

SOLDIER

MAGAZINE OF THE BRITISH ARMY

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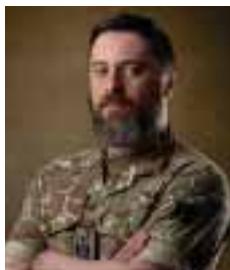
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OUR CONTRIBUTORS
THIS MONTH...**WO1 BAZ LLOYD, RLC**

WITH two tours of Iraq and three of Afghanistan under his belt – not to mention taskings in the Baltics, Somalia, Caribbean and numerous short-term training teams – the command master photographer has plenty of wisdom to impart when it comes to capturing soldiers on camera. The 21-year Serviceman led the judging for this year's Army Photographic Competition, and said he was especially impressed with the quality of amateur entries, which he hopes may lead to some transferring across to the trade. Find all the winning entries – and the judges' verdicts – on page 36.

**CPL RYAN DAY, QRH**

THIS month's fitness inspo comes courtesy of 28-year-old ultramarathon nut, Cpl Day. Over the next few weeks the super-fit soldier will thrash seven (yes, seven) different 100km+ routes to raise funds for the Army Benevolent Fund. If you think that sounds like hell... you're probably right. But his picturesque choice of route – starting with the Isle of Wight coastal path – should take the edge off, as should the massive pizza he plans to eat at the end of each challenge.

SEEING THE ARMY FOR WHAT IT IS

THE digital age bombards our brains with words and messages. So it was a real treat to sit back for a moment this month and enjoy the winning images in the **Army Photographic Competition**. The way this artform captures moments – and holds them still – can seem at odds with the fast-paced age we live in. But when you're still, you see things for what they are, free from other people's opinions. So I want to thank every soldier who entered this year's contest for giving us all chance to reflect on the vital work our Army is doing in an increasingly uncertain world. Turn to page 36 to discover the winners.

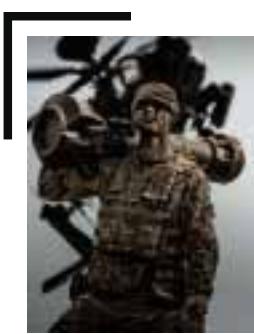
Also this month, we get the lowdown on **Exercise Steadfast Dart** in Romania (page 30) – the largest European outing for Nato this year. Its drills, which unfolded at the same time as *that* White House meeting, made life pretty tricky for those on the ground as well as their leaders. Temperatures dipped below minus ten and there were plenty of lessons in trench warfare and woodland fighting. Unlike their political counterparts, however, the guys in green came away with stronger bonds than ever.

Finally – in case you missed the announcement in our last issue – check out our new-look website at **soldiermagazine.co.uk** which now includes a **special archive section** where you can browse all our issues as far back as the very first mag in March 1945.

There are still a few publications missing, which we are working on uploading soon, but I hope this will be as valuable to the reminiscers who want to look back on a certain operation or event, as it will be to military historians. Warning: it can take you down a rabbit hole for hours.

Sarah Goldthorpe • **Editor**

‘Thank you to
every soldier who
entered this year’





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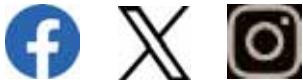
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ARMY TRAVEL

Let's **STOP** Wasting Money

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MUST BE BOOKED
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ARMY

‘People can see how the court came to its decision’

Cleaven Faulkner, Director MCS



COURT MARTIAL RESULTS GO PUBLIC

DISGRACED troops who are stripped of their careers after being convicted at court martial will be named online and in this magazine from now on.

Transcripts of sentencing remarks – the statements made by judge advocates after a verdict – will be posted on **gov.uk** at the close of each case.

The new policy covers cases from the start of 2025.

Cleaven Faulkner, Director of the Military Court Service, said the Armed Forces justice system had sometimes been criticised for a lack of transparency.

He said the latest move – ordered by the judge advocate general – would help to show the workings of courts martial and the rationale for sentences imposed.

Previously, anyone interested in these comments had to attend the case in person or complete paperwork requesting details from

the relevant court centre (Bulford pictured).

“The Service justice system has been on a journey of modernisation and transformation – publishing sentencing remarks is one part of that,” Faulkner told *Soldier*.

“It means people can see, in some detail, how the court came to its decision.

“A member of the public might conclude from a result alone that a sentence is too lenient or severe, but this explains the thinking.”

Cases will only be published online once they have concluded, he added.

Victims whose identity must be protected – such as those in sexual offence matters or juveniles – will not be named. Other details subject to court orders may also be removed.

A handful of cases relating to convicted Army and Royal Air Force personnel were already published as this issue went to press (page 57), with more being prepared.

“In all, the process of publication is likely to

take up to a month or so after the conclusion of a case,” Faulkner added. “But they will go on the website as and when they are ready.”

The news follows a wave of abuse allegations from female personnel (*Soldier*, March), in which many said they had no confidence in the justice system.

Faulkner said all three Services had been supportive of the move to publish, with Army leaders hoping it will provide increased trust in the legal process.

Col Lucy Giles, a course director at the Land Command Staff College and a former college commander at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, commented: “Critically, this will help engender confidence that there is a zero tolerance of poor behaviours – and that our organisation is committed to dealing with the culprits.”

She urged anyone on the receiving end of abuse to report it. Find help on page 57.

WHERE TO FIND SOLDIER



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Sent to Army sites at the start of the month. Pick up a copy at the cookhouse and if you aren't seeing it tell us at subs@soldiermagazine.co.uk



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If you're not serving you can buy the mag from your high street retailer or directly from us at subs@soldiermagazine.co.uk (£23 for 12 issues in the UK)



1 GERMANY

Baptism of fire

A STERN initiation test awaited future British officers in Bavaria as cadets from the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst completed their final drills before graduation.

Staged at US installations in Grafenwoehr and Hohenfels, Exercise Dynamic Victory kicked off with a tactical live-fire package, which, for the first time, incorporated fire support from American .50 calibre Humvee gun trucks.

The trainees then deployed into the field, where they conducted urban and rural ops against a formidable opposing force comprising soldiers from 3rd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment and resident troops from the Joint Multinational Readiness Centre.

Maj Neil Guerin (SASO) from the academy's Combined Arms Manoeuvre Wing said the "demanding and arduous" fortnight would set the junior officers up for success.

"The exercise is shaped to represent operations and tests every aspect of leadership and command before they assign to their respective units in the coming weeks," he added.

The 170 personnel will take part in their passing out parade at Sandhurst on April 11.

2 BELIZE

Beavering away

SAPPERS practised trade skills in Central America, while improving infrastructure for personnel training and living there.

Members of 39 Engineer Regiment's 48 Field Squadron – known as the Beavers – upgraded jungle routes and built a culvert as well as renovating accommodation for permanent staff and their families stationed at British Army Training Support Unit Belize.

Exercise Sailfish also saw them working with the Guyana Defence Force and conducting adventurous training.

Unit spokesman SSgt Glen Jones said the troops had "combined technical expertise with adaptability, proving their capability in expeditionary engineering."



3 ESTONIA

Mercians bed in

SOLDIERS from the 1 Mercian Battlegroup are settling into their stint on Operation Cabrit.

Having taken the reins of Nato's mission in Estonia from The Royal Dragoon Guards, the infantry and attached units were getting stuck into the role as this issue went to press, starting with a command post exercise.

The process of integrating with the host nation brigade will continue through a series of joint drills – culminating in Exercise Hedgehog next month, which will test the country's defensive response.

The Mercians' tour got off to a memorable start when Colonel-in-Chief, the Prince of Wales (pictured below left) dropped into Tapa Camp to speak to personnel and get hands-on with military kit.

4 OMAN

Guardsmen bound for Gulf

MEMBERS of the Coldstream Guards are headed to the Middle East to train alongside the Royal Omani Army this month.

Number Two Company will team up with counterparts from the Northern Frontier Regiment for joint drills in the Jebel Akhdar mountains and the desert plain of Al Hazm.

As well as working towards increased interoperability in rural and urban combat scenarios, they will be experimenting with the likes of drones and dismounted situational awareness tech.

The guardsmen, who are celebrating the 375th anniversary of their regiment this year, will return just in time to receive new colours from the King at Windsor Castle in June.





'Our time in Romania has given us great insights'

Ex Steadfast Dart - page 30



Picture: Sgt Murray Kerr, RA

5 JAPAN

Powder pros

THE remote peaks of Hokkaido's Tokachi Volcanic Group formed the backdrop to the ski touring expedited of a lifetime for 14 personnel from Army HQ (shown below).

Previously uncharted by other Service groups, the region offered the troops challenging ascents and descents through some of the deepest powder snow conditions in the world.

Exped boss Maj Simon Gray (PWRR) said Exercise Tiger Tokachi had pushed him well beyond his comfort zone.

"It was the first time since being on operations that I felt physically and mentally on the edge of my depth as an individual and as a leader," he continued.

"The skiing was completely different due to the deep snow, cold temperatures and terrain.

"It was not laid on a plate ready to enjoy - we had to plan it, find it, manage it, climb and ski it."

The experience had been "out of this world and truly rewarding" the officer added.



6 SOUTH AFRICA

Righting a wrong

A SMALL delegation of British personnel attended the unveiling of a new Commonwealth War Graves Commission memorial to South African military labourers who died in the First World War.

Located in Cape Town, the installation features a forest of wooden posts representing the more than 1,700 workers who lost their lives and until now had not been commemorated.

Trustee of the commission's charitable foundation, Reservist Capt Jay Singh-Sohal (GSC), said the project was part of a scheme to correct historic inequalities in remembrance.

"I felt strongly about being present to bear witness," he added.

7 CYPRUS

Proud moment

BRITISH peacekeepers marked the end of a six-month Tosca mission in style as they were presented with their UN campaign medals by senior officers.

Reservists from 5th Regiment, Royal Artillery plus units including The Royal Lancers were rewarded for their work in assisting multinational efforts to maintain the long-standing ceasefire between Greek and Turkish Cypriot forces.

The medal recipients included Gnr Emily Arnold - who snapped a quick selfie to show her parents back home (pictured above).

The 18-year-old said she was "very proud" to share the moment with her family, especially as her dad had served a full career in the same regiment.

Their tour complete, the soldiers were relieved by arriving colleagues from 5th Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers.



Picture: PO Lee Bleasie, RN

BRACE YOURSELVES

SOLDIERS of the UK Commando Force have completed their winter training in the Arctic circle.

Seen here are members of 29 Cdo, Royal Artillery and 24 Cdo, Royal Engineers as a Dutch NH-90 touched down on Operation Clockwork.

The package saw them tackle mock enemy forces in freezing conditions.

SERGEANT MAJOR SWAP



Signaller WO1 John Miller takes top Army job

THE Service's new senior soldier brings an airborne flavour to the role – and says he is relishing the prospect of representing troops at the top.

Speaking after taking over as Army sergeant major this month, WO1 John Miller – a career signaller – told *Soldier* it was a “privilege” to be appointed.

He admitted: “Honestly, I never expected to get this far when I joined up.

“I’m very much looking forward to the role, supporting our soldiers as well as the Chief of the General Staff, Gen Sir Roly Walker, and the wider military.”

WO1 Miller, who previously served as Field Army sergeant major, enlisted in 1999 and has spent a large part of his career with Colchester-based 216 Parachute Signal Squadron.

Highlights include three tours of Afghanistan and deployments to Iraq and Kosovo.

He relieves WO1 Paul Carney, who has served three-and-a-half years in the role and called time on 27 years in uniform.

‘I never expected to get this far’

WO1 John Miller, R Signals

‘Thanks and farewell’

“It has been a privilege to serve as Army sergeant major over the last three-and-a-half years, a pivotal time in a wider world where so much has been going on. I take my hat off to all soldiers, Regular and Reserve, as well as our veterans for all your work. From my perspective, this role has exceeded expectations. I have often compared it to sport, performing at the highest level of something you love.”



WO1 Paul Carney (RE), outgoing Army sergeant major

JPA GOES OFFLINE FOR TWO WEEKS

LEAVE, expenses and other important admin must all be updated before the JPA system is taken offline for over a fortnight later this month.

The downtime starts from 1700 on April 18 and lasts until 0800 on May 5.

It is required so Defence Business Services (DBS) – the organisation that provides HR and other corporate functions to the MoD – can migrate the platform to the cloud.

"These improvements will deliver a more robust and efficient service," explained Graeme Macaulay from the DBS transformation programme.

"We've worked hard to minimise disruption during this period and everyone's patience is greatly appreciated."

Payment of salaries at the end of April will continue as normal.

DBS is encouraging troops to make any applications – such as those for the continuity of education allowance or legal aid – by April 15.

Picture: Graeme Main



Anything submitted after this date will not be processed until after the migration in May.

Apps that are linked to JPA – such as *MySeries* or the *Armed Forces Personnel Portal* – will also be offline.

For more information on the interruption, search 'JPA and apps major downtime' on the Defnet homepage or Defence Connect.

'Everyone's patience is greatly appreciated'

Graeme Macaulay, DBS

Picture: Sgt Rob Kane, RLC



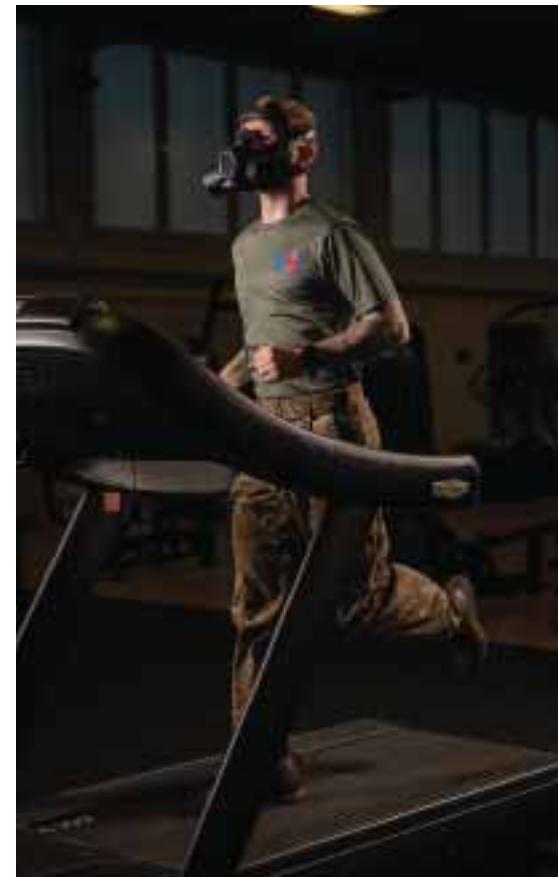
PRINCESS POWER

THE Princess of Wales brought smiles to the faces of personnel – and the public – when she visited the Irish Guards in Wellington Barracks, London, for St Patrick's Day.

Seen here laughing with troops in the sergeants' mess, the royal awarded Long Service and Good Conduct

Medals during her trip and met cadets and veterans.

Her Royal Highness has been colonel of the regiment since 2023 but missed the celebrations last year after being diagnosed with cancer. She presented traditional sprigs of shamrock and joined soldiers for a drink of Guinness.



Pictures: Cpl Peter Dobson, R Signals

LUNG-BUSTER

A ROYAL Signals officer will attempt to become the first person to run the London Marathon in a respirator and military uniform this month.

Lt Tyler Bury is taking on the lung-busting challenge in aid of The Royal British Legion and to highlight the "suffocating effect" of poor mental health on veterans.

The 26-year-old, who has been training for the event since September, said of running in a gas mask: "You're in a constant state of oxygen deficiency so your legs cramp up sooner than normal and you sweat a lot more too."

"I have been so focused on the respirator that I neglected to think about how much the boots hurt."

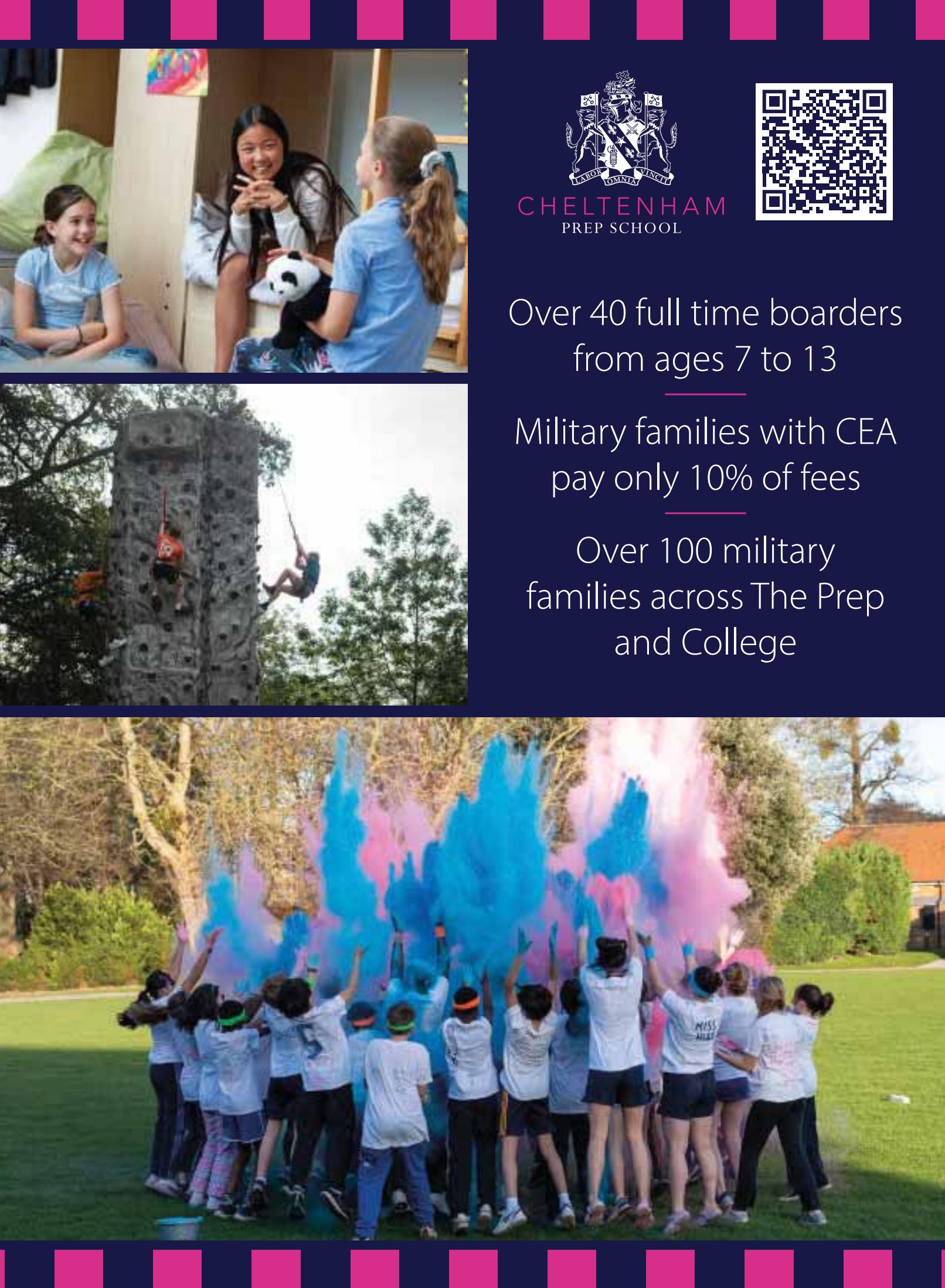
"Running in shorts and trainers is a dream in comparison."

Guinness World Records staff have set the Stafford-based Serviceman a target of five hours to complete the 26-mile route.

"The thought of helping just one veteran get through difficult times has been keeping me going," he explained to *Soldier*.

Search for Tyler Bury on **2025tcslondonmarathon.enthuse.com** to support him with a cash donation.





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ROLE MODELS

Could they help stamp out unacceptable behaviour?



Picture: Graeme Main

MENTORING of recruits could help stamp out inappropriate behaviours, a leading military academic has said.

Lt Victoria Carr (Int Corps) – a senior research fellow at the Sandhurst-based Centre for Army Leadership – said the measure could promote values and standards in initial training.

But she said the move would have to be properly managed with career benefits in place for the leaders who step up.

Lt Carr – a Reservist and civvy street headteacher – stressed that although many of today's youngsters would call out discrimination, some were being exposed to negative influences on

social media.

"For whatever reason, there are clearly people joining who think sexually inappropriate behaviours are okay," she said. "We need to question where these recruits are getting such a distorted moral code from."

She continued: "Mentors should come from outside people's chain of command.

"Authentic mentoring comes from a person you can identify with – so in the case of a soldier in phase one training, a lance corporal would be perfect."

What do you think? Drop us a line at news@soldiermagazine.co.uk or contact Lt Carr on Defence Connect.



Picture: Shutterstock

1,000 COMEDY NIGHTS LATER... Stand-up Nick Page on his military gig milestone

"ON MY first trip to Afghanistan we did the usual straightforward RAF flight: arrive at Brize, discover delay, go home, back to Brize, wait six hours, check in, wait four hours, get on a Herc to Scotland, pick up some boxes, fly to Germany, wait six hours, fly to Cyprus, wait three hours,



watch our plane take off because it's needed elsewhere, watch it return because it isn't, get on and off the plane because they forgot to refuel, fly to Al Minhad, enjoy the portacabins for six hours, get back on the plane and arrive at Bastion in the dark. Still, better than the M25 on a Friday.

There was a moment, just before the lights went off for landing, when I looked round at the troops we were travelling with.

I realised some of them would be in the audience for our shows, and some of them wouldn't be coming back.

They looked like kids.

My comedy career started after an ill-advised bet with a Bootneck

called Howie. Twenty years later, I'm not sure I won.

But I have had some incredible experiences, especially performing for the military.

Our gigs in Afghanistan, called the CSE Shows (now BFBS Live Events) were the best thing I've done as a comic.

They mattered, and that made a difference to our audiences.

I did shows in Bastion, Kabul and Kandahar as well as tiny outposts where me and a singer would helicopter in and do ten minutes each to a dozen guys, then hop back on board to repeat six more times before heading back to Bastion.

I did eight tours, seeing Bastion grow to a small town and then get dismantled again.

I met incredible people who are still friends today, and even now

– ten years after the last time I walked off a stage there – I can be doing a gig in a comedy club here and someone will come up after to tell me they were at a show in the desert.

Between Afghanistan, Cyprus, the UK and shows for all three Services around the world, I've done nearly 1,000 military gigs.

And you're still my favourite audiences. I've never experienced such a bond in the crowd, such robust banter and such artfully horrible nicknames.

Nostalgia is a dangerous place to live, but I'd go back in a heartbeat. Comedy has changed in the last 20 years, and the Forces have changed too. But you're still the best."

Nick Page, comedian
messabout.uk

ABORTION FINDINGS WILL HELP CREATE CHANGE

AROUND a third of Servicewomen have chosen to end a pregnancy, according to the first study of abortion in the UK Forces.

More than 420 female personnel responded to a survey by the Academic Department of Military General Practice.

It found that 29 per cent had undergone a termination, with 82 per cent of those occurring during service and 11 per cent while deployed.

Researcher Capt Victoria Kincaid (RAMS) said that although the one-in-three figure broadly mirrored civilian statistics, the study showed how Servicewomen faced additional difficulties when seeking an abortion.

"If you've had a medical abortion you might be bleeding heavily for a couple of days and there were comments about people passing products in shared bathrooms or even in a Portaloo on exercise," the medical officer said.

Barriers to troops accessing proper care included stigma, having to ask permission to leave camp in initial training and concerns about prescribed pills going missing in post rooms.

More than half didn't tell their medical chain of command, meaning they were also at risk of being deployed or having to do mandatory PT.

Capt Kincaid said: "We are so grateful to the personnel who provided their voices – they won't go unheard. We will create change from what they've told us."

The data will be used to educate commanders, produce information leaflets for troops and inform new policy.

For more on this topic visit the Women's Health page of the My Healthcare Hub on Defence Connect.

BAKED-IN BEHAVIOUR

Army boss lays bare the challenge of stamping out misogyny and training recruits who arrive at camp already holding negative views of women

LEADERS from lance corporal to four-star general must play their part in expelling those guilty of sexual misconduct from the Service, the chief of the general staff has told MPs.

Addressing the House of Commons defence committee, Gen Sir Roly Walker said he was “ashamed” at reports of abuse emerging since the inquest into the death of 19-year-old Gnr Jaysley Beck.

As the MoD launched a new task force to tackle violence against women and girls, he later said in a message to staff that the way values and standards are taught will be reviewed, a gender action plan developed and mentoring for under-represented groups considered.

More widely, he has hinted the training system needs scrutiny to address attitudes in wider society.

The officer faced MPs, who have been conducting their own inquiry into the experience of women in the Armed Forces in the wake of Gnr Beck’s inquest.

A coroner recorded that the soldier, who had endured unwanted sexual advances, died by suicide at Larkhill in 2021 – with the verdict prompting personnel and veterans to go public with their experiences on the *Fill Your Boots* forum.

Stressing his anger at the revelations, Gen Walker told the two-and-a-half hour hearing in Westminster that Army leaders were critical in identifying and weeding out offenders.

“I am ashamed at these stories,” he said. “Combat is hard enough when everything is on the line – the greatest risks are borne by our most junior soldiers.”

“It hurts me that young people

– citizens volunteering to join the Army – are having to fight their own people before they can get through to the enemy.

“We have got to enforce and ensure that our chain of command does its job.”

Gen Walker said he had personally written to subordinates, reiterating his expectations.

“Everyone, from a newly promoted lance corporal to me, as a four-star general, are responsible for ensuring [troops] can come to work without fearing their own people,” he added.

Quizzed by the politicians, Gen Walker – who appeared with the other Service chiefs, First Sea Lord Adm Sir Ben Key and Chief of the Air Staff ACM Sir Richard Knighton plus Defence Minister Alistair Carns – said robust action was already being taken.

Those guilty of offences could expect no quarter and would be met with the full force of the law. Troops including generals, colonels and majors had been held to account and dismissed from service, the top officer added.

Of the 188 most recent matters involving unacceptable



Spreading the net: Gen Sir Roly Walker says the Army needs females



Picture: Graeme Main

sexual behaviours, 23 had been discharged, 37 sanctioned in other ways and 128 dealt with informally at the request of the victim.

Nearly all of the 31 offenders convicted of sexual offences before the courts, however, were immediately discharged as part of their sentence.

Gen Walker went on to voice concerns that misogynistic attitudes were becoming more common on civvy street – and it was important that recruits accepted the higher Army standards over which they would be judged.

This could mean that a far wider rethink was needed, particularly with training, he said.

“In a sense, this gets harder because of some of the baked-in behaviours we are increasingly seeing as prevalent in wider society,” added Gen Walker.

“We have to recode how we view professional

armed services in the 21st century.

“There is nothing I have seen about combat that means one gender is better than another – we need the best citizens in this country to join our Forces so we can play our role as one of Nato’s leading powers.”

‘It hurts me that citizens volunteering to join the Army are having to fight their own people before they can get through to the enemy’

BOWEL CANCER KNOW THE SIGNS

SOLDIERS are being urged to check for any dramas in their downstairs region amid warnings from health professionals that bowel cancer cases may be increasing in younger people.

It's recommended that everyone keeps tabs on any changes in their toilet habits – while looking out for symptoms such as blood in poo, tummy pain, feeling tired and losing weight.

The latest call to arms comes because it is Bowel Cancer Awareness month.

While more likely to strike in later life, stats show that 2,600 people under 50 are among the 44,000 annually diagnosed.

Lisa Wilde, research and policy boss at charity Bowel Cancer UK, said there "was a growing body of evidence" to suggest that the disease was becoming more common in younger people.

While further research is needed to find out why, it is crucial to get checked out if you



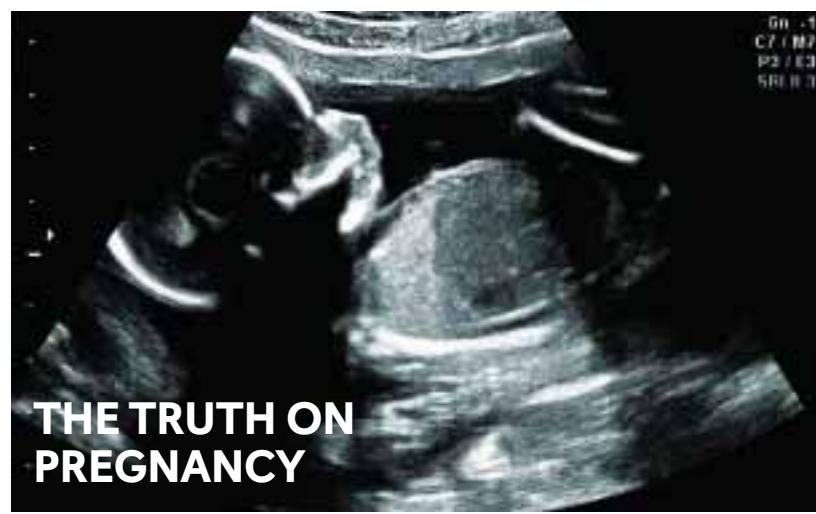
have a change in toilet habits.

Soldier writer Cliff Caswell – who had surgery and chemo for stage three bowel cancer aged 46 in 2019 – said: "Looking back I had the classic symptoms – I should have acted sooner.

"Don't be embarrassed and be totally honest – in short, bite the bullet, sort it out and tell your MO because this stuff is treatable and even more so if you get to it earlier on."

'Don't be embarrassed and be honest'

Cliff Caswell, *Soldier*



THE TRUTH ON PREGNANCY

EXPECTANT Servicewomen are being asked to share their accounts in the first study of its kind.

Open to Regular personnel who are 12-18 weeks pregnant and have not previously given birth, the project will require participants to keep an app-based diary and take part in an interview after their baby has been delivered.

All information will be kept confidential

and anonymous.

The study is being run by the Academic Department of Military General Practice and the Centre for Military Women's Research. Evidence gathered will be used to shape policy for future generations of female troops.

For more information visit centreformilitarywomensresearch.com or email kalm102@pgr.aru.ac.uk

SERVICE KIDS SUPPORT

GRANTS for projects helping military families access quality childcare and education are up for grabs.

The Early Years programme of the MoD's Armed Forces Families Fund awards sums of up to £80,000 for initiatives that enhance learning environments, boost capacity, upskill staff or establish networks.

Open to schools and childcare settings where Service children make up at least 50 per cent of the cohort – as well as local authorities – the first round of applications will close on June 4 and the second on October 8.

Visit the following website to learn more covenantfund.org.uk/programme/armed-forces-families-fund-early-years-programme-2024-25/



DAN'S THE MAN

MILITARY discipline boss WO1 Dan Cope (WG, shown) has been pounding out the miles in aid of the Army Benevolent Fund – taking on the Brecon to Cardiff ultramarathon.

The academy sergeant major – who oversees the training of officer cadets at Sandhurst – finished the 43-mile Taff Trail route in 7hr 26min.

It was the latest marker post in a punishing package of events for the Welsh Guardsman, who is covering the likes of the Brighton Marathon and Dragon Coastal challenges in 2025 as well.

In all, the hardened infantryman is hoping to cover another 175 miles in the next eight months – clocking up £15,000 for the charity.

"It was a great race over a testing course," WO1 Cope said afterwards. "Raising as much as possible and bringing awareness to the charity is the most important thing for me as I've seen first-hand how it's helped close friends."

Search Dan's Running Challenge at justgiving.com

'I've seen first-hand how it's helped close friends'

cash



Pictures: Shutterstock

WHEN THE CHIPS ARE DOWN

Ex-soldier has advice after a gambling addiction hit him hard

MORE needs to be done in the military to tackle the “unseen enemy” of gambling harm, according to a veteran whose own career was ruined by addiction.

With the Forces community statistically more vulnerable to the problem than civilian society, Andy Stoneley (ex-RLC, below) is lending his voice to a campaign calling for greater awareness and early intervention.

Having joined the Army in 1998, he began using slot machines before moving on to

casinos and bookmakers – a compulsion that would eventually see the former soldier serve time at Colchester’s Military Corrective Training Centre.

After borrowing cash from colleagues to fund his habit, he was found guilty of dishonesty and obtaining money by fraudulent means, sentenced to more than 12 months detention and reduced in rank from warrant officer to corporal.

“I lost my liberty, my salary and my purpose as well as feeling a sense of embarrassment,” he said of the experience.

“That was my rock bottom, but after 383 days of, effectively, cold turkey, along with therapy, the cycle was broken.

“I have no temptation to gamble anymore.

“I never want to let myself or my family down again.”

Stoneley left the Army in 2022 and now works for the charity that supported him during his recovery – Breakeven – one of several organisations making up the Armed Forces



Pictures: L/Cpl Jamie Price, AAC

Gambling Support Network.

He and other veterans also feature in a new video, *The Unseen Enemy*, produced by the Beacon Counselling Trust as part of its Battling the Odds programme, which aims to reduce stigma and make specialist support more accessible.

“It doesn’t matter what rank you are – problem gambling can affect anyone,” continued Stoneley.

“I was hit hard but I’m living proof that you can turn any negative into a positive.

“There’s life after addiction – if you speak to someone and get help you can overcome it.

“Everyone deserves a second chance.”

GET YOURSELF HELP

SPEAK to a friend or trusted colleague or your welfare team.

Alternatively, you can access free and confidential advice via support@beaconcounsellingtrust.co.uk

Or contact Andy Stoneley directly on andrew@breakeven.org.uk

Turn to page 56 for further sources of support.

To watch *The Unseen Enemy* on YouTube subscribe to the Beacon Counselling Trust via [@BCTNorthWest](https://www.youtube.com/@BCTNorthWest)

IS YOUR MATE A PROBLEM GAMBLER?

Aside from the financial impact, there are many signs of addiction, including

- Poor self-worth
- Lack of self-care, for example skipping phys, not eating properly or neglecting personal hygiene
- Loss of time – gambling is extremely time consuming
- Being unable to keep up with debts
- Relationship problems – for every gambler, there are thought to be between six and ten ‘affected others’, including partners or family members
- At the extreme end, gambling can lead to homelessness and suicidal thoughts

NUMBER CRUNCHING

Doing the maths on Army life v civvy street...

If you're considering hanging up your uniform, it's important to think about the value of what you're leaving behind, says Sgt Cam Eden (RLC) – the man behind financial education channel the Savvy Squaddie.

In his latest YouTube video, he works out the extra cash he'd need to match his lifestyle as a sergeant on an annual salary of £42,510 living in Service family accommodation.

Spoiler alert – it's more than you might think, as the following figures show.



DIGS MONTHLY RENT OF £1,800

For my three-bed quarter, plus a garage, I pay £218 – almost £1,600 less than I would for a similar property in my base area. And you have to pay for water as a civvy – another £50 per month on average.



PENSION A SALARY OF £91,378

The MoD pays a whopping 43.8 per cent towards our pension, whereas civvy employers only have to contribute three per cent (some pay more). My current salary gives me an annual contribution of £18,619. Assuming my new bosses paid the minimum rate, I'd have to earn £91,378 to match what I get now.



HEALTH PAYMENTS OF £9.99

And this is just what civvies pay per prescription item, not in total. This will obviously vary from person to person, as will dental care, but a check-up and a filling will set you back around £100, even on the NHS – if you manage to find an NHS dentist, that is.



LIFE'S EXTRAS FROM £27

A gym membership will cost around £27 per month versus zero now. Soldiers also qualify for free wraparound childcare. Our local school charges £300 per month – and a civvy employer would be highly unlikely to pay for that.

Factoring in everything above and more, Sgt Eden reckons he'd need to earn £85,563 on civvy street to live as he does now.

"The numbers are surprising, but our pension in particular is extremely valuable," he says.

"There are many reasons people leave, but this exercise is worth doing so you go into civilian life with your eyes open."



Scan the QR code to see the senior NCO's calculations in full, plus other videos on budgeting, savings and more

nutrition



Q & A

ARMY boxers were facing their military rivals in a mission to retain their Inter-Services title as this issue went to press.

Here, squad member Pte Lucas Forinton (R Anglian) tells *Soldier* about the nutritional plan he follows to ensure he is in peak condition before stepping in the ring...

What is your fighting weight, and how difficult is it to maintain?

I fight at 60kg, which can be pretty hard. I usually stay a couple of kilograms above and when I have a bout it comes back down. In the last week or so I'll aim to be a kilo over, I'll then cut fibre and salt from my diet to reduce water retention and lose that last bit of weight.

Talk us through your fight day meal plan

I will weigh myself first thing and if I have room to play with I'll have something with quick, easy carbs like Rice Krispies Squares. After the official weigh-in I'll have a one-litre water electrolyte drink and then some fast-digesting carbs, such as a bagel with jam or honey to fuel my glycogen stores. If the bout is in the evening, I'll have a meal of white rice and lean protein chicken with half an avocado for some healthy fats.

Does this differ when you're training?

When I'm cooking I'll add more seasoning and

salt, and I'll have slightly bigger portions. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, we train three times a day, so I'll start with 30g of dates for some easy energy. After the first session I'll have protein oats, with added protein powder, berries and milk. I'll have four eggs, either boiled or scrambled, after my individual coaching session and then between 1700 and 1800 I'll have rice, chicken and avocado with seasoning or sauce. If I need extra carbs I'll have a banana and perhaps a yoghurt bowl in the evening.

What is your guilty pleasure?

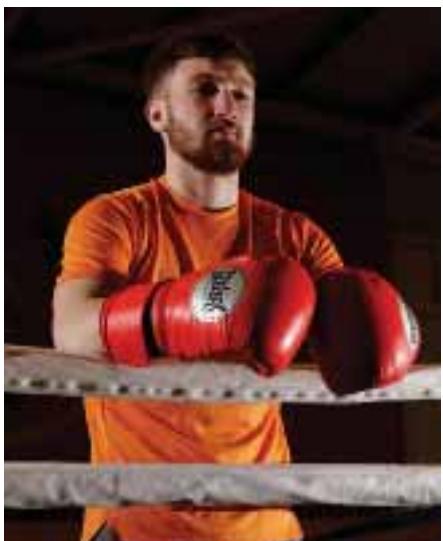
Something sweet like a brownie. It's important not to take it too far, though – once you get that little taste you can go mad. If you stick to one thing and eat normal meals, you can't go wrong.

What's the best advice you've received?

You actually need fats – I get them from things like oily fish, avocados and nuts. Before, I would just have carbs and protein and I'd have energy to train, but would feel dead afterwards.

Any nutritional tips for young soldiers wanting to perform at their best?

Eat clean, whole foods as much as you can and avoid anything that is processed. Yes, have something naughty at the weekend, but if you stick to clean foods for five or six days a week and are physically active, you'll be fine.



2 ENEMIES OF SLEEP

Shut-eye is vital to hitting your goals and avoiding injury. But here's why the stuff you're eating and drinking could be hijacking your effort to get enough ZZZs

ENERGY drinks are gulped down by many of us, but consuming them regularly can play havoc with your shut-eye, thanks to the caffeine inside.

Caffeine is a stimulant, which disrupts your natural sleep-wake cycle making it harder to fall – and stay – asleep. It can also make you feel jittery or anxious. This effect can last for hours, so avoiding canned coolers in the late afternoon is a good start to improving health.

However, it can also be easy to get into a vicious cycle with energy drinks whereby you're tired, so you neck one to stay perky, before then getting bad sleep again. Try to break this routine.

Soldiering is tough, and without enough kip you are more likely to underperform and get injured.

According to the Army Health Promotion team, water is the best source of hydration. Cans like Monster or Red Bull should not be used as your primary source of hydration – not least because they offer very little nutritional value and often contain high levels of sugar too.

Energy drinks can also interfere with your ticker. According to the Service experts, they can change cell function, possibly causing your heart to beat faster or irregularly. This could lead to serious heart conditions. Therefore, these products should not be consumed before or during phys.



JUNK and processed food can reduce the amount of kip you get, believe it or not.

Scientists in Sweden recently found a diet high in fat and sugar may reduce sleep quality by messing with the brain's electrical activity.

And that's before you consider how large, high-fat meals before bedtime can slow down digestion and keep you awake with complaints like heartburn or bloating.

What you eat also feeds the trillions of bacteria in your gut, with research suggesting that the diverse microbes found within may improve sleep for some people.

Feedback from the individual health behaviours check – a data capture exercise started by the Army last year to assess soldiers' behaviours and help them reflect on their choices – found that British troops are not eating enough fruit and vegetables (or getting enough sleep for that matter). And when you think of the realities of ration packs, life on the road, service stations and camp convenience shops, it is not hard to see why this is the case.

Consuming more of the good stuff might be a big ask in some instances, but planning meal times where possible and thinking about what you eat in advance can go a long way to cutting out junk.

Personnel can also look up the "military performance plate" on Defence Connect to see what types of food they should be trying to eat, according to activity level, as advised by the Defence Nutrition Advisory Service.

fitness

SOME BLISTERING WEEKENDS AHEAD

The running-mad corporal tackling a series of seven 100km+ ultramarathons

IF YOUR phys is testing you to the limit, spare a thought for Cpl Ryan Day (QRH) who will be spending his spring/summer weekends conquering seven different ultramarathons around the UK.

Okay, the feat is 100 per cent self-inflicted. But that doesn't mean it will be straightforward – as the runner admitted when *Soldier* visited him during one of his training sessions in Bovington, where he is posted.

"I had a knee injury last year, so my physio wasn't too happy when I said I wanted to do this," the 28-year-old smiled.

"I've done marathons before – usually I do around two per season – but this will be a massive step up.

"I love running, especially the longer distances, and wanted to go for something more."

This mission will certainly hit that target – starting with the Isle of Wight Challenge next month, and ending with the Gower Peninsula Ultra in July.

In June the super-fit Serviceman will compete in the Peak District where his family will cheer him on.

Preparations have included the use of a private nutritionist – to check that his favourite meals of salmon, chicken, rice and steak are giving him the best possible start – and a training schedule of six runs per week.

This includes a tempo session, interval run, two easy runs, a long run on Saturdays and a more moderate run on Sundays.

The junior NCO also hits the gym five times a week, focusing on his lower body with dumbbells, bench and ab work.

"When running, you put about four times your bodyweight through your feet," he said. "So I need to take account of that."

As well as the workouts, Day is hoping his £200-a-pair Hokas will help nudge him over the finish line. With the miles he is currently putting through his footwear, he is having to replace them every 12 weeks or so.

Good planning will be key, though, as the soldier has only completed one ultramarathon before now – Keswick to Barrow which, at a 'mere' 64km, is considerably shorter than any

of his upcoming challenges.

The runner paid tribute to his colleagues and especially his regiment – The Queen's Royal Hussars – for their support, which comes at the end of a difficult period.

"I suffered with an eating disorder and mental health problems, and was even in critical care at one point, but the whole Army welfare system supported me so well through it all," he revealed.

"You hear horror stories when welfare doesn't work, but my regiment really had my back and fought for me to keep my job."

Running played a big role in Day's recovery.

"It really helped me through that because if I run, I need to be refuelling," he continued.

"I also have to be in tune with my body.

"I love longer runs – they are my chance to clear my head and organise my thoughts.

"When I'm struggling, it helps to take a step away and allow thoughts to come and go. It's a coping mechanism as well as a health one; a kind of meditation."

Day recommends long distances to anyone looking for an outlet, as well as those wanting to boost their fitness.

"There are lots of people in the block who will isolate themselves, especially if they're single," he said. "That's when your mental health can go down."

"But I've found something I'm good at and which helps me – that means a lot."

The Serviceman wants to raise £500 for the Army Benevolent Fund and is asking anyone who can sponsor him to do so at [justgiving.com/page/ryan-day-2](https://www.justgiving.com/page/ryan-day-2)

He added: "The Army is one big family, and this charity really helps us to look after one another and get that support."

Name: Cpl Ryan Day, QRH

Age: 28

Joined: 2016

Ops: Cabrit

Height: 174cm

Marathon record: 2hr 56min 56sec

Best 5km: 16min 17sec

Best 2km: 6min 7sec

Top run: Rome marathon – so beautiful!

Fave food: Salmon

Fuel: Styrkr electrolytes and Spartan Protein

Top tip for newbies: Just show up

PHYS OVERHAUL

Press-ups are in, sprints are out under new assessment

PHYSICAL training bosses are piloting a shake-up of mandatory fitness tests to help boost the Army's fighting power.

From this month, a year-long trial of a new soldier conditioning assessment (SCA) begins – a shorter, more straightforward version of the soldier conditioning review.

Troops will have to complete a two kilometre run as well as deadlifts, press-ups and pull-ups, with their best effort recorded for each and used to track progression.

The medicine ball throw, broad jump and sprints that featured in the previous system have been dropped.

Maj Jase Murdoch (RAPTC) from the Army's Personnel Policy directorate stressed that the updated evaluation is not a pass or fail test, but instead would be used to gather "meaningful data" for the chain of command.

"The SCA is based on science and good military judgement," he continued.

"The exercises are more functional and purposeful. Soldiers need to be all-rounders – moving ammo boxes, fire and manoeuvre, climbing in and out of ditches or through



Picture: Graeme Main

'The exercises are functional and more purposeful – soldiers need to be all-rounders'

windows, all of the elements complement those types of activities.

"Because it's simpler it should also save time."

The assessment, which remains gender-neutral, was tested on around 900 troops prior to the launch of the pilot.

Part of the trial will review the continued inclusion of heaves. All personnel will have to complete the exercise to the best of their ability but there will be no remedial training for those who do not meet the benchmark.

Maj Murdoch said he was looking forward to analysing the results over the next year.

"We have a bell curve of standards and in 12 months' time we'll be able to tell the Army whether it's getting fitter or not," he added.

"We want to do everything we can in terms of the chief of the general staff's order to increase lethality and this is contributing to that."

The role fitness test, which assesses troops against the requirements of their specific trade, remains unchanged.

TRY ORIENTEERING

Why it could be the fresh direction your phys regime needs

A TEAM from the Royal Army Physical Training Corps took on world-class opposition at the 3-Day Gargano orienteering event in Italy recently.

Staff Sergeants Robin Harris, Sanju Kerung and Tom Steele, plus Capt Alan Harris (pictured left to right) completed a series of urban sprints and longer forest runs as part of the competition, which was staged in Vieste on the Adriatic coast.

Keen to get more troops involved in the sport, SSgt Harris explains why it's the perfect blend of military training and phys – without the heavy Bergans.

1. It helps improve your navigational skills, building confidence for exercises and operations. You learn to trust your bearings and gain experience of looking at contours and working out what that means for the ground. Events take place in different environments – urban, forest and countryside.

2. You must think and plan quickly. There might be 30 checkpoints and only an hour to hit



as many as you can, so you need to work out the best route.

3. It encourages teamwork. In some events you have to work together to cover as many checkpoints as possible, so you can send your fastest runners to the ones furthest away and your slower, less confident members to the closer ones.

4. It's good interval training. Between each location there may be only one or two minutes of running so you increase and decrease your pace all the time. One minute you're jogging along slowly, working out where you are and the next you're sprinting towards a marker.

5. It takes your mind off the running. Some routes in Italy were three hours long – if I was going out for a run for that length of time I'd really have to mentally prepare. But you have so much to think about, plus it's broken down into points, so it's not so much of a slog.

6. No heavy loads. All you need is a map and a compass.

Want to get involved?

Visit the British Army Orienteering Club website baoc.info for further information.

APR

diary dates

1

Micks mark a moment

PROUD soldiers and veterans from the Irish Guards will be converging on central London for the 125th anniversary of their outfit at Wellington Barracks. The occasion will be marked with a service at the Guards' Chapel in Birdcage Walk, before the regimental band strikes up with a musical programme. Starting at 1730, the free event will be live-linked to association services across the UK and overseas. Search Army in London on Facebook for more ceremonial activities in the capital.



2

Third time lucky?

HAVING finally broken the stranglehold of the Royal Air Force in 2023, the Army men won a second successive team title at the Inter-Services Table Tennis Championships last season. They will be looking for three in a row as the action switches to RAF Halton from April 2 to 4 and are heading to the Buckinghamshire base in confident mood, as are the Army women – who surged to the collective honours last time out. The soldiers hosted a week-long training camp and individual competition in February as part of their preparations, with more than 100 players involved.



9

Rugby returns

A NEW season of Army rugby league action gets under way with the annual Inter-Unit Naivalurua 9s tournament. Staged at the Army Rugby Stadium in Aldershot, the four-tier competition is open to everyone from established teams to novice outfits and features cup, plate, bowl and shield contests – meaning everyone has the chance to leave with silverware. Entries have been coming in thick and fast, with 1st Battalion, The Royal Yorkshire Regiment already submitting two squads.



11

A new dawn

THE first graduates of a new-look commissioning course – one that focuses more on war fighting – will take to the parade square at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst for the first of this year's Sovereign's Parades. The prestigious event marks the conclusion of 44 weeks of hard graft, as the cadets tackled longer and tougher exercises than ever before. Read *Soldier's* April 2024 issue at soldiermagazine.co.uk for more about the changes that have been made to cadet training in light of war in Europe and a more digitally-aware Gen Z.



26

Women's Welsh test

THE Army women face their final test ahead of this season's Inter-Services Rugby Union Championships as they lock horns with Wales under-20s at the home of Dragons RFC in Newport. The Reds saw a string of early season fixtures cancelled but ramped up their preparations last month as they faced the Portugal national team and embarked on a training camp in Gibraltar, ahead of a clash with the French Army. They won this match 24-17 last season (pictured).



Picture: Cat Gorni/Allign Photography

28

On your marks...

SHARPSHOOTERS from across the Regular Army will be hoping to hit top form at the Corps Operational Shooting Competition in Pirbright. The event is more than 40 years old and will be staged over a week with a prize-giving on the last day. Organiser Lt Col Marcus Joiner (R Signals) said: "We're looking forward to a fantastic competition."



career



Picture: Cpl Aaron Stone, RLC

PRIVATE TO PILOT

SOLDIERS could see their promotion prospects take off with a new career path that offers them a rapid climb through the ranks of the Army Air Corps.

Under a system being introduced this month, troops who qualify can bag themselves a WO2 equivalent grade (aviation warrant officer) when they finish training. Previously, they would have been a sergeant.

Those in the cockpit of hi-tech platforms such as Apache and Wildcat can also rise further in the role as they accrue experience and pile up flying hours.

In addition, private soldiers from any Service branch can throw their beret into the ring, providing they have been recommended for lance corporal. The Army remains the only Armed Forces branch offering pilot roles to those from the ranks.

Aviation bosses hope the change will attract the best talent as air assets become increasingly important in the modern battlespace.

Candidates begin flying training at Shawbury, after which the majority typically

specialise on either Wildcat at RNAS Yeovilton or Apache at Middle Wallop. A conversion-to-role course concludes the initial training.

Maj Jake Jewson on the Army Air Corps personnel team predicted that the changes – which follow an MoD aviation review – would open doors for newcomers.

The experienced pilot, with 1,000 hours on Apache, Gazelle and Bell 212 aircraft, said promotion prospects for aviators were strong.

They would continue to climb in seniority after achieving the first aviation warrant officer grade – known as AW1 – with an increase in pay as they progress to AW4.

He added: “The doors are well and truly open for soldiers to pursue a flying career.

“Make no mistake, those

applying face hard courses, but success is achievable and there are rewards for personnel who complete them – notably a great career.”

Troops from many cap badges had trained as pilots, with Maj Jewson stating experience from other roles could be an advantage.

He said: “If, for example, you have served in the Infantry then you already have a skill set that could be useful. We have individuals who have been on the ground on operational tours – they understand how soldiers are working.”

WO2 Mark Bowker (shown left) – who is currently flying the new-generation Apache AH-64E – decided to try for aircrew selection as a lance corporal in the Intelligence Corps.

He said: “I always had an interest in aviation but didn’t believe I had the right background. I qualified on the Apache in 2014 and flew in the Middle East, America and Europe as well as operating from Navy ships in the Baltic Sea.”

The initiative includes a new path for AAC troops aspiring to be rear crew. Ground crews are also being looked at.

‘The doors are well and truly open for soldiers to pursue a flying career’



AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

MyTraining smartphone app allows troops to keep their training records close at hand

AMBITIOUS troops will find it easier to keep their skills and drills in top order with an Army-wide roll-out of a tool that records career achievements.

The *MyTraining* app enables personnel to stay abreast of the military courses they have already ticked off – plus any accompanying reports – via a smartphone.

It also gives commanders oversight of soldiers' documentation in their units to establish if there are any training deficiencies that need addressing ahead of exercises or operations.

App project boss CSgt Jim Lawrie (Scots, pictured below) said the software – which has been used for phase one and two training since 2023 – was being introduced across the Service from this month.

CSgt Lawrie, who has 34 years of Regular and Reserve service under his belt, said: "If we'd had this when I joined up, it would have made life a bit easier.

"It gives soldiers easy access to their records.

"If an infantryman goes to Brecon for training, for example, they will have their relevant course report available through this app and the chain of command can see the evidence too.

"The software has already been used very effectively by the 16 Air Assault Brigade Combat Team's headquarters to keep track of soldiers' parachute qualifications."

Having initially proven its value at training bases, the application would now make career management a more seamless process with troops and bosses, CSgt Lawrie predicted.

"It is definitely going to prove useful for soldiers as they develop," he added.

The technology has already shown its worth as a tool for personnel who are in the early stages of their career.

Recent joiner Spr Finn Parnell (RE) used it during his initial training course.

The 18-year-old said: "It's actually very easy to operate – we were getting it out each week on a Friday to complete the documents that those running the course needed."

"There were a few reflective questions to do too."

He added: "Like other apps, you just slide the menus across on your device – pretty standard stuff."

"If there's one criticism it is that I found it could be a bit slow at times."

"I've only been in the Army a few months, and was interested to hear that *MyTraining* is coming out more widely now – obviously everyone uses apps these days."

Check out the *MyTraining* page on Defence Connect for further information and look out for this icon.



The app has successfully kept track of parachute training



'If we'd had this when I joined up it would have made life easier. It gives soldiers easy access... and the chain of command can see the evidence too'

veterans

POSITIVE VIBES

A GROUP of former personnel are hoping to promote an upbeat vibe around veteran life with the launch of a new community interest company.

Set up to connect the wider family and bring 'balance, pride and positivity', Veterans Can offers an online forum for chat and where members can assist each other.

As well as promoting networking, the scheme gives individuals a say on how the outfit's funding pot is spent plus access to offers from supporting businesses.

Co-founder Garrath Williams, who served as an officer with The Duke of Wellington's Regiment, said: "Everything we do is in the interest of the community - it's a social enterprise putting members in the driving seat.

"As veterans, our shared background is unique as is the thread that pulls us together - we think it matters that we have control and write our own narrative."

See veterans-can.com for further info.



IN NUMBERS

SILHOUETTES of Allied soldiers are returning to the former battlegrounds of France to commemorate next month's 80th anniversary of VE Day.

The haunting life-sized figures - representing the number of troops under British command who were killed on D-Day - were packed and leaving from Portsmouth as this issue went to press.

They were made by charity Standing with Giants and will be displayed at the British Normandy memorial, where they first appeared at last year's Operation Overlord commemorations.

1,475

Figures that are travelling to France



200
New designs this year



500KM THROUGH FIRE AND ICE

A VETERAN who sustained serious burns in Iraq has marked the 20th anniversary of the day he was injured with a 500km trek in the Arctic Circle.

Karl Hinett (ex-Staffords) embarked on Project Fire and Ice - a ten-day slog through Swedish Lapland - alongside Military Cross holder Brian Wood (ex-PWRR), former special forces soldier Jason Fox and Royal Marine-turned TV adventurer Aldo Kane.

Hinett, who was 18 when his Warrior armoured vehicle was set alight in Basra in 2005, said the goal was to raise funds for SSAFA while also shining a light on veterans' mental health.

"The idea was to reflect real life by working together as a team," he told *Soldier*.

"If we had an issue with the cold we had to rely on each other. And while being out in the Arctic is an extreme example, we're trying to highlight the fact that people can have that mentality at home, too, and reach out to a friend if they find themselves struggling."

"We also want to get the message across about getting out there, keeping fit and making the most of every day."

Having also faced ultramarathons around the world and an expedition to Mount Everest, the ex-infantee was no stranger to gruelling

challenges, but said the cold presented considerable issues.

"My hands were the worst affected by the burns - the resulting scar tissue makes it difficult to regulate heat and my circulation is quite poor," he continued.

"I sometimes can't feel the effects of the cold until it's too late, so that was something I had to be extra conscious of."

After seeing how his injuries had affected his loved ones, Hinett added that SSAFA's work supporting troops' families was a cause close to his heart.

To boost the team's fundraising visit ssafa.org.uk/support-us/project-fire-and-ice

'I want to get the message across about getting out there, keeping fit and making the most of every day'

Karl Hinett, ex-Staffords



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A soldier from 4th Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Scotland takes time out of building trenches on Ex Steadfast Dart (see overleaf) to show Romanian counterparts the bagpipes. Every member of the assault pioneer platoon plays either the pipes or drums.

Picture: Marc Ault

Cold realities

As leaders exchange frank views, Nato exercises in the frozen east – on the border of a hot war zone

T WAS a training package that took place in a political climate as frosty as the winter – amid diplomacy to resolve differences between Europe and the US over the path to peace in Ukraine.

With the media focused on a heated televised exchange between presidents Donald Trump and Volodymyr Zelensky and a subsequent top-level summit, Nato's Exercise Steadfast Dart was on the television only fleetingly.

But on the ground in Romania – where the sub-zero bite and the constant grind of conventional warfighting rehearsal were the realities – nothing had changed.

There was simply a determination among troops to get on with the job.

"Out here we have been focused squarely on our role as infantrymen and all ranks have stepped up," Maj Jamie Graham of 4th Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Scotland tells *Soldier* during a brief lull in the programme on the Smardan training area.

"We have been going through trench

»

Report: Cliff Caswell Pictures: Getty: Sgt Anil Gurung and Cpl Aaron Stone, both RLC; Adrien Muylaert; Heiko Mueller





Right: **Soldiers from the 4 Scots rifle platoon take on a target in the trenches as they hit the mock enemy hard** Below: **Younger troops prove themselves in their first multinational outing**

IN NUMBERS:
Steadfast Dart

2,600
UK personnel involved

10
countries exercising

» clearance procedures in addition to fighting in woods and forests – and all the while we've been working closely with troops from some of the other alliance states including the host nation, Spain and Greece."

Steadfast Dart is – by any standards – a huge undertaking. The largest European outing for Nato this year, the manoeuvres throughout Romania and Bulgaria are the first all-up test of the alliance's Allied Reaction Force.

As well as having responsibility for countering threats in the ground, sea and air theatres, this new formation has the cyber and space domains firmly on its radar. There is top-end British involvement too – the land component is headed up by 1 (UK) Division, with the Cottesmore-based 7th Light Mechanised Brigade Combat Team at the tip of the Nato spear.

In these frigid conditions it is somewhat ironic that the formation's troops are the heirs to Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery's Second World War Desert Rats.

But warfighting – whatever the environment – is their stock-in-trade. And working with nine other nations and 10,000 alliance personnel, they are well-placed to prosecute this simulated combined arms battle in which armour, artillery, helicopters, drones and strike aircraft are all available to commanders.

Highlanders of 4 Scots are paired with the light cavalry of The Royal Scots Dragoon Guards in leading the charge.

With vehicles including Jackal 2s, Coyotes and Foxhounds between them – plus support from attached sappers, medics and signallers – the formation is packing a potent punch.

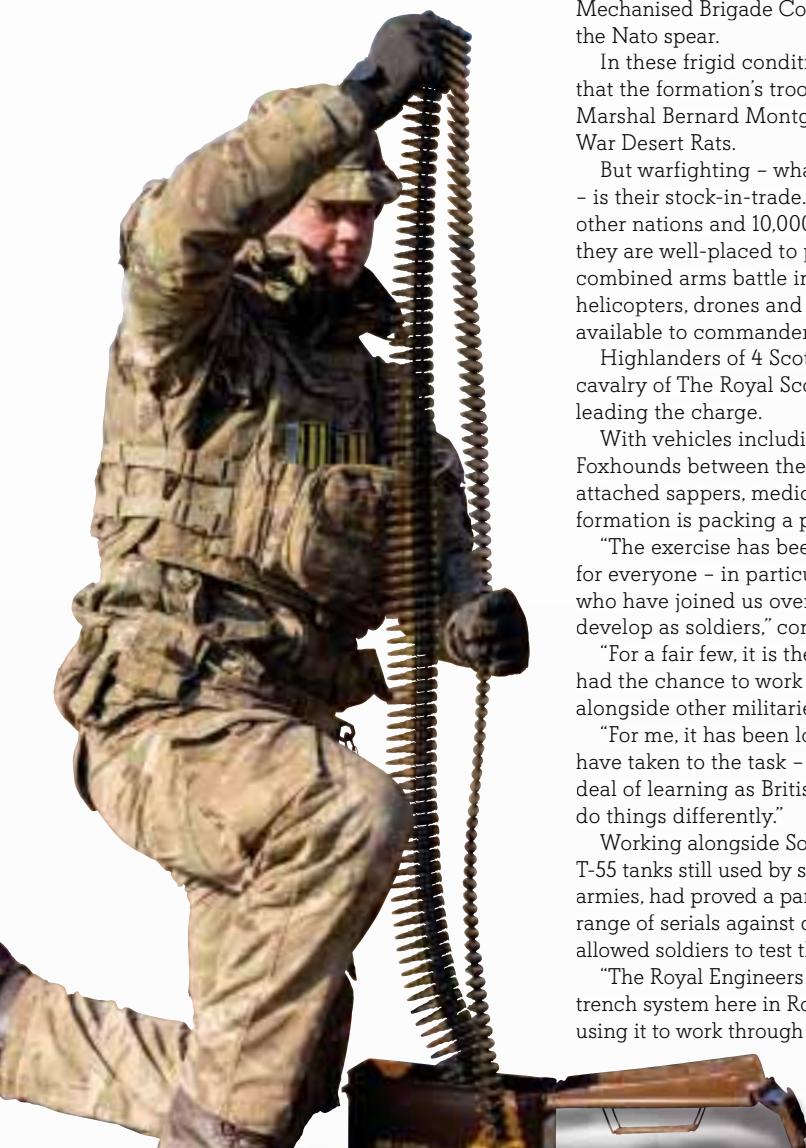
"The exercise has been a great opportunity for everyone – in particular for younger Jocks who have joined us over the last year or so – to develop as soldiers," continues Maj Graham.

"For a fair few, it is the first time they have had the chance to work in a different setting and alongside other militaries.

"For me, it has been lovely to see how they have taken to the task – there has been a great deal of learning as British troops see how allies do things differently."

Working alongside Soviet-era armour, such as T-55 tanks still used by some Eastern European armies, had proved a particular high point while a range of serials against different enemy positions allowed soldiers to test their mettle.

"The Royal Engineers have constructed a new trench system here in Romania and we have been using it to work through clearance drills," Maj



730
British vehicles deployed

10,000
Nato personnel



Right: **The first large-scale deployment of Nato's Allied Reaction Force tested how troops would reinforce alliance units in Romania and Bulgaria**

» Graham adds. "Elsewhere, the soldiers have been fighting through mixed woodland – which ranges from some pretty dense forest, breaking into areas of open copse.

"We have also had the opportunity for company live firing on the ranges, and all of this in temperatures that have gone down to 11 degrees below freezing."

The officer praised the troops for their professionalism throughout an exercise that had also seen some of them crew vehicles across Europe to the training area. With soldiers and their kit landing by ship at ports in Greece and Germany, deploying to Steadfast Dart had been a challenging task in itself.

"They held up well in spite of the demands placed on them," the OC points out. "We have also had some great support from our logisticians, who helped load and unload the equipment as well as providing tanker support."

Those taking part in the manoeuvres certainly feel they have benefited from the experience. Hldr Lewis Talbot, who has been in uniform for five years, said the training package was far larger than anything he had experienced.

"It has been great – and definitely unique," he explains. "I've been out on exercise in Germany a couple of times before but this one was on a different scale."

"Our time in Romania has given us some great insights into working with allies from other Nato countries – live firing has been a high point for me."

"While it is cold, we have been protected by decent kit throughout."

Hldr Luke Rohr agrees that the freezing conditions have been an issue at certain times – but he points out that troops are properly trained for the weather.

"We were already well prepared to operate in the cold when we arrived," he adds. "I've actually only been in the Army for the last four-and-a-half months and it has been a good experience – working alongside the Romanians and seeing how they operate has been really interesting."

"We've been fighting in forests, too – I had the opportunity to break into a wood block – and seeing attack helicopters and fast jets appear has been unbelievable."

The scale is certainly impressive. Working together and learning from each other are key advantages of any alliance, as is the fact that each partner brings its own equipment plus areas of specialist knowledge.

Politicians within Nato may have disagreements, but there is also a broad consensus among them on the principles of collective defence and its contribution to shared interests. And while Steadfast Dart is only an exercise, it is not lost on the soldiers in Romania that a war is raging just over the border.

There, in Ukraine, many of the scenarios they are playing out are happening for real, at great human cost. And this alone underscores the importance of deterrence. «



FACT FILE

ALLIED REACTION FORCE

FORMED:
July 2024

REPLACES:
Nato Response Force

DIRECTED BY:
Supreme Allied Commander Europe

DEPLOYMENT TIMEFRAME:
100,000 troops in ten-day window

BRIT INVOLVEMENT:
Land component led by 1 (UK) Division

COMMANDER BY:
Maj Gen Daniel Reeve



THE RESULTS ARE IN...

This year's **Army Photographic Competition** didn't disappoint – here are the winning shots from hundreds of entries

AFTER being paused over recent years, and a delay announcing the results (apologies to anyone expecting to see them in our previous issue), the winners of the 2024 Army Photographic Competition can finally be revealed.

And as these pages and this month's front cover show, they do not disappoint.

Congratulations to **Sgt Donald Todd (RLC)** for scooping the Professional Photographer of the Year category with a stunning portfolio that can be seen across this spread.

His pictures, all captured between February 2024 and 2025, also include the Image of the Year – a mesmerising shot from behind the scenes with The King's Troop, Royal Horse Artillery.

The 40-year-old veteran of Afghanistan, Bosnia, Iraq and Northern Ireland said he was delighted to claim the top prize.

"I was surprised that my entry was chosen as the winning professional portfolio," he told *Soldier*. "Having worked with the majority of Army photographers, I have seen some outstanding work throughout the year."

The other two winners in the competition were **Grenadier Guardsman LSgt Alisdair**

Szyszko – who beat some tough competition to become Amateur Photographer of the Year.

You can see his images, and what he had to say about claiming the accolade, overleaf.

And last but not least, the winner of the Smartphone Image of the Year category was **WO2 Kayley Butler (RLC)**.

After a three-day vote on our Insta and Facebook pages, readers decided it was her moody shot of a troop commander at sunrise that deserved high praise.

"It's great to have won and I'm proud that it showcases the Royal Logistic Corps," the Servicewoman said.

"The image was taken during an individual

IMAGE OF THE YEAR



PROFESSIONAL PORTFOLIO



Sgt Todd's
winning portfolio
includes our
front cover and
the Image of the
Year, as well as
some standout
ceremonial
moments



AMATEUR WINNER



» training requirement camp that 11 Explosive Ordnance Disposal and Search Regiment ran at Longmoor.

"We'd been up since 0400 and as we got to the top of a hill, blowing, there was the most beautiful sunrise.

"I'd recently taken up photography but my expensive camera was in my bag because I didn't want it getting wet.

"I pulled out my smartphone and got one of the troop commanders to pose."

This year is the first time the Army Photographic Competition has been run since before Covid in 2019.

It saw hundreds of entries submitted from across the Service, with a judging panel led by singer and keen photographer Bryan Adams and Assistant Chief of the General Staff, Maj Gen Paul Griffiths.

The latter said it had been a "really difficult" contest to decide.

"It's so good that this event is back," the senior officer told *Soldier*. "It was great to see some of the photographic talent in the Army on display.

"The standard was amazing, and the professional images were superb, really evocative.

"This competition is an excellent advert for attracting personnel into the trade and also the Service.

"Showing brilliantly creative images of our people is a perfect recruiting tool - from the tropical jungle to the Albert Hall, the entries reveal the breadth and depth of what we do.

"I felt really proud as I looked over them."

The general added that the standard of



amateur entries had been surprisingly good.

Master Photographer WO1 Baz Lloyd - who was also on the judging panel - agreed.

"I was really impressed," he said. "We are always on the look-out for talented photographers and hopefully some of the JNCOs who entered the amateur category will consider transferring in the near future."

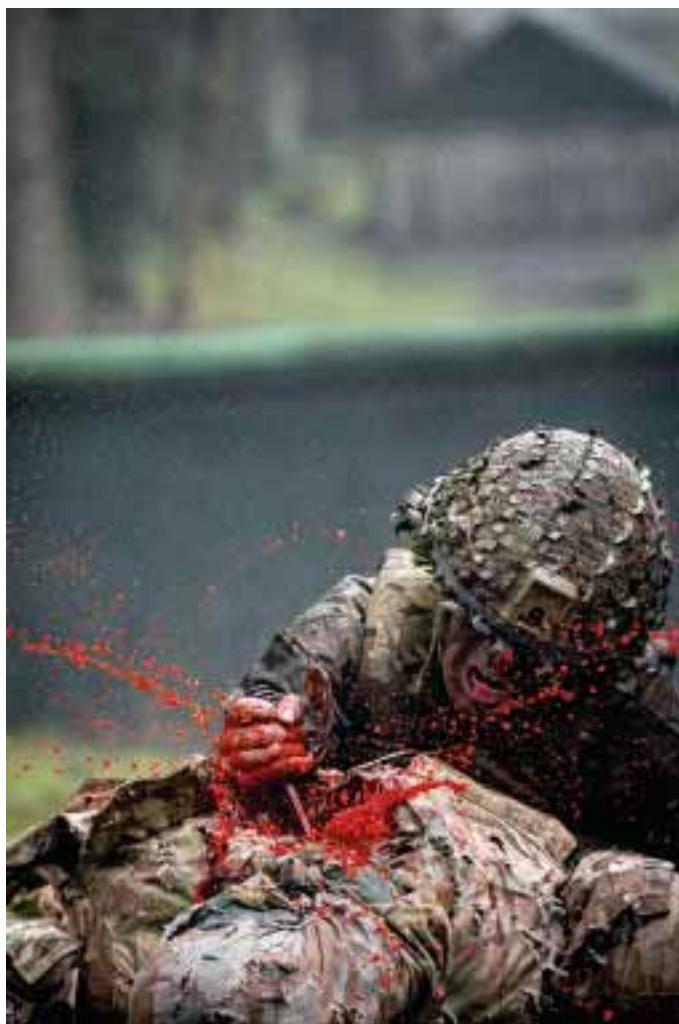
He said it had been reassuring to see how many images had centred on the Army's greatest asset - its people.

"The easy option would be to focus on equipment, but it's by showcasing our soldiers and officers that we connect on a human level with our audiences," he continued.

Judge and *Soldier* photographer Graeme Main agreed, adding that the professional category "left us in no doubt of the depth of talent we have in our defence photographers".



LSgt Alisdair Szyszko (Gren Gds) scooped the Amateur Portfolio, capturing some breathtaking military moments



'GOBSMACKED'

LIFE behind the lens has always been a passion for LSgt Alisdair Szyszko (Gren Gds), who first started taking pictures as a student in Surrey.

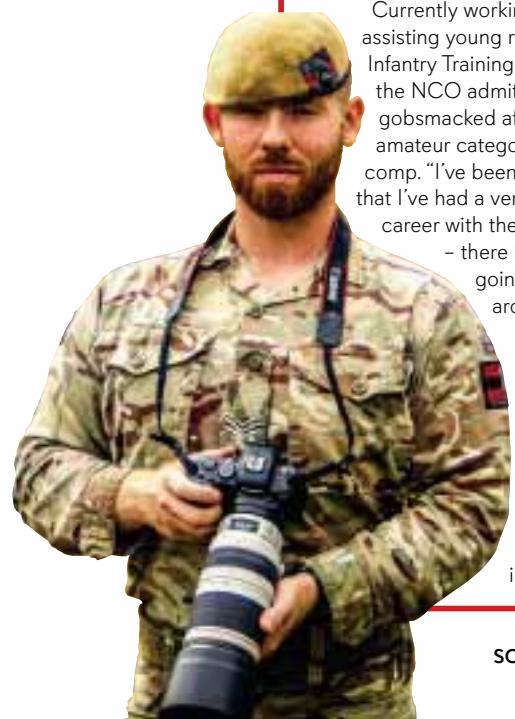
But the rich subject matter that opened up after joining the Army in 2018, with ops and exercises in countries from Kenya to Iraq, gave a new dimension to his work.

Now snapped by the photography bug, the 27-year-old has been recording the highs and lows of military life for his whole career and invested in top-quality kit.

Currently working as a PTI and assisting young recruits at the Infantry Training Centre Catterick, the NCO admitted being gobsmacked after scooping the amateur category in this year's comp. "I've been really fortunate that I've had a very busy Army career with the Grenadier Guards

- there has been a lot going on and I've been around the world.

"It's amazing to be recognised in this competition - I've had some pictures published in *Soldier* magazine before and the trade really interests me."



RUNNERS UP





Top left: Two striking entries from Amateur Portfolio runner-up **Rfn Dominic House (Rifles)**

Above and below left: A couple of stunners from Image of the Year and Professional Portfolio runner-up **Cpl Aaron Stone (RLC)** whose high quality pics have seriously impressed the *Soldier* team this year

» In fact, the judging panel said some of the portfolios had been very closely matched.

However, for Royal Logistic Corps Colonel, Col Jacqueline Powell, there was a clear distinction between the amateur and professional images.

"The amateurs were outstanding but when I moved onto the professional entries I found them absolutely incredible," she commented.

"It's not just the quality of the shots, but the breadth of the topics they covered, which reflected the amazing range of Army activity.

"The very best ones captured a moment visually, but evoked some emotion too.

"As corps colonel I'm delighted to see that this competition has been reinvigorated with such energy and talent.

"It's a great advert for the photographic

trade. I'm very proud of the professionalism on show."

As recent world events illustrate, the information environment is an important factor in military operations.

With adversaries using the media to create division and deceive, Army photographers have a vital role to play in combating these narratives by reassuring the public that military personnel stand ready to take on any threat in order to defend the UK - whatever and wherever that may be.

Got a snap to share?

Don't wait for a contest - email your images to news@soldiermagazine.co.uk or tag [@soldier_magazine](#) on Insta and you could see your handiwork in print.

JUDGES' COMMENTS

"Being asked to judge this year's competition is an honour as my father and grandfathers all served in the British Army. Picking a winner was hugely challenging, and there could only be one in each category, so my congratulations to everyone who entered."

◀ **Bryan Adams, singer**

"I've been thoroughly impressed by all the

entries submitted this year - the standard was so high."

▼ **WO1 Baz Lloyd, RLC
Command Master Photographer**

"The best pictures captured a moment visually, but evoked some emotion too. I'm delighted to see this competition has been reinvigorated with such energy and talent."

► **Col Jacqueline Powell, RLC Colonel**



HIGHLY COMMENDED



ABOVE and below are two highlights from the portfolios of **Cpl Becky Brown (RLC)** which were both commended in the Professional category.

The Servicewoman told judges she finds certain images "particularly striking" in black and white - and the moody effort below of Royal Engineers on Ex Steadfast Defender is certainly no exception. Bravo!



THIS striking corridor assault was captured by **LCpl Taza Salamut (RY)** in the Amateur category.

The soldier said: "The images that I submitted portray 1st The Queen's Dragoon Guards during Op Cabrit. "They show multinational cooperation,



CORPORAL Ross Gourlay (RE) stopped judges in their tracks with this stunning picture of a soldier monitoring the horizon.

"The Elysian Fields is an ancient Greek belief of a land of paradise bathed in golden light that heroes would be granted entry to," said the lover of religious symbolism.

training troops from Croatia, Romania and the US alongside our soldiers on urban operations, but they also have a gritty, cold feel about them which adds to the realism of the situation.

"I feel that they draw the viewer in and evoke emotion."

SMARTPHONE SHOT



CONGRATS to
**WO2 Kayley
Butler, RLC**
who Instagram
and Facebook
followers voted
top with this super
sunrise snap.

Soldier
photographer
Graeme Main
said moody shots
like this often
appeal to people
because of the
amazing colour
on show. And
he encouraged
anyone inspired
by this and other
images to try their
hand in future
competitions.

"If you didn't
win the top prize
this year then
hopefully seeing
these other pieces
will only inspire
you to enter again
in 2026 - the
margins were so
small between all
entries," he said.



ARMY PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION 2024

With thanks to everyone who entered this year's contest and to our panel of judges including Maj Gen Paul Griffiths, Col Jacqueline Powell, WO2 Baz Lloyd (RLC), Hilary Roberts, Graeme Main and Bryan Adams.

THE WINNERS

Professional Portfolio

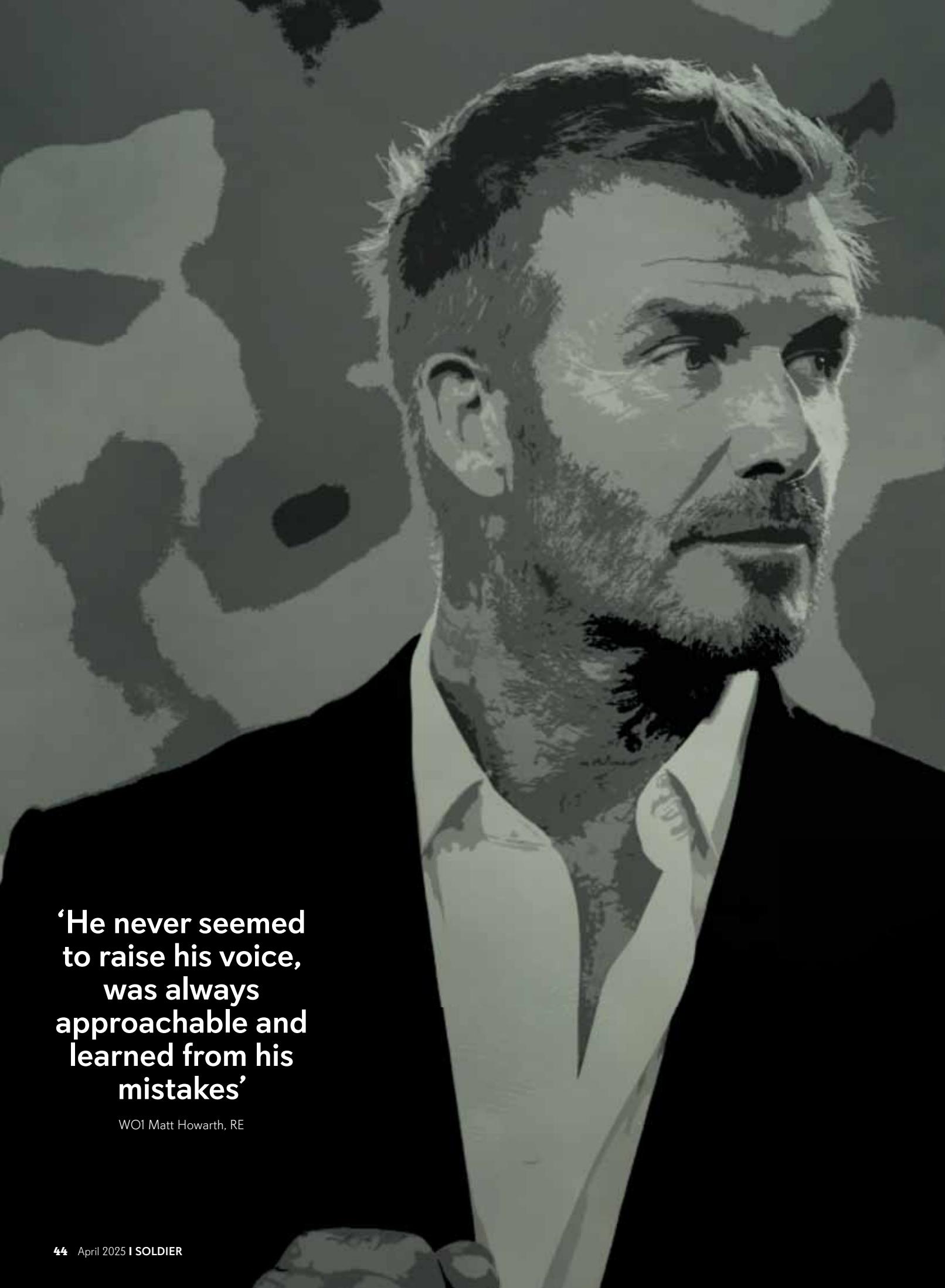
Winner: Sgt Donald Todd, RLC
Runner-up: Cpl Aaron Stone, RLC
Highly Commended:
Cpl Becky Brown, RLC
(two portfolios)
Sgt Andy Grayson, RLC

Amateur Portfolio

Winner: LSgt Alisdair Szyszko, Gren Gds
Runner-up: Rfn Dominic House, Rifles
Highly Commended:
LCpl Taza Salamut, RY
Sig Tanbir Hasan, R Signals
Cpl Ross Gourlay, RE

Image of the Year

Winner: Sgt Donald Todd, RLC
Runner-up: Cpl Aaron Stone, RLC
Highly Commended:
LBrdr Warren Mills, RHA
LCpl Taza Salamut, RY
Cpl Ross Gourlay, RE



**'He never seemed
to raise his voice,
was always
approachable and
learned from his
mistakes'**

WO1 Matt Howarth, RE

‘Be more Beckham’

The next generation of RSMs are being trained to a different standard in 2025

Report: Cliff Caswell Pictures: Shutterstock, Graeme Main

TIS an iconic movie scene that depicts a certain era of military discipline – a drill instructor screaming abuse at a hapless group of US Marine Corps recruits.

The opening of Stanley Kubrick's 1987 Vietnam flick *Full Metal Jacket* is uncomfortable viewing. But it was given the ring of realism because R Lee Ermey – the actor portraying the infamous Gunnery Sergeant Hartman – once held that rank for real and was well aware of how leaders from his past life acquitted themselves.

Although his performance is rightly acclaimed for being an exceptional, and blackly comic, piece of cinema, the shadow cast by it has sometimes proved unhelpful for those training the Army's next generation of regimental sergeant majors (RSMs).

For while the real-life characters on which Hartman was based are consigned to history, there is still a perception they exist.

“There are definitely some people who believe that the drill sergeant in *Full Metal Jacket* is what we’re like now,” says WO1 Matt Howarth (RE), responsible for overseeing the RSM designate course as command sergeant major of the NCO Academy.

“But the era when people shouted and screamed is long gone – for me, the picture of a good leader is more like former England »



IN NUMBERS

RSM designate course

3
per year

5
days in length

55
students on
latest intake



» footballer David Beckham, who never seemed to raise his voice, was always approachable and who learned from his mistakes."

There are certainly no Hartman-esque characters in the 55-strong cohort making up the latest course for RSMs, which is hosted at the Army Staff Leadership School in Pirbright.

Drawn from across the Service, they collectively have centuries of soldiering experience between them – including the era of large-scale ops in the Balkans, Afghanistan and Iraq.

After progressing through the NCO chain and being tested extensively on deployment, however, the expectation on those handed the pace stick is now perhaps the greatest it has ever been.

The five days of preparation on this course – one of three held each year – provides an overview of a role that requires its holders to become the lynchpin of unit efficiency.

These individuals must be the embodiment of standards and the go-to point for soldiers and officers seeking guidance.

Diplomacy, tact and an ability to listen – as well as leading by example – are the attributes required for success; a culture of fear will soon end in failure.

"Every RSM job is unique and so the course is quite broad in approach," continues WO1 Howarth (pictured far right).

"However, with all RSMs becoming the principal adviser to their commanding officers, a key focus is on maintaining this relationship – an environment of trust is critical but they must have the confidence to challenge when needed.

"With this in mind, we have also been

looking at how we might integrate part of the training with a package that designate COs must undergo," he tells *Soldier*.

"This could help both parties better understand the nature of the relationship."

With such a multi-layered remit and an Army continuing to change, WO1 Howarth says the course has already undergone significant revision.

With a packed speaker line up headed by the Army sergeant major, the delegates receive a comprehensive overview of the leadership challenges they are likely to face in a position that straddles rank-and-file soldiers on one hand and the cadre of officers on the other.

Most recently the programme has been expanded to examine the role of the regimental sergeant major in wider UK defence and their position in Nato's multinational environment.

And there is now a greater emphasis on breakout groups and networking opportunities for the new incumbents to pool knowledge and trade best practice.

Course planner WO2 Carl Kane (RLC) believes that giving attendees the time and space to develop relationships is as important as the classroom learning.

"It is key that we provide the RSMs their own network," the full-time Reservist, who was an infantryman in The Green Howards and master driver in a 24-year Regular tenure, continues. "Their role is very different to when I joined in the dim and distant days of 1999 – principally they are now more visible and approachable to the soldiers they are responsible for.

"It is a demanding life so it is helpful to be able to call on one another."

The chance to meet with colleagues is certainly appreciated by those at Pirbright – who also highlight the depth and perspective of the week's syllabus.

"We've all learned a lot," says WO1 Will Laughlan (RE, right centre), the new RSM at Glasgow University Officers' Training Corps.

"The Nato perspective has been especially useful, as has meeting the Army sergeant major, who made it clear he's here to help."

Colleague WO1 Jock Colvan-Graham (RHA, near right) agrees.

"Despite your experience, I think you can have a sense of imposter syndrome when you arrive in this post and find people turning to you for answers," says the career gunner and RSM at 3 Royal Horse Artillery.

"I've worked towards becoming an RSM for a long time now, and being with other people new in post has been great – it has definitely helped to foster greater confidence."

Beckham's quiet self-assurance may inspire some, but for 5 Rifles RSM WO1 Ciaran Crow the footballer is not the perfect parallel.

"I think if you put me on the spot in the

Hartman v Beckham debate, the ideal RSM temperament needs to be made up of around three quarters the former England captain and the remaining 25 per cent the gunnery sergeant," he continues.

"You'd need to convince me that David Beckham is the ideal model in his entirety.

"My assumption is that he is a good leader, but I'm not sure he has a 'good telling off' in him, so to speak.

"In short, people need to know that Hartman is in you, even if he doesn't often appear. It's no good if all you do is shout, though, which was my early experience of the RSM.

"My style is more of the disappointed dad when I have to reprimand somebody.

"In all seriousness, this role requires you to have more in your toolbox now in terms of helping your soldiers – an open-door policy."

Collectively, senior personnel bring huge breadth of experience to the benefit of troops and officers alike. However – as WO1 Howarth points out – it is important they also consider themselves.

"Going back to David Beckham, one of his key strengths was that he kept an eye on the future and his aspirations beyond the pitch," he points out.

"Our leaders must do the same as they think about the later stages of their careers, whether they want to look at a late entry commission, a command sergeant major role or opportunities on civvy street." <<



'Despite your experience, you can have a sense of imposter syndrome when you arrive in this post and find people turning to you for answers'

WO1 Jock Colvan-Graham, RHA (below left)



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BIG PIC



Tickets are still on sale for next month's Army-Navy games at Twickenham. Visit armyrugbyunion.org.uk to book your seats for the men's and women's clashes. With crowd behaviour at last year's event described as "excellent", top brass have written to personnel to ask that they continue to uphold "the high values and standards of the Service" while enjoying the action on May 3.

Picture: Graeme Main



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Join the club

Golfers issue rallying call to prospective female players



WITH the new season in full swing, the Army Golf Association (AGA) is on a mission to attract more female players to the sport.

Boasting competitions at all levels and training events throughout the year, the opportunities are plentiful. And with new women's team captain SSgt Kim Glynn (AGC (SPS)) committed to a mantra of personnel enjoying their time on the course – regardless of results – the environment is a welcoming one.

While stereotypes and preconceptions of the game may have hindered newcomers in the past, Glynn told *SoldierSport* that all are welcome, no matter what their experience, as she started her two-year tenure in the role.

"There is a perception this is an old person's sport and something you play when you can't do anything else," she explained. "But it is the only discipline I know where an 18-year-old can go out and compete with a 72-year-old."

"To represent the Army people think they must be really good players, but because we are a small team we are happy to work with anyone – you do not have to be of Inter-Services standard."

"There are at least two matches each year for novices. We will pair them up with a seasoned Army player who will go round and share their experience, while passing on some hints and tips."

"We also run regional events where we take clubs and equipment

for people to come and have a go and get guidance on all aspects of the game.

"My main goal is to create a family atmosphere. Yes, I want to win, and the Inter-Services is the pinnacle, but I want to win in a way where people have fun as they work together."

Reservist AirTpr Laura McLean (AAC) is one of those who recently joined the AGA's development pathway.

The 43-year-old took up the sport at the insistence of best friend and former captain WO2 Zoe Burrell-Knipe (RLC) and immediately felt at home.

"It is brilliant," she said. "There is so much variety in the competitions and friendly matches, both for the first team and development team."

"Everything is listed on the AGA website and you put yourself forward for the events that work for you."

"I would love to represent the Army at the Inter-Services, but I'd say that is an outside goal for this year. The main aim is to play as many fixtures as I can and try and get my handicap down to single figures."

"It is a fantastic group of women, and the social side is great. They want to play well, but team spirit and going out and having fun is the real driver."

"Hitting that really good shot is so rewarding. Knowing you've got that in the locker and the more you practise, the better you will become is a superb feeling." **«**



'Hitting that really good shot is so rewarding'

AirTpr Laura McLean, AAC

Talk of the tee

Cpl Lizzy Chapman (RAMS) joined the Army women's team in 2024. She shares her experiences...

● **How did you get involved in the sport?**

My partner plays and I picked up my first club towards the end of Covid. I saw people playing netball, football and rugby but I wanted something that was more social. I was posted to Blandford, which has a great golf society, so I reached out to them and they pointed me in the right direction. I had a couple of lessons and then joined the ladies team.

● **Describe your golfing journey so far**

I have progressed quite quickly. I started with a 38 handicap and am now down to 24.5 - the more you play the better you get. A lot of people can be put off when they first start but as you get out with different players you pick up tips to help with your technique. I played in last season's Inter-Services and a few other matches and achieved a couple of wins along the way.

● **How have you found the Army women's set-up?**

It's brilliant. In a way it is quite nice that there aren't many of us as it means there are a lot more opportunities in terms of events and the social side. The girls have been very welcoming, and we have people who have never picked up a club before through to scratch golfers. Everyone on the committee is so dedicated in making sure players get the time off work to play.

● **What do you enjoy about golf?**

I'm a very competitive person and as friendly as golf can be, it is one of those sports where you're always competing - even if it is with yourself and trying to beat what you achieved last time out. It is also enjoyable being outside in a friendly environment. In team sports you don't get the chance to chat with other players while you play, but this is more leisurely.

● **Golf is often seen as elitist. Have you experienced any barriers?**

There is some of that around, but it depends on which clubs you play at. A lot are more relaxed about people coming in to play and it is nice they are now welcoming towards female members. Being part of the team has opened my eyes and we've been to courses I would never normally play. I'd now feel confident about going back to those venues on my own.

● **What are your goals for the 2025 season?**

I want to get my handicap below 20 and play in as many events as I can.



Sign up

Scan here to register an interest in joining the Army women's golf team



TALKBACK

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Picture: Cpl Becky Brown, RLC



'No one believed me as I'd been drinking'

AFTER reading all the comments following the Jaysley Beck inquest I felt I had to write in and describe my experience.

I'm a veteran of 18 years and left the Army in 2020. During my time in service I was sexually assaulted by a colleague after a night out.

I never told anyone about this incident at the time for a number of reasons, but the main one was that no one would believe me as I had been drinking.

A few years later I attended a reunion with five girlfriends, and it came to light that three of us had endured similar experiences during our time serving with the Armed Forces.

We decided we should speak out and agreed to tell the Royal Military Police (RMP).

One of the women was still serving so she said she would write a statement supporting what was discussed at the reunion but didn't want to make an official complaint as she was in the RMP.

This went to court martial, where I was asked to stand up in front of the person who had assaulted me and be questioned. I did this not realising I would be required to stand less than two metres away from him.

After I had spoken, the jury (of five males) made a declaration that one of them knew me so would need to be swapped out.

At this point I requested that the panel be changed to include

at least one female and was told "you get what you get".

I later discovered the accused was found not guilty and continued to serve. I was also told there would be no appeal, that it was "done and dusted".

I often look back and wonder if the result would have been different if the panel had contained both sexes. - **Name and address supplied**

Director Military Court Service, Cleaven Faulkner, replies: I'm very sorry to hear that someone's experience of the military court has not been a positive one.

Without knowing the identity of the individual - and therefore

the case - it is impossible to comment on all the details.

However, the fact this veteran's case pre-dates January 1, 2023 is crucial as this is when the law was changed.

Now the court administration officer must appoint at least one man and one woman to every court martial board.

Also, since September 2023 all court martial boards must be tri-Service.

Please be assured that the diversity and transparency of our procedures have been transformed for the better, giving personnel a much improved experience when they are in the military court system (page 7).

'I WAS TOLD YOU GET WHAT YOU GET'



Hitting the roof over dire Reserve centre

I AM really concerned about the lack of funding for essential infrastructure repairs at my Reserve centre.

Despite experiencing repeated issues, including a leaking roof and non-functional emergency lights, repairs have not been carried out by the maintenance contractor, Vivo.

Since we switched to this company for all infrastructure-related issues in August 2024, the process of arranging engineer visits has become painfully slow.

The jobs simply won't get done if their cost exceeds a £3,600 limit and therefore ours have not been dealt with at all. That's becoming increasingly frustrating for everyone and poses risks to both the functionality of the centre and the safety of its users.

The Defence Infrastructure Organisation, who are ultimately responsible for this failure, must take a more proactive approach to ensure that all requirements

and approvals are promptly addressed, not just those that cost under £3,600.

We need additional funding in place and a more efficient system for solving these problems as they arise.

My Reserve unit takes great pride in maintaining a facility that supports soldiers and potential recruits in their training. However, without adequate finances and timely repairs, the centre cannot fulfil its purpose effectively.

The building needs to remain in good condition if the operational readiness of our personnel is to be guaranteed.

Also, encouraging individuals to join the Army Reserve is a challenge in itself, and that task is made even more difficult when the site is not up to standard.

The Army should be ensuring our centres are safe, functional, and properly equipped now – not at some undetermined point in the future. – **Name and address supplied**

Defence dyslexia fail

AS the Army and wider defence modernise how their workforces conduct digital business, how much consideration is being placed on the need to ensure the relevant applications and tools are friendly to those who may have dyslexia or even dyscalculia?

I have been in the Armed Forces for some 26 years and am only now starting to feel that my dyslexia is impacting my performance – and those concerns are largely due to my limited ability to read from apps within the personnel management systems.

I am sure there are many other defence personnel out there who, like me, are now finding using these applications problematic, so the MoD needs to act. – **Capt Anthony Brown, RLC**

Obstacle to training

BEING an ex-Regular who is now a Combined Cadet Force school staff instructor, I was dismayed to find out that 18 military obstacle courses are being closed down due to cost pressures, including our local one.

We employed the obstacle course whenever we used the local camp for field days. It is a big loss as this is an attractive and challenging facility for our cadets.

Our unit may be prepared to maintain a streamlined course to enable a basic layout (eg, walls, monkey bars) to continue and be inspected as required.

Could this be a feasible option that the respective budget holder would consider? – **Calvin Routledge, Lancaster Royal Grammar School CCF**

80 years ago this month...

A short selection of letters from *Soldier's* first few issues in war-torn 1945, taken from our new online archive launched to mark the publication's 80th anniversary this year...

No statues

I NOTE that Tpr Foxwell (*Soldier* No. 2) suggests a memorial to the British public who have ably supported us through the war.

I suggest that any such memorial takes the form of a free hospital or some other institution of equal importance to the welfare of the people, not one of those statues which become an eyesore to future generations. – **SSM C Burrough, 2 Information Control Unit, British Liberation Army**

His favourite pin-up

THE excellent photograph of the Devon village (*Soldier* No.3) is the only kind of "pin-up" I want to see.

The excuse for the other kind of pin-up (film starlets) is: "Let the boys see what they're fighting for". Well, I'm fighting to save Devon first and Hollywood only incidentally! – **Pte W Wallis, Royal Army Service Corps**



▲ Time to drive it home

I SUGGEST that we hang out in public places in all occupied German cities, towns and villages with photographs of Nazi war crimes.

That would (1) make the locals realise what they have done and come to the proper conclusions and (2) help Allied soldiers to understand why they are warned against fraternisation. – **Pte Henry Reynold, 27 Canadian Forestry Coy**

DIRECTORY

SOLDIER

Bite-sized data to keep you in the know

WELFARE

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

Army HIVE

These centres provide information for the whole military community on a wide variety of topics affecting their everyday life, including relocation, accommodation, health and 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

COMPETITIONS

FEBRUARY 2025 HOAY WINNER

Majority Moto Plus Bluetooth turntable and external speakers
Paul Moran, Dorset

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

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

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

Forces Pension Society

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

Joining Forces Credit Union

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

Money Helper

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

National Debtline

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

StepChange Debt Charity

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

GAMBLING

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

GRIEF

Cruse Bereavement Support
0808 808 1677

RESETTLEMENT

Career Transition Partnership employment fairs help support the transition to civilian life by providing resources, networking opportunities and direct access to Forces friendly employers.

To book your place at an event visit modctp.co.uk

Edinburgh – April 23

Plymouth – May 20

Lincoln – May 21

Newbury – June 18

York – July 2

Elgin – July 9

Bournemouth – September 10

Newmarket – October 8

Belfast – October 15

Cardiff – November 5

Telford – November 19

on Defence Connect or send an email to 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.world

Samaritans

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

116 123 samaritans.org

The Royal British Legion

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

0808 802 8080
britishlegion.org.uk

MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

There's always someone you can talk to. Speak to your friends or family, boss or padre, unit welfare staff (details above), medical officer or GP. A number of charities and other organisations can also provide support and they 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
General mental health support nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters

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

Samaritans
116 123 samaritans.org

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

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

RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN/ABUSE
Aurora New Dawn
Safety for survivors of domestic abuse, sexual violence, stalking
02394 216 816
aurorand.org.uk

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

Relate
Relationship support relate.org.uk

SEXUAL OFFENCES

Anyone wishing to report an incident can do so in multiple ways. It does not matter if your allegation is not recent, or if you don't feel you have any evidence.

There is no need for anyone to speak directly to their chain of command.

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

Crimestoppers can be reached at **0800 555 111**

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

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

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

KICKED OUT

NEW COLUMN FROM THIS MONTH – SEE PAGE 7

THE following personnel were dismissed from His Majesty's Armed Forces following conviction at court martial between January and February 2025:

Sgt Surendrakumar Tamling (29 Regiment, RLC)

Pleaded guilty to **theft** of €10,150 at the Military Court Centre, Catterick. Sentenced to eight months in prison, suspended for 12 months, plus 120 hours of unpaid work in the community and a Service compensation order of £8,572.65.

Maj Benedict Stephens (HQ Int Corps)

Convicted of **sexual assault** after trial at the Military Court Centre, Catterick. Sentenced to 20 weeks' imprisonment, suspended for 24 months, with 220 hours of unpaid work in the community a condition of the suspension. An accredited programme of 26 sessions together with 10 rehabilitation activity requirement days also ordered to be completed.

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

WIN... A Majority internet radio tuner

TEN details have been changed in the image below of **Secretary of State for Defence, John Healey, meeting soldiers at Wellington Barracks with the latest mechanised infantry vehicle, Boxer, seen in the background**.

Circle all the differences on image **B** and send the panel to HOAY 995, Soldier, Ordnance Barracks, Government Road, Aldershot, Hampshire GU11 2DU, along with contact details, including email address, by April 30.

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

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

The first correct entry drawn after the closing date will win this superb Majority Fitzwilliam 2024 Bluetooth internet radio tuner.

Available to buy on Amazon for £150, this tasty piece of home audio kit opens up a world of possibilities to its users, allowing them to tune into their favourite local or global stations.

With an array of incredible features – and an easy set-up experience – this device can be operated from an iOS or Android smartphone, with Undok technology to navigate between audio modes, browse content and control volume.

It comes with more than 25,000 different stations at your fingertips and makes it simple to search by continent, country, genre, and channel name to explore a wide range of topics. Good luck!



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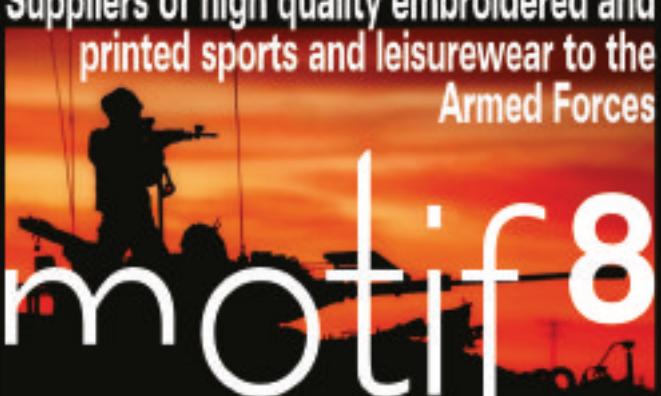
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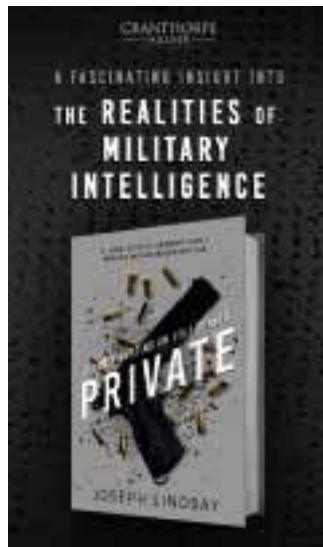
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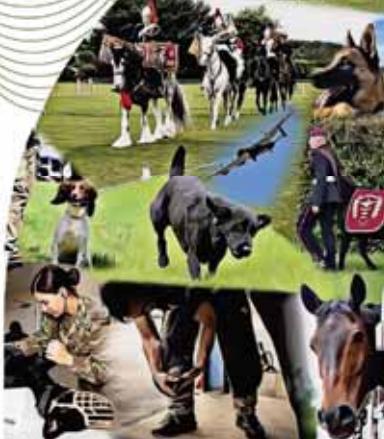
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REVIEWS

★ MOVIES ★ GAMES ★ BOOKS ★



Warfare

Combat up close and utterly convincing

MOVIE

In cinemas from April 18

TWENTY years after a harrowing and bloody engagement in Ramadi, Iraq, former US Navy Seal Ray Mendoza has teamed up with Alex Garland (*Civil War*, *Annihilation*, *Ex Machina*) to bring to screen a viscerally intense recreation of the battle, pieced together from the memories of his comrades.

With their position compromised and having taken major casualties in an IED blast, the personnel mount a desperate and courageous evacuation, refusing to be overcome in what is a seemingly unwinnable firefight.

Using what Mendoza and Garland describe as “a forensic approach to storytelling”, *Warfare* is 90 minutes of unrivalled war cinema – most of which is seen in real time and with an exceptional degree of realism.

The practical effects and masterful sound design ensure the audience cannot be anywhere other than in the thick of the action.

From the laboured and stressed breathing of the sniper focused down his scope to the percussive chatter of machine-gun fire and rib-bruising roar of close air support, it grips the viewer’s attention in a steel vice and doesn’t let go until the credits roll.

Sporting a host of established names (**Will Poulter**, **Joseph Quinn**, **Cosmo Jarvis**) and featuring rising star **D’Pharaoh Woon-A-Tai** as Mendoza, the film showcases a commitment to authenticity rarely seen in modern blockbusters, with actors undergoing extensive training in weapons handling, comms procedures and tactical movement prior to filming.

According to cast member and British soldier LSgt Laurie Duncan (HAC), who appears as one of the



Pictures: Murray Close

Seals, rehearsals continued during the shoot.

"Ray's attention to detail with all things military was incredibly impressive," said the Reservist (pictured below left).

"Just watching him move with a weapon system was like watching a deathly ballet."

The professionalism and camaraderie of the cast is plain to see from the outset.

Everything, right down to the way they operate and speak, is entirely convincing, to the point it's easy to forget that they are actors conducting room clearance drills and not real-life elite operators.

Also on set was wounded ex-Serviceman Elliott Miller, whose casevac from the Ramadi apartment building forms the basis of the tale.

The actors' respect for his story and their dedication

to bringing it to life is palpable.

"I think all of us wanted to do right by Ray and Elliott," LSgt Duncan continued.

"Even on the more challenging days we were always laughing and pushing to be better for each other. It was pretty special."

Warfare is a sledgehammer of a film, brutally compelling from start to finish, with an intensity that will stay with you for hours.

It is to the Iraq War what *Kajaki* is to Afghanistan – unromantic, unapologetic, and unrelenting in its immersion. It takes no prisoners, and is the type of war film that simply is not made often enough.

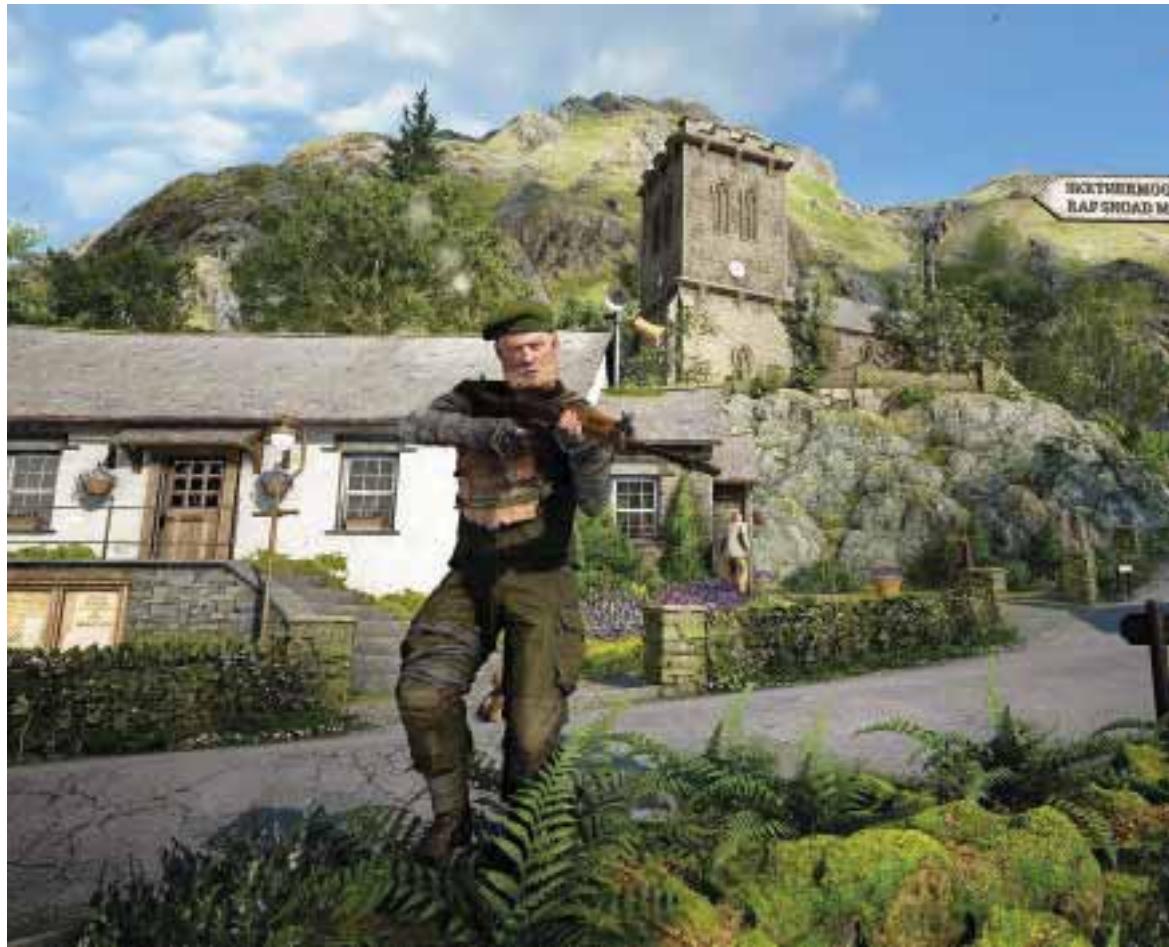
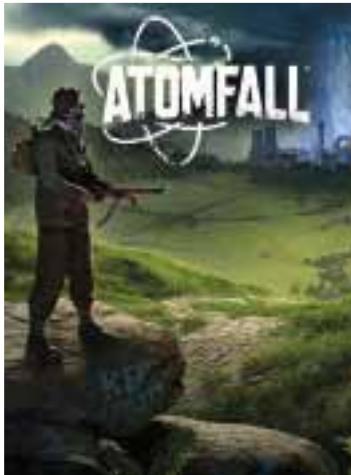


Review: Tpr Luke Maxwell-Libby, HAC



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GAME

Atomfall

by Rebellion

Out now on PC and consoles, priced from £42.99

VIDEO games featuring alternative futures have been in vogue over the past two decades.

From a Second World War in which the assassination of Adolf Hitler gives rise to a Soviet empire in *Command & Conquer Red Alert* to the aftermath of a US-Chinese showdown in *Fallout*, the what-ifs of history are fertile ground for stories.

Now the focus has turned to the UK for the latest dystopian timeline – a scenario in which a 1958 fire at the Windscale nuclear site in Cumbria (which actually happened but was in reality contained) explodes to contaminate the countryside.

Amid the chaos, *Atomfall* casts players as an amnesiac who finds themselves in the radioactive quarantine zone established after the disaster.

It falls to them to discover their purpose in this very British answer to the US *Fallout* wasteland – a place that is less vault dwellers and power armour and more Cornish pasties and Scousers.

Soldier was given exclusive access to a late-build demo of the title ahead of its full release, which was due as this issue hit barracks, and we were suitably impressed with all on offer.

The world of a post-apocalyptic 1950s England, complete with decaying rural villages and iconic red telephone boxes, is beautifully rendered, creating an environment that is almost inviting – until a gnawing sense of unease begins to take hold.

The creeping sense of dread bubbles to the surface

in encounters with the world's inhabitants, who can be a tad unsavoury to say the least.

Combat with the worst elements proved to be tough yet this only serves to make success all the sweeter.

Whether scrapping up close or at range, each fight required timing and strategy.

Mindless shooting achieved little, but a combination of brain and brawn was rewarded while the animation of foes hitting the deck proved especially satisfying.

An argument with a nasty druid faction, who were holed-up in a castle, while we were armed with nothing more than a packed lunch and trusty cricket bat, proved among our testier encounters.

Yet exploration is the real strength of the game and the invitation to wander *Atomfall*'s vast world sets it apart from its contemporaries.

Unlike other titles in the genre that set down strict quest markers, this outing tends to favour an organic approach, leaving decisions to the player and encouraging them to uncover the mysteries of the quarantine zone at their own pace.

Criticisms are few and far between, but we would like to have been able to use the environment to our advantage more when dealing with opponents. Interacting with the world to set traps or hazards would have made life interesting.

This is, however, a small point in a game that seems to otherwise deliver on every front.

We were certainly left wanting more, and are eagerly awaiting delivery of the finished item.



Review: LSgt Ashley Ryan, IG



Atomfall: Behind the scenes



Soldier caught up Ben Fisher, who has been leading the team producing the game at Oxford-based studio Rebellion, and asked him how the project came to be

Q: What inspired the story?

A: There was a real disaster at Windscale – a fire that spread radioactive contamination. It was actually the world's first nuclear accident. But our director at Rebellion, Jason Kingsley, wanted to look at how things might have looked if there had been a far more serious outcome. Games such as the *Fallout* and *Metro* series explore similar themes. But we have a different approach, tending to do titles that have a punky, British slant.

Q: How are players tasked?

A: They start out in the disaster's quarantine zone with no idea who they are, their age or where they come from. It's up to them and they are in a difficult environment from the outset. There is a lot to discover in at least 20 hours of gameplay and more depending on the decisions made.

Q: Where else did you turn for ideas?

A: As well as looking carefully at the historical perspective of the UK in the 1950s, we examined British sci-fi storytelling of the era – books by John Wyndham, who wrote the *Day of the Triffids*, and the *Dr Who* TV series. The film of the *Wicker Man* was another of our sources.

Q: Did you find the 1950s an interesting era?

A: Very – a period of technical innovation and it was great to reflect that culture. In addition, the UK has a deep history going back thousands of years and this is also reflected in the game.

Q: Was *Atomfall* a long project?

A: Yes – it's been going on for about seven years in total with all of the research, although the last part has obviously been the busiest. We're now looking at downloadable content, so we're not finished yet.

Interview: Cliff Caswell, *Soldier*



GAME

Headquarters World War 2: Ardennes DLC

by Slitherine is out now priced £12.79



THE second downloadable content pack for the turn-based tactics title will likely please fans – but the fact there is little new in gameplay leaves the add-on falling short.

Taking to the digitally-rendered battlefields of the low countries during the winter of 1944, *Soldier*'s command of the attacking Wehrmacht forces was a disappointment, largely because the whole affair was virtually indistinguishable from the previous Allied campaign – except the obnoxious Brit storytelling officer has been replaced by an obnoxious German storytelling officer.

It would have been good to see the campaign reflect the state of the Wehrmacht during the end stages of the war – making do with fewer units, higher quality armour and limited mobility and resupply. Instead, beyond the odd bonus Tiger tank, there was none of the above.

While still fun, this one is a missed opportunity.



Review: Maj Griff James, Coldm Gds

BOOK

The Accidental Soldier

by Owain Mulligan is out on April 10, priced £22

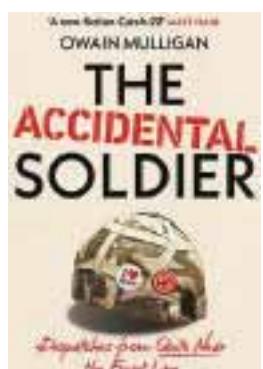
IF YOU are after a book that perfectly illustrates the tempo, training and realities of military life with commensurate razor-sharp observations and wit then this is an essential read.

Owain Mulligan's memoir is a hilarious, self-deprecating account of an unexpected journey from teaching to front-line Service life, filled with laugh-out-loud moments that soldiers past or present will relate to.

Accessible and effortlessly engaging, the author's storytelling captures the quirks, chaos and camaraderie of the Army with pinpoint accuracy.

Whether you've served yourself or just enjoy a well-told tale of military mishaps and triumphs, this delivers entertainment in spades.

It's a real gem and the kind of book you'll want to recommend and re-read for the sheer joy of it.



Review: Lt Victoria Carr, Int Corps



Pictures: Fraser Carson/@the_captured_moments_co

MAKING THE GRADE

BRAZILIAN JIU-JITSU

THERE was no shortage of skill on display as more than 100 fighters took to the mat for the annual Army Brazilian Jiu-jitsu Championships.

The turnout underlined the discipline's status as the largest and most popular martial art in the military as athletes ranging from white to black belts competed in a host of weight

divisions in both gi and non-gi contests, with the top performers earning selection for this summer's Inter-Services clash.

Among those to catch the eye were Cfn Vana Sonson (REME) who despite being a blue belt, defeated a purple belt opponent to take the gi and non-gi titles in her weight category.

Lt Max Hemming (Mercian) was another to excel as he moved up a weight class to

claim gold and silver medals, while veteran Maj Stephen Marsh (AGC (SPS)) produced a strong showing against rivals more than half his age.

"Competing at 60 against lads in their 20s in the white belt division, he gave some very difficult rounds to his younger opponents, and they weren't holding back," Army Brazilian Jiu-jitsu lead Capt Gerry Coghlan (Lancs) told



SoldierSport.

"This event is getting better every year. We have all got full-time jobs so to see the talent increasing, particularly at white and blue belt, is amazing.

"I'd say 90 per cent of those who have won their divisions will be selected for the Inter-Services – availability then becomes the question.

"We are looking to win that competition for the third year in a row and are confident about our chances."

More than 1,000 personnel are currently affiliated with the organisation and with skills courses – the latest of which will be held this month – and seminars running throughout the year there are plenty of opportunities to get involved. And Coghlan believes the



appeal is obvious.

"If you're joining the Army, you are probably someone who likes a scrap," he added.

"This is a combat sport that reflects what we should be doing in the day job.

"It is about high pressure fight or flight situations and if someone is trying to cause you a lot of pain you must think your

way out.

"You need to fight effectively and want that win, even if your opponent is faster or stronger."

Three overseas visits have been planned for 2025, the first of which saw SSgt Andy Capper (Int Corps) and Sgt Jamie Pritchard (REME) win bronze medals at the IBJJF European Championships in Lisbon.

A training camp in Cyprus will follow in June before a full squad travels stateside to compete at the World Masters in Las Vegas in late August.

The sport is also flourishing at corps and unit level, as witnessed at the Army Championships in Aldershot when a team of seven from 39 Engineer Regiment made the 600-mile journey from their base in Kinloss to compete.

"We took over an old fire station on camp and have been training there in the evenings," said coach Sgt Josh Craigie (RE), who started running sessions in January last year.

"This is the first time we have come here as a team, and we've seen SSgt Curtis Noble win the white belt 88kg division with three submissions.

"Obviously, I wanted all my guys to medal but we've had to travel a long way. For me, the minute they stepped on the mat felt like a win.

"We have 15 people who train regularly. We have a purple belt back at unit, but he doesn't like to compete and have another who is looking to become a PTI so didn't want to come and get injured. However, they are all part of the team.

"Next year I want to head to this competition with a minibus full of fighters."

Anyone looking to get involved in the sport should follow [@british.army.bjj](https://www.instagram.com/british.army.bjj) on Instagram, visit the Army Martial Arts page on Defence Connect or email cathal.coghlan101@mod.gov.uk

JIU-JITSU BY NUMBERS

12 Fighters will compete at the World Masters

3 Overseas visits planned for this year – including a Cyprus training camp

2 Successive Inter-Services titles for the Army – they will target a third in July

54 Personnel signed up for this month's skills course

GIBBS TAKES GOLD IN MASTERS BUILD-UP

BRAZILIAN JIU-JITSU

ULTRA-heavyweight Sgt Josh Gibbs (RAPTC) continued to fly the flag for Army jiu-jitsu on the elite stage as he fought his way to a gold medal at the IBJJF London International Open.

Having claimed silver at the same event in October, the soldier was delighted to go one better as he topped the podium for the first time as a black belt – a result made even sweeter by the fact he has returned to work having previously served as a full-time athlete.

"I've not had as much time to train but I managed to get the job done," he said.

"I didn't feel as sharp as when I was training two or three times a day, but the fitness was still there.

"I have done this for so long that it has almost become embedded in my brain.

"I fought a big, strong Brazilian guy in the final. He was a stand-up fighter with a background in judo so it was a case of waiting for a mistake and then capitalising. He tired after three or four minutes, and I went on to win by submission. It was great to get that first gold as a black belt."

Gibbs' focus now switches to the World Masters in August and he is hoping to increase his workload between now and then to ensure he hits peak

condition stateside.

"Come June I will be posted and I'm hoping to get to a location that will allow me to train from Monday to Saturday," he added.

"I've got a couple of events before heading to the masters and they will give me a chance to sharpen up – having that competitive mindset will allow me to shake off any cobwebs.

"Ahead of any international event my aim is to get on the podium and that will be the same for this."

While not competing, Gibbs was an interested bystander at the recent Army Championships – an event where he first cut his teeth nearly a decade ago.

"It is getting a lot busier," he said. "And it is amazing to see people who started out as white belts now refereeing on the mat.

"I used to be head coach of the Royal Artillery team and now I've transferred to the Royal Army Physical Training Corps I'm hoping to get involved there.

"The standard is rising and there are some talented fighters coming through."

'IT IS EMBEDDED IN MY BRAIN'



ARMY AIR CORPS

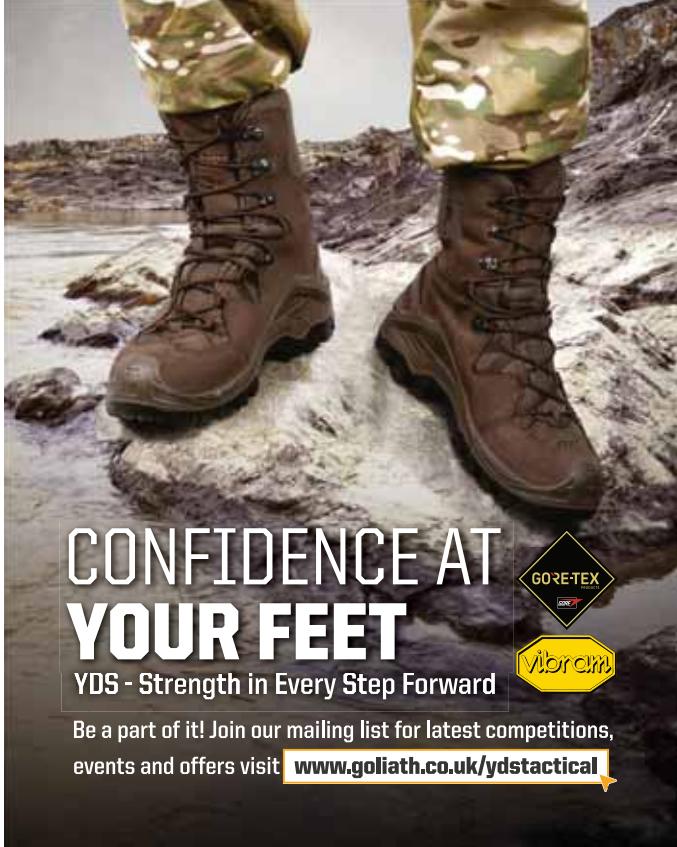


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Pictures: Andrew Foster/Allign Photography

FLAIR AT THE FORE

RUGBY UNION (MEN)

THE free-flowing rugby of the Infantry's Fijian contingent proved too hot to handle for the Royal Engineers as four second-half tries without reply saw them reign supreme in the Corps Merit League One final.

Trailing 15-10 at the break, the champions-elect hit top form in a devastating ten-minute burst to sink the sorry Sappers and lift their first top-flight silverware since 2008.

In a bruising first half, it was the Infantry who opened the scoring as a quick break by man-of-the-match Rfn Lekima Ravuvu (Rifles) from the base of the scrum set the platform for wing Rfn Vereimi Qorowale (Rifles) to cross in the corner.

Ravuvu went from hero-to-villain moments later as he was yellow carded for a high tackle and the Engineers made their

numerical advantage count immediately as LCpl Manu Cakau piled over from close range. Spr Jack Johnson slotted the conversion to edge his side ahead and he extended the lead with a penalty in front of the posts in the 21st minute.

But the Infantry fired a rapid response as a swift tap-and-go penalty from Pte Apriu Myritaki (Scots) created an attacking base that was capitalised on by Ravuvu, whose strong carry allowed Lt Jesse Ribeiro (Rifles) to jink to the line.

The fly half missed his conversion attempt and the Sappers - who were seeking a fourth successive title - completed the first-half scoring as hooker Cpl Matty Eyes charged home to establish a 15-10 lead at the interval.

However, it proved to be the final flourish for the defending champions as their

rivals assumed control. Ribeiro reduced the deficit to two points with a penalty before a booming kick downfield by Ravuvu eventually resulted in LCpl Onisivoro Nayagi (R Yorks) going over in the corner.

The try of the afternoon followed as a slick passing move on the edge of their own 22 saw the Infantry work the ball out wide, where Qorowale was able to turn on the gas and offload for the supporting Myritaki to go in under the posts.

A fifth and final score then completed a 32-15 win.

"It has been a long time coming," victorious skipper Ribeiro said. "We try to train with some structure but once we get into a game the boys just play against what they see and let their flair go."

"We were happy to reach the final but were not expecting to win - it is unbelievable."

ELSEWHERE... the Royal Logistic Corps hit the try trail as they thrashed the Royal Artillery 46-13 in the women's Inter-Corps final.

The Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers defeated the Royal Signals 48-19 in the men's Corps Merit League Two final, while the Adjutant General's Corps downed the Army Air Corps 33-17 in the league three showpiece.





Pictures: Graeme Main

CROWNING GLORY

FOOTBALL (MEN)

HEAD coach Capt Al Brown (RE) celebrated a memorable first season in charge of the Army men's football team as a 3-0 win over the Royal Navy saw them crowned Inter-Services champions for 2025.

Having drawn 1-1 with the Royal Air Force in their first match, and then seeing the Senior Service beat the same opponent 3-0, the Reds headed into the Uxbridge clash knowing only a victory would be enough in their quest for silverware - and they duly delivered in a battling display.

After a frenetic opening the Navy were the first to threaten as AET Emmanuel Roche picked up the ball in midfield and drove forward before firing a shot just over from the edge of the area.

Spr Ryan Fagan (RE) was the soldiers' brightest attacking outlet in the early exchanges and it was his quick footwork and cross that led to the opening

goal in the 14th minute.

With the opposition defence clearing behind, Cpl Clay Bryant (REME) produced a wicked delivery from the resulting corner that beat goalkeeper Cpl Laurence McCormick at the near post to find the net.

Fagan then saw a deflected shot drift wide before a header from LPT Gary Hird narrowly looped over the Army crossbar.

An interception by Spr Ryan Kenyon (RE) led to the Reds' next opportunity on the half-hour mark as Fagan controlled a raking cross-field pass from skipper SSGt Declan Shuttleworth (REME) and curled a shot agonisingly close to the top corner.

Kenyon failed to convert a low cross from Cpl Jamie Turner (R Signals) on the stroke of half-time, but the Army were good value for their lead as the two sides headed to the break.

Turner had the first chance of the second period as he fired wide after the Navy failed to deal

with a long ball forward shortly before Cpl Sean Woolley (RLC) doubled his team's advantage.

Having seen an earlier free kick charged down, the winger went one better as he bent his shot round the wall and into the corner with McCormick rooted to the spot.

Substitute Sgt Dominic Creamer (RE) added the third late on as he lifted an effort over the onrushing McCormick and into the net.

"It was about competing and battling," Brown told *SoldierSport* afterwards. "We knew the Navy would do that and we had to match them."

"I thought we did that a little bit better and won more first and second balls, which allowed us to play our football."

"We've had five camps and looked at more than 50 players this season."

"They have a really good attitude and want to learn and win - they've done everything we've asked of them."



THE Army women survived a second-half fightback to claim a slender 17-14 victory over the French Army in a clash billed as 'Le Crunch'.

Tries from Cpl Millie Williams (AGC (RMP)) and Pte Kaitlyn Fraser (RLC, pictured above) gave the Reds a 12-0 lead at half-time and with Gdsm Manu Komaitai (IG) touching down shortly after the interval, they looked well set for a big win.

Two converted scores in the last ten minutes brought the French back into the contest. But with their last points coming on the stroke of full-time they were unable to press on for a victory.

It was a deserved reward for the Brits' efforts on the day and Army skipper SSGt Jade Mullen (AGC (SPS)) said the tourists provided a welcome test for her team as they build towards the Inter-Services.

"We've had a slow start to the season due to deployments and work commitments," she added. "We still have players missing so this was a strong effort."

"I'm a big believer in defence wins games and we put our bodies on the line with some big hits."

The Army men later beat their French equivalents 47-12.



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TITLE RUN CONTINUES



NETBALL (WOMEN)

THE Army underlined their status as the dominant force in military netball as emphatic wins over their rivals paved the way for a seventh successive Inter-Services title.

Having been closely pushed by the Royal Air Force in recent seasons, the Reds comprehensively overcame that challenge this time round as they triumphed 57-17 in their opening fixture.

The goals continued to flow two days later in the tournament final, when they downed the Royal Navy 54-29.

Attacking duo SSgt Ellie Naweles (AGC (SPS)) and Cpl Melissa Price (R Signals) again showed ruthlessness at the net and with Pte Tamara Samuel (RLC) offering shooting prowess from the bench, there was little their opponents could do to stop the onslaught.

Capt Katharine Chadwick (RAMS) and Sgt Dee Bolakoro

(RE, pictured left) were in superb form at the other end of the court, marshalling a defence that very much had the upper hand in both contests.

"It was a really good run out," skipper Naweles told *SoldierSport*. "In the past we have made slow starts against the RAF but this year we were strong from the off.

"But I don't think the scorelines reflected how well the other teams played and they fought until the end.

"We are lucky to have such a strong bench and when we make changes it doesn't impact on how we play.

"Around 90 per cent of the girls have been together on the team for six or seven years so we know where everyone will be on the court and that makes it so much easier for us."

That said, the squad welcomed three new members for the campaign - Samuel being one of them. Bdr Amelia Finau (RA) and Rfn Izzy O'Malley (Rifles) also produced eye-

catching performances on debut.

"It was as if they had been playing with us for five years," Naweles added. "The whole squad got plenty of court time.

"We made it hard for the coaches in terms of selection this year and both ourselves and the development squad looked really strong.

"The Inter-Services is always a special occasion for us. There was a lot of expectation and to win seven in a row is amazing."

The Army also claimed the development title in Portsmouth but they missed out on a clean sweep as the RAF sealed the masters crown.

On the back of their victory the soldiers saw eight players - including Samuel - selected for the UK Armed Forces squad that was meeting for a training camp as this issue went to press. They will play fixtures against Jersey and Scotland, among others, in the coming months.

The Reds will also tour Fiji later in the year.



Picture: Graeme Main

GAMES GALORE

SQUASH

MORE matches than ever before were played at the Army Squash Championships as personnel battled for a host of individual titles in the men's and women's draws.

Staged over three days in Aldershot, the competition saw 93 players involved in more than 400 contests and former professional Rev Phil Nightingale (RAChD) dazzled

on debut as he claimed the men's open title with a string of dominant performances.

A winner of two PSA tour titles, he only joined the Service last year but swept all before him.

There was also a first-time winner in the women's field, with Pte Keiko Bedford (AGC (SPS)) sealing the honours. Unfortunately, the trophy was decided off the court as top seed Maj Elaine Radcliffe (RAMS) had to withdraw from the final.

"I was excited for the match," Bedford told *SoldierSport*. "She is a fast player who gets to things quickly, so I was expecting it to be tough."

Bedford returned to the sport in 2023 after joining the Army and is looking forward to a long association with the set-up.

"The competition here is really good," she added. "So I need to improve, continue to work on my skills and concentrate on playing more rallies."

BASKETBALL (MEN)

LCPL Anish Tamang (REME, pictured) was among the rising stars to represent the UK Armed Forces basketball team against the GB police.

Marking the start of preparations for this year's Shape International Basketball Tournament, the fixture ended 74-71 in their opponent's favour as some controversial late calls went against the military outfit.

WO2 Matthew Cooper (REME) was named MVP, while SSgt Roshane Murray (RLC) stepped up from his role as assistant coach to play due to a lack of availability.



WINTER SPORTS

PERSONNEL serving on Op Cabrit went head-to-head with their host nation rivals at the Estonian Defence Force Cross Country Skiing Championships.

A four-strong all-female British outfit led by Capt Katy Vincent (RE) held their own in a field of experienced athletes, with the officer finishing fifth in the 4.8km freestyle. LCpl Emily Heaviside (REME) was sixth in the discipline's 2.4km race and novices Capt Harriet Arkwright (RA) and 2Lt Rachael Williams (RE) came 12th and 14th respectively in the same field.

The soldiers also took 12th spot in the team patrol race.

"It was a great opportunity to be involved with one of our host country's national pastimes," Vincent said.



ATHLETICS

THE Inter-Services Half Marathon Championships proved to be a happy hunting ground for Army athletes as they claimed a clean sweep of the silverware on offer.

Staged as part of the Fleet Half Marathon, the event saw Cpl Dean Williamson (REME, pictured at last year's Inter-Services 10km Championships) top the men's standings in a time of 1hr 7min 41sec – an effort that also saw him claim the wider race's overall title.

Lt Megan Davis (RAMS) finished more than five-and-a-half minutes clear of her nearest rival to win the women's field and with fellow soldiers claiming the other podium places they sealed the team crown in style.

The men's squad also lifted their respective team trophy.

The Army will be looking for further honours at this month's Inter-Services Marathon Championships, which form part of the London Marathon.

Picture: John Sumpter/Alligin Photography

FIRST IN THE FLEET

Men's individual champion	Cpl Dean Williamson (REME)	1:07.41
Women's individual podium placings	Lt Megan Davis (RAMS) Lt Rhiannon Kirk (RAMS) Capt Faith Taylor-Tippett (RAMS)	1:15.35 1:21.03 1:22.16
Men's team standings	Army Royal Air Force Royal Navy	4:37.37 4:42.30 4:57.10
Women's team standings	Army Royal Air Force	3:58.54 5:07.38

DRAMATIC WIN FIRES TITLE CHARGE



INTER-SERVICES
MEN'S HOCKEY
ARMY V RAF
3 2

HOCKEY

ELEVEN years of Inter-Services hurt came to an end for the Army men's hockey team as a last-gasp victory over the Royal Air Force paved the way for a successful title bid in Portsmouth.

Capt George Bissett (RE) was the hero against the defending champions as he converted with just seconds remaining of a clash the soldiers had earlier led 2-0 before being pegged back to 2-2 in the final quarter.

The result saw them head into their match with the Royal Navy - a side they defeated 8-2 last season - in confident mood and a further Bissett strike, along with a brace from Cpl Scott Rawlings (REME) and a LCpl Jordan Hardaker (RE) effort, helped them to a 4-2 win, and with it their first Forces trophy since 2014.

"It's been a long time coming," Bissett, who is also team manager, told *SoldierSport*. "I've

been in the system for eight years now and when I first started, we were way off the mark compared to the RAF.

"We've had a new coach, as well as an influx of fresh players in recent times, and we've finally got it over the line.

"2-0 is a closer scoreline in hockey than it is in football and the RAF are a real threat from short corners. When I slotted that goal with five seconds to go it felt like a clutch win."

The Army women ensured there was double delight on the south coast as a 2-0 victory against the RAF was followed by a 5-1 triumph over the Senior Service in the decider.

"You cannot describe the feeling of winning the Inter-Services," said skipper SSgt Emily Lewis (AGC (SPS)).

"We've suffered with injuries this year and have had to pull together as a squad. We struggled in our warm-up games and had to fight hard - we played the same here."



The men's and women's teams both won Inter-Services indoor and outdoor titles this season

ALLEN HELPS REDS MAKE PERFECT START

FOOTBALL (WOMEN)

FORMER England under-20 international Lt Georgia Allen (RLC) delivered two goal involvements on her Inter-Services debut as the Army women started their campaign in style with a convincing win over the Royal Navy.

The ex-Ipswich ace won a penalty that was converted by skipper Bdr Anna Birtwhistle (RA) before calmly slotting a second as the Reds took control in a devastating 15-minute spell that sealed the contest before half-time.

After a cagey opening the soldiers sprang into life midway through the first half as a flurry of chances fell their way. SSgt Tara Parker (RE) was the first to threaten as she tested visiting keeper LH Eilish Brogan at the far post before dragging an effort wide moments later after beating the stopper to the ball on the edge of the area.

Bdr Shannon Bradley (RA) then missed the target after Allen drew a save from Brogan, but the Army's pressure was rewarded in the 35th minute as Allen was tripped in the box after cutting in from the right.

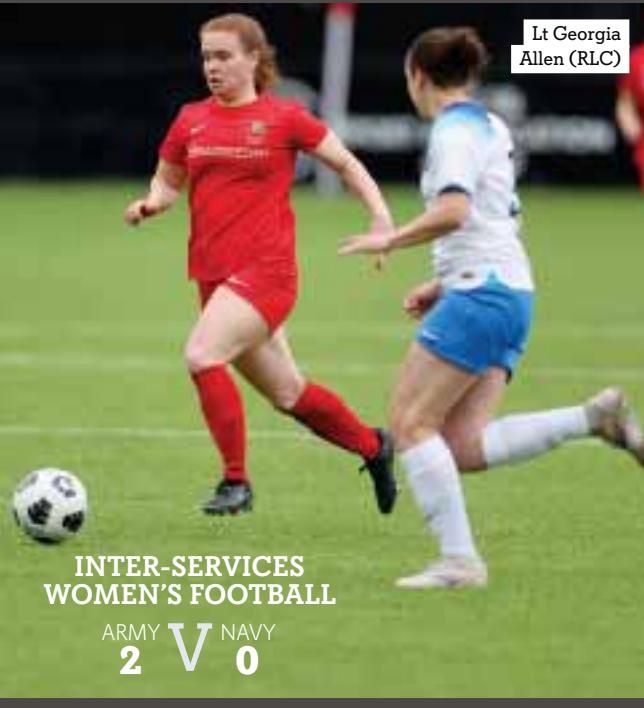
Birtwhistle fired home emphatically from the spot and the midfielder was at the heart of her side's second goal four minutes later. Finding space on the halfway line, she released Parker on the left with an expertly weighted pass and her low cross was met by Allen, who shifted the ball on to her left foot and steered a low shot home via the post.

The Army controlled proceedings in the second half and with greater composure in the final third could have added to their tally. Substitute Capt Krissy Wright (AGC (RMP)) - playing her 26th and final Inter-Services campaign - had their best chance, producing a fine stop from Brogan with an angled drive across goal.

"This is the first job ticked off and we go again against the Royal Air Force," Birtwhistle said at full-time. "We will be the underdogs but they have a fight coming."

The Army face the RAF in Lincoln on April 4.

'THEY HAVE A FIGHT COMING'



Men's top seed Rev Phil Nightingale (RACChD)



NIGHTINGALE ON SONG IN COURT WIN

SQUASH

TOP seed and former professional Rev Phil Nightingale (RACChD) helped fire the Army men to an emphatic victory at the Inter-Services Squash Championships as they lifted the silverware without losing a match.

A 5-0 triumph over the Royal Navy on the opening day was followed by the same scoreline against the Royal Air Force, and the soldiers' dominance was emphasised by the fact they only dropped two games in the entirety of the tournament.

"We had a really strong side this year, with our top five players all available," team captain WO2 Dean Boys (RLC) told *SoldierSport*.

"Having Phil come in as number one really helped. He was ranked 139 in the world at one point and while he has not played on the professional circuit for ten years, he almost banked us two wins before we even started."

Cpl Adam Smart (REME) also impressed. He won both of his matches 3-0 and the results were never in doubt from the moment he stepped on court.

Army Squash has invested a lot of time and money in coaching and training over the

past three to five years. Four of our top five players have come through that system, which shows it is paying off."

The Army claimed two other team titles during the two-day competition in Aldershot - the women's and under-25s - but missed out on a clean sweep of trophies as the RAF sealed the masters' crown.

Moving forward, the men's and under-25s' squads will play three fixtures in four days during a summer tour of Bristol, while a strong contingent will be hoping to be selected for the UK Armed Forces team that will lock horns with the police, fire service and civil service in a four-way tournament played at Nottingham in September.

2025 INTER SERVICES

MEN

- 1 ARMY
- 2 ROYAL NAVY
- 3 ROYAL AIR FORCE

WOMEN

- 1 ARMY
- 2 ROYAL NAVY
- 3 ROYAL AIR FORCE

UNDER-25S

- 1 ARMY
- 2 ROYAL AIR FORCE
- 3 ROYAL NAVY



FINAL WORD

Catching ZZZs

British peacekeepers in Cyprus reveal how much sleep they got last night – and what stops them from getting more

Seven hours. Between being a mum and switching off from work, getting more sleep is always a struggle

SSgt Samantha McCormick, AGC (SPS)



Eight hours.
The biggest barriers for me are caffeine intake and distractions like watching films or TV series.

LCpl Ben Suckling, RL

I am prone to doom-scrolling on my phone so even when I go to bed, I may not get to sleep for a couple of hours. Last night I only got six-and-a-half hours.

Gnr Louise Patten, RHA



I got about seven-to-eight hours last night. The main issue in shared accommodation is that there are people on different taskings, so someone is always getting up early while others are working through the night.

Tpr George Crossman, RL



On average I will have around six to seven hours. On this tour the UK-Cyprus time difference is a factor because when I talk to my family they are two hours behind us.

Cpl Chris Hulme, REME



I try to get a full eight hours every night as it's vital to a healthy work-life balance. I always go to bed and get up at set times. Last night I got eight-and-a-half hours.

Rev Trudy Hobson, RACChD



What are the nutritional enemies of sleep? Turn to page 19



About six hours – I could definitely improve on my sleep hygiene. Different start times and caffeine don't help.

LCpl John Buchan, RL

LEVEL PEAKS



Always Delivering the Advantage



We help former soldiers improve their quality of life.

Matt lives in Hampshire with his young family. In 2009, in Afghanistan, he sustained a long-term ankle injury when he risked his life to save the platoon, which had come under attack during an operation.

Unfortunately, due to complications that arose from his injury, Matt was medically discharged in 2022 and had to have a below left knee amputation.

We were there to support him when he needed help and provided £1,000 towards the cost of an electrical adjustable bed to improve his quality of life and aid recovery. Matt now works as a head mechanic for a local company and is keeping the same positive spirit that he demonstrated throughout his 17-year Army career.



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