col Rupert Thorneloe said: "Sean had all the qualities of an outstanding professional soldier – fitness, coolness under pressure and tactical flair.

"His character was defined by his tremendous and infectious enthusiasm – I do not think he had a negative bone in his body.

"The unselfish and positive manner in which he led his life could not contrast more starkly with the nihilistic cruelty of the people who took it from him."

Maj Birchall joined the Welsh Guards in 1999 and was tasked with leading 9 Company when it was formed to deploy to southern Afghanistan.

WO2 Andy Campbell, who served as Maj Birchall's company sergeant major, said: "Maj Birchall was the right man to bring 9 Company together and will be remembered by all those who met him as an exceptional soldier, inspired leader and most importantly a good man."

"It was my honour and privilege to serve with him. The company has lost a brave man and a good friend."



● Maj Sean Birchall

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— WO2 British infantry serving with US Forces



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— D.C. Special Operations Command (not pictured)



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1. Under the bonnet

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2. One at a time

Change one plug at a time to avoid mixing them up. Each fires in a specific order and if you mix the plug leads up your car will misfire and won't run at all sweetly.

3. Get a grip

Grip the plug lead as close to the plug as you can and slowly ease it off. By just grabbing the lead and ripping it off you risk pulling the lead apart.

4. Work it out

You'll need a special plug spanner or a wrench with an adapter to reach into the plug base and unscrew the old plug, turning anti-clockwise until it's loose. Take it out and clean around the edges of the fitting to remove any oil and dirt.

5. Good as new

With the new plug between your thumb and forefinger, slot it down into the plug hole and screw it in by hand to make sure it's correctly connected. Tighten with your spanner and click the plug lead back.



RAISE YOUR IQ

The brain thrives on exercise – both mental and physical. Keep stretching your intellectual capacities with cryptic crosswords and sudoku puzzles, but don't forget to keep an eye on your general well-being too – get plenty of sleep, and go running or swimming.

Diet can also be a factor in intelligence. Keep well hydrated and go big on wholegrain cereals (including brown rice and wholewheat pasta), B vitamins (found in nuts and fish), iron (meat and fish) and fatty acids (fish, once again). If all else fails (or you don't like fish), just remember that anyone who brags about their high IQ is almost certainly lacking in the more meaningful quality known as emotional intelligence.



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



VIEW

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Equal partners

Gay soldiers celebrate diversity
of modern British Army

Proud to parade: Homosexual soldiers take
part in the 2008 London Gay Pride march
Picture: Nicholas Purkis

Interview: Joe Clapson
Picture: Steve Dock

JUST ten years ago it was illegal to be gay in the UK Armed Forces.

But since 2000, following a ruling by the European Court of Human Rights, homosexual men and women have been able to proudly serve – without hiding their sexuality.

In an interview with *Soldier*, Tpr James Wharton (The Household Cavalry Regiment) explained that instead of being oppressed, gay and lesbian Army personnel are now given full support.

"I came out to the Army before I told my parents, so that says a lot for the Armed Forces," said the 22-year-old.

"I told the Army in March 2003, after all my initial training was over – I was 18. I have always known I was gay but it wasn't until then that I told anyone."

The decision to lift the ban on gays in the Army came after two landmark cases heard at the European Court of Human Rights, which found that the MoD's policy was not sustainable.

Despite the change, the other half of the UK's "special relationship" – the United States – has not relaxed its attitude towards homosexuals in the Forces.

"I still can't get my head round the US' 'don't ask, don't tell' policy," said Tpr Wharton, who has served Queen and country for six years.

"Luckily I don't have to deal with it, but clearly there will be gay soldiers in the US Army who are not being themselves – they aren't allowed to be."

Tpr Wharton was deployed to Iraq on Op Telic 10 in 2007 on long-range desert patrols and he says the idea of a "pansy" serving in a conflict zone is a flawed one.

"I would say whoever goes on a tour to a place like Iraq can't really be described as a pansy – so the gay stereotype doesn't really apply," he said.

The Liverpool FC fan, who met his boyfriend Ryan during last year's London Gay Pride march – the first time members of the Armed Forces were allowed to march in uniform – went on to say that although he can find himself on the wrong end of "banter", it is not a problem.

The hard image and stories from Iraq ensure Tpr Wharton, based at Combermere Barracks, Windsor, does not fall into any gay stereotype, but by his own admission he can make himself a target for abuse.

"I can't be late, I'm off to see Britney tonight," he casually told *Soldier* before realising the potential implications of his comment.

"That doesn't exactly sound the most macho thing to say does it? I've got quite a bit of ribbing for going to the concert, but to be fair a few of the lads have also got tickets."

The very fact that Tpr Wharton – soon to be promoted to lance corporal – feels able to tell his colleagues that he is gay, likes Britney Spears and recently attended a Pink concert speaks volumes for

the strides in equality and diversity made by the Army.

In the past Tpr Wharton and soldiers like him would have been turned away at the door or forced out of the Army for their sexuality. In 1999 alone, 298 people were discharged because of their sexual orientation.

"A friend of mine who is gay was not allowed to be open about it and had the Royal Military Police following him around because of their suspicions – he wasn't allowed to be gay," said Tpr Wharton.

"Some soldiers had to leave and others just remained quiet, so were not themselves. Now it's completely different. I imagine it's like being in a different Army."

"Obviously there are people who are set in their ways and aren't in favour of the changed policy, but the whole attitude is different."

Although he acknowledges the Army's significant progress in diversity issues, Wharton explained that the current situation is not perfect, with potential recruits sometimes put off signing up by ill-informed personnel.

"I think there is room for improvement as far as the Army is concerned because there are still people who can't accept the changes – but it's 1,000 times better than ten years ago," said Tpr Wharton.

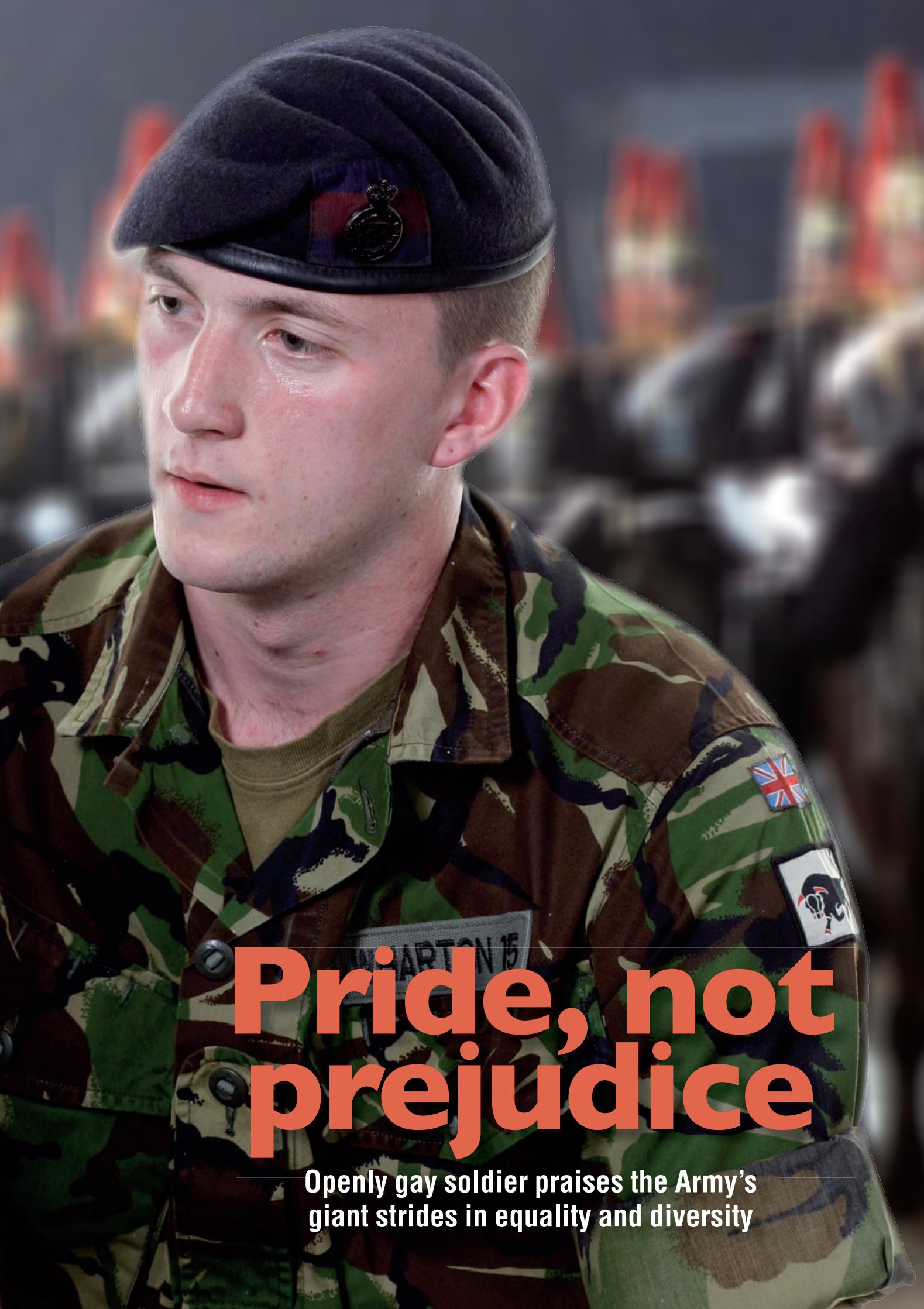
"There could definitely be improvements in the first stages of recruitment because I know people who have been given bad advice."

"A lot of people express their worries about being gay at recruitment and some awful things have been said to them, like 'you're not allowed to be gay in Army time' or 'you shouldn't be gay'."

In his six-year Army career Tpr Wharton can recall just two unwanted incidents as a result of his sexuality, but neither were serious enough for him to question his career.

"Considering some people have general problems every week I'm not complaining," he said "I haven't got any personal problems. My problems are like every other soldier's – bombs and bullets."

The trooper was also keen to elaborate on the general misconceptions people have about homosexual men and women. "People tend to think gay people don't like sport and that they just sit and file their nails – that is not the case," he said. "I love playing and watching sport – I'm a massive Liverpool fan and I don't own a nail file." ■



Pride, not prejudice

Openly gay soldier praises the Army's
giant strides in equality and diversity

Mrs and Mrs

Army offers outstanding opportunities for married medical team



Happy couple: Helen (seated) and Elspeth De Montes-Davis are full of praise for the Army's acceptance of their sexuality

Picture: Steve Dock

Interview: Cliff Caswell

THE pressures of military life have never discriminated against Helen and Elspeth De Montes-Davis – the reality of deployments, risk to life and limb and long periods of separation are as real to them as they are to anyone in the Army.

Based in Catterick, Yorkshire, the two captains have been unfailingly successful in their careers as health professionals. Moving from the ranks to earn a commission as an officer at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, nurse Helen has seen action on two busy Op Telic tours. Elspeth, a recruit from the NHS, is studying to be a GP.

The only aspect of life that sets the pair, both aged 30, aside from their colleagues is the fact that they are a gay couple. Married in a civil partnership in February, they now have the right to be posted together and are entitled to their own quarter. And they are both delighted with the respect they have been shown by colleagues.

"I think the fact that we are both completely open about our sexuality does make life a lot easier," Helen admitted. "We don't try to hide it at all and people are very accepting. At the end of the day, we're just another Army couple."

"Life is really no easier or harder than it is for a straight partnership – we've been married for 18 months now and often go out to each other's functions together. The Army Medical Services is great and we've had no negative backchat."

As ordinary as it may sound for a gay couple to go through a civil partnership and share their lives together, this situation would have been unthinkable in the Army just a decade ago. Until the turn of the millennium, homosexuality was outlawed in the military, punishable by an administrative discharge.

It was not until 1999 that judges in Europe ruled the policy of dismissing gay soldiers amounted to an infringement of their human rights to a private family life. In January the following year, the Defence Secretary announced

the rules would be changed, with sexuality becoming a private matter for individuals.

Fast forward to 2005 and the introduction of civil partnerships, however, and the Army immediately took the new legislation on board, offering gay married couples the full rights of their straight colleagues and heralding a new era of openness.

For Helen and Elspeth, the military's commitment to full equality has given them new opportunities and both maintain that they are better soldiers as a result. Now settled and with a wide circle of friends, they are backing each other in their careers.

"I first met my partner four years ago during the entry officers course at Sandhurst and we discovered that we both got on very well although our paths didn't cross properly for another 12 months," recalled Helen.

"Soon after I deployed to Iraq on Op Telic 9 and Elspeth was then serving in Germany. But we've now settled into life at Catterick after being posted together."

For Elspeth, sexuality was something she had never discussed with colleagues. While openly gay, she had only spoken about the private side of her life with friends. But having married, she admitted to being far more confident and pleased with the warmth shown by fellow troops.

"When I first joined the Army I was in an Infantry regiment and was the only female officer around," she told *Soldier*. "Nobody asked me if I was gay and I didn't say anything – you feel you are protecting yourself by keeping quiet."

"But I'm more confident now I'm married.

Helen also speaks up for the Army's Equality and Diversity initiative, and I have to say that I am very proud of her. I talk about her to others in the same way as you would any wife or partner."

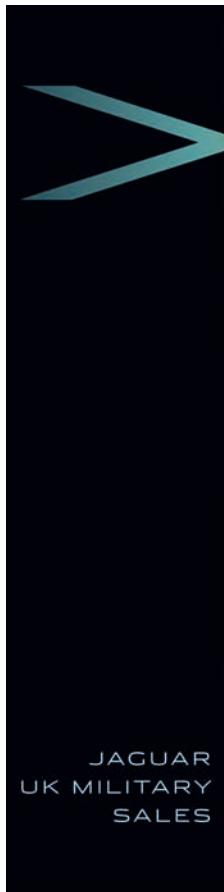
Elspeth also believed that sharing military life together was key to their role as professional soldiers, and helped them deal with aspects of the job such as extreme stress and the short notice with which they could be deployed to theatre.

"I think there are two aspects to our careers – the first is the medical aspect, the fact that we both have vocational jobs and that we understand that some days can bring serious pressure. And then there is the military aspect of our lives, where it helps that we both understand that things can happen very quickly. But for

me the key thing about our marriage is normality – the same things apply to any couple, whether they are Mr and Mrs, Mr and Mr or Mrs and Mrs."

It may have taken the Army longer than the civilian sector to recognise that full equality pays, but in a relatively short space of time the Service has become one of the leading champions of tolerance and respect, and has been setting the pace for change.

With the strong backing of a partner, a happy and contented home life and the benefit of emotional stability, soldiers are more likely to be effective and prepared when it comes to operations. Against a backdrop where every man and woman in theatre counts, this has to be a cornerstone of success in the field. ■



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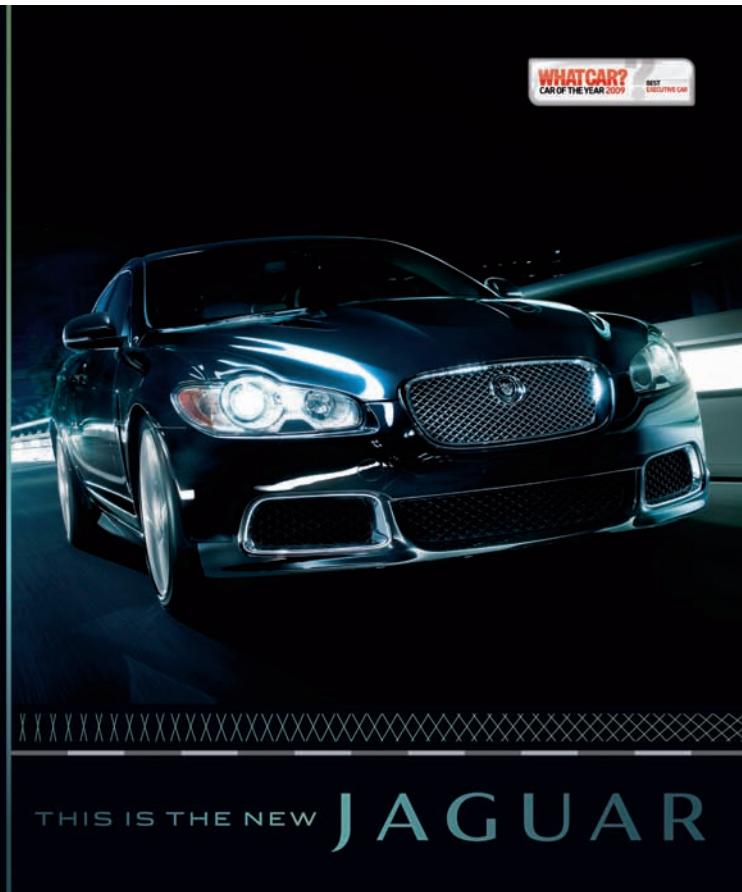
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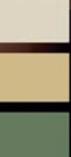
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JULY 2009

SOLDIER - Magazine of the British Army

Report: Heidi Mines
Pictures: Mike Weston

WITH its prime location in the heart of London and an ever-improving set of facilities, the Victory Services Club is no stranger to receiving praise from the highest levels.

Former United States President General Dwight Eisenhower tops a list of the great and the good who have commended the all-ranks club, writing in a letter to Field Marshal The Lord Chetwode in 1947: "There is great need for an organisation where ex-Servicemen and women can gather together and renew the bonds of friendship they forged in battle."

With soldiers arguably busier with operations than ever before, the VSC offers a home-from-home for Service personnel requiring anything from a weekend break in London to a meeting place for a reunion with old colleagues and friends.

But while many soldiers already take advantage of the facility, secretary and CEO Brig (Retd) Roy Lennox believes that a lack of awareness that the club caters for all ranks is preventing even more people from staying there.

"Often the biggest misconception we find with the VSC is that many serving and former soldiers believe it to be another London-based officers' club and this simply isn't the case," said Brig Lennox. "We welcome all ranks to stay and use the facilities of the hotel that was created for Service personnel."

With more than 190 rooms, many providing wi-fi internet access and flat screen televisions and nine of which are equipped for disabled guests, the hotel is open to serving soldiers and veterans as well as members of their families.

Brig Lennox added: "The VSC is all about making people feel welcome and cared for and the main aim today, as it has always been, is to promote esprit de corps and to relieve distress and hardship.

"We want to provide a welcome, relaxed, affordable and accessible haven for those in the Armed Forces."

Lennox told *Soldier* that in addition to offering some of the best value-for-money accommodation in London, the VSC offers free rooms to Servicemen and women who are deemed to need a break by their chain of command.

In addition, the Haven for Heroes scheme devised by the Chief of the General Staff, Gen Sir Richard Dannatt, allows soldiers returning from operations to stay at the hotel for a discounted rate.

While the prices may be cheap, the hotel is anything but. The VSC recently underwent a multi-million pound overhaul and a new Centenary Wing, which opened just two months ago, boasts en suite rooms with triple glazing.

A hi-tech lighting system and the employment of a former RLC master chef has transformed the building into a venue fit to host everything from small weddings to major conferences.

And for nostalgic visitors to the VSC, the remnants of the old buildings taken over just after the Second World War are still available, with their twin rooms and shared bathrooms down the hall.

From its inception in the 1940s as a gift from a grateful nation to its returning Service personnel, the VSC has evolved into a true jewel in the military welfare crown. ■

● Visit www.vsc.co.uk

HOME FROM HOME

Newly-revamped haven for heroes opens its doors to *Soldier*

WE WELCOME ALL RANKS TO STAY AND USE THE FACILITIES OF THE HOTEL THAT WAS CREATED FOR SERVICE PERSONNEL



Body Mass Index Classification

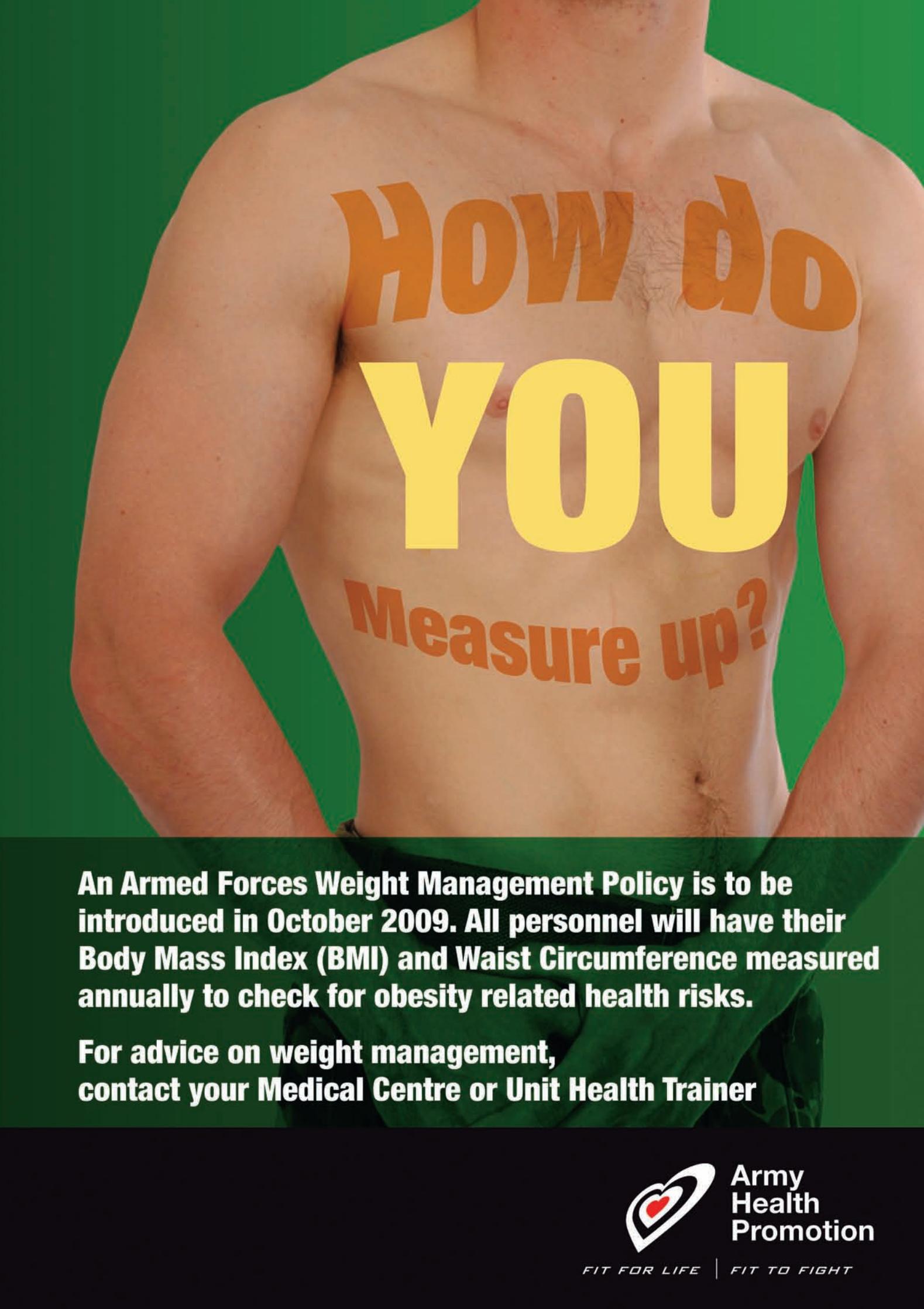
Weight (pounds)	Height (feet and inches)																		Weight (kilograms)
	5'0"	5'1"	5'2"	5'3"	5'4"	5'5"	5'6"	5'7"	5'8"	5'9"	5'10"	5'11"	6'0"	6'1"	6'2"	6'3"	6'4"		
100	20	19	18	18	17	17	16	16	15	15	14	14	14	13	13	12	12	45	
105	21	20	19	19	18	17	17	16	16	16	15	15	14	14	13	13	13	47	
110	21	21	20	19	19	18	18	17	17	16	16	15	15	15	14	14	13	50	
115	22	22	21	20	19	19	18	17	17	17	17	16	16	15	15	14	14	52	
120	23	23	22	21	21	20	20	19	18	18	17	17	16	16	15	15	15	54	
125	24	24	23	22	21	21	20	20	19	18	18	17	17	16	16	15	15	57	
130	25	25	24	23	22	22	21	20	20	19	19	18	18	17	17	16	16	59	
135	26	26	25	24	23	22	22	21	21	20	19	19	18	18	17	17	16	61	
140	27	26	26	25	24	23	23	22	21	21	20	20	19	18	18	17	17	63	
145	28	27	27	26	25	24	23	23	22	21	21	20	20	19	19	18	18	66	
150	29	28	27	27	26	25	24	23	23	22	22	21	20	20	19	19	18	68	
155	30	29	28	27	27	26	25	24	24	23	22	22	21	20	20	19	19	70	
160	31	30	29	28	27	27	26	25	24	24	23	22	22	21	21	20	19	72	
165	32	31	30	29	28	27	27	26	25	24	24	23	22	22	21	21	20	75	
170	33	32	31	30	29	28	27	27	26	25	24	24	23	22	22	21	21	77	
175	34	33	32	31	30	29	28	27	27	26	25	24	24	23	22	22	21	79	
180	35	34	33	32	31	30	29	28	27	27	26	25	24	24	23	22	22	82	
185	36	35	34	33	32	31	30	29	28	27	27	26	25	24	23	23	23	84	
190	37	36	35	34	33	32	31	30	29	28	27	26	26	25	24	24	23	86	
195	38	37	36	35	33	32	31	31	30	29	28	27	26	26	25	24	24	88	
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210	41	40	38	37	36	35	34	33	32	31	30	29	28	28	27	26	26	95	
215	42	41	39	38	37	36	35	34	32	32	31	30	29	28	28	27	26	98	
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225	44	43	41	40	39	37	36	35	34	33	32	31	31	30	29	28	27	102	
230	45	43	42	41	39	38	37	36	35	34	33	32	31	30	30	29	28	104	
235	46	44	43	42	40	39	38	37	36	35	34	33	32	31	30	29	29	107	
240	47	45	44	43	41	40	39	38	36	35	34	33	33	32	31	30	29	109	
245	48	46	45	43	42	41	40	38	37	36	35	34	33	32	31	31	30	111	
250	49	47	46	44	43	42	40	39	38	37	36	35	34	33	32	31	30	114	

Height (centimetres)

To identify your risk level, use the chart below combining your waist circumference and your BMI figure from the chart above

Body Mass Index (BMI)		WAIST CIRCUMFERENCE							
		Men < 94cm Women < 80 cm		Men 94 - 101.9 cm Women 80 - 87.9 cm		Men ≥ 102 cm Women ≥ 88 cm			
Underweight	< 18.5	Increased Risk				Increased Risk			
Healthy Weight	18.5 - 24.9	No Increased Risk				No Increased Risk			
Overweight	25.0 - 29.9	No Increased Risk				Increased Risk			
Obese Class I	30.0 - 34.9	Increased Risk				High Risk			
Obese Class II	35.0 - 39.9	High Risk				Very High Risk			
Obese Class III	≥ 40	Very High Risk				Extreme Risk			





HOW DO YOU Measure up?

An Armed Forces Weight Management Policy is to be introduced in October 2009. All personnel will have their Body Mass Index (BMI) and Waist Circumference measured annually to check for obesity related health risks.

**For advice on weight management,
contact your Medical Centre or Unit Health Trainer**



**Army
Health
Promotion**

Report: Cliff Caswell
Picture: Mike Weston

WHEN Lt Col Henry Eagan signed up for the Combined Cadet Force as a teenager, he could never have imagined that his career would come full circle.

As a youngster craving the opportunities and adventure offered by the military, he learned the fine art of fieldcraft, respect for weapons and the responsibility for commanding others that would stand him in good stead in the Army.

But after more than three decades of service and operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and Northern Ireland, the Royal Welsh officer admitted he was delighted to be finishing his career as it had begun – with young people and those backing them.

As commandant of the Cadet Training Centre at Frimley Park, he is responsible for a key centre of excellence where both teenagers and the adults responsible for developing them are put through their paces.

Lt Col Eagan said he was inspired to be heading up the Surrey-based venue, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, and to see such commitment from young people, their instructors and his staff.

"It is an impressive place to work because it is on the go all the time," the senior officer said. "On our courses the students are pushed all week, and by the end they all have a clear idea of their capabilities – you never see a long face.

"Working with the Cadet Service is also very humbling. In particular, the adult volunteers give up such a huge amount of their own time to help young people. They turn up twice a week on parade nights without being paid and what they do outside of their civilian careers is almost a full-time job in itself."

Based in several acres of grounds, the centrepiece of the Cadet Training Centre is the impressive Frimley Park Manor House, which provides a staff college-like setting for students as well as plenty of scope for training and leadership activities.

On-site facilities include a lecture hall, classrooms and a well-equipped gym shared with the MoD unit at the neighbouring hospital. There is also a rifle range, obstacle course, command task area and a lake for testing skills on the water.

Instructors have six basic and advanced courses at their disposal, while the Cadet Leadership Course and Master Cadet Course are available for young people. Several other activities, including first aid and shooting, as well as a number of seminars and conferences, are also held each year.

"You find that the cadets are people who have the inclination to do something more than their peers," said Lt Col Eagan. "They have a good time and our aim is to give them a sense of the core values and standards shared by the Army.

"They also become more mentally and physically robust over time with activities based on military training. Obviously we also have access to weapons and handling them safely and with respect is all part of the experience."

Lt Col Eagan believed that having been a cadet himself had paid dividends in helping to manage his five full-time Army staff, three retired officers and a contingent of civilians as well as young people and their training programme. But he admitted that his role always proves demanding.

"To be honest you have to be completely focused

all the time and make sure you get stuck into the work," he added. "When you bring everyone together here there is a tremendous energy. The schedule caters for around 2,000 students each year and we are rarely empty."

Maj (Retd) Ken Molyneux-Carter, a former chief instructor who now works to promote the training centre, shared the commandant's views. Having recently been visited by the Duke of Edinburgh to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the venue, he said that generations of cadets had been inspired by the courses.

"The majority of the activities we run have remained the same, although the terms of health and safety, supervision and duty of care have obviously changed over the years," he added. "The cadets are a youth movement sponsored by the MoD, and not a junior Army, although a number of ex-cadets do join up.

"I was in the CCF myself and thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

"The Duke's visit was a superb way to mark such an important anniversary for us – he enjoyed his time and was particularly impressed by the drill parade, which highlighted the quality of the young people in the Army Cadet Force."

There is certainly quality in abundance, and it is extraordinary to see how the cadets support each other while they are out on exercise and leadership tasks. In a society much maligned for being broken, with crime making headlines and the culture of celebrity dominating the media, it is inspiring that thousands are still signing up to the spirit of the Army's values and standards.

In civilian society, these are perhaps now more important than they have been at any time in the recent past. Whether or not the teenagers of today eventually sign up for the military, the fact that they have taken on qualities such as self-sacrifice, self-control and respect for others can only be to the benefit of society as a whole. ■



www.armycadets.com

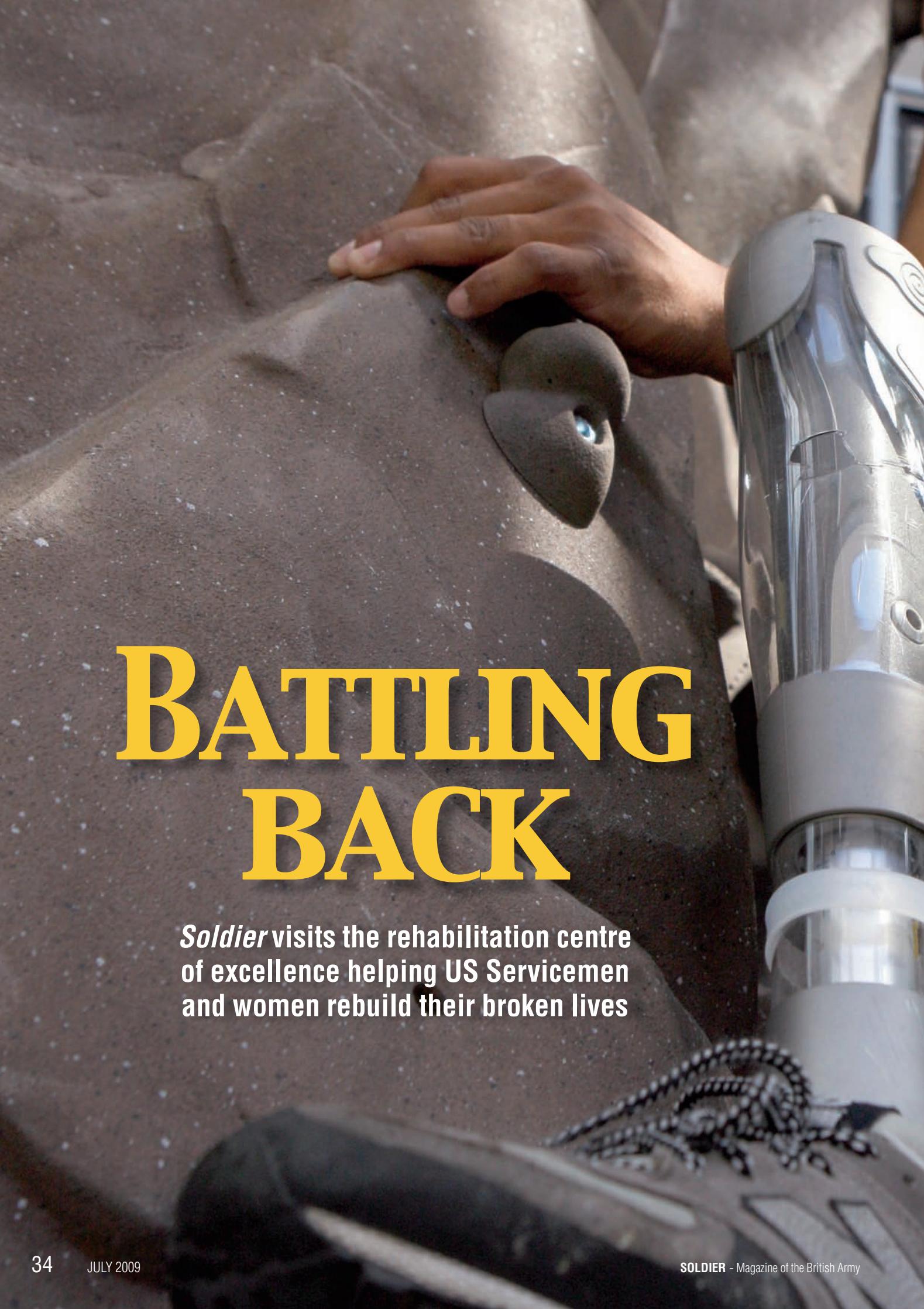




From left, Fast learners: Cdt Sgt Jessica Gissing (Beds and Herts ACF), Cdt Sgt William Boyes (Lancs ACF) and Cdt Sgt Maj Kyle Scott (1 Bn NI ACF) embark on an exercise run by Frimley Park Cadet Training Centre, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary

Young guns

Officers sing the praises of Army Cadet Force as Surrey centre clocks up half-century of service



BATTLING BACK

Soldier visits the rehabilitation centre of excellence helping US Servicemen and women rebuild their broken lives



True grit: SSgt Rico Roman (US Army) builds up his strength and increases his agility by ascending the climbing wall within the Center for the Intrepid

Reports: Samantha Chapman
Pictures: Steve Dock

AS HIS countrymen fought each other in the streets, Argentinian writer and journalist Jose Narosky quietly mused that "in war, there are no unwounded".

Short, simple and strikingly bittersweet, his casual comment echoes the thoughts of many today, decades afterwards, who see soldiers giving their bodies, minds and sometimes their lives for a war on distant shores.

Yet when they come back, some with obvious injuries and others without, there is another force they must reckon with – the huge army of medical staff who will fight back to give these soldiers another chance at life.

With the largest military contingent in Afghanistan, the USA is constantly striving to better the care for its wounded, looking at new and innovative medicine and therapies to bolster its patients' outlook.

At the sprawling Fort Sam Houston in Texas, the quality of help available for the country's warriors sees no boundaries with impressive medical techniques and research and a policy of not only looking after the soldier, but also their family for years to come. >>



STAFF Sergeant Rico Roman grins shyly at *Soldier* as he sits forward on the gym bench, resting his hands on his knees and stretching his prosthetic leg out from under his long, black shorts.

"I got really lucky," says the US infantryman who opted for amputation after his legs were severely injured in an IED attack on his Humvee in Iraq in 2007.

On the face of it luck is a strange word to describe losing a limb, but this earnest 28-year-old from New York is adamant that amputating his left leg has given him opportunities he thought he could never have again.

In fact, he has become so good at wheelchair sports such as hockey and basketball he has been asked to try out for the national Paralympic squad.

"I opted for amputation," said Roman (214 Infantry, 10th Mounted Division). "They managed to save my leg but it was stuck right out in front of me – I couldn't do anything with it."

"I could see that if I opted for it to be amputated then I would have more movement and a better quality of life – so I did and I haven't looked back. It was not an easy decision and it took me a long time to think about it but it has given me back my freedom."

Roman is just one of hundreds of US Army personnel recuperating at Fort Sam Houston's state-of-the-art Center for the Intrepid (CFI), America's foremost facility

for amputees and burns victims.

Built with money donated by more than 600,000 patriotic Americans the awe-inspiring building is a light, airy and relaxing facility which provides top-notch physical therapy to give badly injured soldiers back their lives.

It is just one component of Fort Sam Houston in Texas which looks after every aspect of a soldier's care from the point of injury to returning to their former life.

Occupational therapy is a huge part of the CFI with personnel encouraged to perform everyday tasks such as writing, drawing and routines such as washing, dressing and cooking meals in a specially designed mini-apartment.

Team challenges such as paintball, archery, kayaking and golf also give light relief and boost spirits while the centre's physical therapy helps to build strength, wheelchair and crutch mobility and all-round endurance.

The gym and swimming pool provide most of the focus for the patients – in particular the Flow Rider, a surf simulator that teaches amputees to control and balance their bodies against a raging torrent of water.

"It's a workout of pretty much everything," said a dripping wet PFC Andrew Bradley (82nd Airborne Division), who lost his right leg in an IED attack in Iraq. "It's probably my sixth time and I really enjoy it – I've been here since

AMERICAN IDOLS

Injured US personnel receive pioneering care at medical and welfare facility deep in the heart of Texas



January and have been able to take part in loads of activities."

His girlfriend Andrea Lake, who lives nearby in Dallas and can regularly visit Andrew at the base, said she was immensely proud of her partner. "It's the first time that I've seen him on the wave machine and it's amazing to see," she told *Soldier*.

Andrea is just one of many partners and family members that visit patients at Fort Sam – following the US Army's recognition that love and support plays an integral part in recovery.

The base also boasts Fisher Houses – specially designed homes where Servicemen and women's families can come and stay while their loved ones receive their treatment. Built by charitable organisation The Fisher Foundation, the houses can take up to 57 families who can each stay for up to 60 days at a time.

SPC Frank Barnett (927 Combat Engineers) was injured in Afghanistan in 2008 when his vehicle hit an explosive device. Suffering terrible burns to his lungs, of which he now only has 78 per cent functionality, he has PTSD and is undergoing in-depth rehabilitation.

His 24-year-old wife Diane and their two children William (2) and Noah (10 months) all stay with him at one of the Fisher Houses every other month.

"When my family weren't here I became very isolated and depressed," explained SPC Barnett, pictured right with son William. "They live in Illinois so when they came here to stay I just felt so much happier. It would be easy to give in but when I see my family it makes me think that my life is worth it – I want to be with them and to be better for them."

Next to the Fisher Houses is the Warrior and Family Support Center where former Army wife and generous-hearted director Judith Markelz runs her welfare empire. Having created a building filled with activities, a huge games room, a beautiful outdoor garden and innovative computer room – her aim is give the troops and families somewhere to relax and recuperate.

"These soldiers are not going to be the same people they were before they left, they see things that nobody should ever have to see," she said. "A lot of these young people join the National Guard because it offers them a free education and benefits but now they are out for 15-month tours where they see nothing but hell day after day.

"We wanted to provide a place where people can come together – we have 14 televisions, 5,000 DVDs, a craft area, entertainment room, butterfly garden and barbecue area, computers and kitchens.

"There is always something for people to do to take their mind away from their treatments and what has happened to them."

Yet just five minutes walk from Judith's haven is the Brooke Army Medical Center (BAMC) where personnel never tire of thinking about treatment and how they can constantly improve on the already first-rate care on offer.

Orthopaedic surgeon and British Army officer Maj Kate Brown (RAMC) works at BAMC and is currently on a year-long project looking into the possibility of regenerating bone.

"The extremities are the most common site of combat injuries," she told *Soldier*. "In the US there are around 900 amputees and in the UK it is between 60 and 75 and rising every year – we don't want to just treat them, it is now about what more can we do for them."

Maj Brown is currently

experimenting to see if and how she can regenerate bones with the idea that this could eventually be a possibility for badly injured soldiers. Her colleague and burns specialist Dr Steven Wolf is also looking at regenerating tissue – an arguably more complex technique due to the nerves, blood vessels and muscle that will have been lost.

"There are interesting things going on," he added. "There are a high number of very young and badly injured men and women who are going to live another 50 or 60 years and there must be more that we can do for them. This has the potential to take off and be really, really big." ■

'THESE SOLDIERS ARE NOT GOING TO BE THE SAME PEOPLE THEY WERE BEFORE THEY LEFT, THEY SEE THINGS THAT NOBODY SHOULD HAVE TO SEE'



surgeon and British Army officer Maj Kate Brown (RAMC) works at BAMC and is currently on a year-long project looking into the possibility of regenerating bone.



Pictures: Graeme Main

FOR soldiers, the thought of being inactive and unable is one that comes only in their nightmares.

Yet for those who live through that reality there is now the realisation that it doesn't have to end with whatever they have lost.

For with Battle Back, the Forces' scheme which gives injured soldiers a taste of the sporting adventures they can pursue, anything is possible.

Skiing has quickly become one of the sports of choice for injured personnel – so much so that the Combined Services Disabled Ski Team (CSDST) was set up, and is now recruiting fresh talent with Paralympic dreams.

At the CSDST selection day at Hemel Hempstead Snow Centre, chairman Col David Eadie said there were eight hopefuls trying out for the team, of which six were from the British Army.

"There are those who have skied before and those that haven't," he said. "It is harder for those who haven't because they have to learn the entire discipline, but we are seeing some real talent emerge.

"To get to the Paralympics there is a very long process to go through – it is a lot of time spent in training and competitions, but it would be a fantastic achievement.

"Through CSDST we are trying to give these guys something back that they lost when they lost their limbs.

"When the worst happens they have to face up to what they can't do any more, but

we want to show them what they can do."

Last year Army adaptive skiers Tpr Stephen Shine (2 RTR), Sgt Martin Hewitt (R Signals) and Capt Mick Brennan (Para), pictured right, showed huge potential to take their skiing further and have provided a focal point for many young hopefuls.

The trio's ultimate aim is to qualify for the Winter Paralympics in Russia in 2014, but they recently wowed the slopes at the Army Alpine Championships in the slalom, giant slalom and super giant slalom events.

"They compete against able-bodied skiers because there is a factor system," explained Col Eadie. "Depending on their injury there is a different factor that we put into the final score so that they can compete on their merits.

"It's a good system because all the skiers want to know is how well they have done and it tells them that they are 12th in the Army, for example, rather than being the 12th disabled skier."

There are three categories available for disabled skiers – standing, sitting and visually impaired – the latter of which does not currently have anyone to fill it.

Each skier is then assigned a different set of skis depending on their particular disability – those who have lost arms or a

leg below the knee, for example, will be on two-track skis.

Those without legs above the knee are given one ski and two outriggers (poles with mini-skis on the end) and are known as three-trackers. Finally, mono-skiers may have lost both legs or are paraplegic and have one ski with an adapted chair.

CSDST performance and technical director Maj Ian Large explained: "They will be going down at speeds of around 50 or 60mph at the end of their first season and they always come out with a big smile on their faces.

"We just build on them from there. When training the staff are very aware of the difficulties disabled athletes can have – for example scar tissue is delicate and can be sore and the bottom of leg stumps can really hurt. We do make sure we look after them."

Once the eight skiers are talent-spotted by the CSDST coaches, they go to Austria to be taught how to race and then take part in their individual corps competitions, Service championships and finally the Inter-Service competition.

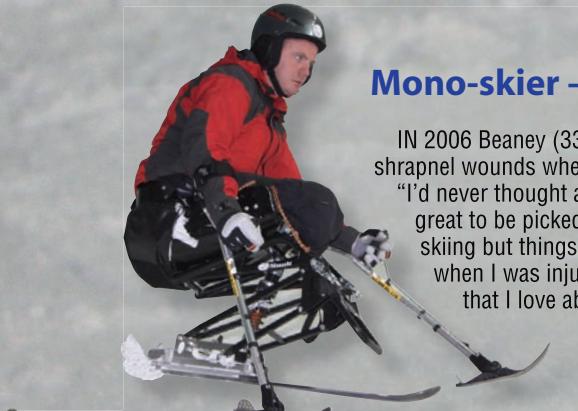
"If you could count how much these sports mean to the soldiers in smiles, it would be infinite," added Battle Back OC Maj Martin Colclough. "I think it is simply a huge morale booster – everything after that, such as the Paralympics, is a bonus." ■

'Through CSDST we are trying to give these guys something back that they lost when they lost their limbs'

Mono-skier – Sjt Martin Beaney (Rifles)

IN 2006 Beaney (33) lost his left kneecap and suffered severe shrapnel wounds when he was hit by an IED in Iraq.

"I'd never thought about skiing before but now I'm here it would be great to be picked as part of a team. I always used to want to go skiing but things always came up so it's ironic that it was only when I was injured that I decided to give it a go. It's the freedom that I love about it, and the chance to learn a new skill."

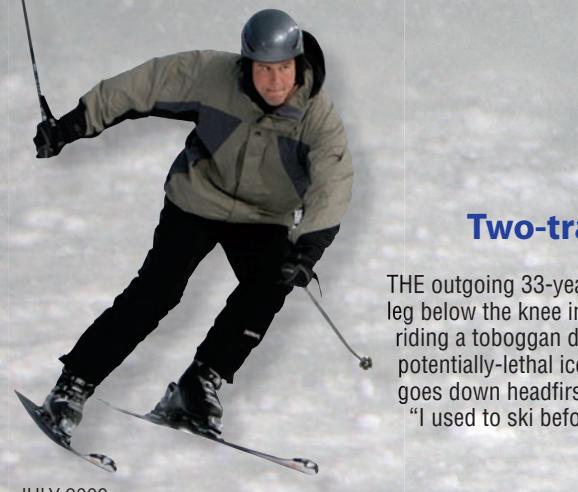


Two-tracker – Capt Bernie Bambury (Rifles)

THE outgoing 33-year-old lost his right leg below the knee in January 2008 after riding a toboggan down the Cresta Run – a potentially-lethal ice shoot where the rider goes down headfirst.

"I used to ski before so it wasn't too hard

to pick it back up. For me it is not the activity itself that is really important but it is getting your confidence back. It's about people lying in hospital beds without a limb thinking that it's the end for them – but it isn't. We have to show that there are no limits."



Dancing on ice

Disabled skiers churn up the snow as they aim for the stars

Three-tracker – LCpl Simon Wiggins (Coldstream Guards)

THE 22-year-old lost his right leg in March 2008 when he stepped on a mine pressure pad while serving in Helmand province, Afghanistan.

"This is only my second time skiing – it was my mate that got me into it. I'd never skied before and we went to Colorado and CSDST asked me to come here for the two-day team selection. I was really rubbish when I first started but I picked it up quite quickly. I thought it would be a lot harder to come back than it has been. Before I was injured I used to play a lot of football but I can't do that now so I hope this has taken that place."





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Mil: 94331 2569

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www.army.mod.uk/welfare-support



A problem shared

Army rolls out new welfare and support policies for soldiers

Picture: Sgt Chris Halton RLC

THE British tradition of keeping a stiff upper lip at all costs resulted in generations growing up in a dignified silence.

While their courage was admirable, 20th Century society embraced the notion that a problem shared was a problem halved and set about creating ways for its citizens to discuss their personal issues in a professional, confidential and non-judgmental environment.

The result has been a happier and healthier nation and, at a time when Service marriages feel the strain of operations, the Army Directorate of Personal Services has followed suit to offer soldiers and their families advice on everything from finance to mental health.

Based at Trenchard Lines, Upavon in Wiltshire, the dedicated team responsible for creating the Army's big book of welfare policies gave *Soldier* chapter and verse on the range of help on offer to today's Servicemen and women. ■

Hearts and minds: All unit welfare officers are bound by a strict confidentiality code, working to the same ethical standards used by practitioners in civvy street



Group funds up for grabs

THE Land Forces Welfare Fund, which provides cash to groups, units and teams, is an underused asset in the Army's welfare provision toolbox.

Maj (Retd) Rob Evans, the officer in charge of welfare fund issues, told *Soldier* that any bids that are of benefit to the collective welfare of a station, garrison or unit are encouraged, but urged more Service personnel to make use of the money.

He said: "We don't have



enough bids and there is spare cash available for anyone who meets the criteria."

The welfare fund dishes out grants for anything from new children's playground equipment to sporting gear and even broadband internet access. The main sources of cash are the Nuffield Trust and the Army Central Fund.

Tapping into these non-public funds is as easy as contacting a unit administration officer and placing a bid.

● For further information contact Maj (Retd) Rob Evans on 94331 3314

Helping hand

FOR some, the economic doom and gloom has compounded an already mounting debt, leading to stress and creating the biggest reason for soldiers to seek welfare support.

In the first instance, troops with money problems should visit their regimental admin officer for practical, free-of-charge advice.

Maj Jerry Redford (1 Mercian) from Personnel Support said the system is flexible enough to offer alternative backing to anyone wary of approaching their chain of

command. He told *Soldier*: "If you've got a debt problem, don't panic. Come forward and talk to someone about it."

The Financial Services Authority has sponsored a presentation called the Work Place Programme, which offers money-saving tips and general personal finance advice for soldiers and their families.

● To arrange a presentation, contact Elly London on 01980 615 955

Career change

LEAVING the Army is a huge step in itself, but combine the transition with ongoing welfare issues and the move to civvy street can seem all the more stressful.

Luckily for troops preparing to hang up their Combat 95s, the Army's Community Support team offers a network of services to any soldiers preparing to leave – regardless of their length of duty.

"The first port of call is your welfare officer," Lt Col Chris Birkhead (AGC(SPS)) explained.

"If a problem is identified during transition, there will be a conference and a welfare support plan is drawn up. This is handed over to the appropriate veterans' agencies who have representatives all over the country and the individual will be allocated to one of these for up to two years after they are discharged."

Although agencies such as the Army Benevolent Fund are there to help soldiers for the rest of their lives, the policy-makers stress that if personnel seek advice through the Army's support teams before they leave, they will be able to access help much faster.

The screenshot shows the British Army website's 'Welfare and Support' page. It features a banner with three smiling faces. Below the banner, there are sections for 'Operations and Deployment', 'News and Press', 'Equipment', 'Events, Activities and Leisure', and 'Join The Army'. A sidebar on the left includes links for 'Personal Support', 'Emergency, casualty and compassionate advice', 'Housing and job moves', 'Education for the family', 'Army related charities', 'Families' Activity Breaks', and 'Veterans and widows'. A 'Page Tools' sidebar on the right includes links for 'Email this page', 'Bookmark with:', 'Rate this page' (with a 4.5 star rating and 2,689 reviews), and 'Average rating: 2.69'.

Food for thought

SOLDIERS in the UK, Germany or on operations will be pleased to hear that monitoring the cost of food is a key item on the menu of the welfare policy-makers.

Lt Col Simon Davies (RE), who heads up Catering, Retail and Leisure, explained that in response to complaints about increased shopping bills, Germany's unit supermarkets have reduced their prices by up to a quarter on a range of everyday British products including bread, tea, eggs, milk, baked beans and magazines.

Lt Col Davies said that Naafi and Efi bosses are dedicated to assisting Service personnel with their shopping. He added: "We are now set on recycling profits into

introducing lower prices to benefit the soldiers spending their money in the shops."

● Lt Col Davies can be contacted on 94344 5559



The price is right: Naafi Max at Hohne Garrison

Trusting times

IT is estimated that more than 3,000 soldiers go AWOL every year as a result of unresolved welfare problems and issues.

Maj Belinda Forsythe (AGC (RMP)), responsible for Personnel Support at HQ Land Forces, said: "Some soldiers are worried about coming forward to get welfare support. They think that because they are in the Army, everyone will know their business."

In fact, welfare staff are bound by a strict code of confidentiality just like social workers in civilian life. The

unit welfare officer, the Army Welfare Service, SSAFA Forces Help and volunteers who work for the Service's Confidential Support Line all operate under the same set of rules.

Maj Forsythe emphasised that the welfare system is based on trust and urged soldiers to come forward to have a chat and seek assistance if they require it.

She added: "Our advice to soldiers is to speak to someone early.

"Don't let welfare problems get out of proportion."

Family ties

FOREIGN and commonwealth soldiers account for ten per cent of the British Army and welfare personnel have devoted a great deal of time and effort to securing fair and equal packages for these troops and their families.

"All soldiers, regardless of nationality, are on the same pay, the same pensions and the same allowances," said Maj Rodney Harwood (2 RRF). "However, life is complicated for foreign and Commonwealth citizens if they are subject to immigration control."

The policy team is currently putting the finishing touches to an Army Briefing Note about immigration issues. In the meantime, the amended rules can be found on the UK Border Agency website at www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk. Further information can be found online at www.army.mod.uk

The Army Welfare Support Service website features a navigation bar with links to Training and Education, Welfare and Support, Equipment, Activities and Leisure, Joining The Army, Training and Education, and Welfare and Support. The main content area includes sections for Family Support, Family Support Related Links, and Family Support External Links. The Family Support section discusses the Army Welfare Service and its availability to Army personnel and their families. The Family Support Related Links section includes Community Guides, Duke of York's, and Family Support External Links, which include Veterans Agency, Queen Victoria School, Children's Education Advisory Service, Service Children's Education, Joint Service Housing Advice Office, and more. The Family Support External Links section also includes links to the Army Benevolent Fund and the Army Benevolent Fund's blog.

FAST FACTS

Confidential Support Line Numbers

From UK and Bosnia/Kosovo:
0800 731 4880

From Germany:
0800 1827 395

From Cyprus:
0800 91065

Lines are open seven days a week from 1030hrs to 2230hrs (UK time)

More than £1 million was given away last year from Welfare Funds

Efi has reduced the price of thousands of products by a quarter - some now priced lower than on the UK High Street

PAYD has now been rolled out across 67 per cent of the British Army



HAVEN FOR **heroes**



Wounded troops head south for ultimate R&R package



Report: Heidi Mines
Pictures: Mike Weston

FOR Darren "Swifty" Swift (former RGJ), coping with his injuries after losing both legs in an IRA terrorist attack in 1991 was something he decided to "just get on with".

The lance corporal was patrolling a mill in Belfast when a device hidden in a jar of coffee exploded, killing colleague Cpl Terry O'Neil and dropping him to the floor.

"I lay there begging one of the soldiers to just shoot me and pleaded with him to put me out of my misery," the former junior NCO

told *Soldier*. "Obviously I'm glad he didn't do that now."

Nearly two decades after his world was turned upside down, the Northern Ireland veteran has stayed true to his vow of continuing to live life to the full.

As well as throwing himself into working to support Service charity *The Not Forgotten Association*, Swifty is a familiar face on the small screen thanks to his work with extras agency Amputees in Action.

But despite his admirable work ethic, the severity of his injuries means that the 43-year-old and his family value the chance to take a

break from day-to-day life more than most.

Luckily for the Swifts, they do not have to go far to find the perfect getaway.

Just a short plane journey off England's south coast, Holidays for Heroes Jersey exists to provide free breaks for injured Service personnel and their families.

"It's more than just a holiday," the charity's founder Dawn Woodhouse told *Soldier*.

"To be honest we really want to reach anyone who has suffered an injury while serving their country, but especially those who have been seriously wounded in the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan." >>





Surprisingly, Dawn has no personal link to the military and started the campaign after hearing a moving sermon on Remembrance Sunday which told of the plight of soldiers injured on Op Herrick.

Originally the 65-year-old planned to open her home to troops and escort them around the island, but soon the idea swept over Jersey and everyone from hairdressers to watersports managers came forward to donate facilities, money and time to the British Armed Forces.

Now just ten months after the initial idea, Dawn and her husband Richard have provided almost

200 Service families with a free break on the Channel Island.

"I don't know anyone in the military but I do know what it is like to be a mother of sons and I can only imagine what it is like for the families of personnel wounded on operations," she said.

Sarah Swift, Swift's wife, explained that the scheme provided a chance for the families of Service personnel to mix with each other.

She said: "The holidays are absolutely fantastic as they also give the children of disabled parents the chance to mingle and see and learn about other disabilities, not just the ones they encounter within their own family."

Lorraine Tuffen, wife of 2 Para veteran Stephen who was shot in the head while fighting near Goose Green in the Falklands, also expressed her appreciation for a scheme which recognises the role and emotions of family members.

"It allows the guys a chance to talk to others who have been through similar experiences," she said. "But it allows us as partners and wives to talk

‘It allows the guys a chance to talk to others who have been through similar experiences’

things through as well.

"You have to be patient with a loved one who has suffered a serious injury and only those who have been through the same issues can understand."

"I would definitely come again."

Veterans of the Second World War and the conflicts in the Falklands Islands and Iraq are among the mixed-age holidaymakers to visit Jersey and Swift believes the older soldiers have a lot to offer the younger members of the group.

"I realised early on that I had a choice," he said. "I could put my chin on my chest and let everyone do everything for me or I could pick my chin up, do what I want to do, how I want to do it and crack on," he said.

"If I visit Headley Court, Selly Oak or events such as this it's not what I say to injured soldiers but what I do. I show them that there is life after a serious injury and after the military. A lot stay in but some guys choose to get out – I want people to know that life does go on."

And thanks to Dawn's "swift" action, that life need not be without its perfect picture postcard moments.

From Afghanistan to the Channel Islands, one local woman has shown how the ripple effect of one sermon can unite injured Servicemen and their families. ■

Team on target: Husband and wife Richard and Dawn Woodhouse are appealing for more disabled Servicemen and women to take advantage of the Holidays for Heroes scheme and bring their families on a free trip to Jersey. To make a donation to the project visit www.justgiving.com/hols4heroesjersey



Jersey holiday scheme is a family affair for wounded Telic veteran

JON-Allan Butterworth was left with traumatic injuries after he was caught in a rocket attack while driving on the Contingency Operating Base at Basra Air Station.

After being hit during the heaviest period of indirect fire assaults on the southern Iraq military hub in July 2007, the Royal Air Force engineer had to have his left arm amputated above the elbow.

He spent a week on the critical list, but Butterworth soon began his rehabilitation and two years on he is training hard to qualify for the 2012 British Paralympic cycling team.

The 23-year-old first heard about the Holidays for Heroes charity through the British

Limbless Ex-Service Men's Association and his wife Chantel told *Soldier* that she was pleased to have taken part in something that recognised the needs of the loved ones of those seriously injured.

She added: "This is the first opportunity since Jon was injured that we have had the chance to do something as a family.

"I think the scheme is a great idea as the family often goes through the suffering too and it is so good to do something as a unit."

Oblivious to her father's disability, four-year-old Rae-Alexis Butterworth said that the only thing she could think of that was different about her father was that he has "big legs".





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Citizen soldiers

remember the last stand

**Britain's last National Servicemen
reflect on their time in uniform 50
years after the last intake started
their basic training ...**

Standing proud: A new soldier gets to grips with Army life during the era of mass conscription



Into the Army's assembly belt of humanity



Report: Cliff Caswell

TWAS an era when the fate of the world hung in the balance, when an unbearable tension existed between the Soviet Union and the West and a third world war seemed inevitable.

On the front line of Germany, British troops massed by the thousand prepared to counter the mighty Russian steamroller should the Reds decide to attack. Many of the young men were teenagers pulled from the comfort of civvy street to fulfil two years of National Service and experience a short, sharp dose of Army life.

This year marks the passing of half-a-century since the last of the citizen soldier generation was pressed into action in worldwide operations from Palestine to Korea. The era of conscription officially came to an end in late 1960 and Her Majesty's Armed Forces were returned to fully professional status.

But while National Service now only exists in the history books and on reality TV shows such as *Bad Lad's Army*, the issue of whether young people should again serve their country has been a talking point in the media and among politicians.

Most recently Prime Minister Gordon Brown threw his backing behind making

Combined Cadet Forces in schools more accessible. Tory leader David Cameron has proposed a citizen service, in which young people would undergo a six-week programme including charity work and physical training as a modern-day equivalent of a term in the Army.

Some quarters of the press have been more forthright in their call for conscription to be reintroduced. However, while some argue that a dose of Forces life did them good, others remain unconvinced that the system could work again, particularly as many are now unaware of the nature of the Army.

According to Professor Richard Holmes, a former lecturer at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst and an acclaimed military historian, the civilian public is now so distant from life in the Services that they have no understanding of it.

"The concept of conscription is fine if you are fighting a conflict of national survival, such as a world war, but it would not work today," he added. "In my view, the Armed Forces would not want it reintroduced either because of the money that would have to be spent on training large numbers of recruits.

"However, I remember growing up in the era of conscription and seeing officers and soldiers in their battle dress

all over the place. What has changed is the visibility – how often do you now see troops when you are out and about?

"They have become competent Signalmen in less than half the time normal before 1939. We have every reason to be proud of them"

"The Wire," Journal of the Royal Corps of Signals

"I don't think that the great British public has any real idea of what a soldier actually does on their behalf. Obviously people want to help through charities such as Help for Heroes, but there is more of an empathy with those who serve their country than a full understanding of what they do."

The end of National Service certainly marked a significant reduction in the ranks of the Armed Forces and the subsequent visibility of troops in public life. But for the thousands who were forced to give up two years of their teenage lives to military service, there are bittersweet memories of their time in uniform.

Many remain convinced that the

they came – and emerged as fighting soldiers



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experience helped them in their later civilian lives – and that young people today would benefit from a similar scheme – although they admit that the training and separation from loved ones had proved hard to bear.

“When I came to the end of my time in the Army I was pleased to leave, but after leaving I felt very glad I had been in,” said Jim Sidnell, who served with the King’s Royal Rifle Corps in North Africa and Germany from 1954-56.

“At the age of 18 I had not long left school and after being called I really missed the parties where you could meet girls. I also remember vividly being on guard duty one Christmas and wondering what my family was doing back home.”

Fellow soldier Ron Oliver believed that the National Service experience had served him well, and that the current generation could benefit from undergoing the same military training. “Before I went in I am ashamed to say that I was a naughty boy and I could have gone down for 18 months in prison after I found myself in trouble,” he said.

“But when I came up for sentence, the court was aware that I was about to go into the Army, and allowed me to go forward to do my basic training and serve in the ranks – what happened did me a great favour and

I’m extremely grateful for it.”

The system, however, was far less appealing for boxer Tony Kain, who was conscripted in one of the final National Service intakes during 1959 and went on to serve in Germany. “I managed to get myself tremendously fit and was always participating in sport,” he said. “I also made some really good mates.

“But to me the whole thing was semi-slavery and I hated doing it. As for my views on whether conscription would work today if it was brought back, I think it would be disastrous. What we need instead is full employment and decent wages.”

Whatever the feelings about the system at the time and disagreements over whether it could ever be introduced to the modern generation, National Servicemen were certainly held in very high regard by senior officers for their

vital contribution on operations.

Field Marshal Lord Bramall, a former Chief of the Defence Staff, summed up the feelings. “We might have a fully volunteer Army now on our operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, but the National Servicemen served during a crucial time in the Cold War – I would never have a word said against them,” he concluded. ■

“It is outrageous that the youth of today should be subject to this tedious, squalid and regimental discharge of an imaginary duty”

The late Mr. GILBERT HARDING

1. This is it. Home is far behind and ahead lies a new life in the Army ...
2. And at first it seems to be a life of continual queuing, the doctor ...
3. The tailor – and if he says it's a good fit, then it's a perfect fit ...
4. And then a lesson in packing a load of strange objects into a kitbag ...
5. Suddenly it all clicks into place and you're nearly a soldier ...
6. Arms swinging, heads up, shoulders back and marching like a veteran ...
7. And then it's all over. Lt Col A.B.M. Kavanagh says a personal farewell to his National Service “Dukes” ...
8. Two years have passed and the final parting with those once strange items of equipment is a goodbye to old friends ...
9. It's the last detail – handing in one's kit. Pictures: Soldier archive

Report: Stephen Tyler

Almost every way imaginable, Afghanistan presents soldiers with a vastly different proposition to any the British Army has faced in modern times.

Away from the urban environments found in Northern Ireland and the Balkans and without the clearly-defined areas of conflict experienced in Iraq, Op Herrick has required troops to fight a disparate enemy which strikes using unconventional tactics.

Thankfully, the nation's Servicemen and women have shown that they are more than up to the task. Using every ounce of their famed adaptability, they have enjoyed a series of hard-won victories against the Taliban and have set the standard for the rest of the world to follow.

Now their efforts are going to receive a timely boost from the top in the form of Op Entirety. The vision of Land Forces Commander-in-Chief Gen Sir David Richards will fine-tune the Field Army's structure, training and staffing to focus on achieving success in Afghanistan by switching the Army onto a campaign footing.

With everything from the way people are recruited to the kit they train with being tweaked, Op Entirety is set to ensure that Herrick-bound soldiers will be better-trained, better-equipped and better-prepared for the theatre than ever before.

Maj Ollie Stokes (PWRR), who is responsible for ensuring that Land Forces is correctly structured for operations, told *Soldier*: "Effectively you have Land Forces in terms of structure, people and how they are trained. What we needed to do was to adjust those three areas to make sure that they were best set up for delivering success in Afghanistan.

"Previously we had an organisation

that was tuned into an old style of war where armoured vehicles were crossing the plains of Iraq. This is about optimising the force structure to meet current requirements."

While big steps are being taken to ensure that the Army's kit and equipment is capable of delivering success in Afghanistan, Op Entirety's spotlight shines just as brightly on the recruitment, training, development and retention of soldiers.

Initiatives such as working more closely with personnel unable to deploy for medical reasons are already in place and the changes extend to family life where more money has been made available for relationship counselling and for the running of HIVES.

The concept of One Army recruiting allows would-be soldiers to choose right from the start whether a full- or part-time career suits

them best, while the cream of the new enlistees are now identified early on and put to the front of the queue for training.

Director General Personnel Maj Gen Andrew Gregory explained that attracting and keeping hold of people of the right quality is a fundamental part of ensuring that the shift to a campaign footing is a success.

"The key thing for me is making sure that we have people of sufficient quality, both now and in the future, to cope with the complexities of Afghanistan and similar operations," he said.

"That means getting young people coming in who are capable of dealing with those challenges, but also retaining the irreplaceable experience of those who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan."

Training soldiers so that they are perfectly



Future footing

Op Entirety set to deliver fresh focus for Herrick-bound troops

prepared for the unique challenges posed by Helmand province is a tall order, but theatre-specific scenarios introduced thanks to Op Entirety are helping to make it a reality.

The £9m Afghan village built at Stanta (Pages 54-55) allows troops to familiarise themselves with the sights, sounds and culture of Afghanistan ahead of deployment better than the generic Fibua areas used previously.

Likewise, vehicles and other equipment that do not play a part in Herrick have slipped down the training pecking order so that soldiers practice with the exact kit they can expect to use in theatre.

Time spent on stag or supporting other units' training while not on tour have also been reduced with the recruitment of MPGSS staff and contract security staff.

Maj Gen Gregory added: "One of the key concerns has been the pressure placed on soldiers' time, both before and after

their operational deployments.

"There has been a feeling that some of the activities they have been doing have been unnecessary and not relevant to what's happening in Afghanistan. We are absolutely focused on those things that are important and if the training is not relevant we have pared it back.

"This is a refinement of what we are already doing. Overall, we want to make sure that people feel that the Army is the right organisation for them to become a part of and that it provides the right support, career development and allowances to them and

their families to make them want to stay in it."

Although Op Entirety has its gaze fixed on Helmand, everything that has been implemented is reversible and can be reapplied to any future conflicts the Army finds itself involved in.

Commander Field Army Lt Gen Graeme Lamb, pictured right, said that the unsurpassed quality of modern soldiers combined with a concentration on specific campaigns would stand the Service in good stead.

"What we have now are some hugely experienced young soldiers. This Army has never been in better shape and the amount of combat experience has not been matched this side of the 1940s.

"I think there is a sense of purpose and selflessness in soldiering and it's about being part of a band of brothers and sisters. Op Entirety is absolutely necessary because there is a need for everybody to be moving in the same direction, both for the current fight and to set ourselves up for what we consider to be the normal order of a troubled world in the 21st Century." ■

'This Army has never been in better shape and the amount of combat experience has not been matched this side of the 1940s'



Fresh focus: Commander Field Army Lt Gen Graeme Lamb (above) said moving to a campaign footing will make troops better prepared for Afghanistan than ever before

Report: Cliff Caswell
Pictures: Steve Dock

IT was a terrifying snapshot of the life-or-death decisions faced daily by British soldiers patrolling the unpredictable front lines of southern Afghanistan.

The main street of the village in Helmand province had seemed entirely peaceful. The residents were massed in the marketplace, meeting and trading. Youngsters were flying a kite and the elders had gathered to smoke pipes in a stall at the far end of the compound. The air was filled with Pashto chatter and music.

There was a noticeable excitement as the soldiers approached, strung out in an extended

line. Enterprising shopkeepers moved to intercept them with bottles of orange juice and water and a hospitable villager appeared with a tray of drinks. In the commotion, nobody seemed to have noticed the man in the long robes who had emerged on the scene and blended in with the rhythm of life.

It was the experience and astuteness of a young soldier that picked out the unusual man in the crowd. As the suicide bomber approached, the peacekeeper opened fire with a warning shot. When this failed to have any effect, the second round was lethal but the attacker managed to detonate his deadly payload.

The explosion was followed by pandemonium. Villagers were sent running for cover and, as the smoke cleared, a stall holder could be seen writhing on the ground, both legs sawn off at the knee and a pool of blood where he had stood.

In the confusion the troops moved to carry out their drills to secure the area and evacuate, grimly aware that a further attack could happen at any moment.

Fortunately, it was only an exercise serial on this occasion. Far from the searing heat of Helmand, this authentic village was created in the heart of the English countryside in Norfolk. Populated by real-life Afghan nationals, a contingent of former Gurkhas who play the terrorists and security forces and amputee

actors who bring realism to casualty situations, it has been taking training to a new level.

"This is all about realism and complete immersion in the situation," said Col Richard Westley, commander of the Operational Training and Advisory Group (Optag) which organised the building of the village. "We wanted realism and that is what there is – here you have the 13-foot-high compound walls and the call to prayer from the mosque. We have been relentless in making our serials as lifelike as possible.

"A lot of the stuff we do here is very kinetic because soldiers have to know the skills to

get out of trouble when a situation is going wrong. People must be exposed to extremes in training – if they are not they will freeze on operations."

The Afghan complex, which opened on the Stanta training area in Thetford this year, marks a huge step forward for troops getting to grips with the Op Herrick environment. As well as the centrepiece of a rural village complete with authentic compounds and an urban setting of larger buildings, there are also forward operating bases and areas where troops can rehearse their IED drills.

Previously instructors had to make do and improvise with older Fighting in Built Up Area buildings based on locations in Europe and Northern Ireland which, despite their creativity, were often less-than-convincing. According to Col Westley, giving soldiers an accurate snapshot of what they are likely to face, as well as introducing them to the people they will come across in theatre, is vital.

"We are sending our young men and women on very demanding operations, and we have to make training effective," he said. "One of the issues is that if you get the cultural piece wrong, you can turn an entire village against you in minutes."

The emphasis on making sure troops understand the Afghan way of life is well appreciated. Former Kabul resident Fazel Beria, who advises soldiers on how to conduct themselves around Afghan people, believed the British had been

• This is all about realism and complete immersion in the situation •

Theatrical dramas

Mock Afghan village prepares troops for Helmand's gritty reality



gaining trust for the respect they had shown during their patrols in Helmand.

"They take to the cultural side of things well, and the village here in Norfolk helps them take their understanding to a new level," he said. "Pashto Wali is a code – Islam forms part of it but it also encompasses values of hospitality, protection and revenge.

"We make sure that we make plenty of training opportunities available, including situations when troops will see village elders in shuras – or meetings – so when they arrive in Afghanistan, they will not make mistakes."

For the troops from 11 Light Brigade who

are currently being put through their paces at Stanta in preparation for deployment to Op Herrick later this year, the new facilities are providing an invaluable opportunity.

CSgt Simon Jones (1 R Welsh) admitted that the village had made training more realistic. "I've been in Now Zad and Musa Qaleh before and they looked like this," he said. "It's really good for the lads to have this opportunity and get to grips with the tight alleyways and high walls they will face."

Fus Dewi Griffiths (1 R Welsh) agreed. "The villages here look a lot like Afghanistan," he

said. "Our training has been really good, and we've had a lot of focus on dealing with IEDs and suicide bombers."

With authentic situations being tested in a realistic environment, British troops have never been better prepared for the rigours of Op Herrick. Ready to deal with the ambush tactics of Taliban insurgents and armed with a full knowledge of Pashto culture, they already have a battle-winning edge.

But commanders are well aware that the pace of training will not stop. With a long haul expected in Afghanistan, and Optag training being expanded, keeping personnel a step ahead of a ruthless enemy will be the ultimate key to success. ■





1 Nuts and bolts

BY signing up as engineers, women can get behind the wheel of the mammoth Trojan and Titan armoured fighting vehicles and learn how to operate them in arduous battlefield conditions. Ideal for those who like to get their hands dirty, the role also trains sappers how to lay bridges and use mine ploughs and provides them with a grounding in construction techniques. After basic training, soldiers head for the Royal School of Military Engineering where they get hands-on experience in laying and clearing mines, placing demolition charges and constructing bridges before beginning Military Engineer (Armoured Engineer) trade training in Bovington.

7 Top of the cops

A BUSY role both on and off operations, the Royal Military Police are responsible for maintaining law and order and military discipline in the Army. The nature of the job means that military police can be deployed anywhere in the world to support units and ensure that crime is clamped down on. Specialisms include close protection and class one corporals can apply to move into the special investigations branch, the Army's equivalent of the CID.



2 It's good to talk

IN an Army where effective communication can mean the difference between operational success and failure, the people responsible for keeping the Service's kit ticking play an undeniably key role. As well as learning all there is to know about the deployment, maintenance and use of information communications systems, women choosing the Royal Signals career path deal with satellite communications and wireless and internet-based systems. Rising to the top in military comms also gives Army signallers the chance to study for internationally-recognised IT qualifications that are highly sought after on civvy street.

3 Pooch power

OUR four-legged friends offer much more than a wet nose and a wagging tail on operations and it is the job of specialist handlers to ensure the canines are looked after, well-trained and ready for action. Dog trainers have to be physically fit to keep up with their charges, but they also require high levels of patience and understanding and have to be ready to work long, unsociable hours. Whether it's looking after a deadly protection animal or bonding with a sniffer dog trained to hunt out even the smallest trace of explosive, serving in the Royal Army Veterinary Corps provides soldiers with a skill-set that is unparalleled outside of the military.

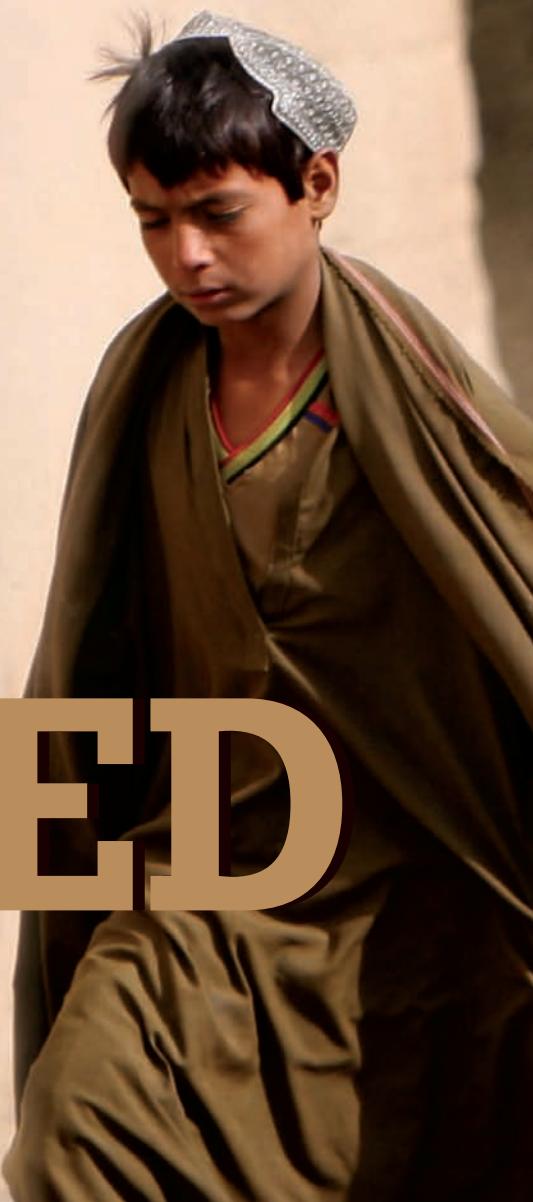
8 Keep on trucking

IF variety is what floats your boat, look no further than a career as a driver with the Royal Logistic Corps. Operating everywhere from the heat of Helmand to the frozen expanses of the Arctic, RLC drivers operate, maintain and service most military vehicles, including Land Rovers, load-carrying trucks, trailers and rough-terrain forklift trucks. Promotion opportunities are good and loggie drivers can end up doing anything from instructing to being a staff car driver for a senior officer.



RANKED

JOBS FOR THE GIRLS





4 Bright sparks

KNOWLEDGE is power and signing up to serve in the Intelligence Corps ensures that soldiers know what is going on at the very front line of operations. The scope of options available is huge – recruits can choose to specialise in anything from human, imagery and signals intelligence to IT security. The work can be challenging and Operator Military Intelligence (OPMI) soldiers need high levels of self-motivation and commitment, but the opportunity to operate in such a varied role makes this a popular choice with both sexes. In addition, the civilian defence industry and intelligence community are crying out for people with OPMI experience.

5 Flying high

THE Army's battle-winning helicopters strike fear into the hearts of the Taliban in Afghanistan and it is only thanks to the men and women of the Army Air Corps that they are able to have such an effect. The troops work with aircraft including the Apache and Lynx and are expected to defend forward operating bases and arming and refuelling points. Requiring a good standard of education and physical fitness, being an AAC soldier also opens up the opportunity to learn how to drive everything from Land Rovers to refuelling tankers.

6 Big guns

WEIGHING in at 45 tonnes and able to reach speeds of 55kmh, the AS90 is a hefty piece of kit which both males and females can operate. Gunners assigned to the self-propelled howitzer learn how to move, maintain and fire the weapon, which is capable of spitting out a three-shot salvo in just ten seconds. As well as having to be physically strong enough to shift the gun's hefty 43kg shells, AS90 gunners require a good degree of mental dexterity in order to operate the weapon's onboard computer systems. Each of the Army's five AS90 regiments, which are based in both the UK and Germany, has a strong team spirit, so going to work is never dull.



STEROIDS



Hardly likely to bowl a Maiden over

Steroid abuse can cause shrinkage of Testicles and Impotence in men

Always check with your RMO if you are considering using any performance enhancing substance



9 Weapons experts

WITH the Army's weapons seeing an unprecedented amount of use in operational theatres in recent years, it is vital that the people in charge of repairing and maintaining them are up to the task.

Luckily, the armourers from the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers are highly-trained and have the specialist knowledge required to safely work on everything from rifles to howitzers. Armourers are expected to know each of the weapons inside out and with good reason – even the slightest mistake can render a gun ineffective. Because of the nature of where the weapons are used, armourers can find themselves working in tough conditions deep in hostile territory.



10 Life savers

AS the Army's experts on emergency first aid, combat medical technicians (CMTs) are a vital front-line asset. Often operating in high-pressure environments, CMTs use their life-saving specialist knowledge to come to the aid of surgical, medical and psychiatric patients. The rigours of combat in Afghanistan mean that CMTs have to be ready, willing and able to move at short notice and must be capable of holding their nerve in any situation. Trade training for the job takes 23 weeks split into three phases which cover everything from basic theory to pharmacy and include a four-week placement in medical centre and ambulance station environments. Additional training can result in CMTs earning NVQ and City & Guilds qualifications. Highly-respected throughout the Army, CMTs also play an important role in supporting Army doctors back in barracks.

Last month

BEST BITS OF BEING AN ARMY BRIDE

1. Homecoming
2. Community
3. Travel
4. Friends
5. Children
6. Social life
7. Spring cleaning
8. Job security
9. Men in uniform
10. Absence

May's Ranked

TELIC TALKING POINTS

1. Is this the way
2. Arabian Knights
3. Radio gaga
4. Vote of approval
5. Lynx tragedy
6. Gardener's world
7. Great Danes
8. Top of the pops
9. Master speaker
10. Demolition day

April's Ranked

GREATEST SPORTING MOMENTS

1. Dame at the double
2. Ruck star
3. Desert oar-kid
4. Nagano nod
5. Golden gloves
6. Taylor-made move
7. Ice queen
8. Medal soldier
9. Melbourne master
10. Old man winter

March's Ranked

GREATEST BATTLEFIELD BREAKTHROUGHS

1. Penicillin
2. Chain mail
3. The rifle
4. Gore-Tex
5. Bowman
6. Bailey bridge
7. T34
8. Polygonal fortress
9. Barbed wire
10. Gaming

Author

CURRENTLY serving as a brigade recruitment adviser in Aldershot, SSgt Sandra Borrowdale is well-versed in the opportunities available to female soldiers in the modern British Army. After signing up as a driver in the Royal Corps of Transport in 1984, she deployed on operations to Bosnia, Kosovo and Northern Ireland before moving into a recruiting role in The Strand, in London. SSgt Borrowdale said: "There are a lot more opportunities for women now. The jobs are more interesting and they are better integrated than when I started. Women can do the same as the guys in a lot of cases."

● Next month's *Ranked* looks at the best Army charity events. Email suggestions to styler@soldiermagazine.co.uk ■



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Title challenge

Heidi “Danger” Mines lives up to her name on explosive course

PASSED
ARMY 5 SOLDIER 2



Student teacher: *Soldier's* Heidi Mines gets some assistance from Spr Tom Heakin (RE) during the Mine Awareness Instructor course at Gibraltar Barracks



Report: Heidi Mines
Pictures: Graeme Main

It would be fair to say that over the years my family name has been the cause of much amusement.

From "Danger Mines" to "Coal Mines" and "Mine's a big one", I have embraced my surname and tried to revel in the knowledge that I am fairly unique.

And so, as I accepted the jibes from the clever corporal who signed me in to Gibraltar Barracks to begin my Mine Awareness Instructor (MAI) course, I held my head high and moved along.

Armed with only my name and a basic knowledge of mines, mainly from films such as *Behind Enemy Lines* that depict beautiful people hopping daintily over buried explosives, I felt the challenge of passing the MAI course was in the bag.

How very wrong I was, I thought, as I crept silently to the back of the class where my fellow students from all three Services had already gathered.

I hoped the ground would swallow me whole when the class of 20 scary-looking, burly personnel turned around in bemusement as my name was read out from the nominal roll.

I was introduced to the group by the course leader as Heidi Mines from *Soldier* – a reporter attempting to pass the course for a *Media Ops* challenge.

Unfortunately, he added the caveat that anything anyone said to me could be written down and used "as evidence". As a result I was initially avoided like the plague.

But even so, by the end of my first day a friendly Para had showed me how to mould PE4 explosive in order to blow up a feather-stuffed pair of trousers.

The demonstration was designed to show the impact of a mine and as the bottoms flew through the air I felt a sense of achievement and that perhaps things were not as bad as they had first seemed.

Anti-personnel mines, anti-vehicle mines, fragmentation mines, Soviet-legacy mines, Bosnian-mines – details of them all are now embedded in my memory. Basically, name the device and I can identify it.

But I found personal accounts of those injured in mine strikes hard to listen to and the tragic and terrifying situations that the soldiers had found themselves in a stark taste of reality.

I learned how great hindsight is and how easy it is to judge when you are not the one in a compromising situation.

As the Powerpoint demonstrations rolled on during the second day, the sheer value of the information that is taught on the course, which is offered to sergeants and above by the Mine Information and Training Centre wing, became apparent.

The instructors assessed my presentation skills on the third day when the group was asked to deliver individual talks on a section of the programme.

We were advised to draw on personal experiences of situations with mines – I chose to discuss my major faux pas at Kabul International Airport.

During my first visit to the Afghan capital I walked from the Hercules straight onto the airstrip where, feeling weary and queasy after my flight, I started to look for a comfy spot on the hard rocky terrain at the edge of the runway.

I thought I had identified a good area to sit down when the bark of a huge warrant officer tore through every fibre of my being. He screamed that I was about to make myself at home in an area scattered with mines and to quickly turn around before I met with a nasty accident.

Although feeling fairly stupid, unbelievably my tale was a talking point in recent months as an Italian soldier suffered

a serious injury while running around the perimeter of Kabul's military airbase.

My biggest discovery on the course was that the threat of mines are even inside some camps and forward operating bases as erosion can cause them to move.

The challenge to pass the course was a tough and very real one and presenting to hardened soldiers with decades of experience between them was terrifying.

For one who is known to talk the hind legs off a donkey, I was remarkably quiet during my sessions in small teams – I simply felt embarrassed by the wealth of military knowledge around the table.

But people were surprisingly responsive to my input when recalling national news stories covering high profile mine attacks on British soldiers and so I did have something to bring to the party, however small.

I also felt a tad disappointed that the type of mine avoidance portrayed by the likes of *Rambo*, who simply replaces his foot with a large stone and carries on walking after stepping on a device, doesn't tend to happen in real life.

Yet, somehow, I passed the course. Despite my initial reservations I am now a qualified MAI which proved that after all these years, my family name is actually quite apt.

I accepted my certificate to a chorus of applause tainted by a few boos and I left the unit experiencing mixed feelings.

Although keen to brag of my first *Media Ops* victory and impart my newly-acquired knowledge to the rest of the *Soldier* editorial team, who regularly deploy to operational areas, my thoughts were firmly with the Servicemen and women who battle daily with the Taliban in one of the most mined countries in the world. ■

'The challenge to pass the course was a tough and very real one and presenting to hardened soldiers with decades of experience between them was terrifying'



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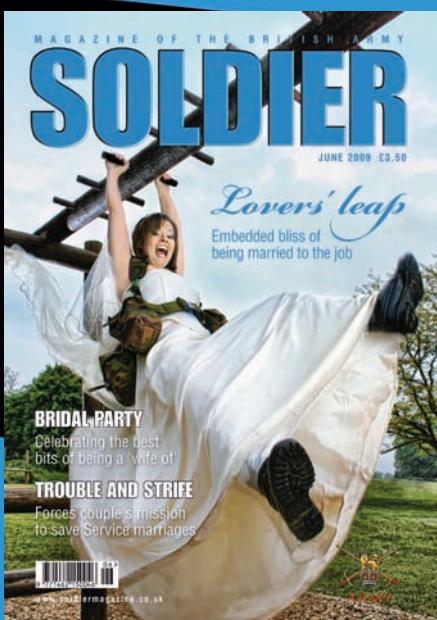
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YOUR letters provide an insight into the issues at the top of soldiers' agendas ... but please be brief. Emails (mail@soldiermagazine.co.uk) must include your name and location (although we won't publish them if you ask us not to). We reserve the right 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.

Royle Family extras? My arse

MY colleagues and I were shocked and appalled after reading the editorial in June's issue of *Soldier*. I for one take offence at being compared to an extra in *The Royle Family*.

All those in the office where I work wear a clean shirt and tie, their slacks are pressed and shoes are shined. We do this not because we have to but because we want to turn up at work smartly dressed.

We could come to the office in string vests and flip-flops because, in the Civil Service, there is no dress code. Do not tar everybody with the same brush.

In your editorial you also state that Service couples have more tenacity to make relationships work than their civilian counterparts. Is it tenacity or the nannying of the military structure?

When was the last time soldiers had to worry about dental bills, doctors appointments, paying for clothes to wear to work or moving house (with respect of solicitors and estate agents)?

For every problem a serving soldier may have the military system has someone they can turn to for help and advice. Not so the civilian worker.

No wonder so many retired Servicemen and women find life difficult when they



Fashion aficionado: *Soldier*'s editor Stephen Tyler gives troops' attire a thumbs up

Picture: Copyright © BBC

return to civvy street. I have rarely read such a one-sided, ill-conceived editorial. – George Packman, DFSS, Worthy Down.

The editor, kicking off his flip-flops and

adjusting his string vest, writes: I don't recall singling out civil servants, but stand by my assertion that, compared to many other professions, those in uniform are clear winners in the best-dressed stakes.

Second helpings, please

I'VE just completed a Telic tour and would like to head out on operations again – this time to Afghanistan at the end of this year.

However, I've been told that there is a new policy under review which will prevent soldiers from being deployed again so soon.

What are the details of this new policy and why is it that, even though I'm volunteering for this second tour, I might be forced to miss out? – Name and address supplied.

Maj Julia Parke-Robinson, SO2 Soldier Policy, Director Manning (A), responds:

There is no new policy under review regarding tour intervals.

The individual guidelines are based upon a tour interval of 24 months between six-month tours. This marks a level of separated service which is likely to be sustainable without long-term damage to morale. It also allows for professional and personal activities, which are essential to refresh an individual before future operations. This includes leave and career courses essential for promotion.



"I hear that Sgt Eccles is off to Helmand again. My Susie says he'll do anything to escape the clutches of his nagging wife."

While it is not illegal for you to deploy on operations again so soon, it would not normally be recommended from a duty of care perspective.

PS . . .

I RECENTLY moved into the warrant officers' and sergeants' mess and have realised that, as a single soldier, I am paying more than double the subscriptions rate of a married soldier.

I've been told this price difference is attributed to catering facilities, but as we are on a Pay As You Dine (PAYD) site, married personnel are entitled to eat in the mess too. Is it not time that the regulations caught up with the changing Army? – Sgt Shinkin.

Brig Mike Griffiths, DPS(A), replies: I believe that you are referring to the direction in Queen's Regulations that livers-out should pay half the rate of mess subscriptions as a liver-in.

Subscriptions are for all mess facilities not just catering. It is a reasonable assumption that you, as a liver-in, have far more opportunity to gain benefit from the communal facilities of the mess, and I therefore think it fair that you should make a larger contribution.

That said, the rules were written prior to PAYD and my staff are examining ways of updating them to better reflect how people live in messes today.

'Length does matter'

WHY is the value of the Army's resettlement grant (£534) the same for a soldier who has completed five years in uniform as it is for a soldier who has completed 22 years of service?

I appreciate that the length of Graduated Resettlement Time (GRT) is greater for those who have been in the system longer, but surely this system is unfair? There is very little incentive resettlement wise to remain in the Service.

Why not just award resettlement grants in cash and on a sliding scale in proportion to the amount of GRT an individual is entitled to? — Name and address supplied.

Lt Cdr D J Elsey, Directorate Resettlement, responds: £534 will purchase four weeks of contract-funded training at the Resettlement Training Centre (RTC), which delivers many of the most popular vocational and educational courses demanded by Service Leavers (SL).

SL can also elect to purchase training outside of the RTC.

Any remaining GRT may be expended on other transition activities that are at no cost to the SL. Civilian work attachments,

house hunting, interviews and job fairs are all supported as duty activities.

Recent changes to policy have also enabled SL to use their Individual Resettlement Training Course (IRTC) in concert with Enhanced Learning Credits or Standard Learning Credits.

Provision is, in the main, dependent upon length of service. It is also the case that those who have served longer have benefited from accredited through-career training and experience, which makes them highly-employable. This is reflected in the statistics; some 94 per cent of SL who wish to work are in employment within six months of discharge.

The writer also proposes the idea of a one-off resettlement grant. The directorate has previously explored this option but Treasury rules on the award of allowances as cash grants have prevented the development of this idea.

Current work to uplift the IRTC grant on a cost neutral basis (based on maximising local training provision and saving on travel and subsistence costs) is ongoing. The aim remains to increase the grant, but no promises can be made.

PS . . .

IN May's issue Mrs Rachael Langley warned *Soldier* readers that dependants of working age who are not already in the British system, have spent more than six months out of the country in a tax year and have not worked, are not entitled to UK Job Seekers Allowance.

I would like to confirm to readers that the MoD is fully aware of this and that the Government made a commitment to tackle the issue in last year's Service Personnel Command Paper. The aim is to address:

- The reduced ability of spouses/civil partners to maintain a National Insurance contribution record during accompanied assignments overseas (potentially impacting on both state pension and accessing contribution- and working age-based benefits such as Job Seekers Allowance).

- Families not being treated as if they were in the UK when being assessed for eligibility to certain state entitlements.

The MoD is currently working with both the Department for Work and Pensions and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs to change both the law and application/assessment process. On current planning these changes will come into effect next year.

Families will be notified through the chain of command when we know more. — *Brig Mike Griffiths, DPS(A)*.



BEFORE I left the Army in 1996 there was talk of National Vocational Qualifications being given out to those who had completed Education Proficiency Certificates and SNCO courses. Is this true or a myth? If certificates were issued, how can I obtain mine? — *M C Taylor (ex-Sgt, RLC)*.

Maj Paul Hair, S02 Accreditation DETS(A), replies: This letter highlights the merit of taking up accredited civilian qualifications immediately on completion of Army courses.

Regrettably, and not uncommonly, the writer has left it too late to take advantage of the accreditation that was on offer at the time. Awarding bodies generally require applicants to take up qualifications within 18 months of course completion.

That said, their experience may still count towards achieving a similar qualification, albeit with extra work and at greater expense. Contact the Army Accreditation Manager on 01980 618107 for more detailed advice on how to do this. There are details at www.armynet.mod.uk of the qualifications available to those who successfully complete Command Leadership and Management.

Qualification freeze

I JOINED the Royal Engineers at the age of 16 in September 2002 and was assured that I would obtain a trade for life and receive a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level three after completing my course as a refrigeration and air conditioning engineer.

Two years after joining up the qualification was still being advertised as an incentive, but at the end of my class two trade course I was not given the opportunity to gain the qualification and was told the NVQ would follow the class one course.

Since then I've discovered that is not the case and we will not obtain the NVQ or any other qualification for that matter. The trade won't even renew my Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) handling and brazing qualification, which is key to my job.

Gaining professional qualifications was a huge factor in my decision to serve and the whole of my trade course feel cheated and let down by the Army. — *LCpl D Salt, RE*.

Lt Col Peter Sonnex, COS HQ RSME, writes: Attaining civilian qualifications for military training is challenging. Awarding bodies often change award criteria, adding to the challenge of matching their and our requirements.

The Royal School of Mechanical Engineering and Royal Engineer Continuous Personal Development team lobby hard on behalf of our soldiers to ensure civilian qualification opportunities are maximised, but this must be achieved within the military training context to meet the operational requirements of the Army and Defence first.

In the case of Fitter Air Conditioning and Refrigeration, the awarding body withdrew its provision for Military Engineer class two and class one training. A new awarding body, SEMTA, is now able to authorise a level two award. Work is ongoing to establish something suitable for our class one soldiers.

Short specialist courses have been established to address the three-year time limit on CITB handling and brazing qualifications. The new courses have yet to be scheduled. LCpl Salt will be eligible to attend both courses to meet the operational requirement for the trade.

We will ensure all courses are fully briefed, imparting an understanding that goalposts do move.

Chips down as chef raises the steaks in PAYD debate

AFTER considering Pay As You Dine (PAYD) in detail I find it difficult to see how the changes it brings benefit our Armed Forces in any way.

As a military chef with more than 16 years of service I have seen many changes within my trade. This evolutionary journey has taken me from working with the old fashioned "slop jockey" through redundancy in the early 1990s, to cooking fine dining food for dignitaries. Now I find myself having come full circle.

I have worked in two PAYD sites and the only constant has been the objective of making money. The thinking behind the business seems to be to serve basic nutritional food using the cheapest ingredients so that the customer plumps for something "tastier" from the retail offers, which is where the contractor profits.

The retail options are inevitably fast food-style fried dishes which, although sometimes served with a type of salad, are largely unhealthy.

This trend is reason for concern, not only in respect of customers' long term health, but also with regard to a skills fade in military chefs. Privates and lance corporals are beginning to miss out on a lot of training opportunities to enhance their culinary skills because of the budgetary restrictions placed upon them.

It is becoming more and more apparent that the junior chefs are showing a lack of artistic flair within operational kitchens because they constantly have to follow PAYD recipe cards within their units.

The effect of this is combated by the continued presence of "the old school", who prop up the team. Eventually these experienced chefs will progress through the ranks, moving away from the stoves. What will we do then? Just contract out all our catering and use the already overstretched Central Volunteer Headquarters' chefs to fill in operational gaps?
– Name and address supplied.

Maj Gerry Young, Food Services, HQ Land Forces, responds: The role of the RLC chef has clearly changed over the past few years with the onset of Catering Retail and Leisure, of which PAYD is a key component. The key role in barracks remains the same; to ensure consumers are given appetising meals which are good value for money.

The concerns noted are addressed by current policy and it is the responsibility of the more senior caterers and the commercial partners to ensure these requirements are adhered to:

- Unhealthy food – the core meal should be available throughout core hours and is to offer a nutritionally-balanced, healthy selection.
- Skills fade – the core meal is to



contain dishes which will ensure catering skills of RLC chefs are maintained.

- Cheap ingredients – core meals are prepared within a limited budget; it is up to the chefs to use their skills to ensure they are presented in an appetising manner. Ingredients supplied by the contractor should adhere to MoD Food Standard Inputs.

- Artistic flair – all chefs should be given the opportunity during exercises, training and functions to enhance their skills and show panache.

For day-to-day requirements, whether at a PAYD site or on ops/exercise, it is essential that recipes are followed in order that a nutritionally-balanced meal is delivered within budget.

- Stepping away from the stoves – the key role of chef supervisors (Cplis/Sgts) is to ensure they and their team deliver quality meals. It is not until they attain management status (SSgt/WO) that they should move away from the stoves to manage the catering output.

- PAYD is here to stay but the provision of proper meals utilising proper cooking techniques is still a key requirement. It is up to the catering managers and the more senior catering staff to ensure that this is being delivered along with the maintenance of core skills.

PS . . .



ARMED FORCES DAY
27 JUNE

THE MoD encouraged councils, businesses and households across the country to show their support for Britain's Services by flying a special flag on Armed Forces Day last month.

While this action was welcome, the Government and MoD are still ignoring long-standing demands from veterans for due recognition in the form of a National Defence Medal. – Tony Morland, chairman of the National Defence Medal Society, Salisbury.

Help with home run?

I RECENTLY separated from my wife, who remains living in the family home with my two young children.

As I'm the owner of the property, continue to pay the mortgage and still regularly visit to spend time with my children, surely I'm entitled to Get You Home Travel (GYH(T)) allowance.

I've been told to the contrary. – Name and address supplied.

Brig Mike Griffiths, DPS(A), replies: The rules for GYH(T) have been evolving since JPA was introduced to ensure that only genuine claimants are supported. In order to claim the allowance you must prove commitment to a qualifying address by providing four of the documents from the

following list (one from each of the three groups and an additional one from any of the groups):

- Group one – mortgage or land registry documents; tenancy agreement (including details of the property).

- Group two – utility bill (excludes mobile phone bills and must be dated within the last four months); Council Tax bill (current year); buildings/contents insurance (current year); direct debit or bank evidence of payment of any of the above (to be dated within the last four months); evidence of inclusion on the current electoral register.

- Group three – solicitor's or estate agent's letter regarding the purchase or letting of the property.

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Downbeat about downgrading

FOR a number of years I've been downgraded due to a serious sports injury. Unfortunately, the injury has never fully healed and I am unable to participate in activities such as running, which involves impact to the lower limbs.

Consequently I can't carry out an Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT) and prove that I have a good level of comparable fitness.

Would it be feasible for the Army Physical Training Corps (APTC) to devise a test for downgraded personnel? The standard for passing this test could be set by taking a sample of those who complete the APFT and measuring their best efforts on a rowing machine and cross trainer.

Introducing a downgraded APFT would ensure that the vast majority of personnel have to meet mandatory fitness levels, and would serve both as an incentive to regain fitness and to dissuade anybody from feigning injury.

Such a test would allow those like myself to feel slightly better about our downgraded status. — **Sgt D Collins, KRH LAD.**

Lt Col Ian Davidson, Land Forces Training, responds: I empathise and congratulate Sgt Collins on his desire to get fitter and acknowledge it can be a difficult process



to undertake. His suggestion that the Army should devise a test for those unable to demonstrate their fitness in other areas is a worthy ambition.

We must recognise that some downgraded personnel are extremely fit but can never be upgraded because of the need to take further precautions due to medical risk factors.



Pain in the leg: A radiologist with 16 Close Support Medical Regiment, RAMC assesses a limb injury during Op Telic 1

Picture: Mike Weston

Having taken advice from the medical branch and HQ APTC, the conclusion is that no two downgraded people are the same and it would be difficult to achieve comparability with a single test across the spectrum of injury/downgrading. For example, someone downgraded for asthma versus an individual with a badly-healed fracture of the leg.

Offsetting cost of offspring

MY daughter has just turned two and to date I have paid out more than £14,000 in childcare costs. What a relief Childcare Vouchers are!

Why does the allowance offered to Service personnel who put their children in private education not stretch to assist those paying for early childcare? Even a helping hand would be appreciated. — **WO2 V Hawtree.**

Brig Mike Griffiths, DPS(A), writes: Continuity of Education Allowance (CEA) exists to assist Service personnel to achieve continuity of education for their child(ren) that would otherwise be denied in the maintained day school sector if their child(ren) accompanied them on frequent assignments both at home and overseas.

CEA is not an educational subsidy. Continuity is most relevant for children in a structured school syllabus, which is generally those aged eight to 18; hence continuity is not generally required for those in childcare or the early stages of education.

There is a substantial amount of help already available from the Government for working parents.

When your daughter turns three, she will be entitled to 12-and-a-half hours of free early years' education a week, for 38 weeks a year.



As you have identified, a Government Childcare Voucher scheme also exists, which the MoD has signed up to using Sodexho as the commercial provider.

The arrangement is through a salary sacrifice scheme whereby the soldier elects to take part of their salary in Childcare Vouchers.

The value of vouchers taken is income tax- and National Insurance-free so there is a significant saving to be made.

Finally, depending on their circumstances, some soldiers may be eligible for Working Tax Credits, which include a childcare element.

I FULLY support the views of Maj Botsford, "Our wounded personnel have earned their stripes" (May), and believe that those killed or injured while serving their country are not properly recognised.

A medal of some description should be sanctioned as soon as possible.

MPs from all parties claim to support our troops and are always saying how proud they are of them, so it's about time they all got together and did a little bit extra for our wounded personnel. — **Jimmy Downey, ex-RAOC (1965-87).**

Man down: Troops from 11 Light Brigade's Brigade Reconnaissance Force evacuate a simulated casualty during pre-deployment training in South Africa





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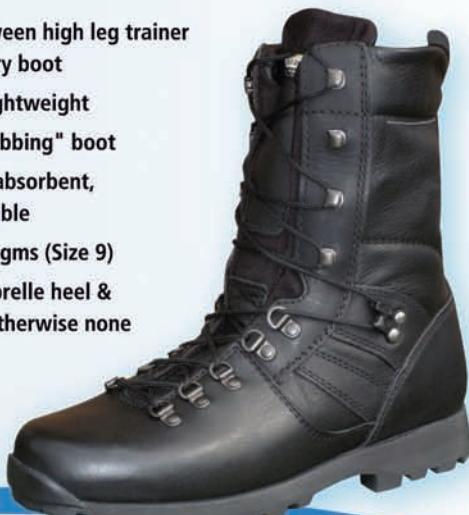
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Recognise skills, not seniority

AM writing to voice a gripe on the subject of the qualifying criteria for the City & Guilds senior awards in leadership and management.

These vocational qualifications are widely recognised and are a very useful addition to an individual's CV.

However, I'd like to know who decided on their qualifying criteria, which are based purely on rank and don't seem to take into account experience or skills.

To qualify for the "licentiate" the eligibility for Other Ranks is substantive sergeant; for "graduateship" it is staff sergeant with two years in substantive rank; and for "membership" it is warrant officer class one with two years in substantive rank.

I don't believe that this is a fair system as little weight is placed on actual experience. For example, an Infantry corporal is likely to be comfortable managing a platoon-sized group, whereas a staff sergeant in the AGC may never have managed a group more than four or five in number.

Wouldn't it be fairer to have a qualifying criteria based on actual management experience? An additional written examination could be used to determine the requisite level of academic proficiency. – *Name and address supplied.*

Maj Paul Hair, SO2 Accreditation DETS(A), responds: Thank you for highlighting the value of these awards. Last year more than 1,000 Army personnel benefited from the very preferable arrangements which help recognise the abilities of our people.

Infantry advantage: A private soldier from RGBW (now Rifles) prepares to brief his section ahead of a patrol on Exercise Red Stripe in Jamaica. Such early exposure to leadership is commonplace for those in the Teeth Arms



Picture: Steve Dolk

City & Guilds is the awarding body and defined the qualifying criteria following consultation on the typical education, training and experience of Forces personnel across the three Services.

Your assertion that the awards are based upon rank, not skills or experience, is not entirely correct. The awards are based upon management and leadership experience, level of responsibility, years of seniority and not on numbers of people under command.

In the British Army, experience, skills,

responsibility and quality are recognised by progression through the rank structure. Conducting an individual assessment and examination of each applicant's management experiences may be fairer but it is not practical.

However, all applicants do have to provide a two-page CV to support their application. Management accreditation is also available on completion of the Army's Command Leadership and Management course and bespoke awards are available from a number of other providers.



I APPRECIATE that a great deal has already been said about the Pingat Jasa Malaysia, pictured above, and that the official line from the Medal Office is that it represents a double award because its recipients were also given a General Service Medal.

However, this has not stopped the Queen granting permission to wear the medal to personnel from other Commonwealth countries, including New Zealand. – *George Munro, ex-Para, Shropshire.*

More to life than money

LAST October I signed for my eight-year Commitment Bonus (CB) but I've realised that, on completion of this year, there is no further incentive for me to remain in the Army. Why is this?

With a potential 13-and-a-half years still to serve in the REME as a technical support specialist (class one), why should I remain in uniform if the Army's not bothered whether I stay or go? – *Name and address supplied.*

Brig Mike Griffiths, DPS(A), replies: CBs are paid as stand-alone payments and are made in return for a commitment to serve for a further specified period. CBs are used by the Services as a flexible measure to assist them in meeting their manning requirements.

It is for this reason that CB payments are targeted at personnel in their first



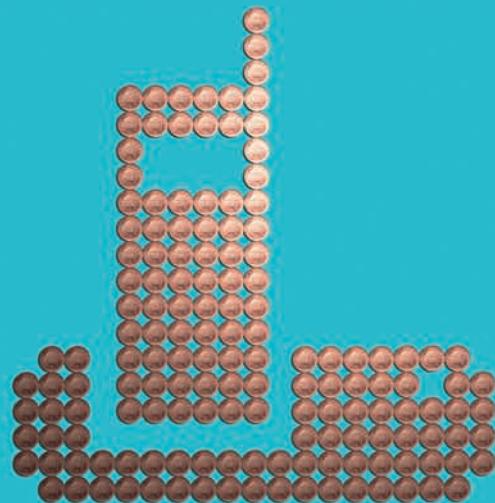
eight years of service, where the manning shortfall is greatest.

Numerous financial measures do exist beyond the eight-year point and I would refer you to *Doing Alright* magazine (doing-alright.army.mod.uk), which gives greater detail on the advantages of staying in uniform.

There is also the substantial draw of a non-contributory, final salary-based pension to consider.

But joining and staying in the Army has never been about financial gain.

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HOME TRUTHS

A PERSONAL view from Julie McCarthy, Chief Executive of the Army Families Federation. Log on to www.aff.org.uk for more information on the Army Families Federation



Picture: Steve Dock

Mail misery: AFF chief executive Julie McCarthy questions the real cost of the "savings" measure to close a dozen Forces post offices in Nato headquarters

Post mortem over lost service

RECENT research by a large think tank suggests that the worst of the recession is over – the housing market is on the move and “things” should start to get better over the next few months and certainly by early 2010.

But on the same day this research was released a national body representing National Health Service (NHS) Trusts warned that the NHS would be facing a huge shortfall in the years following 2011 after the Government admitted it could not sustain current spending levels.

The Conservatives have also claimed that the Labour Government intends to oversee cuts totalling more than £2.6 billion, impacting mainly on Defence, Transport and the Communities departments.

Not that a Conservative government (should that be what we have after the next general election) considers Defence as a sacred cow. Reports are already circulating that a Tory administration would launch a Defence Review and be looking for substantial savings on current expenditure.

Any impact of these cuts on the Ministry of Defence is of course of keen interest to Army families.

There is already huge pressure on the Defence budget, be it equipment, procurement programmes, Service Families Accommodation or welfare provision.

I do not think that anyone – whether politician, civil servant or senior officer – would consider drastically cutting the budget of the latter two, which are vital and identifiable necessities of Army life, but there are other areas where cuts have been made and where further savings measures may need to be considered.

Let's take the decision to close the 12 Forces post offices in Nato HQs across the world that service a 5,000-strong military community. The savings on this amount to some £1.7 million, but looking into the consequences of these closures, the real cost is much more. It is not just about sending and receiving post, for which the resident country's system may suffice. There are implications for voting, financial services, education, access to benefits and more.

Was a comprehensive plan put together

to address these areas before the cuts were announced? No. Are these plans being hastily put together now that the decision has been taken? Most definitely.

While with any savings there is a headline figure (such as the £1.7 million in the post offices case), it is also important to remember that costs can be incurred as a direct result of cuts. Sticking with

the subject of mail, it has been suggested that Living Overseas Allowance (LOA) will be enhanced to take into account the increased costs of postage to the communities affected.

A small increase in LOA for the 5,000 people involved will soon swallow up the saving, but do nothing about the other inconveniences being felt.

The impact on morale of decisions such as these is huge. Cuts may have to be made, but the reasoning behind them and the plans to compensate for them need to be well thought through too, and before, not after, the savings axe is swung. ■



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Directorate of Joint Capability

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Applications are invited for the next Directorate of Joint Commitments (DJC) sponsored long languages courses in Arabic, Pashto and Farsi/Dari at the Defence School of Languages, Beaconsfield, which are planned to start in July 2009 and January 2010.

The DJC sponsored courses, which last 15 months and aim for students to reach the NATO STANAG 6001 standard SLP 3 minimum professional, are run in response to the operational need for linguists in Iraq and Afghanistan and are followed by operational tours in linguistic roles.

Officers of any rank up to OF3 (Maj/Lt Cdr/Sqn Ldr) and Ratings/Other Ranks at any level may apply. The courses are open to both regular and reservist service personnel of all service branches and specialisations. Applications must be endorsed by the volunteer's Commanding Officer and personnel authority.

Selection for the courses is by interview and candidates must have completed a Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT) to the required standard or hold a formal qualification in a foreign language (minimum level: A Level Grade C).

For further information or to request an application form please contact WO1 Adrian Stone by telephone on 01980 615363 (civ) or 94344 5363 (mil), or by email to wo-lcg@dolsu.mod.uk or DOLSU-LCG-WO.

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

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May competition: First correct entry drawn at random and winner of the £100 prize was **Mr H Gault, Great Yarmouth**. Runners-up **Sgt P Riley, Finedon, Northants** and **Mrs P Murray, Defence Estates, Overseas Division, Kenya**, each win a £25 gift voucher.

The ten differences were: target; Land Rover bumper; step in footwell; nut on spare wheel; rear wheel strut; hole in tank track; back support cushion on gunner's chair; machine-gun release handle; target frame; vehicle antennae.



QUINCY – Minister for Defence Equipment & Support, Quentin Davies – can consider himself unlucky that his *Freeze Frame* debut (picture below right) coincided with the height of the fervour sparked by the *Daily Telegraph's* list of MPs' expenses.

In no mood to offer any politician sanctuary from the scandal, *Soldier's* army of satirists were quick to quip about ministers' monetary matters.

The pick of the punchlines, and winner of our prize copy of Ray Kane's *The Sowti Squad*, was LCpl Gardiner's **"The long arm of the law moved quickly to recover MPs' expenses"**.

Slightly more forgiving, perhaps unsurprisingly given his occupation, was Padre Hughes from Berwick-upon-Tweed who penned **"Now we can claw back some of the Armed Forces' pay rise by recycling squaddies' coffee"**.

Taking a different tack were Graham Drew



Kev Jones (Under Secretary of State and Minister for Veterans, Kevan Jones) was beginning to regret accepting an invitation from the Red Devils to "drop in" and meet some of the guys

WIN A BOOK: Write your own caption for the photo above and send it to us by July 31. The best, in our opinion, will win a copy of *Operation Snakebite: The Explosive True Story of an Afghan Desert Siege*, Stephen Grey's account of life in Helmand province.

(DEMSS Kineton) – **"How do you dunk your biscuits in it?"**; WO2 R Hall (242 MI Section) – **"The new mess steward had a tendency to spill drinks on a regular basis"**; and SSgt Marie McChesney (HQ 11 Sig Bde) – **"Forget PAYD, here's Quincy demonstrating PAYG, Pay As You Grab"**.



Picture: Harland Quarrelling

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Mutual Support (Multiple Sclerosis group): 07962 023654; www.mutualsupport.org.uk

National Gulf Veterans' and Families' Association Office: (0900-1700); 24-hour helpline 0845 257 4853; www.ngvfa.org.uk

Regular Forces' Employment Association: 0121 2360058; www.rfea.org.uk

Royal British Legion: 0845 7725 725

RBL Industries Vocational Assessment Centre: 01622 795900; www.rbli.co.uk

St Dunstan's charity for blind and visually impaired ex-Servicemen and women: 0207 723 5021; www.st-dunstans.org.uk

South Atlantic Medal Association: 01495 227577

Services Cotswold Centre: 01225 810358

SSAFA Forces Help: 0207 403 8783; Western Europe 02161 472 3392

Service Personnel and Veterans Agency: 0800 169 2277 (from UK); 0044 1253 866043 (from overseas); Medical Assessment: 0800 169 5401

Victim Support: Germany 02161 472 2272; UK 0845 3030900; www.victimsupport.org

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July-August: Task Force Falklands. National

Army Museum, London. Tel: 0207 730 0717.

July 4: The Three Musketeers in aid of Help for Heroes. Wintershill Hall, Durley SO32 2AL. Book online at www.illyria.uk.com/2009

July 18: Colchester Military Festival. Abbey Field, Colchester. Tickets from Colchester Visitor Information Centre on 01206 282920.

July 18-October 31: Terrible Trenches Exhibition. Family event. Imperial War Museum, London. Book online at www.iwm.org.uk/trenches

July 31-August 2: Rare Military Vehicle Show. Kemble Airfield. Tickets from South West Tourist Information Offices or on gate.

August 8-9: Essex Classic Military Vehicle Show. Damyns Hall Aerodrome. www.mvt.org.uk

August 20-December 31: Outbreak 1939. Imperial War Museum, London. Free admission.

September 5-6: Duxford Air Show. Cambridge. Information and tickets: www.iwm.org.uk/duxford

September 27: Jersey marathon relay race. Charity event. Free accommodation and transport, no entry fee. Write to Gregor Menzies, Island Mil LO, Home Affairs Dept, Le Quesne TA Centre, Mount Bingham, St Helier, Jersey JE2 4XY, call 01534 619580 or email imlo@jerseydsqn.co.uk

REUNIONS

657 Sqn Army Air Corps: All past and present members invited. July 31 at The Meade Hall, Crown and Cushion Pub. Details from SSgt Eddie Smith at reunion657@hotmail.co.uk

Staffordshire Regimental Association: Reunion and dinner on August 22 at Swynnerton Training Camp, near Stone, Staffordshire. Details from Helen Rayson, RHQ Mercian, Whittington Barracks, Lichfield, Staffordshire WS14 9PY or phone 01543 434390.

43 (Wx) Brigade. Did you work for the Brigade before they left for Bulford in 1999? A reunion will be held on August 22 at Wyvern Barracks, Exeter. Details from Lynda Milne on 01392 492433 or by email at lynda.milne352@land.mod.uk

Armourers' Association: Reunion dinner on September 5 at the Victory Services Club, London. Membership is open to all armourers, gun fitters and weapon artificers, serving or retired of the RAOC, REME and RM. Contact the secretary, Chris Dennis on 01905 755334 or email willow18@tiscali.co.uk

King's School CCF: Annual past and present dinner, September 6. Details from Sgt Matt Ireland (matt@mattireland.co.uk or www.kingsccf.co.uk).

Queen's School Rheindahlen: Reunion for former pupils and staff in London on September 19. For details visit www.queensschoolrheindahlenassociation.co.uk

Royal Hampshire Regiment: Reunion luncheon for Territorial Battalions, September 26, relocated to Newburgh House, Winchester SO23 8UY, midday for 1300. Contact Maj Ian Taylor, 4 Cedar Wood Close, Fair Oak, Eastleigh, Hants SO50 7LN, phone 02380 694771 or email ian.p.b.taylor@btinternet.com

3 Royal Anglian (Pompadours): Reunion of

admin and support staff on September 26 in Braintree. Details from Nigel Hunt by email at nigel.hunt417@mod.uk

Glosters Band and Drums: Reunion on October 3 at The Dowty Sports and Social Society, Staverton, Down Hatherley Lane, Cheltenham. Details from Neil Webb, 1 Oakhurst Close, Churchdown GL3 2SS or phone 01452 855236.

Royal Devon Yeomanry: Reunion dinner on October 17 in Barnstaple. All past and present members and attached ranks of the Royal Devon Yeomanry Artillery and D Squadron, The Wessex Yeomanry. Ladies please attend. Contact the PSAO D Sqn by phone on 01271 345471 or email rwxy-dsqa@mod.uk

289 Para/Cdo Regiment/Battery: All ranks reunion October 24 at Napier House, Grove Park, London. Open to all personnel (and partners) who served in 289 in any formation and rank. Contact Capt B W Exley, 265 Bty RA, Napier House, Baring Road, London SE12 0BH, phone 0208 860 1444 or email 106-265-psao@mod.uk

93 (E Lancs) Signal Squadron (V): 40th anniversary dinner will be held on October 24. Preceded by Evensong in Blackburn Cathedral on September 27 at 1600. Contact Capt Dale Ikin on 01254 262444 or email 38sr-93-psao@mod.uk

COMPETITIONS

Guys and Dolls winner: Mrs Jean Licence, Military Court Centre, Colchester. **Runners-up:** Master C Higgins, Liverpool; Master Ben Aindow, Liverpool; Sgt M Holbourn, UOTC, Bristol. **Answer:** Tommy Lee Jones.

Battle Stations Pacific, winners: WO2 K Jones, 104 Regt RA(V); Mrs M Dawber, BFPO 17; Dr H Timothy, Beeston, Nottingham; Andrew Swain, 42 Engr Regt; I Birtle, St Barbasas Bks, Tewkesbury. **Answer:** Flying Fortress.

Seven Pounds, winner: Keith Chapman, Glasgow. **Runners-up:** Christopher Barr, Leicestershire; Martin Massey, Land Warfare Centre, Warminster; Mrs Louise Whittaker, Abingdon; A Elma, 109 Sqn RLC Deepcut; Maj T Venn, DGM PT, Bath. **Answer:** Uncle Phil.

Surviva-Pure winners: Ms G Thompson, Oldham; R White, Waterloo, Liverpool; B Baruah, Glasgow; P Doyle, Plymouth; M Bowen, Bolton; WO2 Law, HQ 12 (Air Sp) Engr Gp; WO2 J Saggers, DSDC Ashchurch; Capt M Rodger, HQ Inf, LF Trg Centre, Warminster; Ian Hemms, RAF Digby, Lincoln; Sgt T Watkins, AFCO, BFPO 806. **Answer:** Sea water.

ROADSHOW DATES

The Army Presentation Team wants to hear from members of the public who would like a personal invitation to attend its dynamic roadshow, which begins with a reception, is followed by a presentation and questions-and-answer session and finishes with a finger buffet.

Military personnel will answer all your questions about the British Army. Call 01276 417000 or email your name and address to apt.mod@btinternet.com

July: 14, Hackney; 15, Islington; 16, Lambeth. **Sept:** 22, Stafford; 23, Birmingham; 30, Hereford.

SEARCHLINE

Kevin "Peanut" Perryman is looking for his mate **SSgt Dave Harrowgate**. Both men served with the Black Watch during Op Telic 1 in 2003. Perryman was a REME reservist attached to the Black Watch. Contact Kevin by email at k_perryman@sky.com

Donna Smurthwaite is looking for anyone who served with her brother **Lee Smurthwaite (Light Dragoons)** in the mid 1990s. Lee died in April 2009. Donna is hoping to put a book together for his daughter. Contact Donna Smurthwaite, Chief Clerk, Babbage Building, Blandford Camp, Dorset DT11 8RH or email usso-hq-chclk@mod.uk

Maureen Trevanion from Australia wishes to return a WW1 medal found in her grandfather's belongings to the family of **8124 Cpl F (Frank) J Travis KOSR**. Cpl Travis transferred to the Seaforth Highlanders some time early in 1917, new regimental number (203771). Email maureen.trevanion@defence.gov.au

Brian Lefley is trying to locate a photograph of the old **Pinjab/Quetta Army Quarters** in Church Crookham, Fleet, Hants, which was taken in the 1950s. The estate housed mainly RAMC personnel. Contact Brian at 11 Newlands Drive, Prestwich, Manchester M25 3BU or by email at brianwilliamlefley@yahoo.com

Calling all men of the new Rifle regiments and the former Royal Green Jackets and their antecedents in the former regiments. The **Riflemen's Club** is forming on Cyprus and those ex and serving members of the regiment are entitled to apply for membership. Contact David Smith at 57A Voskou Villas, 25 March Street, 7040 Voroklini, Larnaca, Cyprus or email davidsmith_gis@hotmail.com

Lesley Johnson, grandson of RSM Sydney Johnson is seeking the family of **John Pardoe (Pardor)** to return a photograph. His DOB is October 27, 1902. John joined the 60th Rifles in September 1932 and died March 9, 1933 in a training accident. Contact Lesley by email leejw1@btinternet.com

Windsor School Hamm 1953-83 is searching for ex-pupils, staff and anyone connected to the school. A thriving society holds regular reunions and publishes newsletters and membership registers. Details to Ann Blunn, 6 Merrytree Close, West Wellow, Romsey, Hants SO51 6RB or email rwbgb@btinternet.com

Where are you now members of **Cutforth Platoon, RAOC Junior Leaders, Blackdown 1971-73**? Sixteen members are planning a reunion and are looking for the remainder of the platoon. We are searching for **Heydon James, Steve Boyle, Jim Miller, Keith Tomlinson, Tony Brown, Jim Cullen, Jock Mosley, Brian Lawrenson, Jim Young and Mick Moore**. Contact philwall@ntlworld.com

Martin Gorner, son of an RAF master signaller, is seeking **Brig J E A Baird CBE**, or his family, to return a flying log book that was found among his father's belongings. The log book dates from 1954-1955 and relates to trips mainly in the Sharjah and Bahrain area. Martin feels the log book would be of more value to the brigadier or his descendants. Contact Martin Gorner at 12 Blankney Close, Saxilby, Lincoln LN1 2JA.

Ex-National Serviceman (1954-56) Edmund Hodges is trying to locate his troop officer, **2nd Lt Ian C Blair, C Tp, 1 Sqn, 3 GHQ Royal Signals**, in Fayid, Egypt and Episkopi, Cyprus. Edmund has written a book about the troop. Contact Edmund by email at edmundhodges@btinternet.com

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POCKET A PRIZE

EXTRME weather clothing experts Mammut have teamed up with **Soldier** to give readers the chance to win a pair of Courmayeur black trousers worth £130.

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Answers by postcard to **Soldier**, Parsons House, Ordnance Road, Aldershot, Hampshire GU11 2DU or by email (comps@soldiermagazine.co.uk) to reach us by July 31. Entries must specify sex and required trouser size. Usual rules apply.



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www.recoverypnp.niceboard.com

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www.baff.org.uk

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

www.armywivesunited.co.uk

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

www.sftf.mod.uk

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

www.army.mod.uk

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

www.forcesresources.co.uk

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www.forceshomes.co.uk

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www.armedforces.co.uk

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www.aff.org.uk

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www.militarymayhem.net

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

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www.veterans-aid.net

Tel: 020 7828 2468, info@veterans-aid.net

www.erskine.org.uk

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

www.blesma.org

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

www.nivets.org.uk

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

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www.armyaviation.co.uk

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www.doing-alright.army.mod.uk

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www.armyrugbyunion.mod.uk

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www.army.mod.uk/welfare-support/welfare-support

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www.rememuseum.org.uk

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www.armymuseums.org.uk

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

www.kingsownmuseum.plus.com

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Jayne, 5'10", (44), slim build, short dark hair, easy going, fun person with GSOH. Enjoys travel, motorsports, pubs, walking, music and more. Seeking pen pals, 30-40, all letters will be answered. P045

Joanne, (32), small build, long brown hair and hazel eyes. Fun to be with, not very good at cooking, enjoys meeting new people, driving, swimming, travelling and going out for a drink and a meal. Separated, has a lovely boy aged 3 and works as a Nursery Nurse. Seeking pen pals, any age group. P046

Joanne, 5'2", (37), short dark hair and brown eyes. Enjoys days out, gardening, the cinema and eating out. Single mum of two boys with too much spare time. Seeking pen pals, any age group. P047

Rebecca, 5'2", (28), brown hair and brown eyes. Enjoys reading, watching TV, going for walks and loves anything to do with horses. Single mum who has nothing much to do in the evenings other than writing. Seeking pen pals 28-34. P048

Female, young 58, slim 5'6", caring, happy with GSOH. Enjoys the coast, the country, events, socialising and has varied interests. Life should be fun and exhilarating, supporting our Military and those who don't get mail. Seeking pen pals, any age group. P049

Tara, 5'6", long dark hair, green eyes, slim yet curvaceous. Enjoys aerobics, the cinema, walking, animals, friends, scuba diving, art and design, travel, wine and delicious food. Seeking pen pals, 39-50. P050

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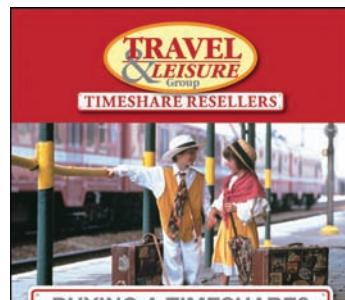
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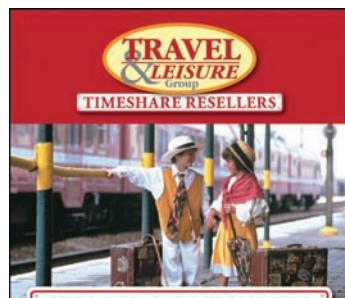
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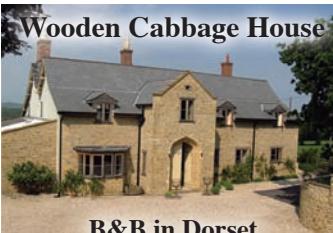
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REVIEWS

NET RESULT

On court with Sega's latest *Virtua Tennis* title

CRUISE CONTROL

Eddie Izzard on working with superstar Tom

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Conspiracy theory: Eddie Izzard (main picture) and Tom Cruise (above) star in *Valkyrie*, out to own on Blu-ray and DVD now from MGM and Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment



What might have been

Izzard plays it straight in retelling of valiant attempt on Adolf Hitler's life

FOR anyone familiar with Eddie Izzard's stand-up comedy routines, there is something unnerving about watching him in a dramatic role.

Out of drag and wearing only the same amount of make-up as his fellow actors in *Valkyrie*, the true story of the failed assassination attempt on Hitler towards the end of the Second World War, the British comedian should be as far from his comfort zone as it is physically possible to get.

But the reality – and subsequently the strangest thing to comprehend – is that the 47-year-old is actually pretty good at being serious.

"I have been pushing very hard to do dramatic roles in films and television and theatre," he told *Soldier*. "It is an interesting place to play because sometimes we have a certain baggage and people might expect certain things from us.

"But I have been pushing dramatically – that is what I wanted to do since I was a kid, so when I got this it was amazing."

Izzard's admiration for the scale of the story told by *Valkyrie* is not misplaced. Starring Tom Cruise as chief conspirator Col Claus Schenk von Stauffenberg, the film follows the covert schemings of a group of Nazi officers – including Izzard's Gen Erich Fellgiebel – who realise Hitler is leading their country down a decidedly dodgy path.

The group come up with a plan to kill Hitler in an explosion at his Wolf's Lair bunker before enacting Operation Valkyrie, an emergency action to wrest control from the SS by mobilising Germany's reserve forces.

History tells us that the plan ultimately failed, but Izzard believes it is important that the story is told to the current generation.

"I am encyclopaedic about the Second World War and for me this is like *The Great Escape*. This is the German equivalent of that.

"For the German kids this is the first time an international film is out there where they can watch Germans trying to kill Hitler. I think it's great for them

and the Brits can get into it because it's chock-full with a load of British actors."

Aside from his love of all things military, the inclusion of Cruise on the cast list was enough to get Izzard to sign on the dotted line.

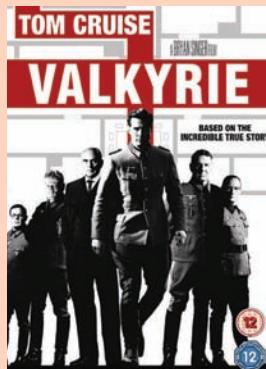
Famed as much for his public outbursts and staunch belief in Scientology as he is for his acting, Cruise often polarises opinion among the film-going public.

But Izzard was full of praise for his pint-sized contemporary.

"He is a very inclusive person," he said. "He's a Scientologist and that's fine. I mean, there are people who are Catholics and I have differences with what they think.

"I personally don't believe in any organised god because I don't see any organisation in the way the world has progressed. I always think that if there were a god he would have flicked Hitler's head off.

"With Tom's working method, he wants to work hard, be focussed and get down there and do a hard day's work."



Valkyrie, out to own on DVD and Blu-Ray now

WHILE the Allied Forces tried to stamp out the Nazis on the Second World War's front lines, some of the German party's senior officers were risking life and limb to overthrow Hitler from within by enacting Operation Valkyrie, a plan to assassinate the Fuhrer and mobilise the country's reserves against the SS. Starring **Tom Cruise** as one-armed key conspirator Col Claus Schenk von Stauffenberg, this film is a solid retelling of how and why the plot ultimately failed. The use of English accents is a bit bizarre, but the suspense carries the movie through.

Tackling such a painful era in German history is a brave move for an international film, but *Valkyrie*'s performance at the country's box office suggests it was a gamble that paid off.

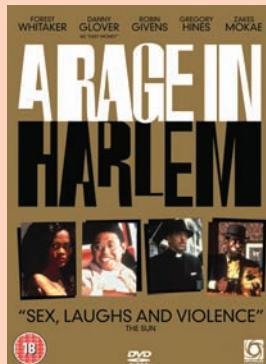
Despite all of the protagonists being German, director Bryan Singer chose to have his cast speak in English with their normal accents and the quality of their acting makes it barely noticeable.

As well as appealing to the paying public, the movie was also a hit with many European critics and Tom Cruise received a three-minute long standing ovation during the premiere in Berlin.

"We were concerned that they should appreciate it, obviously, because it's one of their big stories," explained Izzard. "It's a treasured story, although they have ambivalent feelings about the people involved."

"But it is a big story for them and it was a big responsibility. Tom Cruise really willed this film into existence and the German actors in our cast were saying that German people generally don't give three-minute standing ovations."

"Whether they all like it I am not sure, but I think they will all go and see it because it's a big film where the Germans go and try to kill Hitler."



A Rage in Harlem, out to own on DVD now

A *RAGE in Harlem* is a snappy comedy-thriller following gangsters and con-artists as they try to get their hands on stolen gold. **Robin Givens** is superb as Imabelle as she steals the gold from her partner Slim (the menacing **Badja Djola**), and goes on the run. **Forest Whitaker** gives a deft comic performance as Jackson, a devout Christian who Imabelle takes for an easy mark before finding herself touched by his sweetness and won over by his devotion to her. It's a fun film that's worth watching.

Maj Eddie Elms, 10 AEC



I Know How Many Runs You Scored Last Summer, out to own on DVD now

GROWN-UP members of a school cricket team are gruesomely murdered in this black-humoured Australian blood fest. The remaining five oddballs are placed under police protection at a remote farm where they are "bowled out" with increasingly bizarre uses of cricket equipment. The inter-related cast (in more ways than one) are a group as grotesque as they are inadequate. Don't let the cricket theme put you off, this film rocks.

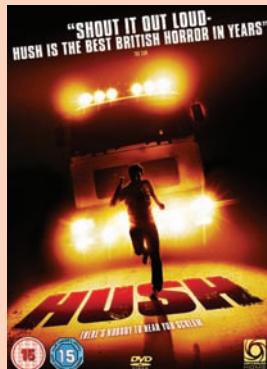
Capt Neil Johnson, 9 AAC



The Good, The Bad, The Weird, out on DVD now

A BIG-BUDGET Korean homage to spaghetti westerns – and movie culture in general – this deliriously violent epic tells of the struggle for possession of a map that shows the location of a hidden fortune. It's great stuff, with a superb opening sequence that perfectly sets the tone for everything that follows: funny, stylish, exciting, bloody and beautifully-shot. There are plenty of references to other films for movie buffs to spot and the whole thing is put together with considerable verve and passion.

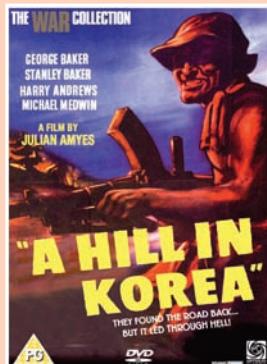
Daniel King, MoD



Hush, out on DVD now

WRITTEN and directed by **Mark Tonderai**, *Hush* is a thriller that, although obviously produced on a low budget, is thoroughly entertaining. Zakes (**William Ash**) and Beth (**Christine Bottomley**) are the argumentative couple who witness a kidnapping on the M1 motorway in the middle of the night. Following the kidnappers to a deserted service station, the hapless pair discover a terrifying world that genuinely shocks. Although the film is disorganised at times, the atmosphere is creepy. One of the better recent thrillers.

LCpl C MacCallum, Int Corps



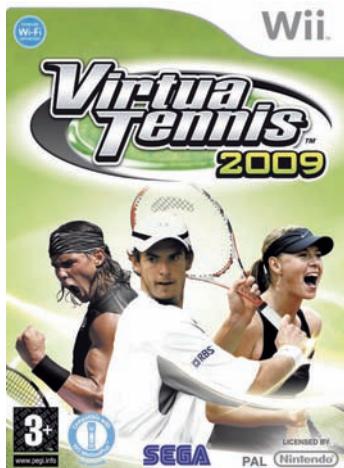
A Hill In Korea, out to own on DVD now

THIS deals in a sympathetic manner with the situation a group of National Servicemen are faced with when forced into action against fanatical communists during the Korean War. Their patrol becomes enveloped by the Chinese and they are forced to fight to the death. The courage these young men display says a lot about the bravery of the British Army through the ages. Though made in 1956, *A Hill In Korea* has a certain likeness with conflicts today, including a friendly-fire incident. A classic film with lots of familiar faces.

Maj Eddie Elms, 10 AEC

Games

JULY REVIEW



You cannot be serious: Stars including Rafael Nadal are lovingly recreated in Sega's latest *Virtua Tennis* title

A perfect match

Sega's latest tennis title uses new motion technology to deliver a smash hit

Preview: Cliff Caswell

LIKE Wimbledon's overpriced strawberries, sipping an expensive glass of Pimms in the rain and the sight of ball boys hacking through a downpour to pull covers across sodden courts, the appearance of a console tennis title never did much to inspire this *Soldier* reviewer.

Lacking the basic coordination, patience and fitness to master tennis in real life, school PE lessons helped form the basis of a huge aversion to the sport and its succession of video game spin-offs. For me, the only excitement ever generated by men with a racquet was the sight of John McEnroe, Jimmy Connors and the other long-haired, ill-tempered players of the 1980s losing their rag on court.

So when Sega invited me to sample the Wii incarnation of its *Virtua Tennis* series you can imagine the response. The prospect of getting thumped by fellow reporters all afternoon held

about as much appeal as a wet weekend on Centre Court.

Yet this latest foray into the world of aces, lobs and smashes surprised on several fronts. Featuring some of the slickest graphics and animation seen on the Nintendo machine, the title makes use of the new Wii Motion Plus controller to give pinpoint control over your moves. In short, this outstanding combination makes for one of the most impressive and realistic sports games ever produced.

"For some time now we have been examining the Wii and what we think the next stage for the machine should be," Warren Leigh, producer for Sega Europe, told *Soldier*. "We looked at *Wii Sports* and developed it a step further. We wanted a full version of *Virtua Tennis* rather than a cartoon title so we have worked on the best incarnation of the game we could fit into the hardware.

"The Wii Motion Plus appeared about halfway through the development cycle of the game and we knew that

we had to incorporate it. Nintendo was great in supplying us with the equipment and talking to us about what it can do."

The incorporation of a new controller into *Virtua Tennis* is without doubt one of the most impressive aspects of the game. A huge advance on the established Wii Mote, the accessory features a gyroscope that more accurately replicates your arm and wrist movements in a way that is perfect for playing tennis shots.

From the late-build demo I sampled, the kit picks up broad forehand, backhand, volley and smash movements while a subtle flick of the wrist can work wonders in rallies. Players can either allow their star to run to a shot automatically, as in *Wii Sports*, or use the thumbstick on the Nunchuck to control them manually.

"We have always tried to advance the *Virtua Tennis* series year-on-year," Leigh said. "Compared with previous generations, there is a lot more in the



way of animation, we have worked on the audio and character options have been expanded.

"You can also play a world tour online, and as you move through the rankings you take away cash that you can spend on equipment at a tennis store. But it is also a game that you can simply pick up and play if you want to."

This is certainly true. Sega has managed to add a new dimension to video game tennis, giving it a finesse that has previously been lacking. Even given my aversion to the sport, the title still proved exhilarating because of the depth of gameplay, programming polish and attention to detail in art, animation and sound.

Despite playing as a succession of legendary stars, however, this reviewer is ashamed to admit that I was still soundly spanked on court and that my record with racquet and ball remains as dreadful as it ever has been. I frequently registered double faults and was run ragged.

Nonetheless, the fact that Sega's latest offering has proved so impressive to a confirmed tennis agnostic is a feat to say the least. If only you could lose your temper and argue at length with the umpire, McEnroe style, when your ball is unjustly called to be out. ■



Order of War, PC

WITH the market for Second World War games now well and truly saturated, it takes a brave developer to take another step down this road. Thankfully this latest real-time strategy offering from Square Enix has enough quality to set it apart from the opposition. Would-be generals can either command the US military in Western Europe or face the Russians as the Germans on the Eastern Front. *Order of War*'s key feature is its scale, which puts players firmly in command of a division-sized force. See next month's magazine for a full review.



The Sims 3, PC

THIS deep title invites players to create a character – one of the eponymous *Sims* – move them into a house and micromanage every aspect of their daily life. From getting a job to going to the gym, the gameplay possibilities are endless and the ability to build and furnish your own home is an interesting distraction. It looks great, but you are ultimately left wondering what the point is. Most people have enough to do in their lives without having to worry about telling their Sim to have a wash. A technical masterpiece, but real life is much more fun.



Guitar Hero Metallica, Xbox 360

THE veteran American hard rockers provide a powerful edge to this latest add-on in the acclaimed *Guitar Hero* series. *Soldier* was impressed with the game on its release last year and this pack will appeal to *Metallica*'s army of fans. Whether it is delivering power ballads such as *Nothing Else Matters* or the belting power chords of *Enter Sandman*, there is plenty to keep the heavy metal brigade engaged on vocals, lead guitar, drums and bass. A selection of tracks by guest artists completes the experience.



Burnout: Big Surf Island, Xbox 360 & PS3

THE ever-popular driving franchise returns for another outing with this new location available as a download. The landscape features some exhilarating roads to navigate plus nine new vehicles to experience them in. The expansion also features new events and challenges, secret areas to discover and an island-specific driver's licence for player progression. With more than 55 awards to its credit, *Burnout Paradise* has made its mark and impressed *Soldier*. The add-on is priced at £9.99 on the PlayStation network and 1,000 MS points on Xbox Live.



Army of Two: The 40th Day, Xbox 360 & PS3

IN an all-new outing for mercenary duo Salem and Rios, the sequel to the original *Army of Two* puts players in the unenviable situation of surviving in a Shanghai under siege, where a carefully orchestrated series of catastrophes is bringing the city to its knees. According to publisher EA, the new game will have a bigger arsenal as well as more cooperative and online options. *The 40th Day* is due to be released in the winter and it will be interesting to see if it delivers the depth of gameplay that made the original so successful.



Bioshock 2, PS3, Xbox 360 & PC

SHOWN at the E3 show in the USA, the much-anticipated sequel to the original *Bioshock* game puts players back in the crumbling underwater city of Rapture. The storyline of this latest first-person shooter centres on a mysterious creature who has been snatching children from the Atlantic coastline. Publisher 2K Games promises a host of new weapons, more powerful enemies and some intense in-game action. Several multiplayer options are also on the cards, including one that allows players to take part in the original civil war that tore Rapture apart.



Perfect ten: New British pop sensation Dolly Rockers have been backed by BBC Radio One DJ Scott Mills



Army barmy barbies

The new feisty, fun and gobby girl band who love a man in uniform

Interview: Heidi Mines

THE pop conveyor belt has an alarming ability to churn out identikit girl groups with monotonous regularity.

Musical talent seems to take a back seat to good looks, fashionable clothes and fluttering eyelashes when it comes to which acts made up of members of the fairer sex get to top the charts.

But just when you thought it was time to give up on girl bands, along come Dolly Rockers. The trio may share the beautiful looks of their contemporaries, but that's where the similarities end.

Brooke Challinor, Sophie King and Lucie Kay denounce Prada in favour of Primark and prefer the natural look rather than spending fortunes on extensions and stylists.

Their carefree attitude is also clear in their music and the threesome have embarked on a mission to reintroduce a late-90s injection of girl power and to encourage their fans to ditch the diets

and start having some fun.

Those with sharp memories may remember Dolly Rockers reaching Louis Walsh's final eight bands in *X Factor* in 2006, the series that saw Leona Lewis triumph and win a recording contract.

Although gutted at not making it at the time, Louis and the ITV talent show's loss was record label EMI's gain and three years on the band have the backing of the UK's music critics – including BBC Radio One's Scott Mills who labelled them "the world's greatest girl band" – because of their unconventional style.

The girls are now very keen to broaden their audience, and explained that a military fan base would be a very welcome addition.

"I have to admit I am boy mad," Dolly Rocker Lucie told *Soldier*, adding that the girls can be just as rowdy as any squaddie and the lads would provide them with a good challenge.

"We would definitely take up an offer

to perform for the troops – a man in uniform is always attractive.

"My dad's family were involved in the Army and my granddad served with the Royal Air Force."

Classically trained, the band of singers met after responding to an advertisement in *The Stage* – the same paper that found the quintet who went on to find fame and fortune as the Spice Girls.

It took years of overcoming rejection before the band finally received their big break from Mills, who felt their tongue-in-cheek lyrics and willingness to laugh at themselves would appeal to his listeners.

Their first single, *Je Suis Une Dolly*, which is put to the beat of Rolling Stones track *Je Suis Un Rock Star*, is available as a free download and their next release *Gold Digger* promises to show the Rockers really can sing and are a force to be reckoned with.

"We were concerned that people may not take us seriously enough, especially



as our first release was a comedy track which had us putting on Del Boy-like accents.

"But hopefully our talent will shine through, especially with our album coming out soon," said 22-year-old Lucie.

With risqué lyrics such as "we flash our pants when we can, can", some critics have argued that the girls may be a bit too sexy for young children.

But the band insist that their cheeky songs are nothing more than harmless fun and that they hold a universal appeal.

"I would like to think that we are accessible to a younger audience as our look can be purchased from high street stores and our hairstyles only require a bit of back brushing," Lucie added.

As the Dolly Rockers gain momentum with more live shows packed with humour and entertainment, their audiences are picking up and running with their outgoing personalities.

Fun, feisty and hard-working, it seems that the latest girl band to roll off the production line has concocted a formula of self-made, unadulterated music that may just win the hearts and minds of pop lovers the world over. ■

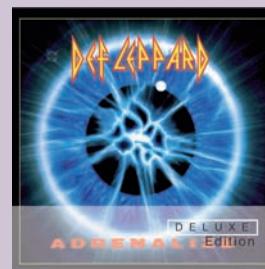
● www.dollyrockers.com



Hands (Little Boots)

ORIGINALITY is the name of the game when it comes to **Little Boots**' (aka **Victoria Hesketh**) debut album. As pop music goes, the glamourpuss offers musical substance a cut above the usual mindless drivel. Likened to pop queen **Kylie Minogue**, this songstress will definitely appeal to the mainstream. Listen out for *Symmetry* where the warbler teams up with **Human League** artist **Phil Oakey**. From the excellent play on words in *Mathematics*, to the dramatic dance tune *Remedy*, Little Boots is refreshingly unique and captivating. If you like pop you'll love this album.

Tara Kane, ex-R Signals



Adrenalize Deluxe Edition (Def Leppard)

FIRST released in 1992, *Adrenalize* followed the acclaimed *Hysteria* album from **Def Leppard**. Selling 65 million records worldwide, the English rock band from Sheffield have definitely earned their cult status. This album slips into the trusted sound that has served them well, and when they slow things down with *Tonight* and *White Lightning*, you realise there is more versatility in their playing than they may be credited for. Devotees will no doubt welcome the revamped return, but it remains to be seen if a new generation will warm to their stadium-rock sound.

Steve King, MoD



Intuition (Jamie Foxx)

THE third album by the talented actor and singer continues **Jamie Foxx's** quest to be one of RnB's smoothest performers. It's a slick selection of minimal soft-tempo songs with an array of contributors including **Lil Wayne** and **Kanye West**. At times the record is so clinical and clean you almost wish for a bit of roughness to loosen things up. *I Don't Need It* produced by **Timbaland** is the pinnacle of the set and gives the listener something to nod their head to. A fair effort, but a more unpolished approach may have produced a better result. I suppose that's how he rolls.

Sgt Charlie Lloyd, RLC



Thirteen (Leona Naess)

NEW York-born singer/songwriter **Leona Naess** has returned after a six-year break from music with *Thirteen*. This is by far the 34-year-old's most personal work to date. Leona's enchanting voice is comparable to fellow artist **Nerina Pallot** in that it soothes and lures you in to her musical world – akin to **Norah Jones** but without the mind-numbing nonchalance. Passion, honesty and antecedence ooze from every track as well as refreshing helpings of style and maturity. In a nutshell, I thought this was one of the best albums I have heard this year.

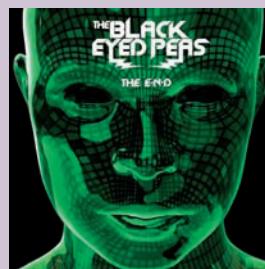
Cpl Tom Robinson, RLC



Gary Go (Gary Go)

GARY Baker, in his alter ego of **Gary Go**, has been called a "one-man **Coldplay**" and there is definitely an element of **Chris Martin** to his voice. But you've got everything on this album; angst, sadness, joy and optimism. There are a variety of sounds from the upbeat, summery self-help mantra of *Wonderful* to the mellow, swingy *Brooklyn* through to pop-rock track *Refuse to Lose* which all hints at the future he could have – bigger than being just a support act for **Take That**. For a debut it's good, and if you like **James Blunt** or **Keane** it is certainly worth a listen.

Sgt Heidi Cox, DSOP

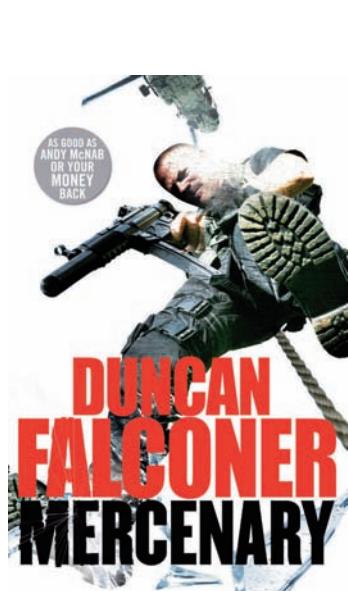


The E.N.D (The Black Eyed Peas)

THE **Black Eyed Peas** have returned with a top album, boasting an evolved sound using a vocoder and electro-pop aplenty. However, the band have kept their hip-hop flavour to keep the fans happy. Proving his skill once again, producer and recording artist **Will.i.am** has taken the group to a new level with some really infectious tunes. Great tracks include *Boom Boom Pow* and *Rock That Body* which are instant favourites and listen out for the latest release *Imma Be*. After a four-year break, which saw solo records from **Fergie** and **Will.i.am**, the group's comeback is really fantastic.

Books

JULY REVIEW



Enemy encounters: With first-hand experience of operating in hostile regions such as Afghanistan (right), Royal Marine-turned-author Duncan Falconer (inset) brings an air of authenticity to the best-sellers chart



Picture: Cpl John Scott Rafoss, USMC

Dangerous liaisons

Ex-Serviceman's Taliban trysts provide explosive element to latest novel

Mercenary by Duncan Falconer
(Little Brown, hardback, £10)

Interview: Samantha Chapman

AFTER more than a decade at the sharp end of operations, former Royal Marine Duncan Falconer could be forgiven for wanting to enjoy the less gritty side of life.

Yet for the Northern Ireland veteran this was simply not an option. Following a short spell bodyguarding he went into the private security market as a crisis manager and has never looked back.

On top of operating at length, and often alone, in perilous places such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Liberia and Yemen, he writes books in his spare time and has just penned his fourth thriller in the John Stratton series.

Mercenary follows maverick operative Stratton as he ventures deep into the Central American jungle to complete what appears to be a simple task –

delivering weapons to rebels intent on revolution. But on arrival Stratton realises the group are inexperienced and against his instincts he stays to train them, unwittingly becoming a pawn in a much wider political game.

“Everyone always asks if Stratton’s based on me, but I can tell you that he’s not,” said Falconer during a rare stopover in London from his home in South Africa. “All my characters are loosely based on people I know because it helps to maintain consistency.”

“Stratton is someone I would have liked to have been, so although I gave him a few of my characteristics, it was only a few. I gave him green eyes because mine are green and a calmness under pressure – one of my traits is that I am cool when something is going down.”

It is this composure that has helped Falconer keep his head through many a hairy situation – particularly while working in the Middle East.

In his role as a crisis manager Falconer often works with the media

and several years ago was involved in rescuing a Western journalist who was kidnapped in Kabul, Afghanistan.

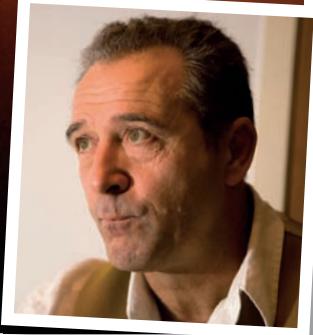
He refuses to say too much about the case, only that the man was “high-profile” and that “we got the money in but we didn’t need to spend it”.

Yet about the rest of his work he is refreshingly frank. “I have spent a lot of time in Iraq and Afghanistan and believe they have very different problems,” said Falconer.

“From my experience I would say that the Taliban learnt everything they know from the IRA, but the IRA were still better than them.”

“For example, one time I was out in Afghanistan and spotted some guys who I knew were giving us the ‘come-on’ – in a classic IRA style of working they were trying to lead us into an ambush. There are lots of things like that which they have picked up.”

“In Iraq it is relatively safe now but outside Baghdad it is a different story. It is dangerous because parts of Iraq are



realising that Islam and Christianity don't mix and tribal leaders are wanting some of the oil money."

Danger is not a word Falconer uses lightly – as a former marine he is used to situations that require the utmost sensitivity.

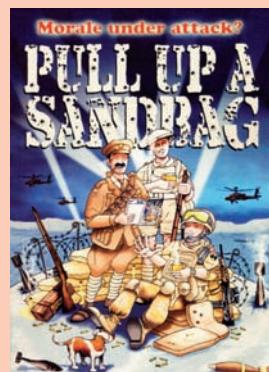
"I have been blown up in lots of places," he said nonchalantly. "Danger is about understanding situations. Birmingham can be as dangerous as Baghdad if you don't know what you are doing."

Already working on his next book – about an MI5 spook – Falconer has a dedicated fan base that enjoys his adrenalin-fuelled tales.

Sprinkled with hints of romance amid several gory and blood-filled scenes, the rough and ready Stratton makes an ideal hero, and one that is easy to relate to thanks to Falconer's humanistic writing. Penned in the same genre and style as Andy McNab and Chris Ryan, he uses his own gritty and determined experience in every one of his books, giving them a more authentic and realistic edge.

So if you're looking for a meaty tale of danger, intrigue and a little bit of loving, *Mercenary* could well be the read of the summer. ■

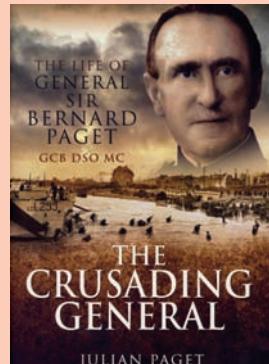
To join the ranks of our reviews team (books, movies, games, music) email styler@soldiermagazine.co.uk



Pull up a Sandbag by Jonathan Smiles

IF ever there was a coffee table book this is it. Packed full of military anecdotes, it's a title you can pick up and read in small chunks. Many soldiers will have heard some of the stories before and I've no doubt there are others out there who "star" in a few! Although full of squaddie humour, it will appeal to those not in uniform. The book also has a serious side with £1 from the sale of each issue going to Help for Heroes (pull-up-a-sandbag.co.uk). The language is colourful so think twice before giving it to your mum.

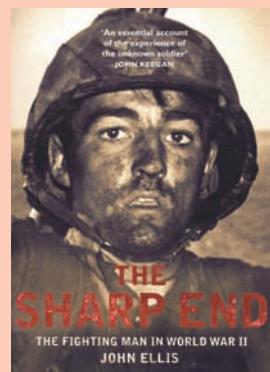
Maj Jonathan Craig, PWRR



The Crusading General by Julian Paget

THIS biography of one of the Second World War's forgotten heroes – Gen Sir Bernard Paget – has been fairly and comprehensively written by his son. As the architect of the D-Day plan it's amazing that Paget is not a household name, an accolade that would have been his had Monty not claimed command of Allied Forces from him on June 6, 1944. Paget's penchant for training rather than fighting also played a part in keeping his profile lower than those of his contemporaries. A cracking read.

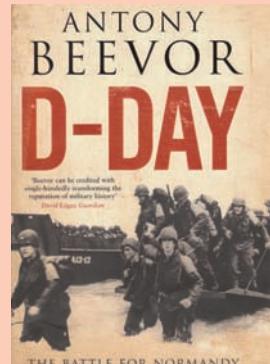
Capt Shaun Fardy, AGC



The Sharp End by John Ellis

PENNED by a renowned historian, this title provides a detailed insight into the experiences of Second World War combat soldiers. Referencing the infantry, armour, artillery and others, Ellis brings the minutiae of war to life using examples from theatres as diverse as Burma, Africa and Italy. The focus on the everyday details pays dividends and good use is made of personal accounts, diary entries and letters to friends and family. Compelling and comprehensive, *The Sharp End* is a great read.

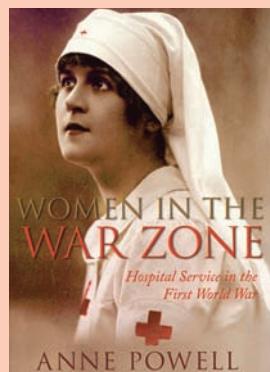
LCpl C MacCallum, Int Corps



D-Day: The Battle for Normandy by A Beevor

PRIOR to reading this book I thought the Normandy campaign had been exhaustively covered. I stand corrected. Following on from his previous works on Stalingrad and Berlin, Beevor has penned an exceptional new account. The narrative is written in the style of a novelist and interwoven with previously overlooked archive material. The result is a vivid and revealing insight into the complexities and human cost of the operation that changed the course of history and the face of Western Europe.

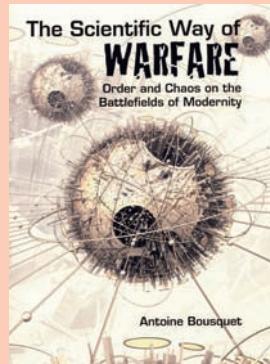
Maj Mike Peters, AAC



Women in the War Zone by Anne Powell

AN inspiring collection of first-hand accounts from female medics who served overseas during the First World War. These courageous women nursed casualties from the battles of the Somme, Arras, Ypres and many others in cramped wards with no electricity, very little food and a lack of medicines. These unsung heroines not only dealt with the wounded, but also those with serious cases of shell shock, typhoid and dysentery. Many nurses were badly injured in the line of duty and others paid the ultimate price. An excellent book.

Maj (Retd) D Cadwallader



The Scientific Way of Warfare by A J Bousquet

IF you're interested in collecting complex war theories to out-Clawsewitz your friends or are just having problems sleeping, then this could be the book for you! Through the use of powerful metaphors (based on the paradigm shifting technologies that are the clock, engine, computer and network), Bousquet explores the impact of science on warfare. This narrative device gives the book a simple structure and, although still challenging, an accessibility that it may have otherwise lacked.

Capt Fraser Dowling, AGC

SOLDIERSPORT



Riding revolution: SSgt Terry Waitt (13 Air Asslt Sp Regt RLC) secures second spot in the Army Cycling Championships downhill mountain bike race at Bulford

Picture: Graeme Main

WHEEL WARS
Army cyclists
battle it out at
Service champs



Speed freaks: Twelve mountain bikers pushed themselves to the limit over a tricky downhill course in Bulford at the Army Cycling Union championships

Re-cycling Union

Fresh approach breathes new life into Army's two-wheeled warriors

Report: Stephen Tyler
Pictures: Graeme Main

DESPITE the humble bicycle being the favoured mode of transport for many soldiers, the Army Cycling Union has historically struggled to tempt leisure riders to step up a gear and have a go at racing.

The pace of operations has meant that annual championships run by the organisation, which administers the sport in the Service, have failed to attract would-be speedsters in significant numbers.

But with British cycling on the crest of a wave after a series of golden performances at the 2008 Olympics, the ACU's showpiece event has gained

fresh impetus and returned in record size this year.

Held over a week in June, the championships saw more than 40 riders tackling everything from downhill mountain bike courses to lengthy road races and ACU general secretary Maj Matt Woodeson (RA) praised the effort of everyone who attended.

"We have put this on before but have found it difficult to get the numbers along," he told *SoldierSport*. "There are hundreds of soldiers who cycle everywhere and our ultimate goal is to be able to give something to everyone whether they are the most junior or the most senior soldier."

"It's going from strength to strength and that is down to people attending,

supporting and of course being given the time off. We understand that although sport is an important part of the Army, finding time for it to happen is down to the support of the commanding officers."

At the heart of the reinvigorated racing line-up is the ACU's insistence on welcoming anyone – regardless of previous experience, talent or rank – into the fold.

This year's races had majors battling private soldiers on the same track and the age range was similarly diverse.

Competitors travelled from garrisons around the world to compete, and Germany-based Lt Nicole Evans (AGC (ETS)) was among the newcomers.

"There are a massive amount of

HELL OF A RACE

ALONGSIDE the more well-known road races and mountain bike events run during the ACU's championships, cyclists also took on the "devil takes the hindmost" race.

Held around the two-mile perimeter track at Upavon airfield, the gruelling event required competitors to ride at a steady pace for all but the last 200 metres of the course.

After reaching the final bend, the cyclists exploded into life and the last two to cross the finish line were eliminated. The process was then repeated until the final four battled it out for a place on the podium.

Eventual winner Maj Matt Woodeson

(RA) told *SoldierSport* that he had been tested to the limit during the 20-mile-plus slog.

"Winning the race was unexpected because I was riding against people who are better than me," he said.

"It's hard to qualify how hard it is because for 20 seconds each lap it's real tunnel-vision racing to get power to the back wheel. For that sprint your heart rate goes through the roof and your legs start seizing up."

"Knowing which side to take, figuring out who is going to go when and whether you should go early or leave it late is difficult, but it's an exciting race."



people who use bikes every day but a lot of them don't think racing is the sport for them.

"I had never done any competitive racing before this, but I really want to get into it now. The support you get [from the ACU] is amazing and I will definitely be coming back next year."

Taking on the cream of the Army's cycling talent requires deep reserves of bravery, skill and endurance and *SoldierSport* witnessed all three attributes in spades during the downhill mountain bike event and the "devil takes the hindmost" races held in Bulford and Upavon respectively.

Taking in a fairly steep course cut through a forest and littered with log obstacles, the mountain bikers had to have complete confidence in their own ability in order to avoid a flying visit over their handlebars.

The devil race was equally tough and Maj Woodeson – who went on to claim first place (see *Hell of a race*, above) – was quick to highlight the traits that cycling shares with soldiering.

"It takes out-and-out fitness to compete at the levels these guys do.

"Cycling requires mental robustness to find the strength to keep going and

that fits in with the difficult situations that soldiers often find themselves in when on operations.

"There's also a lot of discipline needed to push on with training in all weathers and it's a non-impact sport which promotes cardio-vascular fitness and muscular resilience."

With funding, training and all-important insurance from British Cycling available to members of the ACU, Woodeson believes there has never been a better time to give competitive racing a go.

And whether your fancy lies in lung-busting, long-distance endurance events or short, sharp bursts on mountain bikes, there is certainly enough variety to appeal to everyone.

"It's something different for the soldiers who maybe don't want to go down the route of playing football or rugby," concluded Woodeson. "We aim to provide cycling for all for the good of all and if anyone wants to get involved then there are clear advantages to joining us."

● For more information about the ACU, visit the group's website at www.armycyclingunion.co.uk ■

A SPORT FOR ALL

ONE of the tactics in the ACU's drive to increase participation in cycling throughout the Army is targeting groups who are traditionally under-represented, including women and the junior ranks.

The policy is already bearing fruit with this year's tournament featuring several younger soldiers who were getting their first taste of Service competition.

Spr Heinrich Venter (28 Engr Regt, pictured below) was a keen cyclist in his native South Africa and relished the opportunity to continue racing now he has joined the Army.

"I have been riding for about 15 years. It's a passion for me and I am glad I can keep doing it."

"There is a lot of support for it from the Army and there are loads of people in my regiment who help me to organise things."

Although his racing pedigree is already at a good standard, Venter said that the support on offer from the ACU has helped make competitive riding more accessible.

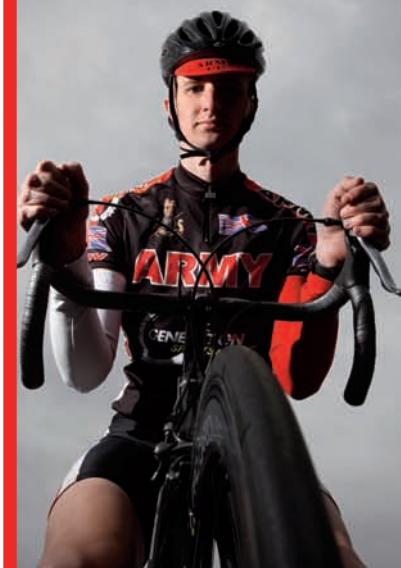
"When you think about the amount of people who have bikes, there are lots who don't race."

"What the Army does is give you the opportunity to ride in big groups and you don't always find that elsewhere."

Fellow ACU newcomer Cfn Chaz Harding (19 Regt RA LAD), who came third in the downhill mountain bike race, urged anyone interested in giving racing a go to sign up.

"I think cycling is a really good sport," he said.

"It's challenging and requires a lot of fitness and you get to be outside. You also get time off work to come and do it."





Bail out

A DETERMINED fielding display from the Royal Air Force dashed the Army's hopes of retaining the Inter-Services Twenty20 cricket crown.

The reigning champions went into the final game against the airmen having beaten the Royal Navy in the tournament's opening match at Portsmouth and looked assured of victory after the RAF posted 136-7 from their 20 overs.

But the Army's batsmen struggled to find their rhythm, eventually falling 13 runs short.

The tournament started well for the Army as the Reds secured a comfortable five-run win over the Royal Navy.

SSgt Ian Dixon (30 Sig Regt) led from the front with a solid 26 and Lt Steve Booth (16 Regt RA) top-scored with 33 as the holders cantered to 151-6 from their 20 overs.

The Navy lost several early wickets before a revival led by the team's middle order gave them a glimmer of hope which was finally extinguished when they came up five runs short.

A three-wicket win for the RAF over the Navy set up a winner-takes-all final, but not even a stand-out 65 from the Army's Sgt Stewart Houghton (251 Sig Sqn) could help the Reds retain the trophy.

● The Army's female cricketers romped to victory in their Inter-Services Twenty20 tournament as this issue went to press. See www.soldiermagazine.co.uk/sport for more information. ■

Measured approach:
Sig David Wade (R Signals) hit 14 runs before being caught in the Army's opening Inter-Services Twenty20 cricket match against the Royal Navy

Wizards of Oz

EX-PROFESSIONAL player 2nd Lt Sam Miller led the charge as the Combined Services squash team claimed two gold medals in an international tournament during their recent tour to Australia.

The young officer joined 15 Armed Forces players Down Under to take part in a frenetic 17 days of competition against the region's top talent.

Starting in Sydney, the Servicemen and women's first match was against a team of the highest-ranked individuals in the city.

Having had little chance to get over the lengthy flight to Australia, the Combined Services team took some time to get into its stride and eventually lost by ten points to six.

The team then headed for the next fixture in Darwin, an all-military three-test series against the Australian



Defence Organisation which the tourists won 2-0 after the hosts conceded the final game.

An individual tournament in the Northern Territories Open followed and Army junior Sig Rich Jones did the Service proud by reaching the final, where he lost a tense match 3-2.

Despite competing in three events in a matter of days, the squad saved its sternest test for last at the Arafura Games, a 60-sport tournament for emerging athletes which attracts entries from more than 50 countries.

The Combined Services males swept away the competition to scoop the team gold, while Miller propelled the Brits further up the medals table with a first-place finish in the individual competition.

A bronze medal for the women's team capped a memorable tour. ■

MOUNT UP

MILITARY mountain bikers can gain the internationally-recognised Scottish Mountain Bike Leader and Trail Cycle Leader awards after the qualifications were introduced through the Joint Service Mountain Training Centre in North Wales.

The courses, which cost civilians hundreds of pounds and take more than one month to complete, are free to Service personnel and are run over five days from the Capel Curig Adventurous Training Centre.

Taking in rides in nearby Coed-y-Brenin and Llandegla, the training package qualifies those who complete it to lead mountain biking expeditions anywhere in the world.

Students must meet criteria including being at least a junior NCO, completing 20 rides of more than an hour-and-a-half and possessing a valid first aid certificate.

Courses catering for up to six people will be run from July 2-31, August 16-21 and October 25-30 with a further six planned for 2010.

For more information, contact Maj Seaton on 01690 720154.

THE OFFICIAL BRITISH ARMY FITNESS GUIDE

STRONG TO THE CORE

You may have heard the term "core stability". This refers to a specific type of training which focuses on the deep-set trunk muscles and aims to develop these muscles' ability to stabilise the spine and pelvis.

A well-functioning core provides a stable base from which to move your limbs with maximum efficiency and power and with minimal risk of injury. The primary role of these "stabiliser" muscles is to hold the body – or part of it – stable, sometimes while another part of the body is moving.

For example, the core stabilisers are recruited to hold the spine in its usual S-shape before you pick a weight up off the floor. While the core muscles do not need brute strength, they do need to be able to switch on when they are needed and to be able to work continuously at a low level of contraction.

That is why core exercises often don't involve lifting weights – in fact some don't even involve moving at all. But don't make the mistake of thinking that the core stabilisers only work during specific core stability exercises. These muscles are active in almost every movement we make, so to a certain extent they are being trained all the time. The focus on proper technique and good posture during dedicated core stability work helps to target them more closely.

THE PLANK

Lie face down on a mat, with elbows below shoulders and forearms pointing forwards. Draw your belly button towards your spine and raise your body off the floor so that your weight is resting on your forearms and toes and forms a perfect straight line. Do not let your back sag in the middle. Hold for the required length of time, breathing freely.



MAKE IT EASIER

If you are not able to hold the full plank position for even a few seconds, try this modified version and work your way up. Begin as before, but this time when you raise your body on to your elbows, keep the knees on the floor so that you form a straight line from your knees to the top of your head.



MAKE IT HARDER

If the full plank feels easy, try extending alternate legs up into the air while still in the position, keeping the body stable and not rocking.



SIT-UP

This is the classic exercise for strengthening the rectus abdominis ("six pack"). It also works the external obliques and hip flexors.

In the Army's two-minute sit-up test, the exercise is performed with your feet anchored by a partner or low object. This position introduces the hip flexors, so is less taxing on the abdominals.

Start by lying on the floor with your knees bent and feet anchored. Have your hands across your chest with your fingers touching each collarbone and your elbows tucked in.

Maintaining a flat back, curl your head, shoulders and torso off the floor until your torso is in an upright position, then roll back down through your spine to the start position and repeat.



Soldier readers can buy the *Official British Army Fitness Guide*, published by Guardian Books, for the discounted price of only £8.99 plus postage and packing (RRP £12.99). Visit guardianbooks.co.uk or call 0845 606 4232 and quote "Soldier".





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SPORT SHORTS

EIGHT Army musicians plan to prove their fitness by taking on this year's Three Peaks challenge.

The soldiers, all from The Regimental Band of Her Majesty's Grenadier Guards, will be attempting to climb Ben Nevis, Scafell Pike and Snowdon within 24 hours during the first week of August.

Musn Christopher Smith told *SoldierSport* that as well as raising money for Help for Heroes, the team wanted to dispel the myth that Army musicians were not as fit as their colleagues in other trades.

For more information, visit the team's fundraising page at www.justgiving.com/markgibson2502

A SENIOR soldier outpaced the competition to claim an emphatic victory in an international triathlon on the Kenyan coast.

WO2 Dave Robins, who is currently serving as QSMI at the Army's adventurous training centre in the country, completed a 1,500 metre swim, 40km bike ride and a 5km run in just under two hours to take first place in the Wildman International Triathlon in Watamu.

INTREPID soldiers from the West Country have raised more than £10,000 after completing a testing seven-day, multi-activity event.

The troops, from 19 and 20 Cadet Training Team and B Company, 6 Rifles kayaked 19 miles down the River Exe, climbed Snowdon, Scafell Pike and Ben Nevis and completed a 900-mile cycle relay from John O'Groats to Land's End for the Triple Challenge, which was organised to raise money for the Army Benevolent Fund and Help for Heroes.

The team included Rifles trio Capt Martyn Griffiths, Capt Alan Barnes and WO2 Graham Perkins and WO2 Shane White (9/12 L), Sgt Phil Jones (Coldm Guards), Sgt Matt John (QDG) and Sgt Brian Saxton (R Signals).

Griffiths explained: "This was a difficult challenge, both mentally and physically."

● To make a donation, visit www.justgiving.com/triplechallenge2009

Ross ready for title shot

Burkinshaw confident ahead of British belt bout

RAMPAGING Rifleman Ross "The Boss" Burkinshaw faces a date with destiny when he takes on Lee Haskins in a British super-flyweight title fight later this month.

The Sheffield-based boxer faces the tricky southpaw in Sunderland on July 10 as he looks to add the Lonsdale belt to the English title he won in April.

If he is victorious, Burkinshaw will realise a dream he has held since first stepping into the gym at the age of eight and the Army man was in confident mood ahead of the fight.

"I've seen bits and bobs of Haskins and I know he's a southpaw and a switch-hitter, but I have what it takes to beat him," he said.

"My training has been going brilliantly and I am in better shape now than I ever have been. When I won the English title I felt like I couldn't get any better because I got down to weight really easily, but how I feel now is unreal."

Earning a title shot against Bristolian Haskins has not come easily for Burkinshaw after his meteoric rise was halted in February 2008 when he had to take nine months out to recover from a dislocated shoulder suffered in the second round of his bout with tough Syrian Abdel Mougharbel.

The Boss admits that going from a strenuous daily training routine to not being able to box at all was a true test of his character, but the infantryman told *SoldierSport* that he has become a better fighter as a result.

"I look at it that everything happens for a reason," he explained. "The night I did my shoulder I had people telling me to look on the bright side but I couldn't see it. But now my body has healed I can see that it gave me the chance to mature and a negative has become a positive."

The expected full house at the British title fight, which is being televised live on Sky, will contain scores of Burkinshaw's Army mates after he filled two coaches to travel up north within 24 hours of the bout being announced.

And although training takes up most of his time, The Boss makes sure he remembers his military roots by keeping in touch with his comrades.

"The Army have been brilliant to me so I try and do everything I can for them in return," he said. "All of the lads keep in touch with me wherever they are as well and I even get messages from Afghanistan."

Although Haskins, who has won 18 of his 20 fights including nine by knockout, will be a tough opponent, Burkinshaw is already looking beyond this month's contest.

"I want to get a couple of defences of the British title, but after that I'm going for the Commonwealth, Olympic or even World belts," he said.

"You can only achieve what you believe yourself and while I know that I'm not the best in the world at the moment, I believe I can get there." ■



GREAT TRAWL IN CHINA

A TEAM of endurance athletes from 2nd Royal Tank Regiment pushed themselves to the limit to complete a gruelling marathon over the Great Wall of China.

Ten runners from the Tidworth-based Falcon Squadron headed to the Far East to take on the 26.2-mile slog over the giant structure's 5,164 steps and the breathtaking undulating foothills

surrounding it in Tianjin Province.

Team leader Maj James Senior said that the squad had raised more than £5,000 for London's Joseph Clarke School for the Visually Impaired.

"It went really well," he said. "We raised more than we thought we would and that was thanks to the initiative of the guys."

"It was pretty tough. When we got to the 21st mile and were faced with a set of steps – some of them up to a foot long – it was a real test of character." ■



SPORT SHORTS

THE Army's top track and field stars continued their warm up for a hectic summer of competition by joining their Combined Services colleagues for a match against Loughborough Students and Achilles, a team made up of athletes from Cambridge and Oxford.

Despite its status as the country's top sporting university, the Loughborough men's squad struggled to match the might of its military opponents and the Combined Services had established a 13-point lead by the end of the 23-event tournament, winning by 146-133 with Achilles well behind with 44.

The Servicewomen found the going tougher in dismal conditions in Leicestershire and struggled to second place with 119 points compared to the home team's tally of 157, leaving Loughborough to take the overall title by 25 points.

With several younger performers on show, it was veteran athlete SSgt Mark Wiseman who led the way for the Combined Services.

The AGC man and former World Masters gold medal-winner recorded a season's best throw of 15.50 metres to win the shot put, with the 40-year-old's nearest competitor more than three-and-a-half metres behind.

Wiseman went on to beat Loughborough's highly-rated Chris Scott in the discus, with the Army man's throw of 51.80 metres falling just short of his season's best.

Director of Modern Athletics Capt Chris Howard said: "Despite the operational challenges placed on each and every Serviceman and woman, the Combined Services team formed up in high spirits with a desire to achieve.

"Loughborough have a reputation as being one of the country's premier sporting academies and such a reputation can have an impact on pre-competition nerves.

"Despite that, our team showed true military grit and performed exceptionally well."

AN ARMY doctor is appealing for sponsors ahead of running the Venice Marathon this October.

Maj Peter Starkey (35), who works in the outpatients department of Aldershot Centre for Health in Hampshire, will head to Italy on October 25 and aims to raise £2,000 for the British Limbless Ex-Servicemen's Association.

The officer said: "Everything that can be done must be done to care for our heroes who put their lives on the line for our security."

Starkey, who served in central Basra during a seven-month tour of Operation Telic in 2006, has previously completed the Paris Marathon in four-and-a-half hours. To sponsor him, visit www.justgiving.com/pge



Picture: Lee Durant

SPORT SHORTS

HARD DRIVE

RESERVIST racer Sgt Ewen Christie held his nerve to claim the narrowest of victories in the latest Armed Forces Rally Team competition.

The Territorial Army loggie and Royal Air Force co-driver Cpl James Dempsey completed the Jim Clark Land Rover Rally just 5.1secs ahead of an all-RAF crew.

Christie and Dempsey were locked in a close battle with second-place RAF pair Cpl Duncan Lilwall and Flt Lt Craig Teasdale throughout the two-day, 14-stage rally in Scotland and only managed to pull away at the end.

The Armed Forces Rally Team entered five Land Rovers into the event, with just ten minutes separating them all.

Leap of faith

Canopy pilot aims high after qualifying for latest international event

Interview: Stephen Tyler

OF all the sports given an airing in the Army, few require quite as much bravery as canopy piloting. The high-speed twists and dives of the skydiving variant, which is growing in popularity around the world, make the discipline the sole reserve of the hard-to-scare.

And with piloting requiring competitors – or “swoopers” as they are known – to step well out of their comfort zone, it is little surprise to know that soldiers are well represented in the sport’s elite.

Among the military men and women to have made their mark at international level is Cpl Deane Smith (RE). The NCO has already competed at the World Championships and was on his way to Taiwan as this issue went to press to represent Great Britain at the World Games, a tournament held by the

International Olympic Committee.

Speaking before jetting off, Smith (pictured left) told *SoldierSport*: “Anyone in the Army can get into parachuting at Netheravon, but because the canopies we use are high-performance and three or four times smaller than a regular one, there is a 1,000 jump limit before you can do it.

“I have about 14 years’ experience, but it’s only over the last six that I have got up to national standard.”

Although he had several thousand jumps to his name before giving canopy piloting a go, Smith was faced with a completely different set of challenges than regular skydiving presents.

Jumping from the plane as normal, swoopers wait until they are roughly 1,300 feet from the ground before entering into a radical rotating dive which sees them pick up speed.

The athletes have to control their turn so they come out of it at around

200 feet in time to pass through a five-foot entry gate above a long pool of water. Depending on the competition, the jumpers are then judged on speed, distance and accuracy.

Smith’s dedication to the sport has helped him creep up the rankings in recent years and he broke into the top 20 at last year’s World Championships in South Africa by finishing 16th.

He is hoping to make the cut for this year’s event in the same country and believes that there are at least three more military swoopers capable of qualifying alongside him.

“Canopy piloting tests a lot of the skills you need in the Army, whether its planning, leadership or commitment,” the sapper added. “There are always nerves and when you are on the plane you know that each jump could be your last, but the other competitors are awesome and see everyone else who jumps as an equal.” ■

PEAK SUPPLEMENTS

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Mountain Fuel director Darren Foote, a qualified climbing leader and former Serviceman, said: “I’ve always been on

the lookout for a range of supplement products to sustain me and keep me totally fuelled. At Mountain Fuel we have developed a range of complementary products which provide a completely balanced set of nutrients for one day.”

SoldierSport has teamed up with Mountain Fuel to offer one lucky reader the chance to win a complete box of sachets. For your chance to win, answer the following question:

Who was the first person to climb Mount Everest?

Answers by postcard to the address at the front of the magazine or by email (comps@soldiermagazine.co.uk) by July 31. Usual competition rules apply.



VETERANS BATTLE BACK

THE newly-formed Combined Services Veterans Rugby Union team put up a good fight as it lost its inaugural match against a Yorkshire Legends team starring former British Lion John Bentley.

Picked from the best players from the Inter-Services veterans teams, the Combined Services 22-man squad, which

contained 11 Army players, fell 0-31 down within half-an-hour of the match at Mooretown Rugby Club in Leeds but showed remarkable tenacity to claw the score back to 10-31 by half-time.

Bentley’s Legends struggled to cope with their opponents’ fitness and were on the back foot during the second half as the Combined Services brought the score

to 20-36 by the final whistle.

Speaking after the Serco-sponsored match, which raised more than £1,400 for Help for Heroes, Combined Services chairman Col Andy Allen (late REME) said: “This will now be an annual fixture for us. The opportunity for our players to raise their game against such quality opposition must not be denied.”

Ready recruits

We asked would-be soldiers enlisting in Birmingham what had convinced them to sign up for a life in uniform with the British Army

Adam Pennie (18)

I wanted to join the Army because I felt there wasn't a lot of employment for me in Birmingham. I trained as a mechanic but I haven't got work. I have encouraged two of my friends to sign up as I think it is such a good career. I have heard good things from friends who are in the Army and I think it is a good chance to see the world.



Mustapha Drammeh (20)

I am originally from Gambia but now live in Albury and want to join the Army for a better life. I hope to be a driver in the RLC and have a paid career. The Army provides education, training and the opportunity to travel. I have always wanted to be a soldier and in my heart of hearts this is what I know I should do.



Lee Simpson (19)

I want to join the Royal Engineers. I trained as a builder and the Army will give me the chance to use my skills. I will get to see the world and have a career so it makes sense to join up. I have kept myself as fit as possible so that I can pass basic training. I would go to Afghanistan if the Army asks me to – that's what being a soldier is all about.



Liam Nock (19)

I am joining the RLC as a chef. I used to compete in catering competitions and I reached instructor level in the cadets. I am looking forward to having the chance to combine cooking and the military and I also signed up because I wanted to do something with my life. I have always wanted to join and have been working on my fitness.



Anthony Robert Cole (23)

I want to join the Irish Guards because my uncle served with them and I'd like to follow him into the Army. I like the idea of the fitness side of the military and I also want to join for financial security, although I always wanted to join up even when I was at school. I would be prepared to deploy to Afghanistan – someone has to.



Grant Churchill (23)

I want a good career out of life and there isn't a better one out there than the Army. I want to be part of a team and being in the military will mean that I am part of a big team. I want to join the Grenadier Guards as I want to be an infantryman. I will be paid to fight for my country and wherever the Army sends me, I will go.



Daniel Hill (21)

I see the Army as a step forward in life and a good opportunity as far as qualifications and training are concerned. My friend is in the Royal Signals and he suggested that it might be a good role for me. Fitness is a strong factor and the fact that the military will give me financial security, especially in the current climate, is a key reason why I joined.



Liam Franklin (17)

I wanted to join for the experience and to see the world. My grandfather was an infantryman and a lot of my mates are in and have recommended it as a good way of life. I have kept up my fitness levels so I am ready for basic training. The prospect of going to Afghanistan is another reason I have signed up.



James Busk (18)

I want to join the RLC as a driver and hopefully gain my driving licence in the Army. I want to be a soldier for the action, adventure and travel and even as a young boy I wanted to sign up. I didn't want to join straight after school so I went to college first. Afghanistan is one of the reasons why I decided to join up – I want to serve my country.



Interviews: Heidi Mines Pictures: Steve Dock

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