

SOLDIER

MAGAZINE OF THE BRITISH ARMY

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FOR TWO
INSIDE



DECEMBER 2022



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I never drive
under the influence
of alcohol or drugs



**DON'T
DRINK
AND DRIVE**

**DRINK/DRUG DRIVING
CAN INJURE OR KILL**



ARMY

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CHRISTMAS HAS COME EARLY!
WIN A LUXURY WEEKEND AT GLENEAGLES



Something to celebrate



LET'S get an end-of-year reality check: it might be the season of goodwill to all men, but with operations ramping

up, personal finances ramping down and Service housing... well, read page 7 for the full story there... we could probably all be forgiven for wanting to crawl into a hole this Christmas.

No such sentiment at *Soldier* HQ, though. Thanks to our daily contact with you – our amazingly enterprising, entertaining and intrepid readers – we are far from ready to write off 2022.

Yes, it has been a shocking 12 months on most fronts – whether international, national or domestic.

But as our end-of-year salutes on page 28 show, the British Army, its people and the values they live and breathe by cannot fail to inspire hope and – dare I say it – optimism for the year ahead.

Committing that sentiment to print has likely sealed our fate for 2023 – apologies in advance for that.

So I will end my rambling there, other than to wish every one of our inspiring readers a merry Christmas and a happy and healthy New Year.

Sarah Goldthorpe • Editor

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Picture: Graeme Main

Families must keep complaining about poor service, the AFF says

Clearing up the housing mess

Soldiers may just start to see signs of improvement in the New Year...

DEFENCE staff trying to improve the woeful underperformance of housing maintenance contractors have offered some cautious optimism about the outlook in 2023.

"I'm deeply disappointed things have fallen so far short," Air Cdre James Savage, Head of Accommodation at the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO), told *Soldier*.

"I have spent a considerable part of my career living in SFA, and I know from personal experience how poor service affects those who often have much more to contend with than civilian counterparts."

His comments follow a string of bad press for military housing since new management deals worth £650m were awarded at the start of the year.

Last month *The Guardian* reported that nearly a third of MoD homes required repair, with some families resorting to legal action and even accusations of "bullying" replies from government lawyers.

Air Cdre Savage said much work was happening behind the scenes to "put things right" – including almost-daily meetings with suppliers at director level to get answers.

"The plans are now resulting in considerable increases in supplier resources to deliver the service and – although much more needs to be done – we are seeing some significant improvements in performance in some important areas," he explained.

Move-in pass rates, repair response

times and missed appointments were three areas where things were on the up, the officer added.

"DIO is monitoring progress closely and will intervene immediately if there is any deviation from the planned trajectory of improvements," he said.

"Responding to complaints remains one of the greatest challenges and we know families are not currently getting the service they should."

"Pinnacle is doing a huge amount of work to improve this to reduce call wait times to the National Service Centre and respond more quickly to emails."

He said changes would include more complaints handling staff.

Collette Musgrave, Chief Executive of the Army Families Federation, explained it was important for soldiers and their families to keep on raising complaints in the meantime.

"That is the greatest cause of frustration for people as complaints have been disappearing into a black hole," she said. "But we strongly encourage individuals to continue to use the process and to keep a record of what they send."

"Take that screenshot, keep a copy of your emails – otherwise when you do get hold of someone you have to start at the beginning."

She added that she too was starting to feel more optimistic about what had become an "increasingly difficult" situation with Army housing.

> continued on page 10

“They’re not getting the service they should”

IN NUMBERS

REPAIR RIGHTS

Emergency repairs to Service housing should be responded to within **2 hours...**

...and urgent repairs within **48 hours**, regardless of the day or time you call.

Routine repairs should be tackled within **12 working days**.

SOLDIER

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ARMY

BE THE BEST

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GLOBAL SITREP



1. USA CONVERGING ON CALIFORNIA

TECHNICAL interoperability and new capabilities were the focus of a major exercise hosted by the US Army in Fort Irwin and Camp Pendleton.

Project Convergence saw 450 UK troops from across 20th Armoured Brigade Combat Team testing around 17 cutting-edge systems – some of which were on their first outing in the field.

Among the areas under examination were how the multiple launch rocket system could be fired more rapidly through the use of

automation and sensors on the F-35 fast jet, as well as how linking up UK and American air defence assets could increase lethality.

Meanwhile, members of The Ranger Regiment swapped tactics with US Special Operations Forces, while reconnaissance and logistical support was provided by a robotics and autonomous systems platoon from 2nd Battalion, The Yorkshire Regiment. Read more about the wide-ranging package in next month's edition.

Picture: Sgt Donald Todd, RLC

2. MALI NEWCOMBE NO MORE

BRITISH troops are set to return early from peacekeeping duties in Mali amid escalating security concerns in the troubled West African nation.

The planned three-year mission for the 300-strong Long Range Reconnaissance Group will now end sooner than expected following similar announcements by France and other allies.

Recent coups and collaboration between the ruling military junta and the Russian-backed Wagner Group have led to fears of an emboldened insurgency and increasing violence.

Armed Forces Minister James Heappey told MPs: "This government cannot deploy our nation's military to provide security when the host country's government is not willing to work with us to deliver lasting stability."

He also blasted the Wagner Group's links to human rights abuses, but praised the "outstanding" efforts of UK personnel during Operation Newcombe, as the commitment is known.

The fifth rotation out of a total of six was under way as this issue went to press, with The Royal Scots Dragoon Guards replacing 1st Battalion, The Royal Irish Regiment (pictured) as lead unit.

However, an exact timeframe for the withdrawal had not been given.

Picture: Sgt Luke Johnston, R Irish

Troops from 1 R Irish fire mortar illumination rounds north of Gao

3. MALTA HISTORY UP CLOSE

BRITISH explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) specialists travelled to the Mediterranean island dubbed "the most bombed place on earth" to learn how their Second World War predecessors operated.

The tri-Service team from the Defence EOD, Munitions and Search Training Regiment visited various sights around Malta during a battlefield study focusing on the 1940-42 siege of the strategically vital outpost.

Some 3,000 raids were carried out by German and Italian bombers in the two-year campaign, in addition to naval attacks – leaving a significant number of unexploded devices in their wake.

“This takes everything up a notch”

Cavalry set sights on Op Cabrit – page 18

Iceland EOD package tests stamina and concentration – page 22

1. USA

INTELLIGENCE FOR THE ATLAS?

Brief the team now:



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4. MOROCCO

3. MALTA

2. MALI

5. OMAN

6. SIERRA
LEONE

6. SIERRA LEONE

LEARNING FROM THE BEST

EIGHT instructors from 1st Battalion, Irish Guards deployed to Freetown to help the Sierra Leone Armed Forces prep for future UN operations.

Staged at the country's Peace Mission Training Centre, the three-week programme focused on fieldcraft, infantry tactics, first aid, patrolling and counter-IED drills – building up to a final exercise.

Lt Col Rob Browne (RLC), UK Defence Adviser to Sierra Leone, thanked all those involved, as well as the Nairobi-based British Peace Support Team (Africa), who coordinated the short-term training team as part of their remit to boost the capabilities of partner nations across the continent.

In particular, he praised the 196 students for "their positivity, digging deep, and giving 100 per cent".



4. MOROCCO

PARAS TEAM UP WITH NORTH AFRICAN COLLEAGUES

A PUNISHING series of desert warfare drills for British and Moroccan troops culminated in a six-day mission to seize control of a fictional airstrip.

Taking place near Marrakech, Exercise Jebel Sahara provided a stern test for members of 2nd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment and their hosts, the 2e Brigade d'Infanterie Parachutiste.

For the paras, part of the Army's Global Response Force, the three-week package was a chance to hone their readiness while learning from the Moroccans' experience of operating in hot, dry conditions.

In return they shared their expertise in mounted and dismounted patrols, marksmanship, demolitions and casualty care.

Officer Commanding, Maj Ash Neve, said working in the demanding and unfamiliar terrain, while also developing their cultural understanding, would stand his personnel in good stead should they find themselves operating in North Africa in future.

He added: "What is also important is that we've trained how we would fight.

"We've taken an expeditionary approach, living in austere conditions and relying on the bare minimum that we've brought with us or can source locally."

5. OMAN

JOB WELL DONE

THE latest batch of personnel to deploy to the Army's Middle Eastern training hub are looking forward to Christmas at home after concluding four months of drills.

Exercise Desert Khanjar saw troops from the 2nd Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Scotland Battlegroup practise basic and specialist skills in Oman's austere wilderness, while also

finding time for cultural visits, defence engagement tasks and adventurous pursuits.

With the growing British base near the port of Duqm becoming an evermore frequent stop on the training calendar, thousands of Servicemen and women will be put through their paces there every year.

Find out what some of them made of the most recent package in the January 2023 edition of *Soldier*.



HOUSING HEADACHES

> continued from page 7

■ "I am a lot more confident now than I was two months ago that those who need to be seized of this issue, now are," she said.

"But people are really worried about this. And with a wider eligibility and entitlement review going on, they don't know what decision to make for the best for their family."

The National Service Centre will maintain its core operating hours over Christmas. Air Cdre Savage said all urgent repairs would continue to be addressed and suppliers (Vivo, Amey and Pinnacle) had "increased resources" to minimise disruption.

In addition, Vivo has been running community engagement events since the summer – including at Sandhurst, Tidworth, Thorney Island, Aldershot and Blandford – where managers and operatives can assist personnel with on-the-day repairs, property MOTs and gas safety inspections.

"The events have proved to be a great success, enabling families to meet the supplier face-to-face," the officer explained.

Further days are planned by Vivo at Larkhill Community Centre (Dec 5); Ordnance House, Tidworth (Dec 6); Upavon Community Centre (Dec 7); The Beeches Centre, Bulford (Dec 8) and Nicolson Community Centre, Boscombe Down (Dec 9).

Amey and Pinnacle are also running a housing engagement event for families at RAF Waddington on December 13 to discuss issues with homes and raise maintenance concerns, with similar events scheduled in the New Year.



DID YOU KNOW

Pinnacle manages customer communications, complaints and occupancy services but Amey (for the North and Central regions) and Vivo (for the South East and South West) are responsible for maintenance

VOICE YOUR VIEWS, VETS

■ A MAJOR initiative to collect feedback from former personnel has been launched by the Office for Veterans' Affairs and the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

The Veterans' Survey will be available until February 3, 2023 in the "Find your study" section of the ONS website or via email at veterans.survey@ons.gov.uk

It is an opportunity to tell the government about experiences and how easy it is to access certain services. Responses are anonymous.



■ STAMINA was the name of the game for personnel at the annual Bismarck Challenge as 600 members of 1st (UK) Division took on a cross-country relay across the Yorkshire countryside with 15kg on their backs. The cavalry triumphed in the Regular categories, with the Catterick-based Light Dragoons winning both male and female events. Meanwhile, men from 8th Battalion, The Rifles and women of 208 Field Hospital took the Reservist top slots.

Picture: Matt Allen

'Training estate will turn'

FUTURE recruits will see a huge difference in their living environment amid a massive cash injection to improve the training estate, top brass have said.

Army basing boss Maj Gen Richard Clements said billions of pounds would be pumped into UK sites over the coming years – with a top-down overhaul of troops' accommodation and other facilities well under way.

The senior officer was responding to an Ofsted report (*Soldier*, November), which flagged that instructors providing high standards of training were being let down by substandard classrooms and austere living areas.

While the Army fared better than the other two Services, the watchdog was still critical of facilities at some bases and urged the government to act.

However, Maj Gen Clements was confident that work would deliver.

He said: "While it is fair to say there has been a lack of investment in the past, we have been working hard to address the situation."

"A ten-year programme across defence is under way – with more than £5 billion being invested on the Army

estate. Notably, there is £1.2 billion for single living accommodation which, along with money from the defence estate optimisation programme, will create 16,500 new and refurbished bed spaces."

Investment has also been targeted towards individual locations.

A £230 million package has been allocated to the British Army Soldier Academy at Pirbright – set to become a new focal point for soldier and NCO career development – which will see major renovations before the end of the decade.

The Royal Military Academy Sandhurst will also see a £50 million slice of cash to assist with improvements at the 200-year-old location, said Maj Gen Clements.

And there will be work at other sites including Catterick – home of the Infantry Training Centre – to consolidate work already completed.

"Clearly, we cannot make large-scale improvements overnight, but they will be delivered," the senior officer concluded. "We are targeting the investment and making sure we address the sites most in need." ■

“We are addressing the sites most in need”



Picture: Shutterstock



'There are people who can assist'

Army is there to support all domestic abuse victims on its patch, top officer says

SPEAKING out about violence at the hands of a partner may seem like a no-brainer to those on the outside.

But if you are a civvy spouse living in Service quarters who is reliant on your soldier's income, for example, the prospect of reporting such abuse may feel almost impossible.

This festive season – a time when domestic incidents often increase as families spend more time together – the Army is reminding victims that support is on hand for anyone in the military community who requires it.

Home Command's Brig Alex Potts – the Army advocate for domestic violence awareness – said welfare officers were being increasingly equipped to help victims with issues such as emergency accommodation and reporting crimes.

"Right now we are coming out of a Covid era, during which the nation's mental health deteriorated," he told *Soldier*. "This saw an increase in domestic abuse and we are now also in a period where the cost of living and other financial uncertainties are potential accelerants."

"But in the Army we have trained more experts who can assist with

immediate solutions to violence.

"They can also help signpost victims to other services."

The officer said it was important for the entire military community to pull together to stamp out these behaviours completely.

"Victims might not see a way out of an abusive relationship if the perpetrator signed for the house or is the main breadwinner," he added.

"So we all need to make sure the circumstances of Army life do not make domestic abuse more likely.

"Because all the goodness of Army life acts to make these incidents less likely – our professional standards, the fact we value our families, the fact we recognise that a supportive home front is key to operational effectiveness.

"We need to make sure this goodness illuminates and deals with domestic abuse and doesn't hide it.

"We must ensure our people know where to turn for help, and Op Teamwork provides a golden opportunity to improve awareness of warning signs and how to respond.

Domestic abuse is counter to all our values and we must find it, deal with the perpetrators and support victims." ■

“We need to make sure Army life does not make domestic abuse more likely”



Picture: Cpl Tim Hammond, RAF

■ THIS year's remembrance commemorations had a special resonance for several reasons.

It was Charles III's first year leading events at the Cenotaph (pictured above) as sovereign.

Meanwhile, senior NCO Sgt Jamie Simeon (SG), whose father John was one of eight killed at Tumbledown, found proceedings especially moving as he read the poem

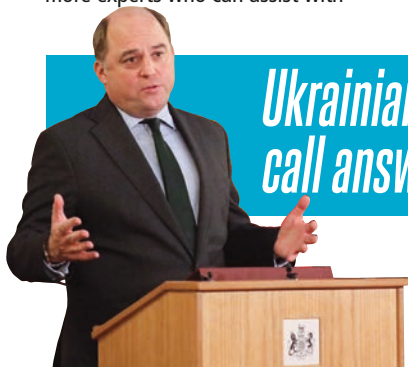
Ode to Tumbledown at Durham Cathedral.

Jamie, who was interviewed by *Soldier* when he visited the Falklands on the 25th anniversary of the conflict (pictured), said reading Lt Mark Mathewson's poem at the festival of remembrance had been a special moment for him.

Major national events included a gathering at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire, where troops, veterans and civilians turned out in their thousands.

Veterans and their partners at the Royal Star and Garter's Surbiton care home experienced a remembrance-themed painting masterclass from Lucy Freud (pictured).

The artist, whose father was painter Lucian Freud and great-grandfather was eminent psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, guided her students as they used acrylics to depict poppies.



Ukrainian kit call answered

■ THE UK is beefing up assistance to Ukraine with a raft of cold weather kit and extra defensive weapons en route to the front line. Defence Secretary Ben Wallace (shown) said soldiers from the Eastern European state being trained on UK soil were returning home with winter items including tents and sleeping bags as temperatures plunge to minus 20 degrees centigrade. He also announced that hundreds of extra surface-to-air missiles were being despatched to deal with Russian drone and cruise missile strikes. Ukrainian soldiers – 2,000 of whom are currently training with British troops and partner nations – are also receiving the latest protective kit.



PAYING THE PRICE

■ A FORMER major is gearing up to spend Christmas Day climbing the highest peak in the Americas – the last of 12 gruelling challenges she has completed in 2022.

Jennifer Price hopes to summit Mount Aconcagua in the Argentinian Andes on or around December 25, rounding off a year-long international quest to raise money for veterans through a series of punishing feats.

The dozen monthly missions she set herself included an ultramarathon in Jordan (shown below), a full Ironman in Spain, scaling Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania and cycling from Land's End to John o'Groats (shown above).

"It's really hard to comprehend the amount of energy and focus this year has required," said the 32-year-old, who recently left Regular service with the Royal Artillery to transfer to the Intelligence Corps Reserves.

"When I – fingers crossed – stand on the top of Aconcagua I will most likely feel a huge sense of relief that I don't need to put my mind and body through any more pain, but I think it will also be hugely emotional.

"However much money I eventually raise, I'm so glad I had the chance to increase awareness of a cause I care deeply about."

Her chosen charity, The Veterans' Foundation, supports hundreds of small organisations with its grant scheme.

To help her reach her £30,000 target visit justgiving.com/fundraising/jennevolve1212



Picture: Brian Goldthorpe

Committed to the core

Soldiers across 1st (UK) Division saluted for their innovation

CIDER-MAKING soldiers were among those to be rewarded for their ingenuity at this year's 1st (UK) Division Rhino Awards.

The annual event, being staged as this issue went to press, recognises the outstanding work of personnel and units in areas such as innovation, coding, teamwork and leadership.

And among the colourful cohort of 2022 winners were members of 6 Regiment, Royal Logistic Corps (pictured above), who received a green award for various eco initiatives at their North Yorkshire base.

As well as planting trees and recycling old bikes to reduce car use on site, the loggies have been sending away the spoils of the apple trees on camp to be made into regimental cider.

Not only has this allowed them to dish out the odd free tippie at functions, but it has curbed a rat problem on the base. Pests had been feeding on fallen fruit.

Project lead, QM Maj "Spike" Milligan (centre left), told *Soldier* the enterprise – thought up by the padre – had caught the imagination of the troops alongside the other initiatives. "They want to make a difference,"

the officer explained.

"And younger soldiers in particular completely understand the need to go green and look after what we've got."

"This sort of thing isn't everyone's cup of a tea, but a small gang really threw themselves into it."

Other Rhino Award winners included Reservist Cpl Jack Barron (Lancs), who won an innovation prize for using his digital marketing skills to help his regiment's 4th Battalion to recruit new members.

And Cpl Emily Hyde (R Signals, pictured left) of 214 Signal Squadron scooped the title of junior leader of the year for showing passion, energy and technical brilliance within her deployed headquarters.

REME soldiers from the 2 Scots Battlegroup were also commended for their ingenuity in creating temporary side windows for their Foxhound vehicles on exercise recently in Oman, which kept the fleet moving.

1st (UK) Division is the British Army's most versatile force, containing some of the Service's most specialist skills.

The formation comprises four light infantry, two logistic, a medical and an engineer brigade. ■



“ I think I will feel a huge sense of relief ”



Stronger command posts

New systems will help reveal potential slip-ups on exercise

THE Army's ability to make its command posts as stealthy as possible on the battlefield has been boosted by a new contract.

Under a three-year deal worth £4.7million, science and engineering company Roke is providing advanced remote observation, surveillance and radio frequency emission detectors to the Land Warfare Centre (LWC).

The systems can be used by observer-mentors during training assessments on exercises anywhere in the world.

They work by gathering data from internal and external monitors to identify weaknesses in operating procedures as well as bad habits that could give away positions to the enemy.

"It is unobtrusive and allows performance to be monitored within the command post using both audio and visual means," LWC project manager Kate Gregory told *Soldier*.

"Then there is surveillance tech using ground level sensors and remotely piloted air systems to capture video, infrared and thermal imagery.

"It reveals the sort of stuff that in the real world the enemy can pick up from a distance – the glow of a burning cigarette or a signal emitted by a mobile phone.

"That brings a real-life edge and



Picture: Cpl Alex Morris, RLC

makes the training audience more aware of the potential of, say, an enemy UAV scouting the area.

"The radio frequency emission collection system helps the observer-mentors generate evidence to encourage correct behaviours in command post personnel – for example, did they break a period of radio silence or send a private text when they shouldn't have done?"

The kit was used for the first time on Exercise Cerberus (shown above and on page 15) and it produced encouraging results.

"It's really taken this element of training to another level and the Army is looking at exploiting its potential in other areas," added Gregory. ■

■ **LOGGIES** got up to their necks in a tough test to prove their driving and navigational prowess. Exercise Mudmaster – organised by 154 Regiment, Royal Logistic Corps – saw more than 200 competitors pushed through a series of off-road challenges north of the border.



Picture: Cpl Nathan Tanuku, RLC

“It's taken this training to another level”

SOLDIERING ON AWARDS

■ A **BREASTFEEDING** advocate and selfless fundraisers were among the current and former troops honoured at this year's Soldiering On Awards.

LCpl Natasha Day (RAMC) won the inclusivity category for her efforts to help serving mums by creating the Defence Breastfeeding Network.

Meanwhile, ex-major Sip Powers was presented with the lifetime achievement award for his years of hard work on behalf of injured and sick troops.

As well as devoting more than a decade of his 34-year career to the BattleBack initiative as an instructor, the former loggie has raised in excess of £40,000 for military charities through endurance events and overseen an MoD project to create adapted homes for wounded personnel.

Retired major Sally Orange (ex-RAMC) was also recognised with the sporting excellence gong for raising awareness of mental health issues – and racking up £500,000 for good causes – by taking on marathons, Ironman events and more.

MALE



FEMALE



WIN
Crye Precision GB4
combat clothing
worth £600!



NOVEMBER'S spine line clues – Artingstall, Horsfield, Young, Nichols – were all the names of winners at the 2021 Army Sports Awards. Read more about this year's event on pages 62-63.

This month we have a **Crye Precision GB4 combat shirt and pants worth more than £600** to give away courtesy of Level Peaks (levelpeaks.com) – a leading supplier of world-class systems and kit to the MoD, police and many Nato forces.

The clothing features a high performance, flame-resistant fabric, making it lighter and stronger where needed. Both garments can be specified for men or women, and are designed for use with removable Crye Precision Airflex elbow and kneepads (sold separately). The shirt is designed to be worn under body armour and features low-profile zippered shoulder pockets to reduce bulk. The pants have integrated stretch for a slimmer cut with maximum mobility. They come with low-profile side pockets, cargo pockets, dedicated knife holder with reinforced opening and zip thigh pockets for mobile phones.

To be in with a chance of winning this tasty kit, tell us what links the clues on the spine of this issue.

Answers, including phone numbers, to the usual address or comps@soldiermagazine.co.uk by December 30. Good luck!

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Exercise Cerberus was the most ambitious Field Army exercise in Europe for a decade. Shown are members of the Armoured Trials and Development Unit testing kit, tactics and procedures ahead of the package



Picture: Cpl Alexander Morris, RLC

Stepping up to the battlefield

British Army confirms peer-on-peer warfighting capability of its brigades

TROOPS are reflecting on lessons learnt during an ambitious series of drills in northern Germany.

Held at Nato Forward Holding Base Sennelager, Exercise Cerberus tested five different brigade HQs to validate them and ensure they are ready to play their part on operations.

It was the Field Army's largest such outing in a decade and saw five British and one American brigade team up to prove their warfighting chops.

French and German personnel were also among the 3,500 soldiers pitched against a peer adversary in a realistic battle scenario.

Maj Gen James Martin, general officer commanding of 3rd (UK) Division, said the deployment – which also involved a massive logistical effort to get 800 vehicles into position – was an example of how the Armed Forces consistently looked for ways to demonstrate readiness.

"Exercise Cerberus is about making sure our brigades are fit to deploy on operations all the way from peacekeeping at one end to warfighting and high intensity operations at the other," he added.

"Hopefully this exercise will provide reassurance to both the British people and our allies.

"I also think it is on the critical path to achieving the chief of the general staff's Op Mobilise ambition."

Among the formations taking part

was 7th Light Mechanised Brigade Combat Team, whose battlegroups are formed around the Foxhound and Jackal vehicles.

Maj Seb Joyce (RA), from the headquarters' plans branch, said the chance to interact with the other formations had been invaluable.

"It provided us with a good opportunity to better understand where our capabilities complement one another and how we can work together going forward," he explained.

"It was a testing time for all of us. It really puts the staff under pressure."

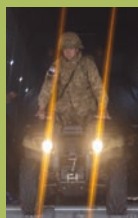
Elsewhere in the package, members of 2nd Battalion, The Yorkshire Regiment were continuing their work to assess new capabilities under the Experimentation and Trials Group.

This included using unmanned ground vehicles and drones, as well as sessions in the Interim Virtual Combined Arms Simulation (Deployable) system – a new mobile suite of networked computers – on its first outing to Germany. ■

IN NUMBERS

800

vehicles mobilised to Germany by land, sea and air prior to Exercise Cerberus in a major logistical effort



"I HOPE I'VE SHOWN OTHER FEMALES IT'S ACHIEVABLE"

■ A BRITISH Army medic has made history by becoming the first female soldier to pass the infamous Parachute Regiment selection test, better known as P Company.

Pte Addy Carter (RAMC, shown) was awarded the coveted maroon beret after completing the gruelling three-and-a-half-week slog, which culminates in a series of loaded marches, log and stretcher races and so-called aerial confidence sessions on the trainasium assault course (pictured below).

The Servicewoman, a member of 16 Medical Regiment, achieved the feat on her second try after a foot injury forced her to pull out of her first course.

"Physically, I found it very challenging, but it's about showing that you can deliver when things get hard," said the 21-year-old.

"I just kept telling myself that every step was a step closer to the end.

"As a woman, I wasn't treated any differently by the instructors, nor did I expect or want to be.

"I hope I've shown to other female soldiers that it's achievable."

The next stage is the basic parachute course at RAF Brize Norton, which will earn Pte Carter her "wings".

Capt Rosie Wild (RHA) previously became the first officer to pass P Company some two-and-a-half years ago (*Soldier*, March 2020).

“It was a testing time for all of us”



Pictures: Cpl Danny Houghton, RLC and Steve Dock

FEARLESS FUNDRAISING



Para pushes the mental health message

Target funds:
£3,200
For: ABF The Soldiers
Charity

A HARDY para took on the medicine ball challenge to raise cash for military causes. Sgt Ryan Sherlock (shown), an instructor on the

Parachute Regiment assessment course at Catterick's Infantry Training Centre, lugged the 3kg-load – representing the invisible burden of mental ill health – for ten hours over ten miles for ten days along the infamous P Company test-week route. Support him at events.soldierscharity.org/fundraisers/ryansherlock

REPORTING INCIDENTS

■ THE telephone number for reporting incidents to the Defence Accident Investigations Branch has changed.

From now on, personnel should call **01980 348622** to notify the team of injuries, deaths, near misses or damages to kit and property.

Troops are asked to update their records accordingly as from January the old numbers will no longer work.



FESTIVE FOOTPRINTS

■ FORCES charity Walking with the Wounded is urging people to get behind its annual festive appeal.

The Walking Home for Christmas campaign will see events happening across the country from December 9 to 20. Visit walkinghomeforchristmas.com

“We’re trying to get the message out new sizes are here”

A fitting trial at Tidworth Garrison earlier this year



Picture: Graeme Main

Have you got your Virtus order in?

NARROWER Virtus scalable tactical vests and shorter yokes can now be ordered by any soldier who thinks they require them.

The items, which fit existing in-service plates, were first made available to some deploying personnel in the spring.

They are part of an ongoing development project and follow the 2021 *Atherton Report*, which said the Army was failing to protect female personnel with adequate kit.

But now any individual can make a bid for the smaller versions.

“We are trying to get the message out that the new sizes are here,” said Helen Boulby, a survivability expert in the dismantled close combat branch of Defence Equipment and

Support’s Soldier, Training and Special Projects team, which is responsible for developing body armour.

At the time of going to press, troops first had to book a contractor-led fitting session via the Defence Connect Virtus page before demanding the kit.

However, a new sizing chart is due to be released shortly which will make ordering smaller Virtus business-as-usual via quartermaster departments.

Keep an eye out for more updates in the New Year. ■

YOUR FEEDBACK COUNTS...

Scan this QR code to get your views on Virtus to the people who are developing the kit and can bring about change



BOX FRESH

■ IN FRONT is the Boxer bridge layer variant and behind it is the 155mm artillery version, seen during a capability demo on Salisbury Plain Training Area.

The event gave senior leaders and project staff a chance to see the vehicles up close and liaise with the manufacturer’s technicians. The Army is set to receive 623 of them to operate alongside Ajax, Challenger 3 and Apache as part of a digital networked combat system. They can be quickly reconfigured to do different jobs on the battlefield including transporting troops. The first Boxer vehicles are scheduled to arrive at units in 2023.

Picture: Sgt Ben Beale, RLC



Ground view

Army Sergeant Major, WO1 Paul Carney, offers his take on Service life...

AS THE festive season beckons and as I write my final *Soldier* column of 2022, I don't think I can remember any other year of such huge highs and lows.

Back in January – which seems a lifetime ago – we were all optimistically emerging from the Covid pandemic and busy preparing for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations, which were carried off with professionalism over the extended May bank holiday.

But just a few months later, the same soldiers were leading the national mourning that followed the death of our sovereign.

Elsewhere, and far from any ceremony, the Army has been continuing to focus on the chief of the general staff's Op Mobilise in response to Russia's invasion of neighbouring Ukraine.

This has seen more of our forces deployed in Europe, with the aim of deterring a wider conflict.

This year has shown how quickly events can move. And as 2022 draws to a close we can expect further challenges in the months ahead – not least because of a cost-of-living crisis that is affecting us all, soldier and civilian alike.

Amid the financial

squeeze, Vladimir Putin's aggression in Ukraine continues to dominate the world picture.

With Nato maintaining its robust defensive posture, we can expect no let-up in a busy deployment schedule on the eastern flank.

Op Cabrit and the expanded British-led Enhanced Forward Presence battlegroup in Estonia remain a deterrent which must be sustained.

However, I have no doubt that we will meet these challenges having seen soldiers demonstrate their resilience and adaptability over the past 12 months.

Above all though, we must make sure we look out for each other during the testing period that lies ahead while maintaining our own mental and physical well-being. Remember to use your chain of command if you need help.

As the Army sergeant major, it has been humbling to see the dedication and professionalism of personnel during an unprecedented year.

My thanks to you all for everything over the past 12 months – and especially to those on duty or overseas operations during the festive season. I wish you a happy Christmas; you continue to do us proud.

“
You continue to do us proud
”

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

Q How will you be spending Christmas this year?

A Out and about, visiting those on duty



Picture: Cpl Alex Morris, RLC

Moving on up

AS WE implement the chief of the general staff's Op Mobilise, I've been really impressed to see personnel honing their conventional warfighting skills.

I recently had the opportunity to visit Nato forward holding base Sennelager, where our five brigade HQs were tested on Exercise Cerberus (pictured above).

It proved a demanding undertaking, not least because shifting troops, equipment and vehicles

to Germany was a logistic feat in itself. And once there, command posts had to be relocated constantly at speed to avoid coming under mock contact.

Movement will be critical to any future conflict with a peer enemy. But soldiers were certainly rising to the challenges set by exercise planners in the serials I saw – as well as working seamlessly with Nato allies.

They send a clear message to any would-be aggressors out there.

PREPARATION STATIONS

■ THE training of our Ukrainian counterparts is continuing apace at UK locations, with NCOs taking the lead in delivering basic military skills courses.

As a result of the instructors' efforts – as well as teams from several other nations – thousands of troops are now better prepared. And all are being issued with lifesaving winter kit and cold weather sleeping bags plus helmets, body armour sets and fully-stocked first aid packs.

The fact that our Eastern European colleagues will be fighting when they land in Ukraine is not lost on our soldiers.

They are defending their homeland and loved ones. That is a sobering thought.

ALL GUNS BLAZING

Soldiers get serious with live ammo
ahead of Op Cabrit deployment



“
Your performance
could be the difference
between you and your
friends living or dying
”



IN A WORLD where even using the Space Shuttle's zero-gravity loo can be accurately simulated on a virtual reality trainer, it's not surprising such technology has been adopted across numerous industries.

But for the military, even the best systems can only progress a soldier's skills so far.

Nothing developed yet has been able to instil the sense of apprehension when handling real ammunition, the acrid smell of cordite in an enclosed space or the shocking jolt of a 120mm gun's recoil when discharging live rounds.

This reality was brought home to many of the less experienced members of B Squadron, The Queen's Royal Hussars on a recent training package for its Challenger crews at Castlemartin.

Thanks to pandemic restrictions, live firing had not been staged for these troops since October 2020 – and even then it was curtailed due to a lack of high-explosive squash head (Hesh) ammunition.

As a result, nearly one third of the 60-odd personnel gathered in Wales had never fired a live 120mm round before – a statistic that needed rectifying fast with an Operation Cabrit deployment looming.

The three-week exercise took B Squadron's crews a step closer to the next stage of their preparations for Estonia – Exercise Tallinn Dawn in Germany, where they will be called upon to live-fire in several scenarios.

“We need to get everyone ready for that package and then for deployment with the QRH Battlegroup in March,” explained Regimental Sergeant Major WO1 Alastair Walker (pictured right).

“First and foremost, we are putting people through the annual crew test – an individual shoot for one tank – before progressing to the troop assessment.

“This is where troop leaders control the movement and firing of three tanks; they separate the ground into arcs and control who takes what target.

“They must then assess what they are seeing and issue call signs to take each target.

“Because we're deploying, the crews are using every single minute possible to refine their skills and the way they work with each other.”

In total, 16 teams progressed through the training schedule, firing both Hesh and armour-piercing discarding sabot rounds at moving and static targets.

And for those firing live for the first time, the effect was profound.

“It's totally different and there are lot of things you have to consider that perhaps you don't appreciate with simulators,” said Tpr Ben Ash, who joined the British Army in 2019.

“Being a gunner, if I hadn't gone through this before deploying I think I think I might have had some apprehension about doing it for real if called for.

“But we have learnt fast about what to expect and how the kit behaves in combat conditions; we've experienced the dust kicking up from our tracks and obscuring our vision, and ”



WO1 Alastair Walker

Words: Steve Muncey Pictures: Graeme Main



» firing on the move, so it's pretty much irreplaceable in terms of preparing us.

"But it's not just the firing itself, it's working with the crew commanders here, where you see a different side to them and realise the gravity of what it is we are preparing for; what the reality is.

"The atmosphere is different and far more serious when you're using live ammo. More sombre, perhaps, as it's reminding us that what we are doing is very aggressive and it could soon be real if it comes to it.

"It's taught me that you really need to level your head and focus on your job because on an operation those 'targets' can fire back, and that means your performance could be the difference between you and your friends living or dying."

That is a message already impressed on some of the unit's more experienced soldiers, including WO2 Jason Dixon (below), a 20-year veteran of Iraq, Afghanistan and Estonia, plus 12 live-firing exercises.

"The simulators are a fantastic tool to get up to a particular standard as they train muscle memory to a degree, but out here the crews are fully equipped with fire retardant kit, body armour, helmet and headsets," he explained.

"Simulation doesn't always replicate that, so this takes everything up a notch.

"Also, the personnel need to get on the vehicles in the elements, feel the kit, and get worn out while still pushing themselves."

He added: "Live firing adds so much stress. We are in a controlled environment and risk is mitigated by our safety measures, but the potential danger of what we are doing here cannot be forgotten and that keeps everyone on their toes."

They will certainly need to be on those if the balloon ever goes up, because these young men and women will be told to destroy lethal near-peer opposition at speeds of up to 40kph over rough, unfamiliar ground.

That requires seamless work as part of a highly coordinated group, while discharging one of the most powerful guns in the world.



WO2 Jason Dixon



"If the worst happens there needs to be total confidence in our ability to deploy quickly and take part in complex operations, so this package is a massive benefit to the crews and the Army in general," said tank commander Cpl Declan McCalmon (below), who has seven years' experience on Challenger 2s.

"In particular, when you're live firing on the move it makes you realise how important this training is.

"The simulators don't shake you around physically, they move only what you see through the sights. Out here, we have to take into account how we are travelling across the battlefield, the friendly forces around us, plus our own movements inside the tank; the gunner has to concentrate on keeping hands and head as still as possible.

"Then it's the driver who can prove crucial, as the smoother the ride the easier it is for the gunner.

"We pick out the best ground or route to avoid large bumps and dips.

"That's why packages like this, where we practise working together under these pressurised and difficult conditions to build team cohesion, are vital." ■

Cpl Declan McCalmon



First to the Finnish

ACCORDING to officer commanding B Squadron, Maj George Trypanis (shown below), the Castlemartin package allowed his personnel to build on some valuable training with Finland's defence forces.

Exercise Arrow in 2022 was the first time the British Army's Challenger 2s had ever visited the Scandinavian country, with the squadron integrated into one of the host nation's battlegroups.

The troops then used the Tes system to gauge performance as they went up against an opfor of Finnish Army Leopard 2 A6s.

"It was fantastic for us as there are few opportunities to exercise against peer opposition," the officer told *Soldier*.

"The Finns also had Russian-made BMP 2 infantry fighting vehicles and it was the first time in my 12 years in the Army I'd ever had one of those in my sights coming towards me.

"We do a lot of work around armoured fighting vehicle recognition and you can look at as many images as you like, but when the real thing is in your sights in unfamiliar terrain it's a totally different kettle of fish.

"When you look at illustrations you tend to pick out distinctive features but in real life those parts may be obscured by camouflage or trees, which makes it much more difficult. As a result, the training benefit to us was huge.

"We also learnt lots about interoperability with the Finns. And as far as preparation for Estonia goes there are few places better than Finland because the terrain is very similar and they fight day in, day out in wooded areas.

"We picked up some interesting tips from them in terms of concentration of force.

"They also used motorbike dispatch riders really effectively to scout ahead of the squadron under radio silence, which is something we are now looking at."



Maj George Trypanis

Dark Purpose

EOD teams play cat-and-mouse with 'terrorists' in Iceland



A SUSPICIOUS package has been reported to the authorities. A clear plastic carton containing a sandwich and a mobile phone is lying on top of a cardboard box by the side of a rural road. Items left behind by an absent-minded picnicker? Maybe. An explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) team arrives and parks up some distance away.

A Harris T7 robot is deployed from their Pinzgauer to conduct a close visual inspection of the site, relaying images back to a command vehicle.

Some wires are detected, so the team leader – or operator – follows the machine in to conduct a deliberate recce of the area surrounding the containers, checking for possible booby traps or secondary devices.

His conclusion is that the BLT sitting inside this plastic tub is not bacon, lettuce and tomato, but a bombmaker's lethal trigger.

A highly sensitive switch, wired to explosives in the box below, has been placed under a slice of sourdough in the lunchbox. If the operator makes one wrong move both he and the bread are toast.

After a careful assessment of the device's structure, it is neutralised with a precisely-aimed shot into a specific part of the IED with a needle disruptor – a small metal cylinder that's fired remotely by the operator, who in this case is an experienced British Army EOD specialist.

Ironically, his name is Sgt Dan "Streaky" Bacon (RE), but after spending two hours encased in a 40kg blast suit he's in no mood for jokes.

The device isn't real; it is one of 20 mock IEDs that he and his team of two will have to tackle in just ten days as part of Exercise Northern Challenge – Nato's largest and most important EOD-specific training event.

Not only that, they are becoming progressively more difficult to defeat.

"The tasks are getting more and more complex as we progress through this package and that's really testing our stamina and concentration," says Sgt Bacon, who is leading one of two teams from 821 EOD and Search Squadron, Royal Logistic Corps – part of 33 Engineer Regiment, which sits within 29 EOD and Search Group.

Held annually at Keflavik in Iceland and hosted by the local coastguard service, Northern Challenge sees army units tackling a series of land-based tasks and navy squads facing maritime scenarios.

For both components, it provides a rare opportunity to use live munitions, such as detonation cord, to neutralise mock enemy devices.

The primary purpose is to practise responding to real-life terrorist incidents and improve team coordination among IED specialists preparing for deployment on international missions.

This year, EOD squads from 14 nations were presented with up to three tasks per day, each one set by a controller.

Mentored by directing staff – typically advanced-level operators from their own country – the teams rotate through various stands that feature car bombs, devices hidden in or around buildings and roadside IEDs, among others.

Some tasks also run into the night to add complexity.

The challenge involving the sandwich-box device was completed at 2230 in the pitch black, and was the third assignment in a 15-hour stretch for Sgt Bacon and his small crew.

"It's been tough, but it's been good," explains the senior NCO, who completed two tours of Afghanistan as a combat engineer and his third, Herrick 15, as an EOD search specialist. He qualified as a fully-fledged operator in 2019.

"In the real world you could potentially face task after task where you will get tired and drained, but you still have to work at the highest level," he adds.

As members of 821 Squadron's airborne troop, Sgt Bacon's outfit supports 16 Air Assault Brigade Combat Team and as a result they get out of the door more than many others in their trade.

Since last year they've trained in Macedonia and Cyprus and »

Sgt Dan Bacon, RE

» jumped into Jordan – yet they were clearly relishing the opportunities this exercise gave them.

“Just doing as many tasks as possible over a two-week period is really good for our skills and drills – we’ve maybe packed two months’ worth of standard training time in here,” explains Sgt Bacon’s number two, LCpl Jack Chalkley (RLC).

“The chance to do the job uninterrupted for a couple of weeks is rare and it’s allowing the organisers to replicate a real-life situation really well.”

The overarching scenario involves a cluster of small terrorist cells attempting to destabilise Iceland’s government with a persistent bombing campaign.

The insurgents, backed by a major foreign power, become progressively more sophisticated in terms of tactics and the devices they plant through the course of the package.

This means the EOD teams must gather as much forensic evidence as they can and provide detailed reports for their chains of command in order to stay at least one step ahead of the enemy.

“We’ve done many of these types of disposal tasks before, but the planners on this exercise are developing the threat throughout our time here and after taking into account what the teams do – and the mistakes they make – they are directing the terrorists to try and catch us out,” says LCpl Chalkley.

The third member of Sgt Bacon’s team, electronic countermeasure specialist LCpl Conor Carruthers (R Signals), believes Northern Challenge is both a supreme test of skills and drills and

an opportunity to learn new things from other nations.

“There is nothing else quite like this,” he tells *Soldier*.

“We have the chance to work alongside EOD personnel from so many different countries and see how they approach problems and can pick up some valuable extra knowledge.”

The small but important contrasts in kit and procedures between different nations precludes true interoperability, where mixed teams might

work on a single assignment. But one particular benefit of this package is that the controller of each task is always an EOD expert from a foreign participating nation – a deliberate ploy on the exercise planners’ part.

“When we train in the UK we face scenarios that come from our own intelligence chains, but here we have different countries coming together to create the tasks,” says Sgt Bacon.

“They tap into their own experiences, so the challenges they set can be different from anything we’ve encountered before.”

It’s a view that is endorsed by WO1 Kev Wright (RLC) from 29 EOD and Search Group – the chief planner of Exercise Northern Challenge this year.

“Our people definitely get something extra from the interjections of international partners; they can get a slightly



LCpl Jack Chalkley, RLC



different spin on a solution to a problem and learn a bit more – it gives them more for their toolbox, if you like,” he says.

“That extends to the higher level, too, because this is an important opportunity to share best practice.

“In our field you can’t stagnate; you must keep up with current threats and developments and, also, any emerging technologies for dealing with them.

“This gets identified in the background chats we have out here. When the staff are setting the tasks, for instance, we might talk about how we’d tackle a particular device but someone else might advise that they would do it another way for a specific reason, or they have found a bit of kit that solves that specific problem – so, all in all, this is a great environment for spreading and gaining knowledge.

“Take Mali, for example. Many nations had been operating there longer than us through the longstanding UN multinational force, so there was a wealth of operational experiences we were able to draw on to help prepare us for that theatre (see panel on page 27).”

It’s not often that a British EOD operator will come across – let alone interact with – a Norwegian equivalent, but out on the edge of Keflavik airfield, beside a dusty road on a volcanic lava field, Sgt Bacon is doing just that. »

“It’s been tough, but it’s been good”

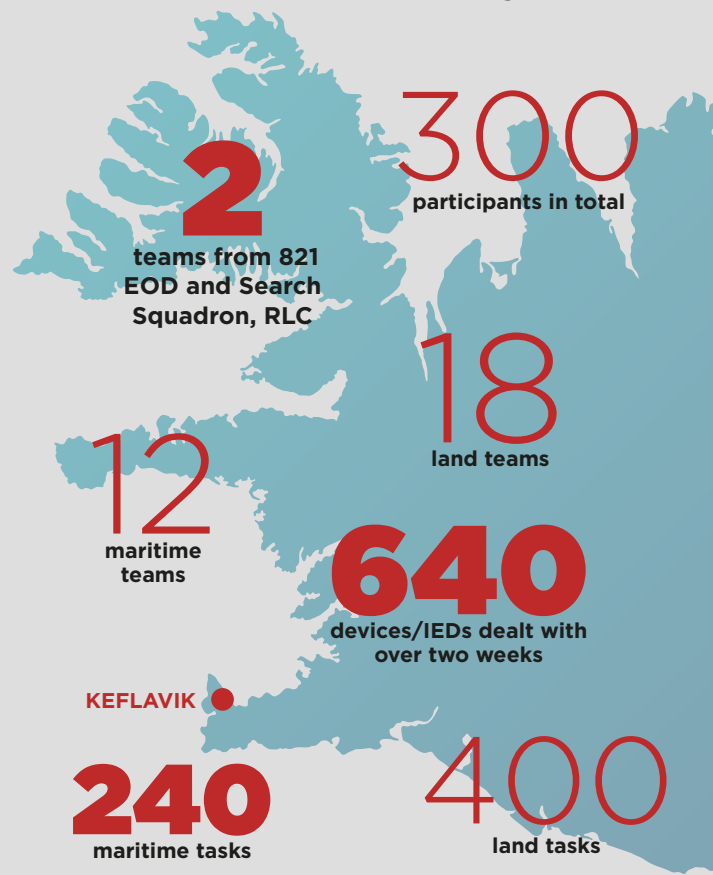
LCpl Conor Carruthers, R Signals

IN NUMBERS

Ex
Northern
Challenge
2022



nations on Ex Northern
Challenge 2022



High-flying squadron

821 Squadron is a multi-traded, Royal Logistic Corps-led Explosive Ordnance Disposal and Search Squadron based in Wimbish, Essex. It is part of the UK’s Rapid Reaction Force and is the sole RLC Squadron that comes under the command of a Royal Engineer formation, in this case 33 Engineer Regiment. The squadron consists of:

The Echelon – this is the quartermaster’s department which looks after materiel demands, logistics and equipment support

Airborne Troop – consists of four EOD and Search teams aligned to the Air Assault Task Force

Commando Troop – consists of four EOD and Search teams aligned to the Lead Commando Group



» His team are on a stand that features a downed drone – one that's carrying what appears to be a bomb.

"The Norwegian controller showed us little things they do differently to us when assessing and dealing with this type of problem," he says.

"It was interesting to see how they would approach this task and I'll feed that intel back to our directing staff and ask them what they think about the Norwegian procedures.

"We'll assess whether they are useful and if we can accommodate them within our standard operating procedures. I might decide to use them in the future.

"I don't have to seek permission to do that through the chain of command necessarily.

"The thing about EOD work is it's somewhat subjective – as

“That's what I love about EOD,
every encounter is unique”





Loose talk saves lives

WO1 Kevin Wright on how vital chat with oppos can be...

"IN 2019 I was working with a Swedish colleague on Exercise Northern Challenge, running a task for a UK team, and we had a casual chat about the British Army's upcoming deployment to Mali.

Sweden has been operating there for a while as part of the UN stabilisation mission and he told me about a particular type of anti-tank mine they'd recently come across.

It was the PRB M3, a low metal-content mine.

His advice to me was that a normal metal detector wouldn't find this contraption easily, not only because it was of low metal content but also because of the high mineral levels in the soil in Mali, which produces lots of false positives and helps screen the devices. He told me to make sure we had ground penetrating radar in the kit we were taking.

As a result, we loaded our mission with dual sensor mine detectors which combine a metal detector and a ground penetrating radar.

The standard metal detector is easier to use so personnel tend to want to take that out into the field, but it simply wouldn't have found the PRB type of mine out in Mali so I was very grateful for the advice."



WO1 Kevin Wright, RLC

long as you stay within your set safety guidelines and SOPs you have the freedom to innovate – even if our own directing staff do things differently.

"We constantly adapt anyway because you never get two threats that are the same – even when it's a type of device we've seen before, the situation around it will be different.

"That's what I love about the role – every encounter is unique – it's a constant cat-and-mouse game with the perpetrators."

The British Army's 29 EOD and Search Group are already significant contributors to this annual training event in terms of planners, directing staff and controllers as well as sending participating teams – and they want to expand their involvement in future.

Opportunities to train with live munitions across varied scenarios, and tapping into a knowledge bank from different deployments around the world, don't come along very often.

There is no doubt that, as highly trained as they are, these specialist teams from across Nato and its allies will be even better prepared for any threat that lies in wait thanks to this unique exercise. ■

INTRODUCING... *SOLDIER'S* END-OF-YEAR SALUTES

We select our standout stories, and personnel, from the year 2022...



WITH no pay rises to speak of, and a pinch on allowances thanks to the cost of fuel and travel, 2022 is unlikely to go down in history as a particularly pleasing chapter for many of us.

But fear not – *Soldier* is here to restore your faith in humanity with the most inspirational stories from our pages, and beyond, over the last 12 months.

Anyone we overlooked? Drop us a line at news@soldiermagazine.co.uk and we will give them a shout-out in 2023. In the meantime, sit back with a brew and a mince pie and let these winning individuals usher in the festive feels...

MORE MILITARY MEMORIES

Familiar Army faces give their verdict on the year – page 74

TALKBACK LETTER OF THE YEAR

WO1 Mike Owens' (RE) contribution to the Talkback pages of the June issue ("Gambling ban is a step in the right direction") lauded the British Army's decision to remove slot machines from across its estate.

And it must have been as satisfying for him to write as it was for us to publish. Back in March 2016 he sent a letter highlighting the dangers around slot machines being placed in communal areas at his base – Swinton Barracks in Tidworth – especially as they were within easy reach of a cashpoint.

The letter was reported on in *The Times* and shortly afterwards senior officers reduced the number of these contraptions at the site.

The warrant officer's concern turned out to be very well founded as analysis later conducted by the MoD-approved Serve and Protect Credit Union revealed that the average spend among regular gamblers in the military was a staggering £220 per month.

With that in mind, it wasn't a surprise when the Army issued *ABN 10/2022 Removal of Gambling and Gaming*

Machines from Army Establishments in April of this year.

It acknowledged gambling addiction's serious impact on the physical, emotional and financial health of troops and their families, and it instructed that slot machines should be removed from its premises as soon as possible.

WO1 Owens' response praised the initiative, saying: "While it won't solve the issue of online gambling addiction, it is a move in the right direction – especially against the backdrop of the cost-of-living crisis."

FRONT COVER OF THE YEAR



Less than six months after leaving a joyful celebration

of the Queen's Platinum

Jubilee, soldiers were once again in the international spotlight at the ceremony marking Her Majesty's death. It has been a year of extraordinary highs and lows, and our **October edition**, celebrating the life of the longest reigning British monarch, was an opportunity for generations of troops who have served her as commander-in-chief to remember and reflect.

Our cover of a Princess Elizabeth on wartime duties with the Auxiliary Territorial Service encapsulated how many in the military family saw her – "as one of us".

Yet life was continuing apace too. Even as the Queen's funeral was held in London, the first young soldiers had already sworn their oath of allegiance to the new King Charles III – the succession continuing unbroken.

FEMALE FIRST

Servicewomen continued to boss it throughout 2022, notching up a series of history-making personal and career bests.

In April Lt Gen Sharon Nesmith was announced as the next deputy chief of the general staff, becoming the first woman promoted to the high profile role and to three-star general.

And in October Pte Addy Carter (RAMC) became the first female soldier to be awarded the coveted maroon beret of The Parachute Regiment – a little over two years after Capt Rosie Wild (RHA) became the first officer to achieve the same feat.

In the sporting arena, the Army women's rugby union team made their Twickenham debut, while the UK Armed Forces' female cricketers graced the hallowed turf of Lord's for the first time. And triathlon star Capt Kat Matthews (RAMC) became the first woman in history to break the eight-hour barrier over the full Ironman distance – an achievement that saw her named Sportswoman of the Year at the Army Sports Awards (page 62).

However, our award goes to explorer **Capt Preet Chandi (RAMC)** – also known as Polar Preet – who made history by becoming the first woman of colour to complete a solo expedition to the Antarctic.

In our February edition, the inspiring Servicewoman charted 40 days of excruciating effort on the snow in which she battled temperatures as low as -50 degrees Celsius and hauled a pulk weighing in at 87kg more than 700 miles.

"The cold days without wind were okay but when the winds came it was so bitter – which made everything that much harder," the officer said. However, the elements failed to deter Capt Chandi and she completed the epic quest five days ahead of her 45-day target.

Having pushed herself to the very limits at the start of the year it would be safe to assume she'd be plotting a more relaxing approach this winter. Well, think again. Polar Preet is currently

attempting a full, solo, unsupported crossing of Antarctica, travelling more than 1,000 miles with the added challenge of a descent of Reedy Glacier thrown in.



LAUGHING IN THE FACE OF PAIN AWARD

We never fail to be inspired by the ever-inventive and slightly unhinged ways that *Soldier* readers find to punish themselves in the name of a good cause. Whether raising cash for charity or breaking new ground, it seems nothing can hold British troops back once they set their sights on a physical challenge.

This year was no exception, with former Blues and Royals staff corporal Paul Minter impressing us with his 6,000-mile run around the UK coastline for his mental health charity Head Up.

Another veteran, Brian Wood (ex-PWRR), caused a stir in the same issue by completing 35 marathons back-to-back.

However, the award winner must surely be **Cpl Jack Jarvis (RE)**, who in March became the first person to singlehandedly row from mainland Europe to the east coast of America (*Soldier*, April). The full screw's mental resilience in spending three-and-a-half months alone at sea while overcoming broken bones,



missed landing points and 10kg of weight loss made us stop in our tracks.

"The thought of all the naysayers spurred me on – I used that as my motivation," the 28-year-old told us in an interview.

What a way to silence critics. And he raised more than £70k for the Brainstrust charity in the process.

Hot on the heels of his Guinness World Record, the Serviceman later took on the Atacama Crossing ultramarathon – a 250km, six-day race across the Chilean desert – where he finished sixth. He told *Soldier*: "I'm now going to enjoy Christmas and then go back to the drawing board and think up something else mad to do."



When the chief of the general staff announces he is putting the Army on a war footing to deter a potential escalation in Europe, it is clear these are unprecedented times. But this was the immediate action taken by Gen Sir Patrick Sanders when he arrived in post in early summer (*Soldier*, August).

Op Mobilise was a move to ready the Army to meet potential threats following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The war also saw Nato adopt a more robust posture with increased numbers of British soldiers joining allies to beef up the alliance's enhanced forward presence in Estonia.

The UK began training Ukrainian personnel while supplying defensive weapons to their forces. Gen Sanders declared that an era where democratic values needed to be defended was upon us, and the British Army would "stand with friends and partners to help maintain peace".

GAME-CHANGER OF THE YEAR





Picture: Sgt Donald Todd, RLC



DEVOTION TO DUTY

On the evening of September 8, Gnr Heather Stark had just settled into her seat on a Cyprus-bound TUI flight, looking forward to a well-earned two-week break from her duties at The King's Troop, Royal Horse Artillery, when a text message flashed up on her phone.

Glancing down she read: "BRIDGE. BRIDGE. BRIDGE" – the long-established code informing personnel of the Queen's death.

With just minutes to go before the plane was due to leave, she and fellow traveller Gnr Emma Wilson knew they had to act fast.

"I had to tell one of the flight attendants that we needed to get off because the Queen had died and we were part of the funeral ceremony," explained Gnr Stark (shown left).

"She didn't believe us at first – I had to get

out my military ID and speak to her manager on the phone, and then go through it all over again with that person's manager.

"After that they were really helpful and were able to let us off. Luckily, a few passengers were still getting on, so we hadn't actually gone anywhere, but I was trying not to look at people as they went past."

Having retrieved their bags, they made it back to camp by 2030, packed their military kit and plunged into a gruelling 11-day routine of late-night rehearsals and high pressure processions.

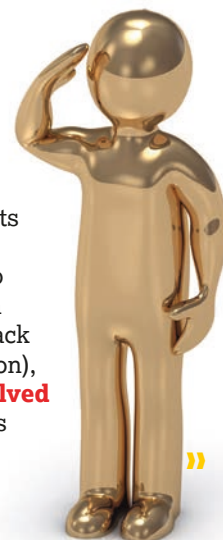
"We were a little bit disappointed because we were in full-on leave mode – I'd had my nails and eyelashes done and everything," continued the 24-year-old.

"We started work that evening and didn't stop until it was finished. It was really tiring, but the first thing we thought of was that we had to do our jobs.

"This is our sole purpose, and we have to achieve it to the highest possible standard.

"It wasn't until a few days in that we were able to stop and take on board that the Queen had actually died – it was pretty emotional to be part of one of the single biggest events in history."

While the duo were sadly unable to get a refund for the holiday (although they are hoping to get their money back through the Royal Artillery Association), we salute them – and **all those involved in London Bridge** – for their selfless devotion to duty.



WORLD RECORD OF THE YEAR

The Army celebrated success at sea as the quartet of **Capt Scott Pollock**, **SSgt Phillip Welch**, **WO1 Victoria Blackburn** and **Sgt Laura Barrigan (all RAPTC)** set a new record in the Talisker Whisky Challenge.

Starting at La Gomera in the Canary Islands, they rowed 3,000 miles across the Atlantic Ocean to their finish line in Antigua in 40 days, 23 hours and 57 minutes – becoming the fastest mixed crew to complete the feat.

“Adapting was vital – in training we rowed for two hours on and two hours off, but in the Atlantic it was so hot in the middle of the day that 90 minutes was the limit,” Sgt Barrigan told *Soldier* in our March issue.

But their efforts did not end with the race’s completion and the Force Atlantic team threw themselves into Army engagement tasks over the following months, visiting schools and colleges across the country in a mission to inspire future generations. Their success will be followed by another Army first – entering an all-female crew in the 2024 event.



Pictures: Penny Bird

GOOD DRILLS



MEN OF HONOUR

There were heavy hearts across the military community when our commander-in-chief was laid to rest in September. Queen Elizabeth II’s funeral – a once-in-a-generation ceremonial spectacle – was executed with head-turning precision. But there were 16 soldiers in particular whose actions mattered above all others – the pallbearers. The individuals were drawn from The Royal Regiment of Scotland in Edinburgh and the Queen’s Company, Grenadier Guards in London. And while the MoD tried to keep their names out of the press, for a few moments in time these young men carried the weight – and eyes – of the world upon them. We couldn’t have been prouder.

Pictures: A/Cpl Ciaran McFalls, RAF and Cpl Simon Lucas, RLC



TOP BANTER

While the dedication and commitment of troops involved in the Covid response was never in doubt, a painting commemorating the deployment raised a few eyebrows in October.

The artwork, depicting 4th Battalion, The Yorkshire Regiment on duty in a supermarket car park, became the subject of online mockery on the Fill Your Boots page, where it was dubbed **"The Battle of Yorks' shift"**.

One Facebook user penned a mock battle citation, writing:

"With Covid all around them they fought back with hand gel and a wet wipe, fought through the position and secured the trestle table under the regimental gazebo."

BAD DRILLS



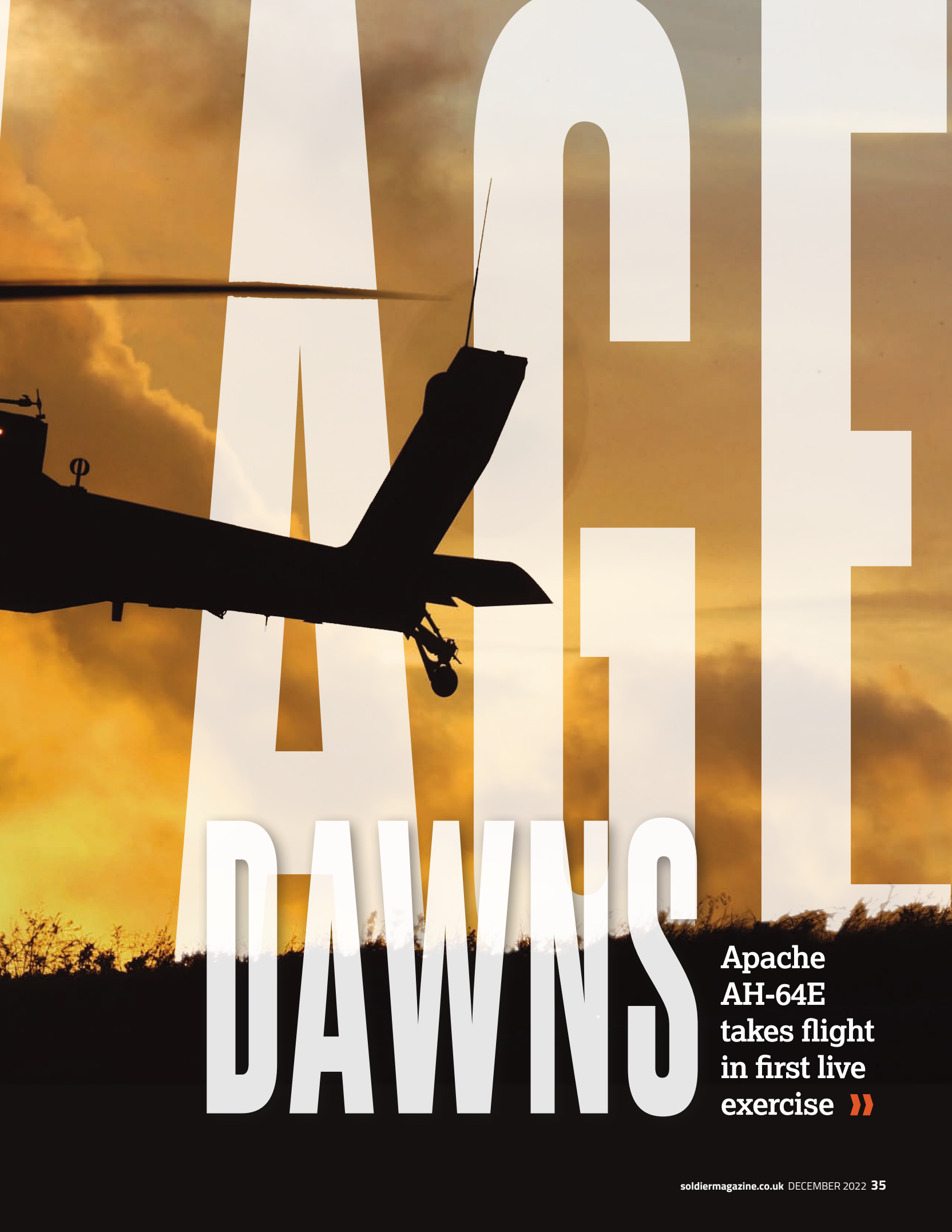
BAD BUILDINGS

Not a month goes by when *Soldier* isn't receiving some sort of communication about substandard accommodation or shoddy maintenance work somewhere on the defence estate. In our September issue ("Family homes falling short") we quizzed the Defence Infrastructure Organisation about the raft of problems – including missed appointments and slow response times – that followed the arrival of new contractor, Pinnacle. Last month's damning Ofsted report on MoD training institutions ("Let down by bad buildings") didn't offer much hope for the military's work facilities either. Add to this a

constant stream of national news stories about the issue and the overall picture is one of bah humbug. Here's hoping the improvements outlined on page 7 take effect fast in 2023.







FAST DAWNS

**Apache
AH-64E
takes flight
in first live
exercise »**

THE most advanced attack helicopter in the world appears as a mere dot on the horizon of a rain-swept Salisbury Plain Training Area.

A second aircraft soon comes into view and, as a pair, they start their slow and methodical advance towards the enemy target.

Flying low at all times and using geographical features such as woodblocks and ridgelines to disguise their movements, the helicopters stealthily stalk their prey – in this instance the Challenger 2 tanks of The King's Royal Hussars – before successfully going in for the kill.

With the mission complete, the pilots make for their temporary home in the field with another tick in the training box.

The helicopter in question is the Apache AH-64E and it is undertaking its first live exercise since arriving at Wattisham-based 662 Squadron, 3 Regiment, Army Air Corps last year.

Armed with an impressive suite of new avionics, sensors and communications systems (*Soldier*, February 2022) it is an impressive step up from its predecessor, the Mk 1, and has the capacity to operate much further in the deep, eliminating threats before ground troops know they are there.

The serials come in the closing stages of Exercise Talon Guardian, a two-week test that has seen personnel complete tasks at sites across the country.

While the AH-64E was the most visual asset, the drills allowed the squadron to deploy as a whole, with many troops engaged in the field for the first time.

"The focus is on basic fieldcraft – both in the air and on the ground," the regiment's commanding officer, Lt Col Simon Wilsey, tells *Soldier*.

"It is based on a realistic scenario in which an enemy establishes an advanced posture before going on to conduct cross-border operations.

"We started by deploying on road to Otterburn. In an austere environment we were getting back to basics and learning how to live and admin in the field, while planning and operating helicopter missions.

"We were targeting air defence systems and light guns before a long road move down to RAF Wittering.

"Now we are operating from the Bramley Training Area and attacking on Salisbury Plain.

"By the end we will have covered a considerable distance on road. Aviation is our job, and we can deploy that rapidly, but we must have sustainment to keep going.

"We are learning lots of good lessons on that front, travelling over long distances and how to operate and engineer the AH-64E in the field.

"There are challenges with any new aircraft but the whole regiment has pulled together to overcome those.

"Because of Covid and the transition process we have not been able to do something like this in a long while. There is a whole generation of junior soldiers and officers for who this is the first time in the field, and they all seem happy to be here."

As well as testing Army Air Corps personnel, the exercise offered valuable training to other elements of the Service as they squared-off against the fearsome aerial asset.

The light guns of 3 Regiment, Royal Horse Artillery, the Jackals of The Royal Lancers and the air defence systems of 12 Regiment, Royal Artillery joined the cavalry's armour in forming a varied enemy presence. »

“It is an incredible piece of machinery, and its advancements will definitely put us ahead

LCpl Chris Voller, REMÉ



Words: Richard Long Pictures: Graeme Main



1,500

KILOMETRES OF ROAD MOVES
COMPLETED BY 662 SQN AS THEY
TRAVELLED FROM WATTISHAM
TO OTTERBURN, AND THEN ONWARDS
TO SALISBURY PLAIN



16

RANGE, IN KILOMETRES, OF THE
AH-64E'S FIRE CONTROL RADAR
- DOUBLE THE DISTANCE OF
ITS PREDECESSOR



“
There are new engines offering
more power, but the main
difference is in the technology
”

Capt Mathew Johnstone, AAC

”Live, force-on-force training is critical to what we do as an Army,” Lt Col Wilsey continues.

“For example, the KRH are learning how to use the ground to hide from our radar and optics. Having a responsive enemy that moves around is so beneficial.”

And the ongoing war in Ukraine also had an influence on how the squadron conducted its business.

“When we set up assembly areas, we are using the lessons learned from the current conflict,” the senior officer adds.

“It is about surviving against low-tech threats, such as mini drones with grenades, as well as long-range fires. We have to think about how to operate at a basic fieldcraft level.”

The squadron hopes to reach initial operating capability in May and was due to undergo its first live-fire exercise at the Stanford Training Area in Norfolk as this issue went to press.

With the tempo picking up, we spoke to personnel on Talon Guardian about what has been an important training step...

Technician talk

For aircraft technician LCpl Chris Voller (REME, shown page 36) the exercise represented a first taste of life in the field.

He joined the Army in 2019 and after completing trade training was posted to 662 Sqn, working on the AH-64E.

As a class two technician he is responsible for maintaining the aircraft, conducting pre-flight checks and if anything goes wrong mechanically, fixing it.

“It is pretty much plain sailing in terms of the mechanics,” LCpl Voller says. “A gearbox is a gearbox on any vehicle, and it is the same with helicopters. However, the avionics and software are a lot more advanced.”

“There is also a new engine from Boeing, so we’ve had to learn about that. It is an incredible piece of machinery, and its advancements will definitely put us ahead.”

While the focus was undoubtedly on the performance of the AH-64E, the junior NCO also stresses the importance of collective training for the entire squadron.

“As much as this is about getting out flying, it is a chance for us as soldiers to be out in the field and work in small teams across the training area,” he continues.

“We are moving to readiness next year and exercises like this prepare us for that.”

“Those basic soldiering skills are now becoming second nature. The weather has been difficult, with lots of wind and rain, which means tasks are taking longer due to the conditions. But we have got a pretty good set-up and have responded well.”

“It is much more enjoyable out in the field as the aircraft is in flight doing the job it is supposed to do.”

“We are going through the maintenance process, seeing it fly and then watching the groundcrew carrying out the refuelling – everything is coming together.”

“While we are all in the same hangar back at camp everyone is segregated, so it is great to have that mix here.”

Pilot’s perspective

Pilot Capt Mathew Johnstone (AAC, shown left) says the AH-64E performed well in the challenges posed by Talon Guardian and that the intensity of training will ramp up in the new year.

Describing it as a “brand new aircraft”, rather than simply an upgrade of the old Mk 1, the officer believes the helicopter will deliver a battle-winning advantage for many years to come.

“The Mk 1 was very much 80s and 90s in terms of its

technology,” he explains. “But this was designed to take us into the 2050s.”

“We study what’s happening with other aviation units around the world and this is the best attack helicopter bar none.”

“This exercise has been a long time coming. We haven’t done training like this for a while now and with the current threat in Eastern Europe it is very important.”

“Things were quite restrictive post-Covid, and it is one of the first exercises where we have fully deployed as a squadron, living in bashers, doing things the Army way.”

“It is what I remember from Sandhurst and that basic training is so relevant here – we have gone back to a field-first mentality.”

Capt Johnstone began the transition to the AH-64E last year, with initial training in the United States. A return to Wattisham allowed pilots to conduct further drills on a simulator and they have been working towards the various qualifications needed to reach the initial operating capability.

“The core flying is largely the same and the handling is broadly similar,” he says, when comparing the asset to its predecessor. “There are new engines offering more power, but the main difference is in the technology.”

Among the many enhanced features to have impressed the pilot is the Link-16 communication system – a tactical platform that enables crews to share mission data with other formations to provide a near real-time threat picture.

“It allows us to integrate with Royal Air Force and American assets in real time,” he adds. “We know where all friendly forces and the enemy are. It is almost like a video game, where you see everything on the screen at once.”

And the new fire control radar has seen the aircraft’s detection range double, of which Capt Johnstone says: “It means we can out-range any air defence system on the battlefield.”

Concealment is key

A major feature of Talon Guardian was the use of concealed forward arming and refuelling points.

Representing a high-value target, the Army Air Corps is adapting the way it carries out such a crucial task, as arming loading point commander Cpl Gary Finch (AAC, shown right) explains.

“We will take a small team, sneak out to a wood line and then give a grid reference and timeframe to the pilot – if they are not there on time we are gone,” he says. “It is important we are not spotted, so we will move to a different location.”

“We only started doing this last year. By splitting into smaller teams it makes us harder to be detected – helicopters are big, noisy machines which can obviously make us a target.”

“We can also use one location for refuelling and another for the resupply of ammunition, to make it even smaller.”

“It is about camouflaging vehicles and you must be quick to get the netting off when it’s time to move.”

“It has been a shock to the system for some people, but we have done a lot of exercises on this, so we are getting to grips with it and trialling it before it gets pushed out to the wider Army Air Corps.”

“There are always going to be a few hiccups, but the lads have dug in and responded well. We are now looking forward to the live firing and getting hands-on with that.” ■





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WITH training activity ramping up under Operation Mobilise, and another busy year ahead in 2023, the *Soldier* team thought we had better roll up our sleeves and find a way for our serving readers to get some quality downtime in the New Year.

Enter the public-spirited souls at the five-star luxury hotel Gleneagles – a resort like no other that is set in an 850-acre Scottish estate with three championship golf courses, a spa and the only restaurant in Scotland with two Michelin stars.

This world-famous destination has teamed up with this magazine for a festive giveaway with a difference.

Managing Director, Conor O’Leary, explained why his team was keen to support Army personnel this Christmas.

“We are extremely proud of our longstanding relationship with the British Armed Forces here at Gleneagles,” he told *Soldier*.

“Spanning back to the Second World War, when our hotel closed and became a military hospital, to our more recent role as part of the UK Armed Forces Covenant, we feel humbled to be able to support the Service community in any way we can and look forward to welcoming a serving member of the Forces and their partner to our hotel here in the Highlands.”

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We are offering one serving British Army soldier or officer a two-night stay for two people during 2023* – worth up to a staggering £1,800!

With times hard, and much of the Army based in South England, LNER is also throwing in return first-class train travel for those who might require it (see overleaf).

The winner will be accommodated in one of the hotel’s luxurious Estate Rooms, with views over the grounds. They will receive a full Scottish breakfast in the resort’s beautiful fine dining restaurant The Strathearn, plus unlimited use of facilities at The Club – including two swimming pools, sauna, steam room, jacuzzi, outdoor heated pool, gymnasium, croquet, putting greens, pitch and putt and tennis.

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To be in with a chance of winning this bucket-list prize, simply tell us how many championship golf courses there are at Gleneagles.

Answers, including your full name, rank, service number and daytime telephone number, to comps@soldiermagazine.co.uk by midnight on December 30. The winner will be drawn at random and contacted in the New Year.



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‘Special needs families need a lift’

I HAVE a four-year-old daughter with autism. She requires specialist schooling and as I live outside the garrison her education needs to be organised by the local authority.

However, the process is a jungle and families in this situation often don't get the assistance they should, adding a lot of stress to the whole procedure.

The Armed Forces' education advisory teams are amazing and offer a lot of support, but local authorities rarely engage with them or take serving soldiers into consideration.

I think it would be a good idea for the military to have their own team dedicated to supporting us rather than leaving it to external bodies.

Maybe a defence representative could be designated to the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information Advice and Support Services (Sendiass).

They would be better positioned to speak on behalf of serving personnel at meetings or tribunals rather than just leaving the parents to cope alone. — **Cpl Anthony Caird, Scots**

Helen Cooper, Education Advisory Team Leader, Defence Children Services, replies: The Education Advisory Team provides advice to all Service personnel about special educational needs, admissions and educational healthcare plans.

In a sense, we are like Sendiass. We can support and contribute to care plan assessments, attend meetings and, if necessary, talk to local authorities and advocate on the behalf of personnel.

However, given the breadth of what we cover educationally and location-wise, we cannot support to

the extent that perhaps a Sendiass team can.

Some local authorities have dedicated military advisers and yours, North Yorkshire, is one of those. For more information visit sendiassnorthyorkshire.co.uk

The difficulty is that local authorities, not the MoD, are responsible for education and assessment of special needs. Some have points of contact for Service families and some don't – and it is not always obvious when looking at their local offer pages.

The mobility factor, variable local offers and a lack of understanding about military life make it more challenging to navigate the world of special educational needs, which as you say is a "jungle". We want to improve this through the Armed Forces Covenant.

We will support personnel to try and offset some of the challenges caused by mobility and the demands of Service life.

We continue to operate alongside our policy colleagues in the Armed Forces Families and Safeguarding Team, who work hard to ensure that Service pupils are not marginalised but directly referred to in policy.

Thank you for raising this issue, which I know will resonate with many personnel across the country and overseas.

For support and advice, the Education Advisory Team can be contacted via the following email address: rc-dcs-hq-eat@mod.gov.uk – and if the query is about overseas locations please contact rc-dcs-hq-oes@mod.gov.uk

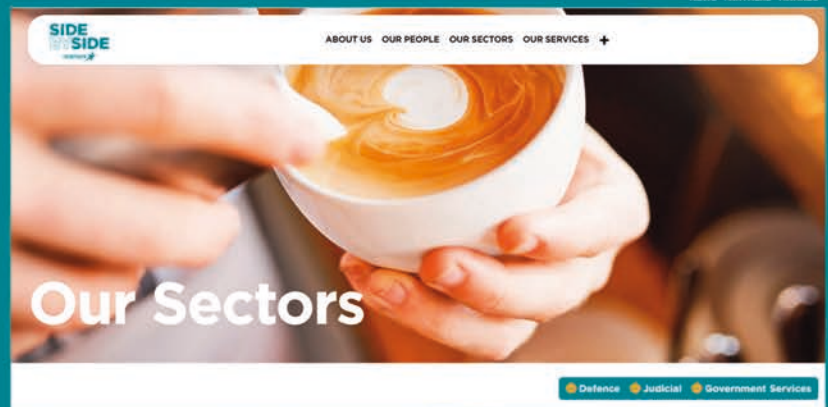
“It should not be left to external bodies”

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

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‘IT’S BLATANT AGE DISCRIMINATION’

● I HAVE looked through various JSPs and documentation to find some written confirmation about the infamous over-37 package.

Unfortunately, I was not able to find anything saying that this is an actual entitlement and the closest thing to that was along the lines of “if a Service person owns a family home they reside in, the unit commander can grant them not to be charged for accommodation”.

The individual’s age or marital status is not mentioned.

I would also add that if there is something written down somewhere, would this not be classed as blatant discrimination against both age and personal circumstance?

Can’t single people under 37 also feel the burdens of having to pay for two accommodation charges?
– Name and address supplied

Col Louise Green, Assistant Head Army Remuneration, replies: The over-37 provision is meant to assist personnel with the costs of settling their family in the latter part of their career.

The provision also enables them to serve voluntarily unaccompanied at their duty station without paying single living accommodation charges.

Eligibility is based on an assumption that many soldiers leave the Army at aged 40, and the support applies in their last three years of service.

The package was designed to support smooth transition to civilian life and is compliant with the MoD’s exemption from age discrimination law.

The recently published Defence Accommodation Strategy and forthcoming *Tri-Service Accommodation Regulations* (due for release in the second half of 2023) are reflective of modern living and will provide a new package that is available to all personnel maintaining a home elsewhere, irrespective of their relationship status and age.

The details of the over-37 policy can be found in [JSP 752](#).

“What if an accident occurs?”



A question of duty for Reservists

MY REGIMENT held a ball recently but many mess members were not able to attend because of the cost of travel and a hotel for the night.

As a Reservist and former Regular soldier, I’ve had a few debates in the past about what should be considered “on duty” so I asked my chain of command whether we should be classed as such while attending an official evening event.

The response I received was that we were not on duty – something that raised a few questions in my mind.

For instance, if we are off duty and not being paid, are we covered by insurances if an accident occurs?

Also, discipline or admonishment for those who couldn’t be there is out of the question. If they are not on duty the discipline and messing rules do not apply.

I also believe we should be paid for any time away from family or work to minimise

the impact on us financially. – Name and address supplied

Maj Charles Gilmore, Reserves Strategy, Reserves Directorate, replies: The policy around these matters is contained in *Reserve Land Forces Regulations*. Provision covering this situation can be found under Category 2 Training.

This is defined as activity of “limited value for which personnel are on duty but for which there is no entitlement to pay, allowances or travel costs except where specifically stated elsewhere in these regulations”.

Individual units are responsible for planning, publishing and recording this type of activity.

As soldiers conducting them are on duty, normal rules around conduct and liability apply.

RACE TO GO GREEN NOT ON RIGHT TRACK

● WE ALL like to talk about sustainability but I still see far too many TVs being left on in the cookhouse overnight.

There is also a continuing overuse of plastic in packed lunches. At some establishments they get a single-use bottle every day in training.

When you multiply that by how many personnel are on courses or exercises at any one time it becomes a ridiculous number being thrown away each month.

Why isn’t it mandatory to use the pattern 58 water bottle and for everyone to make sure it is full to the brim before the session begins?

We’re trying to promote a greener

military with the use of solar farms and becoming paperless but I feel, like many others, that as an organisation we continue to fall at the first hurdle.

– Name and address supplied

GOT A GRIPE?

THEN WHY NOT GET IT OFF YOUR CHEST?

✉ mail@soldiermagazine.co.uk

BULLET POINTS

Bite-sized data to keep you in the know



CAREERS

SaluteMyJob has launched a cyber career jumpstart programme to attract, train, qualify and place members of the Forces community into jobs. Visit salutemyjob.com/ex-military-cyber-security-career-pathways

The Open University's Disabled Veterans' Scholarship Fund is again open for applications this year. The initiative offers 50 free study places at the academic body to former personnel who have a disability or injury resulting from their military service – including mental health conditions. See open.ac.uk



COMPETITIONS

HOAY winner

September: Natasha Pinnock, Manchester **October:** No draw

Spinelines winner

September: Oliver Perera, Oxford **October:** No draw



SEARCHLINE

Armed Forces charity Little Troopers has opened a therapy programme for teenagers feeling the impact of family life in the military. It offers one-to-one sessions with a qualified therapist for those up to age 18. Referrals can be made by a parent, school, community group or welfare worker. Visit littletroopers.net

The University of Chester's Westminster Centre for Research in Veterans wants to learn more about the experiences of former British Army personnel from the Indian subcontinent and West Indies. The research – funded by charity The Forces in Mind Trust – is examining how service shaped the lives of ex-troops and their loved ones. Contact veterans@chester.ac.uk



WELFARE

If you have a problem, your **chain of command** and **unit welfare teams** are always a good starting point. They may also be able to help you find local support groups not listed below. **Padres** can provide individuals with

pastoral care and moral guidance, whatever their faith. Here are some other national organisations that can offer help:

Army HIVE

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

army.mod.uk/hives

Forcesline

A free and confidential telephone helpline and email service for Regulars, Reserves, ex-Forces and their families. 0800 731 4880

ssafa.org.uk/get-help/forcesline

Army Welfare Service

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

ALCOHOL AND SMOKING

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

Drinkline

A free, confidential helpline 0300 123 1110

NHS support

nhs.uk/livewell

BULLYING/HARASSMENT/ DISCRIMINATION

Army Mediation Service
0306 770 7691 or mil 96770 7691
army-mediation-0mailbox@mod.gov.uk

Army Speak Out Helpline

0306 770 4656 or
mil 96770 4656
army-speakout@mod.gov.uk

Defence BHD Helpline

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

CHILDCARE/CARING/FAMILIES

Army Families Federation
The independent voice of Army families, offering confidential advice and support
01264 554004
aff.org.uk

Flexible working has been

introduced by the Army to help personnel tailor their work-life balance. This includes arrangements such as remote working, variable finish times and restricted separation. Read more in the *Flexible Working and You* guide on Modnet. Regulars can find out how this impacts pay and benefits at discovermybenefits.mod.gov.uk

DEBT AND MONEY PROBLEMS

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

Forces Pension Society

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

forcespensionsociety.org

Joining Forces Credit Union

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

Money Helper

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

National Debtline

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

nationaldebtline.org

StepChange Debt Charity

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

GAMBLING

National Gambling Helpline

Free information, support and counselling for problem gamblers in the UK
0808 8020 133

GRIEF

Cruse Bereavement Support
0808 808 1677

SSAFA support groups

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

HOUSING

Joint Service Housing

Advice Office

The MoD's tri-Service focal point to provide Armed Forces personnel and their dependants with civilian housing information

07814 612120

rc-pers-jshao-0mailbox@mod.gov.uk

Single Persons Accommodation Centre for the Ex-Services

01748 833797

spaces.org.uk

Veterans Gateway

A first point of contact for veterans seeking support

veteransgateway.org.uk

INJURY/SICKNESS

Personnel Recovery Centres

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

LONELINESS

Armed Forces and Veterans Breakfast Clubs

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

Samaritans

Someone to talk to, night or day, for free and without judgement 116 123

samaritans.org

The Royal British Legion

Contact the friendly team for information about local groups and support services

0808 802 8080

britishlegion.org.uk

MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

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

Combat Stress 24/7 Helpline

0800 138 1619

Headspace

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

Mind – The Mental Health Charity

0300 123 3393
mind.org

NHS

nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters

Samaritans

116 123
samaritans.org

The Ripple Pond

A self-help support network for relatives of physically or psychologically injured

troops and veterans
0333 900 1028
theripplepond.org

Togetherall

A safe, online community where people support each other anonymously to improve mental health
togetherall.com

RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN/ABUSE

Aurora New Dawn

Safety and support for survivors of domestic abuse, sexual violence and

stalking 02394 216 816
aurorand.org.uk

ManKind

Support for male domestic abuse victims
01823 334244

mankind.org.uk

Relate

UK provider of relationship support
relate.org.uk



REUNIONS

The 25th Anniversary of the **Artillery**

Clerks' Association will be held in the Royal Artillery sergeants' mess, Larkhill on June 23-25, 2023. Visit artyclerkassn.org for further details and updates.

The Army Apprentices National Association celebrates 100 years of Army apprentices on May 13-14, 2023 at Mickleover Court Hotel, Derby DE3 0XX, and at the National Memorial Arboretum. For more information on the milestone event please contact info.armyana@gmail.com

HOW OBSERVANT ARE YOU?

No. 967



national express

nationalexpress.com

WIN

TEN details have been changed in this picture of a Challenger 2 demo at the 2022 Army Expo on Salisbury Plain Training Area.

Circle all the differences on the left image and send the panel to HOAY 967, *Soldier*, Ordnance Barracks, Government Road, Aldershot, Hampshire GU11 2DU along with your contact details, including email address, by December 30. A photocopy is acceptable but only one entry per person may be submitted.

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

The first correct entry drawn after the closing date will win **a return journey for two people anywhere on the National Express network during the first half of 2022**. The nation's favourite coach company, which offers Service personnel a 60 per cent reduction on travel (and 30 per cent to other Defence Discount Card users), boasts free Wi-Fi, power sockets and loads of leg room on-board its modern fleet.

The winner's name will appear in the February issue. All the usual competition rules apply.



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REVIEWS

PICK OF THE MONTH:

Summit Fever

Climbers face the dark side of adrenaline addiction...

> NEARLY two decades ago – in the distant days of 2005 – an invitation arrived at *Soldier* asking that a reporter join a training camp for a planned Army expedition to Everest.

Even by the already demanding standards of an attempt on the world's highest mountain, this adventure was set to be deeply ambitious. The team planned to assault nature's giant via an infamous route known as the West Ridge, which had only been completed by a select few. Needless to say, the Service team's preparations were suitably rigorous.

Thankfully, without either the physical robustness or matching inclination to hang from vertical surfaces via a rope fitted snugly to his groin, this reviewer was disqualified.

Instead the job was snapped up by a younger colleague, whose reward was a battering in the Alps. Engendered with a new respect for mountaineering on his return, he recalled his low point – a doctor shining a torch in his eyes, probing for signs of altitude sickness, as he lay exhausted on the ice.

This story came to mind as the soldiers' adventurous training location forms the backdrop to this month's movie pick – a fictional thriller which pulls no punches in laying bare the dangers of climbing, nor the grim realities when the sport bites its practitioners.



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GAMES

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MUSIC

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BOOKS

MOVIES

» *Summit Fever* follows a group of young, ambitious mountaineers as they launch attempts on the most demanding peaks of the Alps. Centred on inexperienced youngster Michael (**Freddie Thorp**), who quit a ghastly finance job in London after deciding that risking life and limb was a more bearable option, he soon finds himself intoxicated by life in Chamonix.

Spurred on by his less risk averse partner JP (**Michel Biel**) and an unfolding romance with ski-guide Isabelle (**Mathilde Warnier**), the buddies pit themselves against the formidable Eiger, Matterhorn and Mont Blanc rock faces. Amid each unfolding challenge, they come to terms with the dangers of their sport as they encounter a string of fatalities before being plunged into their own high-altitude nightmare when a storm suddenly changes course.

Let's start with the strong points. The cinematography is nothing short of spectacular. With an already outstanding natural canvas with which to work, director **Julian Gilbey** uses a combination of close-up camera shots while drone footage provides the sweeping and enormous depth of perspective.

The result is a world in which the mountains become characters as much as the climbers, human flesh-and-blood vulnerability intensified by the epic surroundings.

Unfortunately, the grandeur is let down by a story of predictability and cliché although some decent acting talent carries off the

action and an air of tension is maintained with the growing casualty count. The horrific death of a celebrity free-climber – whose mad endeavours are keenly watched by his contemporaries through pairs of binoculars in the bar – is a case in point.

Summit Fever is then, on balance, a decent watch with just enough substance in the plot to carry a film that is beautifully shot from every angle and springs to life in its final part. The action bears some similarity to **Baltasar Kormakur's** 2015 movie *Everest*, which explores similar themes and character templates as well as featuring equally spectacular camera work.

Both portray a world of top-end adventure as risky as it is clearly exhilarating.

They have certainly cemented an aversion to climbing for this journalist who – having hitherto avoided mountains – will continue to do so without complaint. ■

VERDICT

Mountaineering mayhem, worth a watch

★★★★★

REVIEW: CLIFF CASWELL, *SOLDIER*



Out now
on digital
platforms

PICK OF THE MONTH:

Svoboda 1945: Liberation

For: Switch

Gripping story and a fitting tribute

» SOLDIERING has been a theme of video games since their inception half-a-century ago – from the *Combat* cartridge of the early Atari consoles to the *Call of Duty* titles, the digital front line has tested generations of players.

Most of these outings have been seen through the warfighting lens, with the aim of taking down the enemy either from a first- or third-person perspective. Many of a certain age will recall childhood hours spent in seaside arcades, shovelling 20 pence pieces into machines touting Capcom's *Commando* – a run-and-gun affair that coincided with Sly Stallone's *Rambo* films.

But the field of battle is far broader than the actioner alone. Over the years there have been plenty of thought-provoking titles with conflict as a backdrop – to the extent that the Imperial War Museum in London has launched an exhibition showcasing how video games have become a key storytelling platform.

And it is this deeper category into which our pick of the month fits.

Svoboda 1945: Liberation gives players the role of finding out about the tragedy that befell a Czech community on the German border at the Second World War's end. In a story that unfolds through full-motion video, beautiful graphic novel artwork and a series of minigames, the aim is squarely to leave players with an empathy for a particularly brutal historical period.

In an unusual quest, protagonists assume the role of a researcher with the Eastern European country's Heritage Preservation Society. They are tasked with determining whether an old schoolhouse – which is at the centre of a local dispute involving a ruthless property developer – should be listed as a monument.

It soon transpires that the building was at the centre of events in 1945 when, as the Nazis were ousted, the Russians became the new occupiers. But the plot takes a twist when the lead character discovers a photograph – apparently of his grandfather – dressed as a combatant at the height of the drama.

You seriously can't be comparing the expulsions to Nazi atrocities!

Wasn't it understandable though, after all the suffering?

You're right, it is good that people are talking about it.



The game itself is played via a map of the town and a point-and-click interface, providing access to an unfolding cast of characters available for interview plus other aids including a notebook detailing progress in the investigation.

The other parties in the tale range from veterans who were involved in the war at various times to community leaders and visitors who happen to be there on personal pilgrimages.

An encyclopedia also opens up as the story unfolds giving details of the real-life historical backdrop to the game. Community tensions, the brutality of the Nazi and Soviet invaders as well as the deportation of the Germanic Sudetenland citizens at the conclusion of the war are among the events explained. This is not a game that pulls any punches in depicting the truth and the price paid by civilians of all ethnicities caught up in the violence.

Alas, *Svoboda* is not a title for everyone. Players looking for a full-on strategy offering or complex detective romp will quickly be disappointed. While highly playable – and there are plenty of decent minigames in the package – this is more of a journey of discovery than a challenge for entertainment.

Those embracing the outing, however, will find themselves immersed in a well-crafted story that is nuanced, without heroes or villains and a growing understanding of how past events resonate dangerously into the present day.

The location in which the drama takes place

will also be familiar to some current UK troops – notably instructors who have been involved with a British Military Advisory and Training Team based nearby.

Svoboda certainly cannot be faulted on its originality. The development team at Charles Games, which has links with Czech academia, have created a unique title.

They are clearly passionate about bringing the period to life with their diligent research reflected in a polished product.

While the game was released on PC and other platforms last year, this recent port to the Nintendo Switch is carried off flawlessly and will attract a new audience.

It all adds up – in *Soldier's* view – to a very different offering, which underscores the use of the games console as a learning tool as well as an instrument of entertainment. *Svoboda* is also a fitting tribute to a generation who endured so much repression in a particularly bleak episode of European history. ■

VERDICT:

An outstanding – if upsetting – interactive story

★★★★★

REVIEW: CLIFF CASWELL, *SOLDIER*



War studies

If you've found *Svoboda* compelling, you should also try...

Attentat 1942

THIS outstanding first outing from Charles Games gives players a research task relating to their family's role in the events surrounding the assassination of SS officer Reinhard Heydrich in Prague. The all-formats game is largely presented in the same way to *Svoboda* and covers similar ground – in this instance collaboration with the Nazi occupiers and betrayal of resistance fighters are among the themes. It is an edgy experience and presents some interesting – if uncomfortable – moral questions following an event that saw many civilians killed in German reprisals.



Warsaw

PLAYERS assume command of a team involved in the uprising that took place in the Polish capital towards the end of the Second World War in this tactical role-playing title. Leading a cohort of irregulars, they face a well-equipped Nazi opposition which – as in 1944 – is charged with putting down the challenge to their rule in the most brutal way. Beautiful graphic novel visuals and a haunting soundtrack make this PS4, Switch and PC game an extraordinary piece of work.

PICK OF THE MONTH:

Oxymore

French synth wizard salutes sonic influencer

► VETERAN electronic music guru **Jean-Michel Jarre** has always been something of a Marmite character – dividing critics in a career as varied as it has been long.

An early adopter of the analogue synthesiser, his first album *Oxygene* was universally seen as breaking new ground when it was released 46 years ago. But his more mainstream 1980s and 90s trajectory – with albums accompanied by huge set-piece laser shows – was branded by some as gimmickry.

Nonetheless, Jarre has arguably remained one of the most influential figures on the contemporary scene, with a broad church of club DJs, rock legends and film soundtrack composers citing him among their influences.

The extent of his legacy was apparent in his Grammy-nominated *Electronica* project a few years ago, its two albums featuring collaborations with artists ranging from The Who's **Pete Townshend** to movie score mainstay **John Carpenter**.

In a return to his roots, however, he has turned the lens inwards for his latest studio outing to salute a pioneer who first inspired him. *Oxymore* is a tribute to **Pierre Henry** – a member of the French musique concrete movement that experimented with recorded sound and of which Jarre was a student in his early years at the Groupe de Recherches Musicales in Paris.

Having planned a collaboration with Henry before his death in 2017, Jarre gathered samples for the project from the composer's widow before manipulating them into a textured soundscape with a trance-like edge.

Yet the musician has also created an album that is accessible and rhythmic, underpinned

by a production process that delivers the experience with intent.

"I always thought that musique concrete, or electroacoustic music, actually had heavy and delicate aspects," Jarre recalled. "In *Oxymore* I tried to include those two elements as a kind of oxymoron – it stands on the pillars of delicate, intricate, subtle sounds and stronger, forceful, raw sounds.

"Pierre has inspired me and working around some soundbites of my own led me down a path that I may not have taken otherwise."

Jarre highlighted that the engineering process for the album had been crucial to its creation. The mix of analogue and digital technologies was realised in a so-called "spatial 3D", recorded in the studios of Radio France. The CD includes a digital code for a special mix delivering the full intended experience.

The results are impressive. *Oxymore* is a solid album and could yet win the musician younger converts oblivious to his earlier outings. It is ironic that, given more than five decades on the scene, some of his best and most progressive work has emerged recently.

There are a number of standout pieces on the latest effort – notably *Brutalism*, with its dark timbres and raw, relentless drumbeat playing out a tone established earlier in the recording on the equally dark title track.

Yet the mood is transformed with the more upbeat *Synthy Sisters* and *Sex in the Machine*, which provide a welcome relief to the sombre sonic experience.

All in all, *Oxymore* delivers its desired outcome while paying homage to a movement that continues to influence many musical genres. And with further remixes and collaborations promised, – including with British artist **Brian Eno** – there could yet be more of interest to follow. ■



VERDICT:

A powerful sonic journey

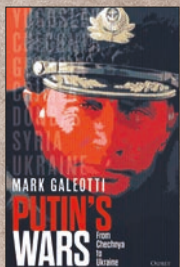
★★★★★

REVIEW: CLIFF CASWELL, SOLDIER

Giftspiration

Take the stress out of Christmas shopping with our roundup of the latest titles for military bookworms

BOOKS



Putin's Wars

by Mark Galeotti

CHRISTMAS Eve will mark the ten-month anniversary of Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine – and while it hardly makes for cheerful yuletide reading, this book is a must for all those

seeking to understand the decades-long build-up to the conflict. The author – a scholar of Russian security – charts Putin's various campaigns against his neighbours, from Chechnya to Georgia, Crimea and Donbas, as well as his intervention in Syria. The evolution of his military into its less-than-impressive present form is also explored – and will be of particular interest to the serving community. With events still unfolding in real time, any title of this nature will inevitably lag slightly behind, but as an authoritative analysis of the origins of the crisis – and an insight into the challenges facing Nato – this offering is not to be missed.

Becky Clark, Soldier



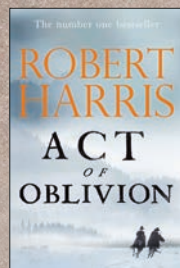
Never Will I Die

by Toby Gutteridge

THE author of this inspirational book was a Royal Marine and one of the youngest members of the Special Boat Service when he was shot through the throat in Afghanistan,

leaving him a paraplegic. Hospitalised for years, he had to learn everything again – virtually the only part of him still working was his head and the mind within. He went through several hells as he struggled to find his place in this new world, but eventually stopped fighting and realised he could actually do some good. The charity he subsequently founded, called Bravery, uses extreme sports to bring out the best in under-privileged youths. This is a powerful, poignant account of how one man overcame his demons and harnessed a life-changing event in order to help others.

Andy Kay, ex-RS



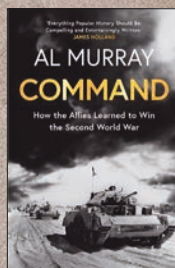
Act of Oblivion

by Robert Harris

THE best historical fiction combines a gripping plot with meticulous research – leaving the reader inspired to learn more about the real-life protagonists. And the latest release from Robert

Harris once more proves his mastery of the genre. Turning the clock back to the Restoration, the action switches from London to New England as the men behind Charles I's execution flee the monarchists' retribution. Harris skilfully brings 15th century Britain and the fledgling colonial settlements to life, conjuring up a deeply divided post-Civil War society in which Parliamentarians and Royalists alike were utterly convinced of the justness of their cause – a polarisation not entirely unfamiliar to political discourse today. Humanising the zealots at either end of the spectrum – both the hunter and the hunted – is no mean feat but is pulled off with aplomb in this engrossing tale.

Becky Clark, Soldier



Command

by Al Murray

BEST known for his comedy alter-ego the Pub Landlord, Al Murray is also a keen military historian – hosting the hit podcast *We Have Ways of Making You Talk* with fellow history buff and author James Holland.

This may be the comic's first book "without jokes" as he puts it, but his trademark wit comes through nonetheless and makes for engaging reading as he highlights ten commanders at various levels who led the Allies to victory in the Second World War. His fascination in – and knowledge of – the leading characters who helped turn the tide of the conflict is evident, and contagious. The chapter on Percy Hobart, of course, held particular appeal for this Royal Engineer.

WO1 Mike Owens, RE



Red Devils

by Mark Urban

AN AUTHORISED history that reads like a thriller, this is the story of the trailblazers of The Parachute Regiment during the Second World War. The author, a veteran himself, selects six members of the

then newly-formed outfit and reveals the cutting-edge operations they took part in, as well as the legacy they left for future generations of the Army's finest unit. The level of detail is extraordinary and the mixture of archival research, British and German sources, comprehensive maps and iconic images of airborne warfare – along with new material provided by the subjects' families – makes for a gripping, fast-paced history that you won't be able to tear yourself away from.

Sgt Adam Jackson, Para



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SOLDIER SPORT



« AHEAD OF THE FIELD

THE Army Equitation Association is looking to end the year on a high at this month's London International Horse Show. The contest comes on the back of another successful season for the riders on both the military and national stage. Read a full report on page 71...

Picture: jayphotos.co.uk



BOXING STARS SHINE BRIGHT IN AWARDS SPOTLIGHT

THE Service's boxing set-up was the big winner at the annual Army Sports Awards with representatives claiming three of the major prizes on offer.

Cruiserweight star LCpl Carnell Brown (AGC (SPS), pictured above) led the charge as he overcame the challenge of world champion wakeboarder WO2 Dale Crossley (RE) and UK Armed Forces judo player WO2 Ethaniel Jeffries-Mor (RG) to be named sportsman of the year.

After starting in the sport in 2016, the soldier capped a stellar rise through the ranks by being crowned national elite champion as the top-tier competition resumed after Covid.

He won three bouts in seven days to secure the silverware, joining the Service's proud list of boxers who have excelled at the sport's highest amateur level.

Victory also saw Brown elevated to the select few who

have claimed both national novice and elite titles.

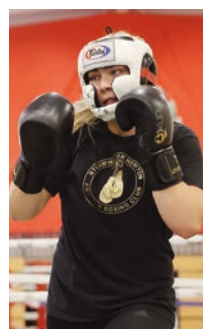
With the belt around his waist, his focus immediately turned to the day job, starting pre-deployment training ahead of an Op Cabrit tour earlier this year.

"This feels amazing," Brown said on collecting his award. "Being a national champion is something a lot of boxers strive for. It was hard to get back into it after Covid but you stay focused and we were all in it together – we just had to make what we could out of it."

The boxers celebrated further success in the rising star category, with LCpl Terri Stuart (REME) taking the honours in recognition of a phenomenal debut year in the ring.

Hailing from a background in kickboxing, she joined the Service squad in August 2021 with no amateur experience.

Within months she won a gold medal at the MTK Box



**"I AM
EXCITED
TO
CARRY
ON"**

Cup and went on to compete at the England Boxing Elite Championships, where she was defeated in the semi-finals to finish with a bronze medal.

As the sport continued its post-pandemic catch-up, the nationals swiftly came round again and Stuart claimed another bronze.

The fighter (pictured left) was then victorious at the Angel of the North and Haringey Box Cups and was named captain of the UK Armed Forces team.

Stuart saw off competition from rugby union starlets Pte Courtney Pursglove (RLC) and Spr Jack Johnson (RE), plus Inter-Services triathlon champion Pte Jasmine Holmes (Int Corps), to claim her latest prize.

"I'm so grateful to receive this award, especially with the level of talent also nominated," she said. "To do as well as I have done this season makes me excited to carry on next year."

Commonwealth Games boxer

Cpl Meg Reid (RLC) was in contention for the sportswoman of the year accolade, but she missed out to international triathlon ace Capt Kat Matthews (RAMC) in the quest for honours.

The officer achieved a host of notable results in 2022 including a second-place finish at the World Ironman Championships and victories at the 70.3 events in Lanzarote and Swansea.

But the feat that generated the biggest headlines was her participation in the Sub8 challenge, a project to determine if a female athlete could break the eight-hour barrier over a full Ironman distance.

Not only did Matthews (pictured below), aided by an expert support team, beat Nicola Spirig to the finish line, she did so in a time of 7hr 31min 54sec.

Completing the list of nominees was dual code rugby international Bdr Beth Dainton (RA) and Cpl Sarah Hawkes (AGC (RMP)), who represented Northern Ireland in judo at the Commonwealth Games.

Service boxing had further cause to celebrate as Mick Gannon was presented with the lifetime achievement award.

A decorated athlete, he turned his hand to coaching in the 1970s and was Army coach from 1986 to 1993, winning multiple Inter-Services titles.

Gannon later became a tutor and assessor on England Boxing courses and, despite being retired from the military for more than 20 years, he continues to run programmes for the Army. ■



AWARDS IN NUMBERS

GOALS SCORED BY THE ARMY WOMEN'S HOCKEY TEAM IN THEIR TIER THREE TROPHY RUN

24

NATIONAL TITLES WON BY BOXER LCPL CHRIS BESSEY UNDER COACH MICK GANNON

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5

WEEKS BETWEEN CAPT KAT MATTHEWS FINISHING SECOND AT THE WORLD CHAMPS AND FACING THE SUB8 CHALLENGE

4



DEDICATION REAPS REWARDS

A FIRST ever victory in the England Hockey Tier Three Championships, coupled with another Inter-Services title, saw the Army women's hockey squad named team of the year.

"We are really proud to have won this award," player-manager Lt Col Nic George (R Signals) told *SoldierSport*.

"We have been in the running in previous years but just missed out, so it is nice for our hard work and dedication to be rewarded – that recognition is important to the team.

"This is a young squad that is growing, and this honour will help us attract new players and quality opposition, as well as raise standards.

"The tier three championships are like any knockout competition in that you need to be on top form for every game.

"The depth in our squad meant we were able to use 30

individuals from round one to the final and we will go again this season.

"It is a great opportunity to bring through some new talent and get them on the pitch alongside our more established players."

Elsewhere, netball umpire Cpl Channon Heaney (RLC) was crowned sports official of the year.

The soldier started officiating in 2015 and has quickly climbed the ranks to the point where she is now recognised on the England Netball stage, umpiring Superleague, Premier League and national schools fixtures.

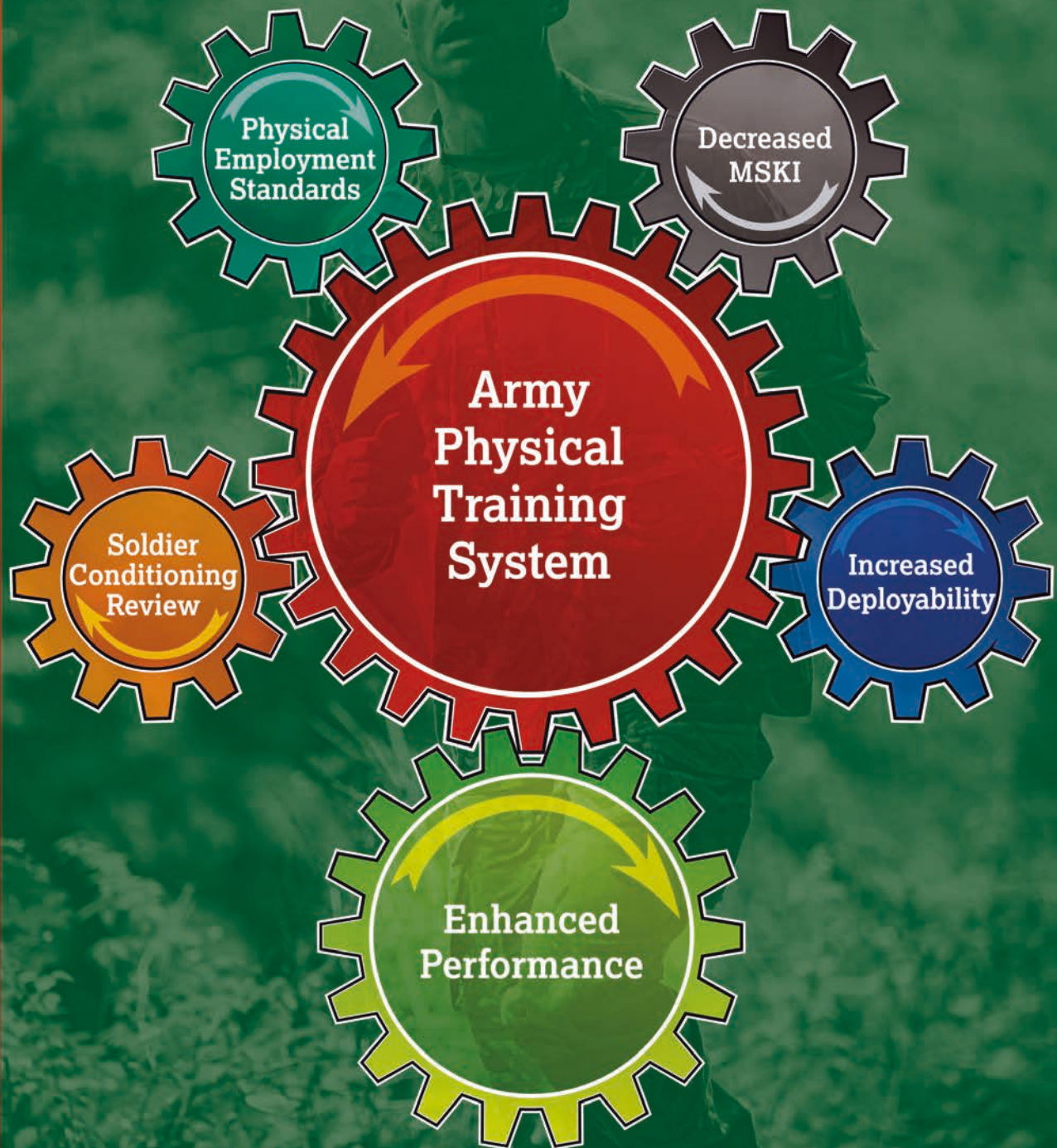
Heaney has also served as Army Netball fixtures secretary.

And finally, 6 Regiment, Royal Logistic Corps took the major units' prize, with 2 Regiment, Army Air Corps and 204 Field Hospital lifting the minor and Reserve unit trophies respectively. ■



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ROBERTS BOWS OUT

PLANS for the new campaign were dealt a blow following news that Capt Mal Roberts (RLC) had stepped down as head coach.

Appointed during the Covid-19 pandemic, the officer oversaw a successful Inter-Services campaign last season that culminated in a 35-27 win over the Royal Navy at Twickenham (pictured below).

Roberts' departure sees him end a 25-year association with the Army Rugby Union, during which he won 26 caps as a player and won ten successive Inter-Services titles between 1999 and 2009.

He then fulfilled various coaching roles and progressed to head coach of the senior team.

"He never took his eye off his military career, despite playing as much rugby as he did," said Col Sandy Fitzpatrick, director of men's senior rugby.

"I don't think there are many others who will be able to replicate his commitment. Him leaving breaks the chemistry we had in the group, but it is an opportunity for someone else to come in."

Fitzpatrick later announced Lt Col Tim Osman (RA) as an interim replacement. A full-time successor will be named ahead of the 2023/24 season.



TRIALS SET TONE FOR SERVICES PUSH



**"YOU
TAKE
YOUR
EYE OFF
THE RAF
AND
NAVY
AT YOUR
PERIL"**

WITH a number of high-profile players unavailable this season, the Army men's rugby union set-up has taken the first steps in forging a squad that it hopes can challenge for Inter-Services honours.

Retirements, work commitments and new careers outside the Service have seen the team lose the likes of Sgt Matt Dawson (Int Corps), SSgt Ken Dowling (RA) and skipper Capt Jamie Miller (AAC), but a three-day trial for aspiring players in Aldershot has paved the way for a positive future.

A total of 48 soldiers were involved, with strength and conditioning and technical skills among the sessions covered ahead of a match against the Army under-23s side (pictured).

"This allows us to identify any new talent coming through that could potentially compete for a red shirt," Col Sandy Fitzpatrick, director of men's senior rugby, told *SoldierSport*.

"It also gives us the chance to see any individuals from the

under-23s team who could go through to the seniors.

"When it comes to the Inter-Services, you take your eye off the Royal Air Force and Royal Navy at your peril.

"It is imperative we form a strong squad early and build through the fixtures to come."

The trials match came at a crucial stage for the under-23s as they continued preparations for their own Inter-Services campaign, with the match divided into three periods to give players valuable minutes.

"The format meant every player who needed to be seen from a senior and under-23 perspective, got on the pitch," the officer added.

"Of the players we had, around two thirds were new to us. For some, the standard of rugby was perhaps a little bit beyond them but all 48 have been given development plans so, if they want to come back in future, we will see quality performers.

"This is part of our responsibility, and they all know the areas to work on." ■

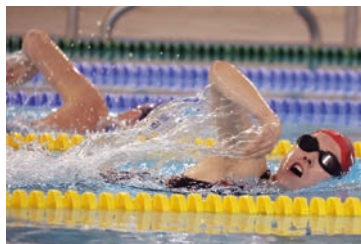
MONTH IN SPORT

December's key dates...

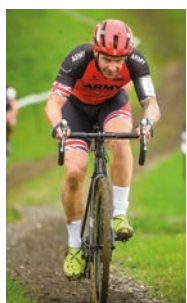


WHAT: Inter-Services Indoor Archery Championships
WHEN: December 3
WHERE: NAEC Stoneleigh
NEED TO KNOW: The

Army held off a strong challenge from the Royal Air Force to be crowned outdoor champions in the summer. Can they follow it up with indoor glory?



WHAT: Inter-Corps Swimming Championships
WHEN: December 7
WHERE: Aldershot
NEED TO KNOW: The Infantry set three new records as they sealed the men's title last time out, with the RLC taking the women's prize. Who will end the year on a high?



WHAT: Army Cyclocross Series
WHEN: December 7
WHERE: ATR Grantham
NEED TO KNOW: Riders take to the saddle for the third and final round of

the competition, which will be staged in the aftermath of Army athletes racing at the World Cyclocross Masters Championships in Ipswich



Pictures: Simon Brentford and Steve Fitch

HICKS TOASTS WINNING FORMATION



**"SO
MUCH
TIME
HAS
GONE
INTO
THIS"**

SKYDIVER Maj Anna Hicks (RAMC) saw years of dedication to her sport pay off as she helped Britain's female four-way team to World Championships glory.

The doctor and her NFTO team colleagues overcame the challenge of France and the USA to secure top honours in a contest decided by the most formations performed per skydive.

Each outfit completed ten jumps, with NFTO averaging 20 formations in each 35-second window of freefall.

They became the first UK squad to triumph at the competition since 2008, having previously finished second and third.

"It was amazing to finally get there," Reservist Hicks said. "So much time and dedication has gone into this."

"We've had a really strong training year and peaked at the right time. We threw all our spare time and money at

this and completed 520 jumps before the competition.

"This is not about artistry and there are no points for style – you simply do as many formations as possible."

"We opened a small lead after the first round and kept pushing. That advantage became more comfortable, but you are always conscious of the fact you have to come back and battle the next day."

"Going into the final round we knew we had it, as long as we didn't totally mess up."

Hicks, who served for 16 years as a Regular, started out in skydiving during her days as a medical student and has credited the Army in helping her reach the top thanks to its talented athlete scholarship scheme (Tass).

"It is such a physical sport," she explained. "Through Tass I've had a strength and conditioning coach, a sports psychologist, physios and dieticians. At the elite level that is so important." ■

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Pictures: Graeme Main and Cat Goyrn/ASCB



MOMENTUM ON THE MAT

ARMY'S TAEKWONDO AND KARATE STARS FORGE AHEAD AS YEAR ENDS ON A HIGH

OLYMPIC bronze medallist Sarah Stevenson was on hand to deliver expert tuition to the Army's world taekwondo fighters at the latest skills, grading and assistant coaching courses in Aldershot.

The two-time world champion (pictured right) pushed the athletes in two challenging sessions, with personnel grateful of the elite-level guidance at the end of another successful year.

"Taekwondo is all about speed and agility, which is what the focus was on," the team's OiC Maj Stephen Gibbons (R Signals) told *SoldierSport*.

"The more we mix things up and get exposure with those at the highest level, the better we will become.

"It is great to get an external view and she really took us out of our comfort zone."

The course also saw five members pass British Taekwondo gradings/promotions, with another three gaining assistant coach qualifications.

The team is due to compete at the Southampton Prize Fighter Championships later this month and will head to the European Masters Games in 2023.

"It is going really well," Gibbons said, while reflecting on the health of the sport. "We have close ties with the national governing body and are following their syllabus – we are happy with the pathway we're on."

Taekwondo's ITF discipline is also thriving, recently hosting its winter training camp and inaugural Inter-Corps Championships, which was won by the Royal Electrical and

Mechanical Engineers.

The Army's top fighters then competed at the UK Open, with Sig Sagar Kunwar (R Signals), LCpl Mitchell Pembroke (AGC (RMP)), Sgt Sam Hall (REME), Pte Elli Curtin, Sgt Joe Molloy and Capt Stuart Wordingham (all RAMC) winning medals.

On the back of their performances, Kunwar and Pembroke have been invited to attend national squad training.

"The camp is all about the continuous development of skills and allowing the team to train together," head coach Wordingham explained.

"We are a small sport, with 20-25 core members training regularly, but we have had a high level of progression.

"At the British Championships last year we only had one fighter but this time we are taking a full squad of seven over two days.

"The development they have made over the past 12 months has been very good. The ball is now rolling and it is our job to maintain that momentum."

And in a busy month for the Army Martial Arts Association, the karate team excelled at both the Inter-Services and European Championships.

The soldiers headed into the military showdown with some key performers missing but still claimed the overall title.

"We came in feeling a bit low as we had people missing and did not have our best team available," OiC Maj Ronnie Harley (RAMC), a Reservist with the Medical Operational Support Unit, said.

"So we surprised ourselves and walked away with the major prizes. The Royal Air Force brought a really good team, as



**"THE
MORE
WE MIX
THINGS
UP THE
BETTER
WE WILL
BECOME"**

did the Royal Navy.

"They are smaller than us and have a lot of people busy through work, but the guys running those squads have put in a huge amount of effort."

Harley singled out newcomer Pte Autumn Holmes (RAMC) for praise. A relatively late call-up, she went on to secure an individual silver medal.

"Her OC talked her into coming along," he said. "She hadn't trained for two years due to joining the Army and then carrying out basic training but did phenomenally well.

"She is someone who we recruited indirectly. By going out and competing nationally and regionally we are promoting the message that people can join the Army and do karate."

From there, the fighters travelled to Florence for the European Championships where Harley bolstered the Scottish ranks and eight others represented England.

WO2 Hayley Just (RE) won gold in the individual kumite, while there were silver medals for Maj Karen Owen (AGC (ETS)) and Cpl Kira Donaldson (RLC), and a bronze for Lt Alexandra Merisoiu (RAMC). The quartet added further accolades in the team events.

It also proved to be a special trip for Harley, who took gold in the over-50s kumite.

"I have never got beyond the quarter-finals previously," he said. "I was a bag of nerves for the first couple of fights but once I reached the semi-finals, I was a completely different person. There was no pressure and I won comfortably.

"It was a really good showing and the standard is getting better every year." ■



Pictures: Jacks Snaps



RACERS STRIVE FOR GAINS AFTER POSITIVE YEAR

THE Army motorcycle road race team has been reflecting on the highs and lows of life on the track in 2022.

The trio of Cpl Calvin Heaver (REME), WO2 Gav Watts (R Anglian) and veteran Scott Halliday combined speed, tactics and good mechanical recovery to help the set-up to top spot in the No Limits Club 1000 Endurance Championships.

Featuring legs at some of the country's premier circuits – including Silverstone, Snetterton and Donington Park – the soldiers scored consistently across the seven rounds they completed, winning all but one race to finish 37 points clear of their nearest rivals.

Meanwhile, the sprint team claimed second place in the Inter-Services Championships in what was a season of two halves.

The Army enjoyed a dominant start with strong showings at Brands Hatch, Mallory Park and

Donington Park but narrowly missed out to their Royal Air Force rivals in the battle for collective honours.

The Mallory race was particularly memorable as the race organisers flipped the grid, pushing the fastest riders to the back and staging the release of each row to add a time penalty to the mix.

While proving chaotic it gave everyone an opportunity to win a trophy, with Pte Seb Evenden (R Anglian) topping the standings.

Heaver was another to enjoy individual success – starring in both the endurance and sprint disciplines, finishing second in the Thundersport GP1 Sportsman Championship and winning the Inter-Services.

Other riders to be honoured were LCpl Pete Doogan and Maj Stuart Keenan (both R Signals), who won the Loz Williams and Billy Redmayne Trophies respectively in recognition of



**"NEXT
YEAR
WE WILL
HAVE
GOOD
DEPTH"**

their dedication and commitment to the team.

"On the whole, it has been a successful year," team secretary and rider Maj John Miller (RE) told *SoldierSport*.

"The performances of Calvin Heaver have been a real positive, but we were disappointed to finish second in the Inter-Services once again.

"We had a healthy lead but then lost one of our fastest riders after a big accident.

"Exercises and work commitments also took their toll, and the RAF were able to beat us.

"But next year we will have a great chance of winning as we should have some good depth in the team.

"Calvin initially joined as part of the pit crew and him going on to have success as a rider is a good example of the pathway we have. We already have four or five interested parties in place for the new season." ■

SPORT SHORTS



Picture: Align Photography

Glory for Gloucester

THE UK Armed Forces men's team were involved in an entertaining encounter with Gloucester United in the annual rugby union remembrance tie.

Army front-row stars LCpl Epeli Kotobalavu (RLC) and Sgt Gareth Smith (R Welsh) were among the try scorers for the military outfit, but their efforts could not prevent a 45-33 defeat to their youthful opponents.

Elsewhere, the UKAF women have returned home following a successful end to the International Defence Rugby Competition in New Zealand, beating Tonga 44-11 in the plate final.



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LORINERS WIN CAPS SUPERB SEASON

A RMY riders head into the season-ending London International Horse Show this month on the back of some fine results across the board in 2022.

A total of 21 athletes were selected for the various teams that competed throughout the year with the Inter-Services contest, the Loriners Cup, going down to the wire.

The Army and Royal Navy each posted two first- and two second-place results from four legs. Therefore, the trophy was decided on the number of top-six finishers per leg – an advantage held by the soldiers.

And there was further success at the UK Armed Forces Dressage Championships as the Army dominated the podium places.

More than 20 personnel were in action and Maj Becky Darke (RLC) was crowned individual dressage champion, with LBdr Liz Griggs (RA) taking the Reserve prize.

As well as competing on the military circuit, the riders have been excelling on the national and international stage.

At dressage's Cavago Associated Championships,

Griggs was first in the elementary contest, with Cpl Gillian Gallagher (RLC) second in the novice standings.

Eventing's Bicton International Horse Trials saw Capt Amy Cooper (RHA) finish fifth in a field of 71 competitors in the BE 100 class three-day event, with Gnr Ellie Mitchell (RHA) and Bdr Laura Hails (RA) 18th and 45th.

Capt Mary Pearson (RAVC) was ninth in the international-level competition comprising dressage, 1.10-metre cross country and 1.15-metre show-jumping tests.

There was further success at show jumping's Keysoe International, where LCpl Laura Charley (R Signals) and Air Tpr Will Field (AAC) secured a one-two in the CSI 1* competition at 1.15 metres.

And the Army and Royal Artillery Hunter Trials (above) welcomed entrants to Larkhill, where Bdr Alanna Stirton (RA) was triumphant in the open class. Maj Kirstie Deakin-Main (RA) took the intermediate prize, and LBdr Declan O'Rourke (RHA) and 2Lt Lana Hughes (AGC) the novice and restricted novice awards. ■

INTER-SERVICES
LORINERS CUP
WINNERS

ARMY
RUNNERS-
UP

NAVY



Picture: Action Replay Photography



Pictures: Alligin Photography



PAIN IN THE RAIN

POINTS were at a premium at a rain-swept Witney RFC as the Army under-23s rugby union team suffered a narrow loss to the Royal Air Force in their opening Inter-Services fixture.

A last-gasp penalty saw their rivals clinch an 8-7 win after a converted score from Sig Drew Stephenson (R Signals) gave the soldiers a 7-0 lead at the break.

The RAF hit back with a second half try but when they failed to add the extras, the soldiers looked set to celebrate victory. However, they were penalised at the death and AS1 Kieran Jenkins slotted the simplest of kicks to complete a remarkable turnaround.

The Reds faced the Royal Navy as this issue went to press.

Elsewhere, Pte Courtney Pursglove (RLC) and Rfn Vereimi Qorowale (Rifles) scored tries on the same weekend at the top level of the women's and men's professional game.

Replacement Pursglove touched down for the fifth and final try in a 31-12 win for Sale Sharks over DMP Durham Sharks, while Qorowale sprinted home from the 22-metre line in a 31-28 defeat for Newcastle Falcons against Northampton Saints in the Premiership Cup.



AIR FORCE TRIUMPH IN ARMY'S BACKYARD

IT WAS a case of recent history repeating itself at the Inter-Services Indoor Hockey Championships in Aldershot as the Army missed out on major honours for a second successive year.

Having dominated the competition for more than two decades, the women's team saw the title slip from their grasp in 2021 as the Royal Air Force secured top spot.

The Reds returned in determined mood ahead of the latest showdown, and a 4-0 win over the Royal Navy set them on the path to success.

However, the defending champions provided a sterner test and some slick penalty corner routines saw them open a 3-0 lead at the break. Further punishment followed in the second half as the light blues completed a 7-0 win to claim the title.

"Credit to the RAF, they have been

growing their squad and have made gains," Army player-manager Lt Col Nic George (R Signals) told *SoldierSport*.

"It is fantastic that we have credible opposition with international players who can give us a game, and long may it last."

The Army men also found themselves in a winning position having defeated the Navy 4-2 in their opening match.

And they were well placed in their clash with the RAF, leading 2-0, 3-2 and 4-3 at various stages of the game.

But their rivals enjoyed a storming end to the encounter, coming from behind to win 6-4 and lift the trophy.

The airmen enjoyed further glory in the under-25s competition, however, there was Army success in the masters draw, with the men's and women's teams sealing their respective honours. ■

**"CREDIT
TO THE
RAF -
THEY
HAVE
MADE
GAINS"**



● TEAM GB pilot LSgt Lamin Deen (Gren Gds) has called time on his international bobsleigh career. The soldier competed at the 2014 and 2018 Winter Olympics and hit a sporting high by winning a World Cup gold medal in 2017. Deen said: "After an amazing and action-packed 15 years in the wildest sport ever to be created, it's time to say goodbye."

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An introduction to AT during Basic Training. Unit Training (Type 2 AT) Training delivered at unit level, focused by the theme of interest. It can be either single or multi activity.

EXPEDITIONS (TYPE 3 AT)

Voluntary Expeditions with a particular aim which can be from a unit, several units or even to service and support from single units right the way up to swimming Everest or climbing Antarctica. There is something for every level of ability and provided the right resources are available Expeditions can be as simple as a day out or as complex as a multi-day expedition.

LEADER/INSTRUCTOR TRAINING (TYPE 4 AT)

Individual Training is conducted at our Adventure Training Workshops. We deliver Foundation, Leader and Instructor courses, allowing units to build their own capability to deliver expeditions.

EXPEDITION PLANNING

Following successful Adventure Training, units are encouraged to plan and deliver their own expeditions. The Army AT Group has a network of specially trained Expedition Leaders (Officers) to assist Expedition Leaders and Unit Adventure Training Officers, who are assisted by the Army AT Group.

CIVILIAN NATIONAL GOVERNING BODY AWARDS

Where possible we provide a pathway into civilian National Governing Body Awards, giving you a qualification you can use to prove your skills.

FAST TRACK WITH PRIOR EXPERIENCE

Relevant the Army AT Group and military qualifications may allow personnel to progress with a FAST track or skip onto a FAST track process.

NOB PATHWAYS



FAST TRACK PROCESS



TYPES OF AT



Packed with information about the courses available, as well as the planning and conducting of Expeditions, this guide is for *everyone* regardless of experience or rank.

Scan the QR code below to see how you could benefit from all that Adventurous Training has to offer.

The Army AT Group look forward to welcoming you on a course soon!

ADR010238



SCAN HERE TO VIEW AND DOWNLOAD THE GUIDE



DEVELOPING LEADERS BUILDING RESILIENCE



ARMY BE THE BEST



It feels like Servicewomen have made strides towards equality this year. We opened 52 breastfeeding rooms across defence, which are helping people go back to work stress-free, and extra guidance has been issued on parental leave. We also changed the rules so personnel can claim for mess dress alterations as the result of pregnancy or the menopause.

LCpl Natasha Day, RAMC
Defence Breastfeeding Network founder and Soldiering On Award winner (page 13)

Top of the list is rowing the Atlantic, second is doing the Atacama Crossing – a 250km ultramarathon in Chile. And after that beating my little brother at crazy golf because he plays off a handicap of eight or nine.

Cpl Jack Jarvis, RE
Guinness World Record holder for solo transatlantic row (page 28)



With my hand on my heart, I joined the Army to serve Queen and country – so the passing of the sovereign this year is my standout memory. I was en route to see young soldiers at a parade when her death was announced. It suddenly struck me that they would be the first in many decades not to serve Her Majesty.

WO1 Paul Carney
Army Sergeant Major

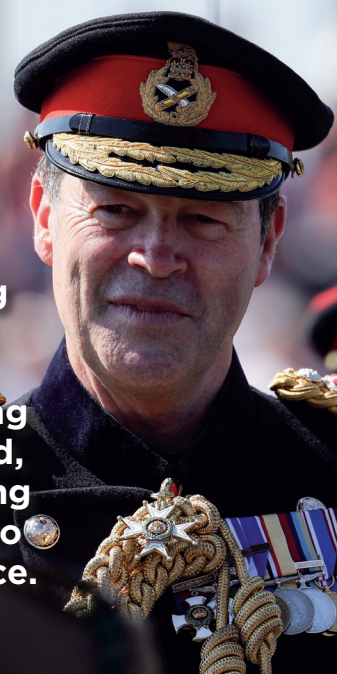


For me 2022 will be a year of intense pride. The Platinum Jubilee was an incredible four days in which the Armed Forces were pivotal and which Her Majesty The Queen clearly enjoyed. And then, so suddenly afterwards, her military were superb during the 11 days of Operation London Bridge, in Scotland and London. They were faultless and galvanised a renewed patriotism across the country.

WO1 Vern Stokes, Cldm Gds
London District Garrison
Sergeant Major

War in Europe. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has reminded everyone why armies matter. We can't simply wish for peace; peace is something we have to do. We need an Army capable of deterring our adversaries and, if necessary, fighting and winning wars to make a better peace.

Gen Sir Patrick Sanders
Chief of the General Staff



My year in a nutshell

We asked some familiar Army faces what stood out most to them when looking back on 2022

The full resumption of representative Army sport has been so great to see. Personally, having PTI SSgt Nerys Jones (RAPTC) on my team for the Sub8 Ironman was integral to achieving the whole event.

Capt Katrina Matthews, RAMC
Female Ironman record holder (page 62)





GET IMMEDIATE SITUATIONAL AWARENESS

FirstLook is a throwable, rugged and expandable robot that provides immediate situational awareness, performs persistent observation and investigates dangerous and hazardous material while maintaining a safer stand-off distance for operators. Quick to power-up, FirstLook can be deployed in a moment's notice.

FirstLook allows operations where other robots can't fit or manoeuvre. This rugged, lightweight robot can be inserted into structures and provides operators with visual, audio, and sensor feedback before entry. Manoeuvrable in a variety of environments, FirstLook climbs small obstacles, overcomes curbs, turns in place and self-rights when flipped over.

For more details email: info@levelpeaks.com



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ABF

THE SOLDIERS'

CHARITY

The Army's National Charity



WINNER: GOLD

OPERATION BLETCHLEY

YOUR CODE BREAKING CHALLENGE

40 MILES | 10 CODES | 1 MONTH | CRACK THE CODES BEFORE TIME RUNS OUT

Operation Bletchley is a series of distance and codebreaking challenges which raise vital funds for ABF The Soldiers' Charity – the Army's National Charity. Participants can take part from anywhere in the world using their phones, fitness trackers or even a good old map. There are three code levels to choose from: Junior, Codebreaker and Cypher Expert.

Our two January missions are now open! Land in Berlin and cover 40 miles on foot through Soviet territory and decrypting vital intelligence to beat the blockade, or embark on an undercover 80 mile journey across Yugoslavia arranging supply drops and organising attacks in our Balkans mission.

Since its launch, over 11,000 people have taken part from all over the world, walking nearly 750,000 miles while raising nearly £500,000 for soldiers and veterans in need. With a thriving Facebook community, Operation Bletchley has also won a gold award after being voted 'The most innovative event in the UK'.



Registration is £15 per mission (£15 with fundraising or £40 with no obligation to fundraise). Registration open now. Your mission(s) must be completed between 1 – 31 January 2023. To find out more and to register for this event visit soldierscharity.org/operationbletchley or email events@soldierscharity.org or scan this QR code to go straight to the sign up page.

EVERY £ RAISED WILL HELP SOLDIERS AND VETERANS – PLEASE SIGN UP TODAY

ABF The Soldiers' Charity is a registered charity in England and Wales (1146420) and Scotland (SC039189) and registered as a company limited by guarantee in England and Wales (07974609).



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AND YOU SUPPORT
THE WHOLE ARMY FAMILY**