

MAGAZINE OF THE BRITISH ARMY

SOLDIER

SEPTEMBER 2007
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streets of Sangin

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Cover picture (left): Maj Dom Biddick, A Company commander, 1 R Anglian, calls for air support during a fierce firefight in Helmand province. Picture: Cpl Jon Bevan RLC
Background image: Soldiers from 1 R Welsh are carried into battle in southern Afghanistan by Mastiff. See Pages 27-29 Picture: Mike Weston



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"Inventive, I grant you, Ahmed, but who's going to convince Osama these
new Inglisi infidel Mastiffs are not Taliban-devouring hunting dogs."

● Top dog – Pages 27-29

Mastiff bristles on the front line

WE had been told by a number of
sources that troops fighting in
Afghanistan were impressed with
Mastiff, their new armoured patrol vehicle.

And as we found out on an assignment to
Helmand, those claims were borne out on
the ground, where this "top dog" has rapidly
become the soldier's best friend.

Ironically, this Mastiff is half wildcat – the
six-wheeled heavyweight is an improved
version of the tried and trusted Cougar
beloved of the US Marines. It offers
high levels of protection in addition
to lethal offensive options from its
grenade launcher, .50 cal machine
gun and GPMG.

See what soldiers think of it
(Page 27).

THE Chief of the General Staff
puts the case for a clasp to recognise
combat operations in Helmand (Page
7), while a correspondent reckons it is time
to reintroduce the wound stripes first issued
during the First World War (Page 58).

FATHER Nick Gosnell, the HOAY
competition winner in June, wrote to tell
us he was putting his £100 prize to good
use. As he is chaplain to the 1st Battalion,
Irish Guards in Iraq, we were intrigued.

FIRST SIGHT

"To say it was a great boost to the morale of
my troops here is an understatement – they
haven't stopped laughing since I told them."
Sitting in his chapel-cum-office at Basra
Air Station, Father Nick decided to use

the money "to buy more supplies
of 'padre's morale', which I can
distribute wherever I go.

"So on behalf of those to whom
I minister in the battle-group
here, thank you for your generous
donation to our welfare fund and
the difference the money will make."

He added that he was "mightily
encouraged" by the influence that ordinary
soldiers' letters [in the Talkback pages] have
in the hierarchy. "Even the most junior now
has a voice. Thank you."

AND finally. This 100-page issue
contains, for our subscribers only, a
free 2008 *Soldier* calendar. It is a small
token of our appreciation for your support.
Details of how to order a glossy version of
the calendar appear on Page 76. ■

**'A Taliban emptied
his AK47 magazine
at us. Luckily he
was a very bad
shot and missed'**

– Troops tell their
stories, Pages 23-25

ALWAYS LATE ON PARADE?



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Picture: Sgt Will Craig RLC

On the front line: Gen Sir Richard Dannatt, pictured with the CO of 1 Gren Gds, Lt Col Carew Hatherley, right, made his remarks after visiting Afghanistan

Support our troops

Blood spilt in Helmand is in defence of our nation, insists top soldier

THE head of the British Army has called on the British public to support, value and thank its soldiers for their ongoing efforts in southern Afghanistan.

Gen Sir Richard Dannatt made the appeal in an open letter to a national newspaper following a visit to Kandahar, Camp Bastion, Lashkar Gah and Gereshk. The Chief of the General Staff wrote: "I returned yesterday from visiting the front-line troops in Helmand and Kandahar. Although the fight is tough, their morale is sky high.

"I am really proud of our soldiers and marines, and the members of the Royal Navy and RAF who support them.

"They know why they are in Afghanistan and why their mission is important. They

AT-a-glance guide to what CGS said:

- **Special clasp for Helmand**
- **Make our troops feel valued**
- **Afghanistan is a misunderstood war, very different from the unpopular campaign in Iraq**
- **Security of Afghanistan impacts on all of us and on the nation's security**
- **We are fighting the away match of a wider campaign against terrorism**

continue to face the dangers with courage, fortitude, characteristic good humour and growing success." He appealed to the public to continue to support troops fighting "for our defence and putting their lives on the line for the nation".

"Part of that support is understanding what we are doing and why. So if you know a young soldier, why not drop him a line or shake him by the hand? He doesn't expect thanks but I know he would really appreciate it.

"The nation will be giving him a medal – hopefully with a special clasp that says "Southern Afghanistan" – but he wants you to know how he earned it and why he wears it with great pride.

"Anyone who has served with the Army in Afghanistan for more than 28 days is entitled to a campaign medal.

"It's my belief there should be a clasp on the Afghanistan Medal that says Southern Afghanistan. I'm going to argue the case for it. I think that would be proper recognition of the very difficult circumstances and the fighting that's going on here – a way for a grateful nation to say thank you."

Gen Dannatt pointed to differences between the campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq. "Iraq is an unpopular war in which 168 of our Servicemen and women have so valiantly given their lives," he said. "Afghanistan is a misunderstood war. Of course, it is a tragedy when any one of our young Servicemen loses his life on operations, but it is a double tragedy if people in the country don't really know why he was risking it in the first place.

● Continued on Page 8

General wins concession on parcels

GEN Dannatt's comment that he found it "rather irritating" that families wanting to send packages to sons fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq "have to pay a fiver for a two kilogram package" had an immediate effect.

A day after CGS remarked on television during a visit to Helmand province: "Come on Royal Mail and the Post Office – I think you can do that for free," the chairman of Royal Mail, Allan Leighton, said free postage would be granted as soon as possible and

last until Christmas. Gen Dannatt responded: "I am delighted with the support shown by Royal Mail and extremely grateful."

Service families, who typically spend several pounds a week to send morale-boosting items to their soldiers, have campaigned for a free parcel service to operational theatres for years, and a petition has been placed on the Downing Street website.

Campaigners are already urging Royal Mail to make the concession permanent.

We and our allies are taking the battle to Taliban – Gen Dannatt

● From Page 7

“This may seem obvious, but in many people’s minds our involvement in these two campaigns has become blurred. Let me clarify things from the perspectives of Afghanistan.

“The Army’s involvement in that country, and in Helmand province in particular, is about trying to provide security in Afghanistan, in order to enable others to get on and do reconstruction, provide education and healthcare and to create jobs, proper jobs, not just ones fuelled by the evil narcotics trade.

“All this is needed to provide hope and new opportunities for the people and to let them live under the government they voted for. So we are not fighting the Afghans, but we are trying to give a new chance to these people whose country has been blighted and exploited by invasion and civil war for the last 30 years.

“OK, very noble but what has this got to do with us? After all, Afghanistan is a very long way away. Well, the security of Afghanistan impacts directly on all of us and the security of our nation. If we allow the mission to fail or if we allow space for terrorists to train, equip and prepare then they will find it easier to attack civilian targets in the UK as they have done elsewhere around the world, most notably on 9/11.

“In strong partnership with our Nato allies and other friends, including the Pakistani Army on their side of the border, we are striving to prevent our enemies establishing a safe haven. We and our allies are taking the battle to them. But this isn’t just about fighting.

“We and our colleagues in other government departments are working to support and build the Afghan nation so that they have a genuine alternative to being under the power of terrorist or extremist networks like Al Qaeda. All this is easier said than done but we need to be committed to stay the course in Afghanistan.

“The Army is up for it, because we know that the blood that we spill in the deserts of Helmand is in direct defence of our nation – we are fighting the away match of a much wider campaign against terrorism; Afghanistan is just the most pressing part of that campaign. We can be busy, we can be stretched, we can run hot – provided we are looking after individuals.

“And, critically, my soldiers feel valued, supported and thanked for what they are doing,” said Gen Dannatt.

Objectors overruled

Charity defeats ‘nimbys’ in battle for Ashstead

PLANS to transform a house near Headley Court into a home from home for families visiting injured Service personnel could become a reality this month.

Staff from the charity SSAFA Forces Help said they would start work immediately to convert the seven-bedroom property in Ashtead, Surrey, into the new facility and pledged that those visiting loved ones could move into the disabled-friendly house, which is just two miles from the rehabilitation centre, within weeks.

“We are going to have to make a few changes to the property, but I believe that we could have the first people staying there in September or October,” Maj Gen Andrew Cumming, the charity’s controller, told *Soldier*. “We’re going to get cracking on the work immediately.”

Maj Gen Cumming was speaking after SSAFA won a controversial planning battle to convert the house at Grays Lane into a sanctuary for military families.

Members of Mole Valley District Council gave the green light to the plans to applause from scores of serving and former soldiers packing the public gallery at a meeting of the Development Control Committee.

The councillors rubber-stamped the project despite receiving more than 80 letters from Ashtead residents worried about the impact the development would have on the area. The objectors,

none of whom attended the meeting, said they feared a possible increase in traffic, harm to the character of the area and the risk of terrorist attack. But in an unprecedented show of support for the scheme, councillors were told that 600 letters and a petition of 43,000 names had been handed in.

Susan Norton, whose George Cross-winning husband Capt Peter Norton was treated at Headley Court after being seriously injured in Iraq, told *Soldier* she was delighted with the final outcome.

Mrs Norton, who spoke in support of the SSAFA project at the meeting, added: “When Peter was at Headley Court our family had a two-hour journey from Gloucester. But others had to come from Northern Ireland and Scotland. There are still families going through what we have been through and there will be others in the future. It’s been a roller coaster of emotions but we have the house now and I’m just so happy that the families are going to have this support.”

Soldiers were also euphoric at the council’s decision, which, they said, would provide huge support to both recovering personnel and their families.

Maj Alex Cooper of the 1st Battalion, The Cheshire Regiment, stressed: “This is the right result and I congratulate the council for considering the case sensibly. There is a need for a house similar to the one in Ashtead to house families near Selly Oak in Birmingham.”

Outbreak disrupts training

THE foot and mouth crisis put paid to Army manoeuvres as government officials ordered a number of training areas off-limits to prevent the spread of the disease.

The MoD confirmed to *Soldier* that training exercises had been suspended at the Hankley Common and Elstead areas as well as Ash Ranges after cases of the illness were confirmed in cattle on farms near Guildford, Surrey. A spokeswoman stressed that the overall impact on military training had been “negligible” but said the department had

been monitoring the situation. She added: “The Territorial Army had to cut short their firing training at Ash Ranges, but the facility had been due to close for maintenance anyway. One other exercise was moved a few miles away to Minley, near Farnborough in Hampshire, as an alternative location to Hankley Common.”

The spokeswoman confirmed that troops had not been called upon to help with the crisis as they had during the severe outbreak in 2001.



Light show: A sixth C-17 is expected to join the Royal Air Force's fleet at Brize Norton by the end of next year

Lightening the load

Operational strain on air fleet to be eased by arrival of sixth Globemaster

HARD-pressed troops on operations are set to benefit from the extra air support provided by a new C-17 Globemaster, the MoD has announced.

Defence Secretary Des Browne insisted that the aircraft would provide a "significant boost" for troop transport operations as well as improving overall effectiveness. The C-17 will join the Royal Air Force's five-strong line-up. The fleet has proved to be invaluable in theatres such as Iraq and Afghanistan. As well as transporting soldiers, the US-made Globemaster has been used to move kit, including Apache attack helicopters and Tornado fast jets, to and from theatre.

News of the latest procurement follows concerns among senior politicians about the RAF's increasingly hard-pressed transport aircraft. Members of the House of Commons Defence Select Committee recently said they had "real doubts" over whether the fleet could bear the strain of operations.

As reported in *Soldier*, the MPs suggested that more C-17s could be procured to bolster the fleet, but pointed out that the production line could soon be closed down.

Mr Browne was adamant that the additional Globemaster would bolster the RAF fleet when it arrived at Brize Norton in Oxfordshire at the end of next year. He said:

"A sixth C-17 will provide a significant boost to our ability to transport troops and equipment wherever they are needed."

● A new two-star divisional-level HQ being formed at York will lead the

Regional Command Centre South in Kandahar, Afghanistan. Mr Browne said in a written ministerial statement that the new HQ 6 Division would have a core of 55 Service personnel.

Pilots at a premium

SENIOR officers have launched a bid to raise the profile of the Army Air Corps amid concerns that fewer soldiers are putting themselves forward as pilots.

With the current busy schedule of ops, military chiefs are worried that the Army's airborne assets have become less visible to troops on the ground than they once were and are looking to "re-engage" with would-be recruits to the corps.

"With the operational tempo at its current level, we feel the Army may have lost contact with who we are," said Col Bill Sivewright, the deputy chief of staff at the Directorate of Army Aviation in Middle Wallop. "They don't see our aircraft apart from, for example, the Gazelle in the safety role at Batus in Canada."

"In addition, the end of battalions going through Northern Ireland has meant that we have lost some of the visibility we had. We need to regain that contact with soldiers."

"But we are working on hard operations in difficult environments, and doing the job well," he added. "It is an interesting time – we have never been so sought-after."

Lt Col Chris Stewart, who heads up the personnel section at the Middle Wallop-based directorate, also stressed that troops with flying potential would be considered.

He emphasised that the corps, which is celebrating its golden anniversary this year, relied heavily on NCOs to fly its highly sophisticated fleet of aircraft.

He added: "The Army is unique in the sense that it has more soldier pilots than officer pilots. The Royal Air Force and Royal Navy only allow officers to fly."

"We are dependent on our soldiers and they have not been coming forward over the last few years. We have embarked on a campaign to re-engage with the Army."

● Aim high – Pages 49-51

UNDER Big Ben

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

Danes bolster Afghan mission

BRITISH soldiers serving on the next tour of southern Afghanistan will be bolstered by more troops from Denmark, Defence Secretary Des Browne has confirmed.

Speaking shortly before MPs began their summer recess, the Defence Secretary revealed that a Danish battle-group would operate under the command of 52 Infantry Brigade when it succeeds 12 Mechanized Brigade in October.

Mr Browne added that more Viking vehicles would also be shipped to theatre and would be manned by soldiers from The Queen's Royal Lancers and the Royal Marines.

He added that by the end of the year about 7,800 UK personnel would be deployed in Afghanistan.

Missing you: Numbers of soldiers going Absent Without Leave (AWOL) have plunged by more than half over the past three years. According to figures revealed by Armed Forces Minister Bob Ainsworth, 1,275 soldiers have gone AWOL this year compared with 2,330 in 2006 and 3,030 in 2004. Mr Ainsworth, who recently succeeded Adam Ingram in his post, was responding in a written answer to a question from MP Nick Harvey.

Home from home: Thirty Service families found themselves in hotel rooms this year while repairs to their homes were carried out. Veterans' Minister Derek Twigg said that prime contractor Modern Housing Solutions laid on hotels for short periods in cases where significant repairs to Service accommodation needed to be carried out.

Eyes in the sky: The new Watchkeeper unmanned aerial vehicle system is expected to be in service by 2011, Armed Forces Minister Bob Ainsworth has confirmed. In a written answer to MP Ann Winterton, Mr Ainsworth also revealed that the project was expected to cost in the region of £840 million.

Enemy fire kills three

Hostile action claims lives of British trio in Iraq

SUMMER operations in Iraq claimed the lives of three British Servicemen as terrorists continued their efforts to block progress towards peace.

LCpl Timothy "Daz" Flowers REME died after being hit by shrapnel in an indirect fire attack on his Basra Palace base on July 21.

Cpl Steve "Eddy" Edwards of the 2nd Royal Tank Regiment was killed ten days later when a roadside bomb exploded near his Warrior armoured vehicle.

On August 6, Pte Craig Barber of the 2nd Battalion, The Royal Welsh, was killed during a night op against terrorists mounting mortar and rocket attacks.

LCpl Flowers, who was 25, had been serving with the Irish Guards battle-group at Basra Palace. He was in the vehicle park when the base came under attack. Remembered by commanders as a consummate professional who was happiest on ops, the NCO had been on his second tour of Iraq.

Lt Col Michael O'Dwyer, CO of 1 IG, said: "He worked with an unswerving dedication regardless of the unpleasant conditions of southern Iraq.

"Not only was his job physically tough, but the mental strength required to work out in the open, when the threat of indirect fire was so high, was enormous."

Cpl Edwards, who was a member of 2 RTR's Badger Squadron, had been on a night patrol in the Mustashfa district of Basra when he fell victim to a roadside bomb. He had been checking on the safety of soldiers in his Warrior when he died.

An experienced NCO, the 35-year-old had served in the Balkans and Northern Ireland as well as the Iraq war of 2003. He was due to be promoted later this year. Married with an 18-month-old son, he had been in theatre since May and had been working under the command of the 4th Battalion, The Rifles.

Lt Col David Catmur, CO of 2 RTR, said Cpl Edwards would be remembered as "a tankie to the core" who was "proud, loyal and professional".

He added: "His years of experience and kind-hearted nature will be a great loss to us all. He epitomised all that is good about our soldiers."

Pte Barber, who was 20, had been



● LCpl Daz Flowers



● Cpl Steve Edwards



● Pte Craig Barber

driving a Warrior armoured vehicle when he was killed by rifle fire in the Al Fursi district of Basra City.

The married father had joined the Army in 2004 and had already completed a tour of Iraq. He had recently qualified as both a driver and team medic.

His CO, Lt Col James Swift, said: "Craig had taken part in the whole spectrum of operations on this tour. He died as he lived, working for others and helping to protect them.

"Craig married Donna in August last year and was looking forward to their first wedding anniversary – he had arranged his leave in order to be there."

● Police and marine accident personnel are investigating after an Army cadet died when her boat capsized at Lochcarnan, South Uist, in Scotland.

The Coastguard mounted a search operation for Kaylee McIntosh after she was reported missing following the incident on August 3. She was taken to hospital in Stornoway, but later pronounced dead.

Kaylee, who was 14, had been among 40 colleagues from the 2nd Battalion, Highlands Army Cadet Force HQ from Aberdeenshire taking part in the training. Four adults and seven other cadets were in the boat when it capsized.

Mercians form up

SOLDIERS from across the heart of England are looking forward to an exciting new era as they usher in the last of the Army's super regiments on September 1.

As this issue went to press, The Mercian Regiment was due to be officially formed at a ceremony in Tamworth attended by representatives from antecedent regiments The 22nd (Cheshire) Regiment, The Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters Regiment, The Staffordshire Regiment and the Territorial Army's West Midlands Regiment.

Consisting of four battalions, including one Territorial Army unit, the Mercian's mix of light role and armoured infantry is well equipped to live up to the regiment's "stand firm and strike hard" motto.

Under its new cap badge of a double-headed eagle and Saxon crown, the regiment will continue to draw its strength from Cheshire, Worcestershire, Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Staffordshire.

● See October's *Soldier* for an in depth look at the Army's latest line-up.

Perks of province

THE British Army has begun a new chapter in Northern Ireland with the creation of a peacetime garrison and commanders have stressed that troops deployed there will enjoy a competitive benefits package.

While accommodation charges, contribution in lieu of council tax (CILCT) and food charges will now mirror those on the UK mainland, all Northern Ireland-based Service personnel will receive a £5.60 a day NI resident supplement.

And, because car insurance is historically more expensive in Northern Ireland than elsewhere in the UK, soldiers based in the province can expect to be refunded the difference in cost of cover compared with a central London postcode.

Single and married unaccompanied soldiers will be granted a dozen free journeys to the mainland a year while married accompanied soldiers will be granted three family journeys. Trips include travel at public expense to the airport or ferry terminal plus the ticket price and onward travel costs to the UK destination.

All serving personnel will also be granted four Northern Ireland long weekends on top of their yearly allowance, while those taking up a posting can expect perks including excellent accommodation and top-quality healthcare.



Hitting back: Gunners from 19 Regiment RA fire in support of operations in Helmand, a deployment which has increasingly attracted critical media reports on the levels of casualties suffered by British soldiers

Misleading

MoD rejects newspapers' Afghan casualty claims

THE Ministry of Defence has played down reports that casualties in Afghanistan are reaching critical levels after a series of claims in national newspapers.

The Department insisted it was "ridiculous" to suggest that statistics for injured soldiers were being hidden, adding that figures for those hurt on operations were routinely published.

The response came in the wake of a series of critical media reports, which suggested that British troops were suffering high casualty rates on ops in southern Afghanistan.

A spokesman for the MoD stressed: "While we do not publish statistics for all personnel who require minor treatment, we do record details for all personnel admitted to our field hospitals with more serious injuries and with diseases."

"To record every minor treatment is unnecessarily bureaucratic and our medics, who are first-class, would prefer to spend their time treating people."

The rebuttal came after Defence

Secretary Des Browne opened fire on the *Daily Telegraph* for a series of articles claiming that the casualty rate in Afghanistan was now approaching the level of the Second World War.

The Defence Secretary disputed newspaper revelations that losses were running at ten per cent, claiming that the figure was "nearer three per cent".

He also scotched claims that troops had a one in 36 chance of dying on tour, dismissing the figures as "completely misleading", while lambasting an editorial asserting that the Government had no clear strategy in theatre.

Mr Browne said in a letter to the newspaper: "I have been committed to being straight about the human cost. I am deeply saddened by every death and injury. I am absolutely clear why our troops are in Afghanistan; no one who sees the magnificent work they are doing could not be. We are there because the people need us and their government wants us."

● BRITISH troops in Jamaica have been helping with the clear-up operation after the 130mph winds and heavy rain of Hurricane Dean battered the Caribbean island.

Soldiers from the 1st Battalion, Grenadier Guards, who had been on Exercise Red Stripe when the storm struck, stayed on in the capital Kingston to restore power to the British High Commission and help clean up debris. As this issue went to press, there were also unconfirmed reports in the media that soldiers had to be pulled back from jungle manoeuvres in Belize.

Hammer blow for Brits in Helmand

Ongoing operations in southern Afghanistan claim lives of five soldiers

RESOLUTE soldiers have been remembering the contributions of three respected colleagues who became the latest fatalities in the battle to bring stability to Afghanistan.

LCpl Alex Hawkins, of the 1st Battalion, The Royal Anglian Regiment, and Sgt Barry Keen, of 14 Signal Regiment, were killed during contacts in Helmand province in late July. Days later Pte Tony Rawson, 1 R Anglian, died after falling victim to Taliban fire.

Sgt Keen, who was a communications specialist with 245 Signal Squadron, died from his injuries on July 27 after a mortar round landed on his compound.

The 34-year-old senior NCO, who was from Gateshead, had been taking part in Operation Hammer – an offensive in the Upper Gereshk Valley – in support of the Afghan National Army.

Sgt Keen had served 18 years in the Army and had previously taken part in operational tours including Bosnia and

Northern Ireland.

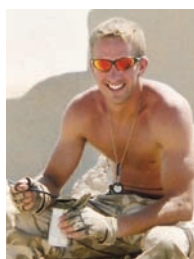
Lt Col Steve Vickery, CO of 14 Signal Regiment, said: "During his tour of Afghanistan, Barry had proved himself a dedicated soldier with a flair for helping others.

"This trait had been strongly evident throughout his career and typified a man who always thought of others before himself. He died doing a job he loved."

LCpl Hawkins, who was 22, was killed after his Vector vehicle was caught in an explosion in the outskirts of Sangin during a routine patrol on July 25.

He was airlifted to Camp Bastion but died from his injuries.

Two other soldiers were injured in the blast, which happened as the patrol was returning to base.



● LCpl Alex Hawkins



● Sgt Barry Keen



● Pte Tony Rawson

Originally from East Dereham in Norfolk, LCpl Hawkins had been in the Army Cadet Force before signing up for Regular service in 2003 and had proved an impressive soldier from the outset.

Completing a tour of Iraq as a rifleman, he qualified as a sniper last year and had proved himself highly capable during battles with the Taliban while on ops in Helmand.

His battalion colleague, Pte Rawson, died during a firefight north-east of Sangin on August 10. Two other soldiers were wounded during the contact.

The 27-year-old, who lived in Essex, had joined the Army in 2002 and had already completed a tour of Iraq. He had also served on worldwide exercises and had been involved in several contacts with the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Lt Col Stuart Carver, CO of 1 R Anglian, paid tribute to LCpl Hawkins as a "natural leader and one of the most promising soldiers of his generation".

The commanding officer added: "Never to be forgotten, he will go down in regimental history as a true professional and a close friend who we feel privileged to have served and fought with.

"He leaves behind some fond memories and a lasting legacy that we all strive to live up to.

"Our sincere condolences are with his family and friends."

Of Pte Rawson, Lt Col Carver added: "He was a young man passionate about his job with a big heart and trustworthy personality who died courageously in combat. He was a true Viking who we will never forget.

"Our sympathy and thoughts are with his fiancée Louise and his family and friends at this very difficult time."

Training tragedy

A PROMISING young recruit was among three Armed Forces personnel to die after a Royal Air Force Puma crashed during an exercise in the Catterick area.

Pte Sean Tait, who was 17 and on the Combat Infantryman's Course, died from his injuries two days after the helicopter went down on August 8.

The teenager was among nine Army personnel on the aircraft.

Two other recruits sustained serious injuries in the accident, which also claimed the lives of two RAF personnel – the helicopter's captain, Flt Lt David Sale, and crewman Sgt Philip Burfoot – both from 33 Squadron at RAF Benson in South Oxfordshire.

A full investigation of the circumstances surrounding the tragedy is under way and is being conducted by both military and civilian authorities.

Pte Tait, who was from Castlemilk in

Glasgow, had joined the Infantry Training Centre in July and had already impressed instructors.

His commanding officer, Lt Col Mike Thornton, of the 2nd Battalion, The Rifles, recalled: "His sharp sense of humour and gritty approach to infantry training are just the qualities we need from today's young infantry soldier.

"While his loss has been a hard blow to all of us, it pales into insignificance compared to the loss that his family must now contend with."

Brig David Clements, Commandant of the Infantry Training Centre, paid tribute to all those who had been involved with the rescue effort after the crash.

He added: "The police, ambulance and mountain rescue services all provided a superb response and we are grateful for their exemplary actions."



● Pte Sean Tait



Picture: Sgt Will Craig RLC

Dirty work: Sand and dust is thrown up as a company of Grenadier Guards deploys on Operation Chakush (Hammer). The op, aimed at driving the Taliban extremists out of the Upper Gereshk Valley of Helmand province, resulted in the deaths of Sgt Barry Keen, 14 Sig Regt, and Gdsm David Atherton, 1 Gren Gds

Supreme courage under fire

A MORTALLY wounded officer battled to get back into position to co-ordinate his comrades' counter attack against a ferocious Taliban onslaught.

Capt David Hicks, of the 1st Battalion, The Royal Anglian Regiment, remained resolute despite his injuries after his base came under attack from rifle fire, mortars and rocket-propelled grenades in Sangin, Afghanistan, on August 11.

The experienced officer, who was the 2iC of C (Essex) Company, died despite being evacuated to the main base at Camp Bastion for medical treatment.

Capt Hicks was commissioned in 2002 and had served with the Grenadier Guards in Bosnia as well as his regiment's 2nd Battalion in Iraq.

He had deployed to Afghanistan's Helmand province in March and had been involved in several contacts with Taliban fighters deep in enemy territory.

Lt Col Stuart Carver, CO of 1 R Anglian, paid tribute to Capt Hicks as a dedicated, loyal and conscientious officer who would be sorely missed.

Lt Col Carver added: "It is typical of him that he led from the forward position during the attack on his company in order to best direct the battle and provide an inspiring example.

"Even after being mortally wounded



● Gdsm David Atherton



● Capt David Hicks

his only concern was to get back into position to control the fight – highly professional and with a genuine concern for his soldiers, he typified the highest standards of leadership.

"Our sincere condolences are with his family and friends at this most difficult of times," Lt Col Carver concluded.

● **A SELFLESS** soldier gave his life to allow his comrades to advance after opening fire on a Taliban position with a Javelin anti-tank missile.

Gdsm David Atherton, of the 1st Battalion, Grenadier Guards, was shot after smashing the enemy with the weapon during a fierce firefight in Afghanistan's Helmand province. His actions, during Op Hammer near the village on Mirmandab in the Upper Gereshk Valley, allowed his comrades

to press ahead and advance safely. Gdsm Atherton's friend, Gdsm Carl Fairclough, summed up the soldier's selfless attitude. "He was a good mate who you could trust with your life," he said.

Known to his colleagues as Jaffa, Gdsm Atherton joined the Army in 2002 and had already clocked up operational experience in Iraq and Bosnia. Originally from Manchester, the 25-year-old soldier had been serving in the anti-tank section, 3 Company, as part of Battle-group South.

Lt Col Carew Hatherley, CO of 1 Gren Gds, remembered Gdsm Atherton as a capable soldier who was "a real character and a good friend to all who knew him".

He added: "Whether he was conducting ceremonial duties in London in his tunic and bearskin or fighting in combats, he was proud to be a Grenadier.

"During his time in Afghanistan he had been operating in austere conditions and the harshest of climates. He had risen to the difficult challenges, given selfless service to the nation and died doing what he loved."

Col Angus Watson, CO of the Battle-group South, said Gdsm Atherton's loss had been keenly felt. "Gdsm Atherton died as his company was going forward, bravely taking the fight to a determined enemy. He will be sorely missed," he said.

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Superstar trooper

Cavalryman targeting *X-Factor* record deal

A GIFTED soldier-turned-singer is poised to hit the right notes after being tipped by bookmakers as one of the favourites to win a recording contract on ITV's *The X-Factor*.

Tpr Ryan Idzi, of the 1st The Queen's Dragoon Guards, has been earmarked as one of the early front-runners for the top talent show.

And with bookies William Hill already offering tempting odds on him winning the contest, anyone fancying a flutter could be quids in if the soldier, who served in Iraq with the 20th Armoured Brigade, shows top form.

"He's obviously a quality lad, without a doubt," a William Hill spokesman told *Soldier*. "He looks the part and he can sing. We're so confident that he will make the final 12 that we're not even giving odds for that."

"Ryan is going to get a massive amount of publicity based on the fact that he has served in Iraq, so we're offering 20-1 for him to win the show."

Tpr Idzi, who is based in Osnabruck and drives a Scimitar armoured vehicle, started singing to entertain his mates while based in the desert.



Picture: Cpl Anthony Boodock/RLC

The 22-year-old admitted he was nervous about performing in front of the *X-Factor* judging panel, headed up by the infamous Simon Cowell, but he

said he had already been put through the gruelling test of singing for his peers.

He added: "I was made to sing by my squadron sergeant major. If I can sing in front of everyone in the sergeants' mess, then four strangers are not going to make a difference."

"At first my friends didn't believe that I was going for it, but now they are really chuffed. This is good publicity for the regiment and they are fully behind me."

Tpr Idzi, who sang *Ain't No Sunshine* and *Lean on Me* in his first audition, admitted that he had been heavily influenced by the big band sound.

"I try to mimic lots of styles but I mostly listen to Robbie Williams and Frank Sinatra, although I've been told I sound like Craig David," he added.

Tpr Idzi is the second soldier from 20 Arm'd Bde to try for the *X-Factor*. Last year LCpl Kevin Wilkins, from the 5th Battalion, The Rifles, tried his luck on the talent show but failed to make it past the audition stage.

However, the soldier, who is originally from Cardiff, insists that he would continue with his Army career even if he goes on to win the £1 million recording contract. "I wouldn't give it up just yet," Idzi concluded.

● Festival fever – Pages 84-85

Guardsmen die in blast

SADDENED members of the 1st Battalion, Irish Guards have been remembering the lives of two experienced soldiers killed on an operation in Iraq.

LSgt Chris Casey and LCpl Kirk Redpath died when a roadside bomb exploded close to their Snatch Land Rover near the Rumaylah oil fields, west of Basra.

The British soldiers, who had been escorting a convoy from neighbouring Kuwait, were widely regarded as highly capable and thoroughly professional NCOs, who had been determined to leave Iraq a more peaceful place.

LSgt Casey had served with the Irish Guards on operations in Kosovo and Northern Ireland after joining the Army nearly a decade ago. He was on his second tour of Iraq, having previously taken part in the 2003 war.

The married father-of-two, who was 27 and originally from London, was also a gifted musician in the Pipes and Drums and had played at prestigious events including the Edinburgh Tattoo.

He had been due to return to the UK this



● LCpl Kirk Redpath



● LSgt Chris Casey

month and had been tipped by commanders for promotion.

LCpl Redpath signed up for the Army in 2003 and had served on exercises all over the world. Originally from Romford in Essex, he had deployed to Iraq in May and had been serving as a member of the battalion's Intelligence Cell, attached to Badger Squadron of the 2nd Royal Tank Regiment.

Like his colleague, the 22-year-old was also a talented musician and a side drummer in the Pipes Platoon.

In the past he had been selected to play

the bugle in the famous Ceremony of the Keys at the Tower of London.

Lt Col Michael O'Dwyer, CO of 1 IG, described LSgt Casey as a capable professional and devoted family man who always had time for others.

The commanding officer said: "For much of the time of his tour, LSgt Casey was involved in training the Iraqi Army."

"He had hundreds of soldiers hanging on his every word, not surprising given his enthusiasm and genuine interest in their wellbeing."

"He was a doting family man and our thoughts and prayers are with his wife and young children."

Of LCpl Redpath, Lt Col O'Dwyer added: "He was a larger than life character, well-known for his slightly cheeky approach and cheerful disposition."

"Notwithstanding the fact that he worked in the Intelligence Cell, he knew that in order to maintain the credibility of his briefings he needed to take part in patrols himself. He was the perfect role model to every Irish Guardsman."



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Sangin street cred

Young Vikings push Taliban from Helmand heartland »

The Sangin sights: Pte Mike Bigmore, 1 R Anglian, scans the town from the roof of a house devastated by last summer's warring



Report: Karen Thomas
Pictures: Mike Weston

AS we cautiously patrolled between Sangin's traditional mud-walled compounds, nothing outwardly distinguished the men in full battledress from any other British soldiers in Afghanistan.

Identical uniforms blended seamlessly with the sand-coloured narrow alleyways of the small, unremarkable town, which clings to a thin strip of fertile land bordering the Helmand river valley.

But, just as last summer's ferocious fighting shattered Sangin's obscurity, this summer's tour dramatically changed the young lives of A Company, the 1st Battalion, The Royal Anglian Regiment. With an average age of 19, the youngest Viking company found itself in the thick of combat within weeks of deploying on Op Herrick in March.

The Taliban had doggedly kept its grip on its southern heartland as civilians in the Sangin and Upper Gareshk valleys fled the fierce battles. With spring's arrival came the threat of an enemy offensive and for the first time a first-line infantry regiment, 1 R Anglian, would lead the battle-group in northern Helmand. A Coy underwent a baptism of fire in Nowzad as soldiers fresh

Main picture, Best foot forward: Cpl Chris Hazell heads for the streets of Sangin; Below, left to right, Pre-departure: Pte Stephen Nicholls and Pte Niki Waites get ready to go out on the town; Vigilance: LCpl Werner Van Der Merwe remains alert for Taliban trouble; Price of a loaf: Lt Graham Goodie chats with bazaar traders



from Pirbright fought their first firefights before breaking the Taliban's tenacious hold. After three months of operations, often tabbing for hours in a 50C heat with 60lb on their backs before engaging enemy fighters, the Vikings cleared the way for residents to return to their homes.

Now striving to maintain a fragile peace on the streets of Sangin, Maj Dom Biddick, OC, A Coy, hoped his men's performance had proved they were up for Op Herrick.

"We trained bloody hard and thrashed the guys until they had a mental recognition of how robust they really are. They have shown themselves to be as aggressive and competent as any other soldiers in the Army," he told *Soldier*, emphasising how his troops' self-discipline, fighting spirit and tight bonds were a direct result of being exposed constantly to life-threatening danger.

"Helmand will leave an imprint on these guys, especially as they deal with such a level of violence, injury and death. It really forces you to understand the value and fragility of life, and what a great gift it is."

We continued our early morning patrol through Sangin's bazaar as rays of sunlight filtered through the desert dust kicked up by local traders displaying their wares. Persistent children badgered the British soldiers for souvenirs as their fathers proffered fat watermelons and plush silk carpets for a "good price".

But evidence of recent warfare still littered the town as we took a break in a compound with bullet-riddled walls, gardens of rubble and shattered glass windows. Recollections of close-quarter battles were just as real for 18-year-old Pte Craig Hill.

"My strongest memory of Helmand will be fighting on the ground and seeing people getting hurt. But I'm proud of being with 1 R Anglian and fighting alongside my mates instead of staying in England and doing nothing."

Acts of courage during their first firefights were not uncommon for the Fighting Ninth teenagers and Pte Sam Hicks, 19, won the praise of his colleagues for his bravery.

"I was silly enough to climb onto a roof in full view of the Taliban pinning down a section. I put fire down on

the enemy so they could extract but it was my first time in a contact so it was a bit of a shock," he admitted.

Although going outside the heavily fortified camp in the spring would have been unthinkable, the summer Sangin streets opened the troops up to different dangers. Cpl Chris Hazell outlined the difficulty of sending out foot patrols to gain the trust of Afghans trickling back to their homes while remaining vigilant to the threat of a RPG strike or suicide bomber.

"If we're going to get anywhere here we have to get the locals onboard because

they'll end up with the Taliban if we alienate them. We have to temper any action, which is difficult because you don't know where the Taliban are and you might accidentally walk into them just around a corner."

Lt Col Stuart Carver, CO and battle-group commander, acknowledged the majority of Helmand's population was undecided on who they should support but he remained optimistic Afghans could be won over.

"There is still a fear of the Taliban and that we are going to leave but there has been a huge change in attitude and now people are willing to engage with us," he said, explaining how the enemy is increasingly dependent on recruiting foreign fighters.

"It's a pretty tough environment because of the heat, casualties, limited contact with home and pressure of never knowing when the next attack will be. But you can take things into your own hands and it's all still to play for. There's a real sense that, if followed up by the politicians and aid agencies, we're well on the way to success."

The young Vikings have already shown that 1 R Anglian is as tough as anyone in taking the fight to the Taliban. Now they have to engage in a different battle to secure long-lasting peace for the people who want to live free in Sangin. ■

'I'm proud of fighting alongside my mates instead of staying in England and doing nothing'





On a Shura footing

**Sangin elders gather again under
Afghan National Police protection**

Interview: Karen Thomas
Pictures: Mike Weston

It was the first time Maj Dom Biddick, OC A Company, 1 R Anglian, reported to the weekly council of Afghan elders that Sangin had not come under Taliban attack since their last meeting.

Fierce fighting to push enemy forces out of Helmand's Sangin Valley had kept most leaders of the surrounding communities away from the governor's house at the district centre. But the fragile peace that had enveloped the town during the previous month was beginning to entice residents into resuming their normal lives.

Under the watchful guard of the Afghan National Police (ANP), the Shura – or “council” – assembled in a more relaxed atmosphere. It has been a traditional local government forum for residents for many generations but this was possibly the first time the elders had watched the progress of farm irrigation projects on a Microsoft PowerPoint slideshow.

Maj Biddick explained the British Army's role of supporting the district governor, Afghan National Army (ANA) and ANP but said more could be done to keep the Taliban away if civilians got involved as well.

“We're utilising the Afghan means of communicating, exchanging ideas and reaching a consensus, and the photographs show our genuine coordination with the ANP and ANA. The elders are opinion-formers but although the Shuras were happening when we arrived in Sangin, they had a much lower turnout. Now they are gaining momentum and elders are coming from a wider area of up to 20km away,” he told *Soldier*, adding how this was an indication of the growing confidence of the population in the effectiveness of British and Afghan operations.

But the collaboration with local forces had not happened overnight and the ANP, in particular, had suffered from a poor reputation. Arriving in Sangin when

the fighting was at its fiercest in May, Sgt “Tiger” Gardner, 1 R Anglian, was tasked with mentoring an ANP platoon in conducting police operations. He paid tribute to his charges, who had been targeted by the Taliban, and their hard work in retrieving their tattered name.

“The police already had the necessary core skills so I had a workable product and just needed to bring the best out of them. The high of my work has been getting feedback from the soldiers that the police are doing the correct search drills. For the ANP to be seen doing their job well is really good for their reputation but it has been a team effort,” Sgt Gardner said of the police officers who were now providing protection for the Shuras in the district centre.

The evident rapport between the ANP and their mentor was also fundamental to building wider relationships and trust between two vastly different cultures.

With nine tours and 25 years with the Army under his belt, Sgt Gardner was keen to stress the key to his success with the ANP was largely forgetting about the differences and just treating them as he would want to be treated.

“I have learnt from them that we worry too much about the culture. Be yourself because they respond well to that and if you worry about offending them then you are bound to put your foot in it.”

Capt Catherine Fisher, R Signals and civil-military cooperation (CIMIC) officer, agreed that the Afghan civilians she worked alongside were “much more clued up and relaxed” about the differences and didn't take offence. After two months of liaising with the community elders on development projects, she was also impressed with the civilians' growing recognition that they could influence the Taliban with the support of their own authorities.

‘We're utilising the Afghan means of communicating, exchanging ideas and reaching a consensus’

“The governor tells the people not to cooperate with the Taliban and the slideshows of progress are beginning to hit home. The talks are moving from security to new reconstruction and development projects and the representatives at the Shuras are saying that if we start a project they will keep the Taliban away. It just needs villages to stick together,” she explained.

But battling enemy propaganda is almost as difficult as battling the fighters themselves, especially as residents still fear terrible retribution for supporting the Nato coalition should the former regime take back control. Against the threat of renewed violence, the majority of Afghans remain undecided on whom to support. One way to allay those fears is through actively helping them rebuild their communities while increasing the competency of the ANA and ANP.

“We've killed a lot of Taliban but we need the tolerance and, eventually, the support of the people,” admitted Maj Biddick. “Afghan civilians need to be reassured that we are committed for the long haul, as the Taliban tell them that we don't have the stomach to stay.”

The Shura slideshow continued to project photos of the progress in wiring new lighting for the Sangin bazaar and in clearing rubbish from the streets.

But these ripples of reconstruction take on a greater significance as Afghans from all walks of life and British soldiers work together to chase away the remaining Taliban shadows. ■

Main picture, Attentive: Afghans weigh up what the British have to offer against the threat of Taliban intimidation; **Below, left, Reaching out:** With the help of an interpreter, Maj Dom Biddick, 1 R Anglian, builds a rapport with community leaders. **Below right, In safe hands:** Sgt “Tiger” Gardner, 1 R Anglian, lends his experience to the ANP protecting the Shura



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Postcards from the edge

Fighting talk on Herrick's front line



Interviews: Karen Thomas
Pictures: Mike Weston

THE front line in Afghanistan's Helmand province is easy to find – it's either just outside the camp gate, metres away from your bed or you're actually sitting on it in body armour 24 hours a day.

Nowhere is safe from the gunsights of the Taliban. Every soldier knows it's 360-degree warfare and there is no front or rear. The probability is that they will be engaged in a firefight at some point of their tour during which they must be a soldier first.

As troops trained for the front line find themselves in regular contact with the enemy, men and women from the support units have also found themselves swapping their spanners for a Minimi machine gun or steering wheel for a rifle to fight alongside their comrades.



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LCpl Ben Matyszuk, RLC fitter section driver

I WAS attached to 1 R Anglian when they were clearing Sangin of Taliban. A guy came over and asked if I could give him a hand and I thought it was to move some crates but it was to carry a ladder on a foot patrol. As we were going through Sangin we came under contact and I put a fresh magazine in my rifle and fired along with everyone else into the enemy position. We extracted back and started patrolling in a different direction. Some sappers were blowing a compound door and we had two choices on where we could provide cover after the blast – Taliban RPGs shot up the position we didn't take cover in. When I came out here I thought I would be firing my weapon but not on a foot patrol.

SSgt Mark Blow, RE attached to 1 Gren Gds

WE were moving up to clear around 24 compounds when we came under fire from small arms and RPGs. I had to blow a hole in a six-foot wall so we could destroy the position firing on us. I set the safety fuse going but I was left holding a burning fuse attached to the detonator, which I had to get rid of very quickly. We moved up to another compound but very accurate fire pinned us down – every time we peeked round the corner small arms would go off. Three Grenadier Guards crossed a 25-metre stretch of open ground to get eyes on the enemy's firing position. I threw some cover smoke but as they ran the trees near them were being ripped apart by fire – I still don't know how they got through unhurt.

2nd Lt Merlin Hanbury-Tenison with Cpl Les Binns and Tpr Lee Dobbs, Light Dragoons on Scimitars

WE were out in Helmand when we found a large fort in a village that we knew would offer some excitement. We'd already destroyed some mortar plates that were firing on us with a Javelin missile and tried to find a route into the fort to goad the enemy to engage us. I was leaning out of the wagon when a Taliban emptied his AK47 magazine at us. Luckily he was a very bad shot and missed me but then another Taliban fired an RPG that was so close I could have reached out and touched it. We returned fire with the 30mm gun and general purpose machine gun (GPMG) while I fired rounds at the enemy from the turret. We were there for about an hour under rocket fire before we withdrew.

Cfn Oliver Parker-Grater, REME recovery mechanic

WE were on an operation with 1 R Anglian, tasked to clear an area of Taliban. As the troops were moved up in Vikings, we had to go with them in case we were needed for the vehicles. As soon as the infantry dismounted they immediately came under fire. All the Vikings manoeuvred into an extended line, including us, to cover the troops pushing forward. As they cleared the compounds, we drove up behind them providing fire support. This went on all day with untold contacts including incoming mortars landing just 200 metres away. In the end a big contact with more mortars kicked off for about 15 minutes and we had to lay down a lot of fire. When it got dark we hid in the desert but I really enjoyed it.

LBdr Chris Heath, RA attached to 1 Gren Gds Operations Mentoring and Liaison Team

WE were tasked as the fire support team (FST) on an operation near Garmsir. We spent seven days on the Joint Tactical Air Coordinator (JTAC) hill protecting the camp and were initially fired upon by enemy machine guns. But, as the week progressed, the accuracy and rate of fire increased until the enemy brought in heavy machine guns, RPGs and mortars. We fired everything we had, getting as many rounds down on the enemy as we could. We called in some big firepower, including fast air A10s and Apache helicopters, and were the first FST to observe the Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System (GMLRS) being launched. It decimated the target and huge lumps of rubble went flying everywhere.

Pte Joseph Tremaine, 1 R Anglian WMIK driver

THE weapons mounted installation kit (WMIK) is a target and the Taliban will attack it. It can be frustrating to be the driver because you need to stay in the driving seat in case you are needed, for example, to evacuate a casualty. But I'm trained to use the mounted machine gun and if you see the enemy up close, you have to get your rifle out. My first contact was on Op Silicon when we came under attack while providing cover for the ground troops. An RPG exploded over our heads and we had incoming mortars. As the attack intensified, we fired the .50 cal and GPMG but eventually we called up Javelin. The Taliban fired RPGs again, which gave us a lock for the missile – after that, everything went quiet.



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Top dog

Tankies lead Mastiff to front of pack in battle for Helmand »



Grrrr!: Mastiff's vicious snarl is just a warning of its savage bite

Report: Karen Thomas
Pictures: Mike Weston

TALIBAN fighters are reeling from the ferocity unleashed on Afghanistan's front line by the Hound of Helmand.

Moving menacingly at the head of a convoy snaking through Camp Bastion's gates, Mastiff embodied the indomitable British bulldog fighting spirit as it deployed on yet another operation. After just a few months in theatre the new breed of armoured truck is proving to be a battle-winning revelation for troops in combat.

Swapping tracks for six wheels, Falcon Squadron, 2nd Royal Tank Regiment, has been taking Mastiff for more than a walk in the park. It has terrorised the Taliban with its firepower, catching enemy forces on the back foot with its mobility across the rugged terrain while shrugging off retaliatory attacks.

Lt "Monty" Beaumont said Mastiff's capabilities initially took everyone by surprise before it rapidly became the troops' best friend.

"Mastiff is an incredible show of force and on our last operation the Taliban couldn't throw anything back at us. It dominates the high ground, it's robust, well protected and its mobility does scare the enemy as we can move across the land pretty much unhindered," he told *Soldier*, describing how foot soldiers have also taken to the fierce new pet.

"If it goes out of sight, the infantry will pick up the pace to keep up. Inside the vehicle they have relative comfort because they can cool down and sort themselves out after a patrol, which is really important when patrolling in the heat of the day.

"It actually inspires the troops working in and alongside the vehicle – everyone here in theatre wants a piece of Mastiff," Lt Beaumont added.

Cpl Thomas Bond was on the Mastiff

'It's one of the best vehicles the Army has in terms of protection and saving lives'



quick reaction force. He agreed there was an incredibly high demand for 12 Mechanized Brigade's newest asset, especially as its grenade machine gun (GMG) offered supreme fire support for the ground troops.

"It's one of the best vehicles the Army has in terms of protection and saving lives. And it acts as a very strong deterrent. If the Taliban see Mastiff coming, they move out of the way – they won't stand and fight."

But the new arrival is quite a different vehicle for Falcon Squadron, which had been training on medium armour Scimitars with the infantry in Canada and Belize. When duty called at short notice they found themselves working alongside Royal Logistic Corps' drivers on a spanking new set of wheels in their first Op Herrick tour. Yet Maj Nick Cowey, OC, never doubted his squadron would take Mastiff by the scruff of the neck and push it to the absolute limit of its pedigree potential. He added the key was ensuring everyone stuck to the basics they learnt during last year's training.

"You can change the vehicle and the location but you are still left with a group of blokes who can do the job that's required. It exonerates the decision to put Mastiff into the hands of the Royal Armoured Corps," Maj Cowey explained, adding how his men had to





Main picture, The comfy box: Relaxing in Mastiff's air-conditioned safe haven, The Royal Welsh discover the origins of its nickname; **Bottom left, The Hounds of Helmand:** Mastiff strains at its leash as it heads out of Camp Bastion on operations; **Bottom right, On top:** Taming Mastiff's massive firepower

quickly adapt to going eyeball-to-eyeball with hostile forces.

"I told the lads they must be a soldier first and foremost and, in addition to all the Mastiff preparations, they must be able to shoot straight and be fit enough to last

long days. When Mastiff is static at the forward observation bases (FOBs) it comes under sustained direct and indirect fire.

"It's a really close fight in there with the Taliban just 100 metres away. For tankies that's close range, as we're usually looking

at the enemy from 1,000 metres."

With 2 RTR and the RLC letting Mastiff off the lead to mark its territory, the Taliban have quickly found themselves confronted by a savage beast whose bite is far worse than its bark. ■

Cpl Ben Roder, 2 RTR, tells his Mastiff front-line story . . .

"We were tasked as fire support to the 1st Battalion, The Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters Regiment clearing the Taliban from a small village and establishing a FOB. We swept through the village with no resistance and pushed onto the high ground to overwatch the troops preparing the base. When the Taliban realised what we were up to, they attacked. We took sporadic small-arms fire and RPGs from a tree line just 50 metres away, so Sgt Cude and I put down rounds from the .5 heavy machine gun and grenade machine gun.

There was a massive enemy attack a couple of days later as they tried to take back the village and destroy the FOB. Some of the infantry were just ten metres away from the Taliban, who kept coming until the last man, throwing everything they had at us. I eventually had to dismount and use the general-purpose machine gun on the ground to get more firepower down on them. It was a six-hour fight that felt like 15 minutes, although my ears were throbbing after I took off my headset.

It was the first time we'd been so close to the enemy but we got straight into using our basic skills and drills. As for this vehicle, at first I didn't have much confidence in it because it's a truck but now I think Mastiff's worth its weight in gold."



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Dam defenders: In range of Taliban mortar fire, soldiers from 1st Battalion, The Royal Anglian Regiment, adopt a brisk pace as they return to base after conducting a patrol to protect the Kajaki dam – a strategic asset that is crucial to reconstruction in southern Afghanistan

Kajaki kings

Vikings conquer Sangin Valley's Dead Zone »



Report and pictures: Cpl Jon Bevan RLC

SOLDIERS call it the Dead Zone; a remote area in Afghanistan's Sangin Valley where silent settlements bear witness to intense fighting.

This is a land familiar with war – three decades ago the Russians were here. Now dwarfed by the mountain peaks of this inhospitable region, British troops move between their observation posts and the deadly detritus of a past conflict. Scores of mines still litter the land; the empty trenches of the former Soviet invaders still scar the landscape.

As part of the International Security Assistance Force's (Isaf) Task Force Helmand, soldiers from the 1st Battalion, The Royal Anglian Regiment, are charged with defending the Kajaki dam, a strategic asset crucial to reconstruction in Afghanistan's volatile southern region.

The daily work of these soldiers revolves around watching and waiting, tabbing and fighting in a deadly, round-the-clock game of cat-and-mouse with the enemy.

In a month of constant action, the Taliban has unfailingly attacked all but one of the British patrols. Working from a main base at the dam, Isaf troops rotate between bread-and-butter infantry work on the ground and keeping watch from observation towers high on the mountain slopes.

"The routine of foot patrols is physically and mentally demanding in this tough environment," said Maj Tony Borgnis, OC



of B (Suffolk) Company, which has been given the arduous task of taking the battle to the enemy.

“But the resilience of these young men is truly remarkable – the regular patrolling keeps them fit and active. Despite months of intense operations, they are still as eager to fight as though it was day one of the tour.”

Maj Borgnis was speaking as his troops prepared for yet another excursion into hostile territory. In the early hours of the summer morning, they set out on a 4km tab to the target, a suspected Taliban compound.

Bolstered by British sappers, combat medics and soldiers from the Afghan National Army (ANA), the Vikings were looking to deal a body blow to enemy forces by denying them the use of their valuable weapons’ caches.

“Yesterday’s patrol was tough, as we had to run about 2km back to the base, but it was a good one,” said Pte Martin Bradbury, a light-machine gunner from 2 Section, as the assaulting troops left their base under cover of darkness.

With each of them carrying 80lb of kit and weaponry it promised to be a demanding few hours in dangerous conditions.

Maj Borgnis expected the enemy fire to

start around 0520. His expectations were met ten minutes early when Taliban rounds rained down on the former Russian trenches where British troops were providing covering fire to ANA troops conducting the clearance mission.

The British forces responded in kind, hitting back harder. With Nato aircraft circling overhead and dropping 500lb bombs on the enemy, mortar rounds fired from the main British base slammed into advancing insurgents.

As explosions pitted the ground, a sniper moved silently between positions to ply his lethal trade, stopping only for a few covert puffs on a cigarette.

The 80-minute exchange of fire was so intense that machine guns were overheating. In one trench Pte Oliver “Dusty” Hale, who was protecting his unit’s left flank, had to break from the trigger to drench his weapon with gun oil, a thousand used cartridges already carpeting the trench floor.

As soldiers from the ANA finished their clearance op, the Anglians began to pull back from the trenches. With the sun up, they no longer had the cover of the night and braved lethal fire in a 500m dash across open ground.

The troops’ pace slackened, but remained brisk, as they hit the cover of a dried-up river bed, although everyone was aware that they were still in range of Taliban mortar fire.

But the soldiers reckoned that at least ten enemy fighters had been killed and could reflect on a mission accomplished as they headed back to base.

Five hours after setting out, they finally approached their camp where, having stripped off soaking body armour, they sat down to breakfast.

There was satisfaction at a job well done but with the sun chasing away the

last coolness of the morning, minds were turning towards future actions. There was an air of confidence among the troops that progress was being made.

“Today’s patrol has been very successful in that no British or ANA casualties were taken,” reflected Maj Borgnis. “But furthermore, we are now gaining the upper hand in these situations due to our superior knowledge of the ground, which was once to the advantage of the Taliban.” ■

‘Yesterday’s patrol was tough as we had to run 2km back to base, but it was a good one’

Main picture, Heated exchange: Pte Oliver “Dusty” Hale protects his unit’s left flank during an 80-minute firefight; Above, Counter-attack: 2 Section, B Company returns fire with interest

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Goodbye and good luck

Final chapter in Britain's 15-year mission to bring peace to Bosnia »



In the beginning: British troops deploy as UN peacekeepers in the catastrophic aftermath of the former Yugoslavia's break-up



Steel support: Eventually based in Banja Luka metal factory, British troops spent 15 years standing up for civilians in war-torn Bosnia; **Bottom left, Moving on:** Packing up Banja Luka metal factory and British military involvement in Bosnia; **Bottom right, Through thick and thin:** Tomas spent 14 years working as an interpreter for British generals; **Far right, Remembrance:** People of Banja Luka erect a plaque in tribute to British forces in the park in the town centre

Report: Karen Thomas
Pictures: Soldier archive

NO Hollywood fanfare trumpeted the happy ending for British Forces in Bosnia but the fact that they could slip away quietly, unnoticed by most civilians, was a greater tribute to their hard work.

Closing the gates of Banja Luka metal factory for the final time last month signalled an end to a campaign which brought peace and stability to a country savaged by civil war. The packing began six months ago when the EU agreed the Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) government was firmly established, making a British military presence redundant.

The road to EU membership and, hopefully, economic prosperity had begun on the security foundations paved by British Forces in this small but volatile Balkan nation. Watching

Bosnians enjoying Banja Luka's thriving café-culture under a carefree summer sun underlined the peaceful legacy that British troops have left behind.

Overcoming initial hostility when moving to the immense metal factory in the Serbian stronghold of Srbska Republica in 1996, the "Brits" persevered for more than a decade to stabilise a country of four-and-a-half million people. More than 70 British Service personnel gave their lives in the cause.

With an estimated 200,000 civilians dead and almost two million forced from their homes, the international forces had their work cut out. But a genuine affection grew between the British soldiers and hundreds of civilian employees who have passed through the metal factory gates during the past ten years.

‘In the chaos they were a rock I could lean on – that’s why I have such huge respect for them’

Big-hitting generals including Sir Mike Jackson, Sir Michael Walker, Sir Freddie Viggers and the current CGS, Sir Richard Dannatt, are unlikely to forget the feisty,

no-nonsense English teacher Elizabeta Tomas, who started work as their interpreter in 1993.

“They were professional, reliable and caring, and you knew where you stood with them. In the chaos they were a rock I could lean on and that’s why I have such huge respect for them,” Elizabeta told *Soldier*, adding how fellow locally-employed civilians greatly appreciated the fairness and respect their employers showed them.

“They did a good job and made a difference. Even at the very end they were educating their employees in the skills needed to get another job.”

Raising the expectations of what Bosnian employers will offer, combined with the UK standard of training, will hopefully spread to all parts of a country experiencing around 50 per cent unemployment. That level of skill and professionalism will be essential if BiH is to become a member of the EU and draw a firm line under its brutal past.

As for the British Army, there can be few modern soldiers who have not at some time passed through BiH, witnessing atrocities, bringing relief to so many and, finally, leaving. Capt Leigh Coy, REME, served in BiH in 2000 and





Bosnian employees have the final word on the British legacy:

Aleksandar Gedan, *Five years with Defence Fire and Rescue Service*

"The British brought peace to this area, making it stable and secure for future economic development. I was sent to the UK to train as a MoD firefighter and now have the highest qualifications in Bosnia. The local authorities can use our skills to improve their service, as our fire incidents and loss of life are caused by poor equipment, standards and rescue procedures."



Branko Paurevi, *Seven years as a mechanic*

"I was a Croatian refugee and working here helped me to get back my home in Banja Luka. I'm pleased to have worked with the British and working on a variety of equipment has expanded my skill and experience. I'm now a Croat working with Serbs but we are just ordinary people with lives to lead in a destroyed economy that now needs to be rebuilt."



Izeta Nikoli (Zizi), *11 years as a cleaner*

"Before the war, I had a responsible job as a manager but the British could only offer me work as a cleaner. However, I would not swap back to my old job. Our working environment was completely different and much better to what we had before. The British also participated in many humanitarian events to help our community. It must be good to be a Brit at times like this."



2002. Helped by his civilian employees, he was packing up ready for August 31 when the keys to the metal factory were handed back to the owners.

"The fact that we were able to close up and walk away in good order was down to what all the guys over the last 15 years have done," he said, adding that finishing Operation Althea on a high was extremely satisfying. "It's a great feeling to wrap this campaign up because it's the closure of a chapter that's important to the Army and people at home."

For Bosnians, life has returned to normal but only they can work towards rebuilding their economy destroyed by conflict. Despite recognising that British troops can no longer help them, many civilians expressed their genuine regret at the prospect of waving the last green uniform aboard the final flight home.

"It's a sad and happy moment to see them go," explained Elizabeta, as she reflected on her 14 years working with the Army. "I will miss them as friends who truly wanted to make this country better. But I'm happy because we don't need foreign troops anymore and we're ready to move on."

"I was here to welcome the British and now I wave them goodbye." ■

Briefly, Brits in Bosnia:

1991 – Bosnia and Herzegovina's three main ethnic groups – Muslims, Croats and Serbs – begin conflicting struggle for political power as the former communist Yugoslavia breaks up

1992 – Muslims and Croats form an alliance in opposition to the Serbs, which leads to civil war and ethnic cleansing on all sides

• The Serbs begin a bloody three-year siege of the capital, Sarajevo

• The British Army deploys as UN peacekeepers (BRITFOR) tasked to deliver humanitarian aid across the war-torn country

1995 – The Dayton peace agreement finally stops the fighting

1996 – The British, now based in Banja Luka's metal factory, lead the Nato-led Implementation Force (Ifor) in Serb-dominated northwest BiH

2004 – British forces lead the NW Multi-National Task Force with 600 troops as part of Eufor, the EU-led military operation

August 31, 2007 – Britain closes its 15-year Bosnia campaign, as the country starts down the EU membership road



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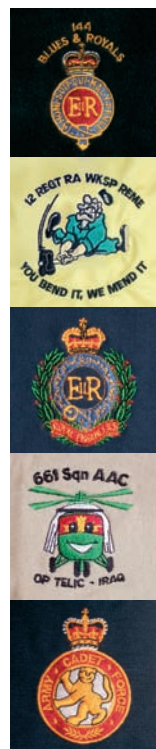
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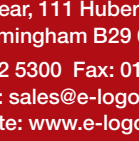
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From war to peace



Future face of the Army in Northern Ireland »

Moving on: Op Banner, the British Army's longest-running military campaign, came to an end on July 31

Report: Andrea Webb
Pictures: Soldier archive

CHARLIE Charlie one – this is Zero. Operation Banner is terminated. All call signs acknowledge. Over.

As Capt Paul Walkley, 1 Staffords, issued the final order of Operation Banner over the radio network from the ops room in 39 Infantry Brigade's headquarters at Thiepval Barracks, Lisburn, the longest chapter in British military history quietly closed and a new one opened.

After a bloody 38-year conflict which claimed the lives of more than 3,600 people, political progress has prevailed and Northern Ireland is finally facing the peaceful and stable future so many of its population dreamed of but never thought they would live to see.

One example of just how far the province has progressed in recent years lies in the fact it was named one of the "must see" travel destinations for 2007 in the latest edition of the *Lonely Planet Bluelist*. A glowing report stated: "There is no better time to see Northern Ireland than now. Freed from the spectre of the gun by ceasefires and political agreement, it is abuzz with life; the cities are pulsating, the economy is thriving and the people, the lifeblood that courses through the country, are in good spirits."

With sole responsibility for security sitting squarely on the shoulders of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), the British Army's support is no longer required.

A peacetime garrison of fewer than 5,000 Service personnel will remain in the province and, in common with other parts of the United Kingdom, troops based there will be trained and available for worldwide deployment rather than internal security. But, because of the particular circumstances in Northern Ireland, the military will retain its public order and explosive ordnance disposal capabilities. Essential flying training will also continue.

With combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan dominating the headlines, it is hard to believe that the Northern Ireland we see today was once viewed as the most difficult and dangerous deployment troops could undertake.

During the darkest days of the



Mixed memories: A 2 Queens snatch squad armed with batons and shields prepares to arrest a riot ringleader and, right, British soldiers enjoy a chat with children during a border patrol

Troubles rioting would rage for days on end, gun battles could last for hours, and it was quite common for more than 10,000 soldiers to be deployed on the ground at any one time.

In 1972 there were 1,853 bomb attacks, 10,564 shootings, 1,264 weapons were found along with more than 27 tonnes of explosives and 130 British Army soldiers died as a direct result of terrorism.

As the campaign drew to a close, the Army conducted an internal review entitled *Operation Banner – An analysis of military operations in Northern Ireland* and identified four broad phases to the conflict.

The first period, from August 1969 until around the summer of 1971, was largely characterised by widespread public disorder with marches, protests, rioting and looting, while the next phase, from the summer of 1971 until the mid-1970s, is best described as classic insurgency.

Both the official and provisional wings of the IRA (OIRA and PIRA)

fought the security forces and both had a recognisable structure of companies, battalions and brigades. Protracted firefights were common. The Army responded with operations up to brigade and divisional level. The largest of these was Operation Motorman, which was

conducted from July 31 to December 1, 1972 and marked the beginning of the end of the insurgency phase.

The OIRA declared a ceasefire in 1972, which it has never broken, while PIRA began a process of transforming itself into what will probably be seen as one of the most effective terrorist organisations in history.

Professional, dedicated, highly skilled and resilient, it conducted a sustained and lethal campaign in Northern Ireland, mainland United Kingdom and continental Europe. From 1980, its political wing, Sinn Féin, involved itself in mainstream politics. From the early 1990s the level of violence in Northern Ireland diminished gradually. PIRA declared a ceasefire in November

‘From the early 1990s the level of violence in Northern Ireland diminished gradually’



1969 – Army deployed on streets of Londonderry and Belfast.

1970 – Army imposed a curfew on part of the Falls Road area of west Belfast and searched homes for weapons.

1971 – Gnr Robert Curtis, RA, was the first British soldier to be killed by the IRA during the Troubles. Internment without trial was introduced, hundreds of people arrested. Shift from rioting to armed violence.

1972 – Bloody Sunday. NI government suspended and direct rule imposed. Bloody Friday. Army dismantled "no go" areas during three-month Op Motorman.



1974 – More than 30 people killed in Dublin and Monaghan by Loyalist bombs. IRA bombs in Guildford, Woolwich and Birmingham caused death and destruction. Prevention of Terrorism Act was introduced.

1976 – Police primacy. Army now acts in support of RUC.

1979 – IRA ambush killed 18 soldiers and a civilian at Warrenpoint.

1980/81 – Hunger strikes resulted in deaths of Bobby Sands and nine others.

Mid-1980s – Army erects a series of hilltop observation towers in south Armagh.

1985 – Anglo-Irish Agreement.



1994 and, except for a few relatively isolated exceptions, it held and led to the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. A long process of political discussion, negotiation and the decommissioning of IRA weapons followed.

The military's analysis acknowledged the Army did not "win" in any recognisable way; rather it achieved its desired end-state, which allowed a political process to be established without unacceptable levels of intimidation.

The review concluded that security force operations suppressed violence to a level which the population could live with, and with which the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and later the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), could cope.

But as the flag of 39 Infantry Brigade – Northern Ireland's last operational brigade – was lowered for the final time at Thiepval Barracks and replaced by that of the newly created 38 (Irish) Brigade, there was no talk of winners or losers. Instead, the heads of those in attendance at that low key ceremony were bowed in recognition

of a difficult and dangerous job well done, in commemoration of those who were killed or injured doing it and in anticipation of a new era for the military in Northern Ireland.

"Although it is inevitable that after a period of 38 years people will have lots of memories, it is important we look towards the future," said Lt Gen Nicholas Parker, outgoing General Officer Commanding Northern Ireland. "What we should be doing now is turning and facing the direction we are going and looking to see how the military can move from being part of the security forces to becoming part of the community.

"Of course, that won't happen overnight and we certainly don't want to push it," he added. "On the one hand our people have got years of military conditioning behind them which we are going to need to change and on the other the two sides of the community view us from very different perspectives because of history.

"People haven't seen soldiers on the streets for the past two years, except perhaps in South Armagh," he said. "So

ironically, although we are no longer operational in Northern Ireland, it is very possible that there might be more visibility of green vehicles driving about the countryside to and from training areas. It will be an entirely benign sight but it might take people a while to get used to.

"Our main objective now is to allow 19 (Light) Brigade [which recently moved to the province from Catterick] to live comfortably and prepare for operations effectively and for us to re-integrate with the community without impacting on local political processes," he said.

"There has been a real change in Northern Ireland. It is almost as if people are blinking in the sunlight and seeing a new environment emerging. Priorities have changed and there has been a dramatic transformation in people's lives in the past few years. All the indicators are good and things are settling into a new phase.

"From where I sit and with the information available to me, I am absolutely clear that this is a police commitment now, not an Army one." ■

1987 – Eight IRA members killed by British Forces in Loughgall. IRA bomb in Enniskillen killed 11 people during Remembrance Day ceremony.

1990 – IRA launched new tactic, which became known as the "human" or "proxy" bomb.

1993 – Downing Street Declaration signed.

1994 – First PIRA ceasefire declared.

1996 – Multi-party peace talks. First PIRA ceasefire ends with the bombing of London's Canary Wharf district. IRA bomb attack on HQNI.

1997 – LBdr Stephen Restorick, RHA, was the last British soldier to die as a result of terrorist action. Restoration of PIRA ceasefire.

1998 – Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement signed. A bomb planted by the Real IRA in Omagh killed 29 people – the most deadly single attack during the Troubles. Nineteen battalions were involved in public order ops.



2001 – Royal Ulster Constabulary GC became the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

2001-2003 – Three acts of PIRA decommissioning.

2005 – Process of security normalisation and countdown to end of Op Banner began.

2007 – New power-sharing government started in Northern Ireland. Op Banner ended after 38 years and peacetime garrison of fewer than 5,000 troops remains.



Tale of the Troubles

In their own words, British soldiers who served in Northern Ireland share their memories of Operation Banner . . .

Pictures: *Soldier archive*

**Lt Col (Retd) Mike Martin, Royal Hampshire Regiment
Belfast, 1969**

THE situation in Londonderry was getting out of control. The battalion was on leave, having returned from a UN tour of Cyprus. I was with my family in Wales and thought as adjutant I had better ring to see what was happening and was told to "move back here now". There were AA signs on the Severn Bridge saying "All Royal Hampshires and Royal Green Jackets return to base".

All were recalled by telegram and after 48 hours we were only five men out of 600 short. We flew straight to RAF Aldergrove in VC10s – our Land Rovers and trailers came in Hercules. I remember a general saying to me: "The RUC are having a spot of bother. It'll all be over in two or three weeks."

We were rushed up to Belfast where Bombay Street and Cupar Street were being completely burned out. We were made enormously welcome by both sides, they saw us restoring law and order and a degree of sanity. There was no threat to us at all – we felt we were needed.

Twice we had weapons stolen, but the next morning they were returned by the local IRA. That would not have happened 12 months later. The level of bitterness and hatred between the two communities was difficult to describe. I remember writing to my wife on day three saying that "I can't see a solution to this".

**Jack Leyton, R Anglian
Londonderry, 1971**

MY wife, children and I were in married quarters watching the TV when a news flash announced that a Royal Anglian soldier had been shot in Londonderry. To our horror, and at that very moment, a Land Rover screeched to a halt outside the house next door and we saw the

families' officer and padre go inside.

Our neighbour, a private soldier, had been shot in the head while manning an OP in the Brandywell Estate when IRA gunmen fired over 50 rounds at it.

For the next two weeks, my wife (I was away on duty), along with a few others on the patch, did their best to help his pregnant wife and five children, constantly consoling her throughout long nights of worry and looking after her kids and her housework while she visited him in hospital for hours at a time.

Unfortunately, the soldier died from his injuries. Later the same year I was tasked to take items of clothing to our company sergeant major who had been hit in the leg by bullet fragments and was in the Altnagelvin hospital [in Londonderry]. In the ward were four other SNCOs, three of whom had gunshot wounds to the head. I'll never forget the faces and the sobbing of the wives sat by their bedside. Sadly, the three with head wounds did not survive.

**Pte Stephen Burke, A and SH
Newry, 1972**

ONE day, while I was on guard duty, a large hostile crowd started gathering outside the front gates of the camp, chanting and banging on the metal gates.

Things were beginning to get pretty serious and I was expecting us to be sent outside to disperse them. But our officer commanding was a very shrewd leader. Instead of sending the troops out, he ordered the pipe major to the gates with his bagpipes.

The pipe major paraded up and down the barracks playing his pipes, and before long the protesters were singing along and dancing to the tunes. After a while they all walked off and peace was restored. I have always admired the way our OC handled that difficult situation. His innovative and passive method was an inspiration to us all, and I am sure it helped to form bonds with the community.



John Moore, RGJ South Armagh, 1981

WITH only a couple of weeks before our four-month tour was due to end our platoon was given one final operation. Intelligence suggested that IRA units were mounting illegal vehicle checkpoints along the border and we were to stop them.

We were transported from Bessbrook to a spot south of Crossmaglen near the border and from there we patrolled to our various given locations in the dark to set up covert observation posts. Our brick, three men, chose a derelict van in a scrapyard about 150 metres from the border to watch and listen for IRA activity.

Conditions in the van were cramped – during the day we sweltered and at night it got pretty chilly.

As dusk approached on July 16, the third night of our mission, I took the stag position. Moments later our hide was raked by heavy automatic gunfire from across the Irish border. Terrorists had discovered our patrol and used an M60 and Armalite rifles to counter-ambush us. The IRA unit was later thought to be about six to eight strong.

My brick commander Deano was struck by two bullets. I returned fire. After a short but intense firefight I was hit in the upper spine by a high velocity bullet, instantly paralysing me from the chest down.

The other member of our brick was slightly injured but managed to walk out of the yard and was flown by chopper to Musgrave Park Hospital, Belfast, along with Deano and me, both carried on stretchers. The contact happened only ten days before we were due to be reunited with our families back home.

I was very seriously ill and the next day

my parents were taken to Belfast to see me. I was then flown to London to begin a lengthy period of recovery in Queen Elizabeth Military Hospital (QEMH), Woolwich. During the first few days in intensive care I was told that Deano – my friend – had died. He was just 21.

The treatment and care at QEMH was excellent. It had to be as I was to spend almost 11 months as a patient there followed by nearly eight months at the Joint Services Medical Rehabilitation Centre at Chessington.

During this time the Falklands War had come and gone, resulting in hundreds of injured Servicemen joining me for treatment and intense physiotherapy.

The camaraderie and military spirit was surprisingly good and there was always an element of competition with my peers, but as long as I could compete with the

soldiers from the paras (my regiment's old adversary) I was happy. I met one particular para and although by rights we should have kicked off we became friends – besides I couldn't use my legs and he had none to kick off with.

Being presented with my first wheelchair was like attending a funeral on Christmas Day. The excitement of opening a present and taking off the wrapping paper was mixed with the sadness and terror of having to sit in the grotesque thing. I soon learnt to live with my chair and over time realised it had become my new best friend.

In mid-May 1983 I was medically discharged from the Army. That was a poignant day in my life as I had to face civvy street as an incomplete paraplegic. I had to adapt and overcome things on my own – a shock after being looked after so well in the military system. I often think of that fateful night on the border and always remember my friend Deano. I may have left Ireland but Ireland has never left me.

'I was hit in the upper spine by a high velocity bullet'

WO1 Phil Gilbert, 1 Scots Sept 87-Apr 88

ON March 16, 1988, a Loyalist gunman [Michael Stone] attacked an IRA funeral in Milltown Cemetery [West Belfast]. This was an unwelcome escalation in a tense period and meant more attention from residents who were directing their frustration at us, both verbally and physically.

We moved from patrols to blues to form part of a joint patrol with the RUC. On March 19, 1988 we were inside RUC Woodburn waiting to deploy. The funeral cortège of one of those killed at Milltown Cemetery was interrupted by two individuals who approached the cortège head-on in a silver VW Passat.

We all sat quietly, speechless and helpless, within the confines of our armoured Land Rover, enduring the professional commentary from the Lynx pilots. Was this an audacious Loyalist attack like three days before?

We were ordered to move to Penny Lane, a barren piece of land at the back of the shops off the Andersonstown Road. On arrival I stepped out of the vehicle and was confronted by two motionless individuals lying on their backs in the open wasteland, clothed in just their underwear and socks. A car was alight 50m away, burning furiously.

I checked for a pulse on both of the bodies, unaware of their identity. They were both dead. I covered them up with blankets from my vehicle. After a short while the Fire Service arrived and extinguished the fire.

It was then that a chill went down my spine – an armoured plate was identified within the burnt vehicle behind the driver's seat – these were our guys. [The two plain clothes British Army corporals, Derek Wood and David Howes, were attacked by mourners and shot dead.]

I will never forget this incident. To forget would mean that the sacrifice of these men was in vain. ■

Commanding

Special Forces guide award-winning actor's military role in *The Unit*

Interview: Karen Thomas

MONUMENTAL characters such as the US President, Nelson Mandela and a crack Special Forces operative fit onto the athletic frame of Dennis Haysbert like a Saville Row tailored suit.

Standing at 6ft 4in tall, the acclaimed actor is blessed with a military bearing, but Haysbert also has real life insight and the authority necessary for carrying off powerful roles so convincingly on screen.

Catapulted to worldwide fame as American President David Palmer in the huge hit series *24*, Haysbert continues his TV success playing covert operations leader Sgt Maj Jonas Blane in *The Unit*.

The action-packed drama uncovers the shadowy world of military intelligence in which a secret team of US Special Forces soldiers risk their lives in far-flung places to combat terrorism. But the twist to the series is that their own government denies they exist – there's no rescue should their illicit activities go awry.

With his athletic background and commanding air,

Haysbert was an obvious choice to take the Bravo TV show's lead role as troop commander. But he credits his applauded portrayal of the elite commando, code-named Snake Doctor, to a US ex-Special Forces operative.

"*The Unit* is based on a book called *Inside Delta Force* written by Eric L. Haney. He is one of our producers, one of our consultants and my chief adviser," Haysbert told *Soldier*, as he settled into an immense armchair in a London hotel. "He is a retired command sergeant major and 12-year veteran of Delta Force, so for almost everything I do, no matter how much I

love my directors and producers, he is the one that I go to."

Despite shunning athletic college scholarships – the young Californian-born Haysbert instead studied acting at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts – the hard physical training and weapons handling needed to play Sgt

Maj Blane came easily.

"I've been an athlete all my life so I know how to run. I know how to duck and get dirty



performance

and it's fun," laughed the father of two.

"I've hurt everything on my body – ripped my shoulders, pulled quad muscles and hamstrings, sprained ankles and I can't even count the scratches and scrapes and bruises but, as a soldier, you've got to pick yourself up and finish."

Although he never considered a career in the Army, the 53-year-old Haysbert grins at his own admission that some form of "hocus-pocus" is at work on his acting career. He feels he's been "channelling warriors", both political and military, through his film and television roles. Most recently, he gave an immaculate performance as the iconic South African freedom fighter and president Nelson Mandela in *Goodbye Bafana*.

Other silver screen military credits include *Navy SEALs* and *Farhead*, and the quietly spoken actor hinted that more big character parts are on the way.

Starting his career in 1979, Haysbert spent a decade guest-starring in TV shows such as *The A-Team* before his acting break as Pedro Cerrano, a voodoo-practising Cuban refugee baseball player in the movie *Major League*.



Leading role: Dennis Haysbert, centre, assumes the role of a covert operations commander in *The Unit*

His versatility and talent for portraying sensitive personality-driven characters was eventually recognised in 2002 by the Washington Film Critics. They named him Best Supporting Actor for his role in *Far From Heaven* when he was cast as Raymond Deagan, a gardener who strikes up a forbidden friendship with his white female employer in 1950s segregated America.

It's this depth to his gentle nature that prompted Haysbert to stress the role of a soldier's family, which is quietly played out behind *The Unit*'s action scenes. As Haysbert's Sgt Maj Blane leads his men, on-screen wife Molly, played by Regina Taylor, leads the wives in their battle with the fear and uncertainty that their husbands might not return home. "You've got to balance going off to do a mission

with when you come back and have to decompress," explained Haysbert, as he spoke of his admiration for professional soldiers who have to move seamlessly between intense combat and family life. "It was in the pilot episode that I come home and Molly asks 'how was the office?', and I reply 'same as usual'. *The Unit* shows the stress they are under and families in the audience start to empathise with that."

As the eighth of nine children born to deputy sheriff Charles Haysbert and homemaker Gladys

Minor, the actor grew up with a healthy respect for family and duty. He continues to be drawn to characters such as Sgt Maj Blane because "everybody needs protecting".

"I think doing the show is a kind of healing, especially for my nation, because it brings in the families of the soldiers and what they do.

"Sometimes they do things they're not really keen to do but they do them because they've been ordered to," Haysbert acknowledged, going on to praise the work and dedication of all soldiers. "I'm very pro-troops and pro-military but not necessarily pro-war – that's a politician's game.

"It's a dangerous world and I recognise that. So be safe, come home safe and trust that you are respected and honoured." ■

"I'm very pro-troops and pro-military but not necessarily pro-war – that's a politician's game"

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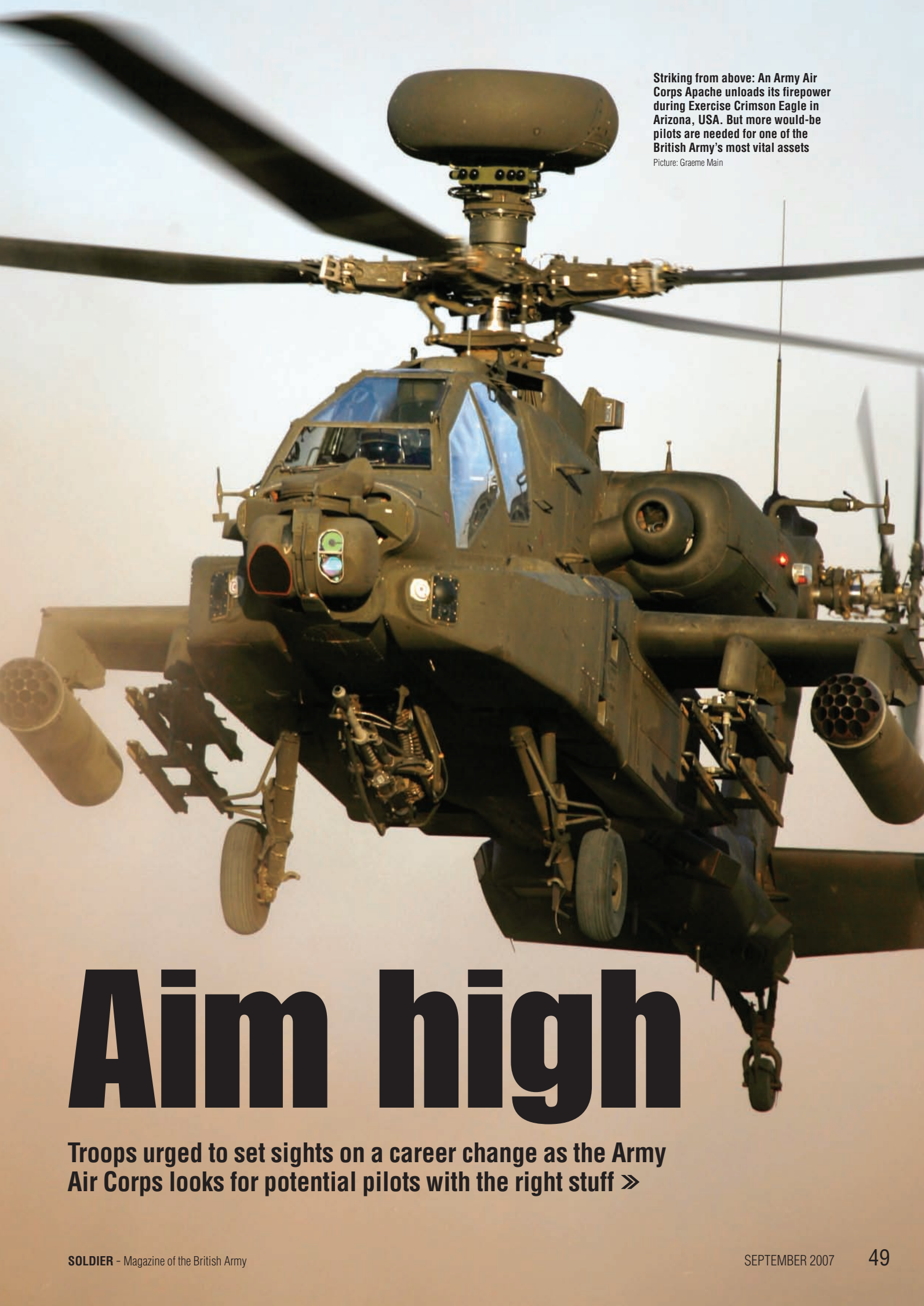
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Striking from above: An Army Air Corps Apache unloads its firepower during Exercise Crimson Eagle in Arizona, USA. But more would-be pilots are needed for one of the British Army's most vital assets

Picture: Graeme Main

Aim high

Troops urged to set sights on a career change as the Army Air Corps looks for potential pilots with the right stuff »



Report: Cliff Caswell
Main picture: Steve Dock

IT was a breathtaking manoeuvre the battlefield helicopter did not look designed to accomplish.

But flying just beyond the astonished families and children of graduating Army Air Corps pilots, the Lynx performed the barrel roll with the grace of a fixed-wing aircraft, the clatter of its blades reverberating across the hangars.

Gazelles in close formation replaced the Lynx at centre stage, their pinpoint precision a testament to the skill of an outstanding display team. It was a perfectly executed routine in the best traditions of the Blue Eagles.

Anyone watching could have been fooled into believing these pilots did nothing but rehearse and perform aerobatics. But displays are only a small part of the work of this vital corps. With an increasingly important role in theatres such as Iraq and Afghanistan,

crews have been getting to grips with new procedures and a demanding work schedule that has overnight placed them at the sharpest end of operations.

"The AAC has established itself as one of the main players in the British Army," said Blue Eagles team leader and veteran Lynx pilot WO1 Barry Jones as he disembarked from his aircraft after the display at Middle Wallop. "To put it very simply, you cannot go into battle without us."

Life with the corps – which marks its golden anniversary this year – has changed significantly in the first decade of the 21st century. The introduction of Apache prompted a re-think in tactics and procedures while high-threat environments in Iraq and Afghanistan have placed new demands on pilots.

Yet these are challenges to which

the AAC crews have risen. Mostly NCOs drawn from a cross-section of trades (including former infantrymen, tank commanders, signallers and chefs), they have won praise for their professionalism and courage on worldwide operations.

WO1 Jones, who joined the Royal Corps of Transport in 1984 and started flying a decade later, has seen first-hand how the role of Army pilots has changed. "The Lynx used to be our attack helicopter until Apache came along, but now the older aircraft is used in roles such as inserting patrols and

extracting casualties."

AAC crews have won respect for the speed with which they have taken on new technologies. Capt Jason Cook, a US Army officer on an exchange programme at Middle Wallop, was astonished at how quickly the rulebook had been re-written with the arrival

'The AAC has established itself as one of the main players in the British Army'

Your Army Air Corps needs YOU

Support from above: Army Air Corps Gazelles fly over Otterburn ranges in Northumberland during a forward air controller exercise

Below right, They did it: Four Army Air Corps helicopter pilots who began their military careers wearing other cap badges and made successful transitions to flying

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Cockpit careers: The Army's line-up



Westland Apache



Westland Lynx



Westland Gazelle



Bell 212-HP



Eurocopter AS 350 BB Squirrel

Illustrations: © Keith Draycott - DeltaWeb International Ltd

of a technologically-advanced attack helicopter and by how the soldiers had taken to flying it.

"The Apache wasn't such a culture shock to the US Army as we've had attack helicopters for some time," he said. "But here the AAC crews have a brand new, very complex machine and everybody is already using it to the best of its capability."

"I joined the Army as a vehicle mechanic," recalled WO2 Mark Taliku, who has just converted to the Apache. "After ten years of that I was going to leave. But I came here in 1999, set about reinventing my career and have not looked back."

"After going through my flying grading I started on Gazelles."

SSgt Mal Malcolm, an instructor with 671 Squadron and a Gazelle pilot for the Blue Eagles, was equally satisfied with his career as a pilot.

"I was a tank crewman in the Royal Armoured Corps before I did this," he

recalled. "I've been flying since 1994."

Apache pilot SSgt Jo Gordon, who was a chef for the first eight years of her Army career, stressed that would-be pilots should not be daunted.

"I never had any doubts that I could fly," she said. "It was all about self-belief and if you want to try for a career in the corps, you should put your application forward."

"You get taught what you need to know in bite-sized chunks," added SSgt Gordon, who is an instructor with 673 Squadron. "The training package on offer is very good."

There are vacancies for those of the right calibre at both soldier and officer level. Fulfilling important roles on all fronts, from surveillance to transport to attack, the next 50 years of the corps history promises to be as interesting as the first half-century. ■

www.army.mod.uk/aac

● See more at www.soldiermagazine.co.uk



● WO1 Barry Jones



● SSgt Jo Gordon



● SSgt Mal Malcolm



● WO2 Mark Taliku

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Jungle rock

Op Herrick-bound Gurkhas put Brunei training to the test »



Sure footing: Soldiers from 2 Rifles defend their quarry base against an advancing company of Gurkhas during exercise Ulu Rajah



Report: Stephen Tyler
Pictures: Steve Dock

CHARGING into the sandy valley's outer edges in the stifling mid-morning heat, the soldiers knew from the crescendo of rifle fire that their arrival into the insurgents' stronghold had not gone unnoticed.

Covering mortar fire and a barrage of smoke grenades bought vital time for the advancing company from the 1st Battalion, The Royal Gurkha Rifles, and the famed Nepalese troops battled to keep their footing as they scrambled for cover down a craggy hill.

With humidity topping 90 per cent and the sun bouncing unforgivingly into their faces, the Gurkhas needed every ounce of physical and mental strength to take the fight to the enemy.

The punishing conditions gave a very real sense of the challenges facing troops on Op Herrick, but the dense jungle billowing to the horizon like an expanse of green cloud reminded everyone present they were not in Afghanistan.

Instead, more than 800 soldiers were deployed in a quarry in Brunei to take part in Ulu Rajah, a biennial combined arms exercise hosted by the oil-rich Sultanate's resident garrison.

After teaming up with counterparts from the Royal Brunei Armed Forces (RBAF), 1 RGR started the exercise by spending four days in the jungle battling a fictional enemy – played by 200 troops from the 2nd Battalion, The Rifles – before the final quarry assault.

Ulu Rajah – which was written and run by staff at HQ Brigade, which commands 1 RGR and is based alongside 2 RGR in Shorncliffe – took on a special significance this time round as it was being used to test the Gurkhas' battle-readiness ahead of their deployment to Afghanistan later this month.

"We came here in the summer last year knowing that we had a fairly free period for training and for transforming Brunei Garrison into something a bit more integrated and efficient," explained 1 RGR's commanding officer, Lt Col Tim Warrington. "Then, of course, Afghanistan came up. Having settled down initially into routine jungle training, we were forced to change course and train to meet the very significant challenge of operations in Afghanistan. Ulu Rajah has given us a chance to go into a series

of unseen activities and look at our procedures. It's a fundamental part of our preparation for operations."

In a garrison renowned for its use of Brunei's abundant jungle for training resident Gurkha battalions, Ulu Rajah posed organisers a dilemma – how could they tailor the exercise to the needs of soldiers who would be fighting on the open ground of Afghanistan rather than in the confined spaces of the rainforest?

The answer was found when the quarry was spotted from a helicopter and closer inspection revealed that its sand and rock surface was not too dissimilar to that found in the hills and plains of Afghanistan.

"We actually tried to shape the exercise so that it made the jungle effectively neutral," battalion 2iC Maj Phillip Hannah told *Soldier*. "We haven't engaged in our normal jungle tactics and have instead tried to work around the periphery."

"The Rifles did a very good job in the sense that none of them got lost and they provided us with a very able foe. It's very difficult to catch us out, but they played the game and were unconventional in replicating some of the tactics we are likely to come up against."

Despite the stark contrast between Brunei's environment and the baking Afghan hills, Lt Col Warrington said the basic skills that Gurkha soldiers have been forced to learn in the jungle would be universally useful.

He was also pleased that an RBAF company, including a squadron of Scorpion tanks, was able to play an active role in the exercise and hoped the partnership would continue in future

'We were forced to change course and train to meet the challenge of operations in Afghanistan'

Clockwise from below, Final preparations:

Troops from 2 Rifles open fire on attacking 1 RGR forces during exercise Ulu Rajah

Air ambulance: A support helicopter flies to the aid of a soldier suffering from heat exhaustion

Joint effort: A combined Gurkha and Bruneian company advances into the sweltering quarry

Return fire: Gurkhas from 1 RGR practise live mortar firing as part of the JWAC course



training. "The point about the jungle is that it is always real and people can and do go down even in routine training," he explained. "If you get it wrong in the jungle then you get into trouble. As an environment for developing personal skills and drills for learning about battle discipline and how to administer yourself, there is frankly no better place."

With Ulu Rajah successfully wrapped up, 1 RGR headed back to the UK where it continued its pre-deployment training over the summer.

And although this month will be the first taste of Op Herrick for many in the battalion, there is no lack of enthusiasm for serving in Afghanistan from soldiers who fought tooth and nail to secure the privilege of joining the Gurkhas ahead of 13,500 other applicants.

"I think it's the ambition of any soldier in the British Army to make a contribution on live operations and the Gurkhas are no different," said Lt Col Warrington. "We have a sense of the environment in Afghanistan and the culture and dynamics that underpin it.

"There are a lot of similarities between Afghanistan and Nepal in terms of the climate, terrain and way of life, so the Gurkha is very comfortable with the prospect of operations there because it's an environment that he instinctively and intuitively understands."

This is a sentiment shared by 2 Brigade commander Brig James Plastow: "The fighting capability of Gurkha soldiers is legendary and I have no doubt that they will win their engagements, but they also have particular linguistic and cultural skills which should prove exceptionally valuable when working with the people of Afghanistan." ■



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TALKBACK

I'm back in Iraq so soon

Brief is best

YOUR letters provide a real insight into the issues at the top of soldiers' agendas . . . but please keep them brief. Emails (mail@soldiermagazine.co.uk) MUST include your name and location (although we won't publish them if you ask us not to). Anonymous letters go in the bin. The Editor reserves the right to accept or reject letters, and to edit for length, clarity or style.

Before you write to us with a problem, you should first have tried to get an answer via your own chain of command. Our postal address is on Page 5.

I WAS on Operation Telic 8 with 20th Armoured Brigade for the full tour from April to November last year. Soon after returning to the UK I was posted to 4 Rifles, and deployed on Op Telic 10 from early in May until December.

I told my superiors I didn't want to return to Iraq so soon, but my OC said I had to go, although other companies had soldiers in the same position who were told they would not deploy if they did not wish to.

What are the rules on tour intervals? – **Name and address supplied.**

Maj Beanie Farrimond, Manning Plans, DM(A), responds: There are no regulations restricting the deployment of Regular soldiers other than those in the last six

months of a 22-year engagement, when only those who volunteer deploy. There are guidelines designed to monitor and manage tour intervals, which allow the chain of command to manage the separated service of soldiers.

PRIZE LETTER

Individual Harmony Guidelines (IHG) are defined as: "The level of separated service that results when an individual has an operational tour interval of 24 months between six-month tours within a programme of routine activities. It marks a level of individual separated service which is likely to be sustainable without long-term damage to morale. It is currently calculated to be 415 days in 30 months."

These guidelines were endorsed by the Executive Committee of the Army Board in 2004 and HQ Adjutant General released a notice in 2005 to the chain of command

regarding the management of separated service. Director Manning (Army) is responsible for compiling the Army Separated Service Report quarterly and Land Personnel Branch directs the chain of command on management of separated service.

The IHG is, as it is described, a guideline for decision-makers; it is not a rule. During periods of high operational commitment, such as the Army is experiencing at the moment, it is accepted that IHG will be exceeded. Some soldiers will experience greater or significantly shorter periods between tours and separated service should be viewed over the 30-month period to assess the cumulative effect.

Wherever possible, the chain of command should act to balance individual activity fairly across their unit and manage individual expectations.

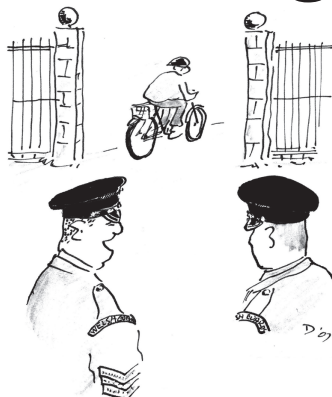
Prisoner of the congestion charge

I AM single, posted to the Welsh Guards in Wellington Barracks, London, and have my car on camp. But I can't drive before 1800 without incurring the £8 congestion charge and unless I am on official business I can't claim it back.

I have friends and family close by but am camp-bound until 1800.

I am aware we get £3.57 a day in Recruitment and Retention Allowance (London) but this is to cover the extra costs of working and living here.

I can claim the discounted congestion rate but would have to change my vehicle insurance and registration from home to work, adding £450 to my insurance. Married soldiers are entitled to Oyster cards. Is there no help for single soldiers?



"I see that Gdsm Eccles has found a way to ease his congestion charge problems."

– **Name and address supplied.**

Brig Jamie Gordon, DPS(A), replies: Transport for London operates a scheme whereby residents in the congestion charge zone are eligible for a 90 per cent discount on the £8 a day cost. Your admin officer will advise how.

But your car has to be registered at your address in Wellington Barracks.

If you choose not to save money on insurance, you are not eligible for a discount or refund, and may be invalidating your insurance by registering the car at a different address to where it is kept.

You should be aware that Oyster cards are not free – those who qualify pay 31p a day or £113.15 a year.

So get your registration sorted and claim your discount before you find yourself in a bit of bother.

Five pages of your letters and emails on issues of the day

Wi-Fi morale booster

SINCE I have been deployed to Afghanistan, wireless internet has been installed in accommodation in more than one camp. It's the best welfare facility I have come across and it has changed the way everyone here feels about the tour.

The service it gives is a level up on what Paradigm provides for the Forces. Soldiers can use the internet and chat on MSN Messenger while in bed. Most chat to families at home on MSN using their webcams and a lot are now using Skype Talk instead of the welfare telephones.

Basically it has replaced the Paradigm Internet phones as a welfare facility. I reckon 90 per cent of the guys have laptops and use it. When the system goes down, which is not often, it has a

big impact on morale. Soldiers pay \$40 a month (which is not a lot for what it provides) and the facility has been approved by Army security.

But why has it taken an individual to create this and why has the Army not pushed Paradigm in this direction? I don't know how much the Army is paying Paradigm but they are not providing the same level of service.

A Royal Signals engineer could set up wireless internet with the right backing from the Army but I don't think Army chiefs comprehend the effect it could have on soldiers deployed for long periods of time.

If the Army is thinking of providing this service it needs to be done now and not later. It's not a lot to ask. – **Name and address supplied.**

Brig Jamie Gordon, DPS(A), replies: Paradigm must cater for widely different circumstances across the three Services. It performs what is asked of it in the contract. MoD has asked both Paradigm and SSVC to run a commercial Wi-Fi pilot project at the Basra COB with a view to rolling out provision to all theatres in the near future.

This will be in addition to internet access provided through the deployment welfare package and not in place of it.

It will be provided to individuals on a pay-as-you-go basis and is outside the MoD contract, although Paradigm has agreed that MoD will be able to monitor Wi-Fi performance on the same basis as contracted provision. Wi-Fi will not replace cabins at this stage because not everyone has a laptop and those who do will not be able to use them in all circumstances.

Our fuel bills are huge

I HAVE written to Defence Estates (DE) twice, but not had a reply. Can *Soldier* please help?

My gas bills for the last year amounted to £918.51. When we moved in, our utility provider estimated our yearly consumption to be £480 but subsequently changed the estimate to £696. The heating system and cooker are major factors in the increase.

The electricity bill for the same period is £573.57. The supplier estimated annual consumption as £240, then doubled it to £480.

An engineer says the boiler system is up to 25 years old and very inefficient.

We informed Modern Housing

Solutions (MHS) in March 2006 that there was no felt beneath the tiles, rendering the upstairs cold and damp, with mould in some corners. I was informed by DE Colerne that there is a project in place to resolve the problem, but no date has been set.

Our quarter is a D-type, grade 3, and in need of a major overhaul.

Although we have been given a new cooker, it has taken nearly a year for it to happen, at considerable cost in fuel bills to me. We had a number of visits by MHS to resolve the issue, but each time, the problem remained.

It took a visit by the head office of MHS in Warminster to decide the cooker should be replaced.

I have lived in three quarters at Colerne in less than two years – the first was sub-standard for condition and size,

the next reasonable but not at grade 2 standard, although we were charged for grade 2 despite appeals; and by the third my family circumstances had changed and I became entitled to our current D-type quarter.

During those two years I have served in both Iraq and Afghanistan and am unhappy that my family has had to endure sub-standard housing.

We really feel some kind of reimbursement would be fair. – **Name and address supplied.**

Brig Jamie Gordon, DPS(A), replies: Your utility bills appear to be excessive and you should contact my staff by telephone. As to your letters to Defence Estates, if they are not responding, you should make a formal complaint. The procedure is set out on their website www.defence-estates.mod.uk

PS...

THE Victoria Cross was founded by Royal Warrant on January 29, 1856 and the first award investiture, by Queen Victoria, took place in Hyde Park on June 26, 1857 – not 1854 as stated in *Soldier* (Barefoot Soldier competition, Book Reviews, July). – T Bell, Birmingham.

We stand corrected. We should have made clear that the deed for which the first VC was awarded – to Midshipman (later Rear Admiral) Charles Lucas RN – actually took place in 1854, on June 21 to be precise. – Editor.

Time to bring back wound stripes

I BELIEVE it is now time to recognise our soldiers' contribution to both campaigns by reintroducing "wound stripes".

In the First World War they were granted to those soldiers who had been injured in combat and were worn on dress uniforms, on the left sleeve.

It is right that those soldiers, sailors and airmen who are injured in combat,



Badge of honour: First World War brass wound stripe with backing

and there are a great many every day in both theatres, are recognised.

I know critics will say that we "don't do Purple Hearts", but I for one feel a deep sense of gratitude to these brave young soldiers who are paid little and recognised

even less. Let's be a bit un-British and shout about our boys' achievements. – **Maj Matthew Botsford, 2iC QDG, Sennelager.**

A lack of sympathy

AFTER 15 years dealing with the Veterans' Agency as a divisional secretary (War Pensions) of SSAFA-Forces Help, and nine years as a member of the area war pensions committee, I was not surprised the agency refused a pension to the widow of a senior NCO killed in a road accident (First Sight, May).

There is an unfortunate tendency for staff to look for points that could count against the claim rather than giving the sympathetic benefit of any doubt to ex-Service personnel. If it was not for the Royal British Legion, SSAFA and RAFA, many deserving cases would not receive due compensation.

I could quote many cases that went to appeal, such as an SAS sergeant – a veteran of 80 drops – whose spinal weakness was ruled by a medical examiner to be due to age, and an former POW grossly ill-treated on the infamous bridge over the River Kwai who was refused a pension. Both gallant men died while waiting for tribunals, which ruled in their favour. – **Capt (Retd) J F Mapstone, Northampton.**

Villains don't pay tax, so why do I?

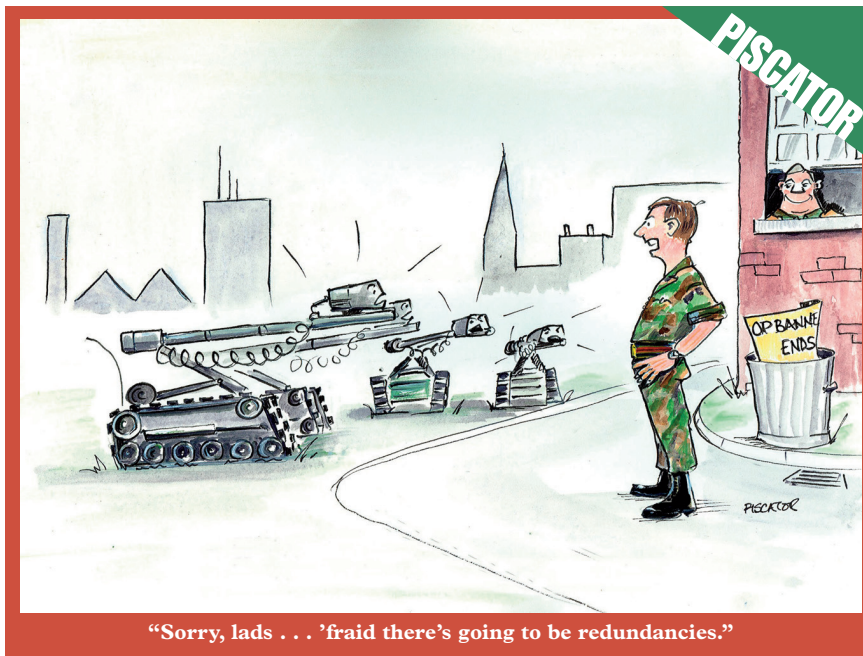
WHEN I bought my house I was sent a council tax pack. It listed groups entitled to a discounted rate, including those with a member of the household serving a prison sentence.

When I asked why soldiers on operations weren't allowed a discount while criminals were, I was told there was no legislation to allow it. But during the first Gulf conflict the Government passed legislation allowing such a discount. Why not now? – **Name and address supplied.**

Brig Jamie Gordon, DPS(A), replies: Council tax concessions are a matter for local authorities. They have the powers and it is up to them how to use them. Some do give a discount.

For prisoners the rules reflect the fact that in many cases they will have no means to pay the tax and that if they don't, councils would be unable to take enforcement action.

There was a reimbursement scheme for soldiers who served in the 1990-91 Gulf conflict, but this was under the former community charge. This scheme was discontinued once the property-based council tax regime was introduced. You will be glad to know the MoD is reviewing how best to provide support for the council tax costs of Service personnel deployed on operations.



"Sorry, lads... 'fraid there's going to be redundancies."



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Promoted, only for my LOA rate to drop

THIS letter may only be of interest to warrant officers and, I think, soldiers aspiring to a commission.

Why, on commissioning, do I receive less Local Overseas Allowance (LOA) than when I was a WO1 the day before?

A Late Entry (LE) captain with two children receives £2,000 less a year in LOA than a WO1 living in Cyprus with the same number of children.

I was told by the LE community (unconfirmed) that LE captains receive a major's LOA rate, and while this is better than a captain's rate, it is nowhere near that of a WO1. We don't change as people and our spending certainly does not go down. – **Name and address supplied, Cyprus.**

Stephen Sartain, AD SP Pol Allowances 4, replies: The reason your LOA rate has reduced is due primarily to the Factor Plan, which is a Treasury-agreed mechanism

used to adjust LOA rates based on the typical lifestyle and spending patterns of a specific "marker rank". The "marker rank" used for other ranks is a corporal, and for officers, it is an Army captain.

Evidence shows that as a group, these two categories of personnel spend their disposable income in different ways. This difference in spending patterns in turn affects the amount of LOA required to maintain their average UK lifestyle.

The LOA of LE Army captains is the same as that of a major. But in this case, you are still subject to a drop in LOA, because although the major's is factored up from that of a captain, your current WO1 LOA is factored upwards to a greater extent from the "marker rank" of corporal. This issue is recognised as a potential weakness and is being addressed by the Strategic Review of Remuneration team due to report in December, with implementation work on agreed solutions during 2008-09.

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or e-mail claims@britishlegion.org.uk to find out how we can help you.

A national panel of solicitors supports The Royal British Legion and specialises in accident claims for members of the Armed Forces.

Mucked about on housing

I AM about to make my eighth forced house move in just over five years and again there are no quarters available.

My family and I accept that postings are part of Army life but it is made more difficult by the housing situation. Needless to say most of the problems could have been avoided if there was not such a desperate shortage.

My most recent application was completed in good time and in one of my regular conversations with the housing department I was told I would not be considered for Substitute Service Families Accommodation (SSFA) until a month after my reporting date, which could then take up to 60 days to process.

I have two school-age children yet I cannot retain my current quarter (due to lack of housing!). It is comforting to know that if I had been an RAF warrant officer I wouldn't have experienced these problems. I don't have much time for



"The real frustration, Edith, is that our mail never seems to catch up."

serial complainers but I feel compelled to write because if I cannot be housed, what chance do junior ranks have?

No doubt I will be quoted rules and

regs which will leave me wondering why I bothered, but when the Army is more stretched than ever before, surely this most fundamental retention issue must be given serious consideration. – **WO1, name and address supplied.**

Brig Jamie Gordon, DPS(A), replies: *It appears that you have been unnecessarily mucked about. Defence Estates should answer all applications for SFA within 15 working days if they are received within four months of the required date. If they are unable to give you an address, they must offer you a Non Availability Certificate entitling you to SSFA for a minimum of 51 or 65 days (depending on whether you are moving within GB or from elsewhere) before you require the accommodation.*

There should thus be no requirement for you to retain SFA at your old station, but you may do so for 28 days if you are waiting for SFA at your new one.

Case for military fostering

WE have been in the Army for 17 years and seen many occasions when a foster family within a military community could have been of help, for example when a single parent is deployed.

When a relative steps in this often results in the child having to leave the military community, which can involve the additional stress of changing schools. A foster family "on the patch" with kids at the same school may make the deployment slightly less of a strain.

When parents have problems at home children might need short-term care. Short-term foster care on the patch

might be better than children going into local authority care. My wife and I would like to help in these situations.

Although civilian authorities may consider military families turbulent, the environment can be stable and well structured.

We approached fostering agencies in Hampshire and the National Fostering Agency, which consider us suitable, but because we are in the Armed Forces and potentially posted every two years we have been advised to try elsewhere.

Do other serving military families currently foster, and if so how did they

(without the involvement of a LA) by someone other than a parent or close relative with the intention that it should last for 28 days or more. The regulations require the parent or others involved in or aware of such an arrangement to notify the LA at least six weeks before the arrangement begins, or if it is to begin within six weeks, they must notify the LA immediately. The LA is then responsible for ensuring the needs of the child are being met. Personnel overseas should approach the BFSWS to fulfil the role of the LA.

The Army Welfare Service (AWS) will provide confidential personal support to individuals considering either becoming fosterers or wishing to privately foster a child, including signposting them to the appropriate authorities or agencies.

Contact your local AWS through the Army Welfare Information Service, which provides confidential information and direction on any welfare problem, during working hours on +44 (0)1722 436569.

go about it? Would the Army Welfare Service consider sponsoring a serving family for fostering training with a local authority but utilise them on a military basis? – **Name and address supplied.**

Brig Jamie Gordon, DPS(A), replies: *Your suggestion is a good one and while something similar already exists in Germany we will take it on to see what might be possible in the UK, for instance through better links to local authorities coupled with the promotion of fostering opportunities in support of military communities in garrison towns.*

Soldiers serving in the UK who wish to become fosterers should contact their local authority (LA) fostering team or a fostering agency in their area.

Details are available in the phone book. The British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) also has an extensive agencies database. SSFA-Forces Help can also provide advice and support. Soldiers serving overseas should contact the British Forces Social Work Service (BFSWS), which acts in the role of UK local authorities. I know this works because I served with a soldier who filled this role.

The other issue concerns private fostering

PS...

I AM a student nurse and recently applied to join the TA, so saw *Soldier* for the first time in July. I see why it has won awards, but should I be surprised at the representation of women? There were 18 images of women and more than 80 of men and just three items had images of women who were both in uniform and not in an advert. One from a game show and one page of cartoons which, though placing nurses centre stage, simultaneously renders them naked and stupid. This leaves just one item, on Page 90, in which a uniformed woman is sensibly presented as a soldier engaged in the job. If we're going to be represented at work, please let it be dignified. – **Name and address supplied.**



Undignified: Cartoon rendered nurses naked and stupid



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AFTER nearly 31 years of service I moved into a staff admin officer post in the West Midlands. Five months later I have still not received a penny from the system although my regiment is paying me by cheque.

I RE-ENLISTED in 5 Rifles after taking a year out. One reason tempting me back was the re-enlist bounty but a year on I am no closer to receiving the money.

I WOULD like to add my support to the letter ("Blue tinge to Naafi", July) regarding the ridiculous number of expats with access to Cyprus bases.

I AM a unit clerk nearing my 22-year point and have had several soldiers posted in with six months left to serve. They have no jobs and have been told to keep in touch for admin purposes only. But they cannot provide a replacement for me until my termination leave. Is it just clerks who don't get "gardening leave" and are expected to work to their last day?

SINCE returning to Germany from a six-month tour in Belize I have not received my local overseas allowance. My unit has me down as being based in Germany, but JPA reckons I am in the UK.

I PUT in for my separation allowance more than three months ago and have had nothing yet. As I spent most of last year away, the least the Army could do is to pay me what I'm owed.

Cost of PAYD

MAY I tell your readers of another disadvantage of the white elephant that is Pay As You Dine (PAYD) in Germany.

In Fallingbostal Garrison we lost our freedom of choice when the Naafi monopoly took over our dining arrangements and now we have lost part of our welfare benefits as well.

We now pay the full cover price for English newspapers. A Naafi representative wrote in answer to my query that the MoD won't support free distribution of newspapers because they are not a welfare organisation.

Garrisons which still have Red Shields are able to buy their papers at the reduced welfare package prices.

I feel someone didn't read the small print on the PAYD contract. – **Naomi Paterson, Fallingbostal.**

I WOULD like to comment on the reply to the prize letter ("My PAYD concerns", May).

The first paragraph of Brig Gordon's

response implies that PAYD was introduced because one group of soldiers were paying for the food of another group. This was a view the MoD sought to promulgate based on, in my opinion, a flawed survey and a desire to not appreciate how, when and where single soldiers took their meals.

PAYD was also introduced for a number of other reasons – not least to seek commercial investment in dining facilities which had been underinvested in over many years by the MoD.

The rationale for PAYD was complex and at times contradictory and I suspect we are now living with the problems of expectation management. As ever, those who were expecting the most will receive the least.

The concept now sees units with a "single supplier" for food and entertainment. It is not right that gambling and the sale of alcohol are used to entice a contractor to supply food to our soldiers. – **Lt Col R Laden RLC, HQ IMATT(SL).**

Where's the compassion?

WHEN my mother was admitted into intensive care last year I wanted to be by her bedside. She died 14 days later and my father, who is disabled, needed help in arranging the funeral.

I had to use my remaining retention and annual leave to support my family. My unit granted me a day and a half of compassionate leave. Colleagues have told me they were granted at least two weeks' compassionate leave. – **Name and address supplied.**

Brig Jamie Gordon, DPS(A), replies: The amount of compassionate leave awarded rests with the CO. The upper limit of four weeks can only be exceeded in exceptional circumstances. I do not know why you were not granted longer compassionate leave but your unit could make the change, if you could persuade them. Ultimately, any soldier who feels they have been treated unfairly has the option to submit an Application for Redress of Complaint in accordance with Army Act Section 180 and following the procedure at AGAI Section 70.

Ease up on us oldies

WE all need to achieve a level of fitness to do the job properly, but some of us have completed a lot of service and suffered a fair amount of wear and tear.

I'm in the Military Provost Guard Service (MPGS) and have problems passing the annual fitness tests because the impact of running on hard ground gives me severe knee pain. But when I run in the gym I have no problems in doing the distance in the time allotted. This is not allowed in the Army, but is accepted in other parts of the Services.

Can't we oldies have a little leeway? – **Name and address supplied.**

Maj Tom Greenwood, MPGS, replies: The answer is in MATT2. Physical fitness is a fundamental requirement to ensure

combat effectiveness, job performance and general health are maintained. The self-discipline required to gain and retain high levels of fitness is inherent in the Army way of life and must be part of the character of every soldier. Fitness improves appearance, confidence, team cohesion and self-discipline and reduces susceptibility to fatigue, injury, mental stress and ill health.

Commanders at every level are responsible for the implementation of MATT2, ensuring that those in their command are fit for their employment role, and are to publish a Physical Training Plan and Directive.

The writer of the letter does not say how old he is, but MATT2 directives show how training and testing changes for different age groups. The unit PTI staff will give advice and assistance where necessary.

PS...

I WAS disgusted by the letter from the obviously young and inexperienced AGC clerk ("Baby-sitting clerks lose out", Aug). All the AGC I have worked with have been more than helpful and fully understanding of the rigours of life in the Infantry. JPA so far has been a good experience for me, and as I was platoon sergeant in a rifle company before moving to recruiting I know a good 90 per cent of the paper/JPA work is solved by the platoon sergeant or commander. Only as a last resort do we approach the clerks. – **Sgt, AFCCO, name and address supplied.**

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Not getting easier

Families can't escape from worrying about their loved ones on operations

REST and recuperation is a mixed blessing for Army families; it's lovely to see your soldier and to have some normal family time, but it's also stressful knowing that you will soon have to say goodbye to them again.

This time together also brings home the reality of what our soldiers are doing and how hard they are working in incredibly difficult conditions.

I know from speaking with families of deployed soldiers and from personal experience that operational tours are becoming harder and harder to bear from the family point of view.

With so many incidents happening on a daily basis in Iraq and Afghanistan, we can't escape from worrying about our loved ones being in such a dangerous place.

There have also been cases recently where the media has released the news of a fatality, including unit details, before the next of kin has been informed. This causes great distress among families within the unit and could be avoided if the media checked with the MoD before they went public.

Ongoing debates over casualty statistics and whether or not the MoD is hiding the true figures are also irritating as they can, in my mind, only result in busy medical staff in the field being required to spend more time filling out forms than actually treating our soldiers.

Unlike the US, UK casualty statistics list only those requiring admission to

hospital, not those who are treated and returned to duties.

Certainly information about casualties should be released, but why do we need to know about minor ailments which don't impinge on operational effectiveness?

The media implied that the numbers of personnel hospitalised during July in Afghanistan and Iraq did not present a true picture of the severity of the conflicts. Weren't 191 hospital admissions, 51 wounded in action and 14 dead enough for them? Herrick and Telic aren't Hollywood movies and these statistics aren't just numbers – they are all someone's spouse, parent or child.

It's more about the media being hungry for a negative story than concern about our soldiers. I wish they would refocus their

energies on supporting the troops and their families and on how the seriously injured could be best cared for in the long term.

One place where you can view positive stories about the Forces is on www.youtube.com, where the MoD has uploaded video clips of units in action around the world.

There are some really encouraging stories about how the British Army is making a difference on the ground, from flood relief in Gloucestershire to mentoring the Afghan Army.

They also give us families a real flavour of how soldiers are living in Iraq

and southern Afghanistan. One clip, aptly titled "Morale in a Box", shows deployed troops opening parcels sent out to theatre by a philanthropic pub landlady who has been coordinating the dispatch of small welfare parcels to unnamed soldiers.

Although post is a crucial welfare service, I am concerned about requests for year-round free postage to deployed personnel as I worry about the logistics of getting the increased volume to troops. There's only so much flying time available and transport is already stretched by operational requirements and getting troops in and out.

Frankly I would rather soldiers had air support on a mission than wine gums and an extra pair of socks from home. Most of those on ops don't need basic items sent to them as they are usually available in theatre. It's a break

from routine and contact with home they crave, so letters, blueys and phone cards are often just as welcome.

The exception to this is Christmas, when the free parcel service is vital.

It is a real morale-booster and work is already under

way to get the 20,000 or so Christmas boxes ready to send out this month so all those deployed will have some cheer on Christmas Day.

In an ideal world a year-round free parcel service to deployed personnel would be lovely but the reality is that, at the moment, there aren't enough aircraft and personnel to make it actually work. ■



A personal view from Catharine Moss, Editor of the AFF Families Journal

"I would rather soldiers had air support than wine gums and extra socks from home"

Want to know more about the Army Families Federation? Log on to www.aff.org.uk

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1 **Make a shopping list:** Plan what you really

need so you will be less tempted to pick up things you don't. Do you buy items only to find you have plenty of them at home?

2 **Check the special offers:** Are there items that can be substituted for more expensive stuff on your list? But make sure you are not buying just because the items are cheap.

3 **Take advantage of BOGOF offers:** Buy One Get One Free offers are commonplace, so use them for deodorants, chocolate and beer.

4 **Buy supermarket own brands:** Often the only difference you'll notice is the price. Basic items can even be produced by the same supplier but in different packaging.

5 **Use your bonus points:** Remember to use them to buy items you need.

6 **Limit your non-essentials:** Reduce the

number of luxury items you buy, such as chocolate and booze.

7 **Visit other shops:** Smaller shops and farmers' markets can be cheaper and fresher than supermarkets.

8 **Eat fresh food:** Seasonal foods are in more plentiful supply and therefore cheaper.

9 **Go more veggie:** Replace two meat dishes a week in favour of seasonal vegetables. You will be amazed at how much you save.

10 **Grow your own:** You can grow vegetables and fruits in small spaces. And have the satisfaction of eating what you've grown. ■

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NO. 790

WIN £100 HOW OBSERVANT ARE YOU?



TEN details have been changed in the latest in the series of drawings by our cartoonist, Chip. Circle the differences in the left-hand image and send the whole panel to **HOAY 790, Soldier**, Ordnance Road, Aldershot, Hampshire GU11 2DU by September 28.

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

Name: (Give initials and rank or title)

Address:

July competition (No 788): First correct entry drawn at random and winner of the £100 prize was **Maj (Retd) A D Corfield, HQ QDG, Cardiff**. Runners-up **Mrs A O'Mahony-Gardener**, Unit Admin Office, JSSU Cyprus, and **M T Furlong**, AFV D & M School, Bovington Camp, Dorset, each win a £25 gift voucher.

The ten differences were: Parachute stripes; turret window; flag detail; additional pen in pocket; spurs on gun handler; MP's armband; tactical recognition flash on marching soldier; pole topper on tent; parachute lines; rider's breastplate.



Winner of our July competition (inset)

THERE were some great captions for July, but our prize goes to LCpl O'Brien, MPGS, RAF Linton-on-Ouse, for "OK, you practise on me getting knighted".

LCpl Jones, from the same MPGS section, sent in "Thanks again for this Silver Stake Award, old boy, but I'll be flying Vampires, not killing them".

We also liked the heartfelt "You must be joking . . . is this really the type of nail I need to hang a picture in my married quarter" from Mrs Kerry Harvey, whose husband is with 1 SG in Münster.

Sgt Matt Sweetman, 3 Bn REME in Paderborn, offered "Use the toothpick on large lumps, Colonel, then floss", and Dave Donaldson, DII IPT, Corsham, came up with "You don't say - only \$20,000 for King Arthur's sword".

Sgt Taff Watkins, AFCO, Northern Ireland,



The Army's elite sumo wrestlers swept the board at the Inter-Services but knew they had to bulk up big time for the world championships

WIN A BOOK: Write your own caption for the photo, above, from our December 1960 issue and send it to us by September 28. The best, in our opinion, will win a copy of **Home Run: Escape from Nazi Europe** by John Nichol and Tony Rennell. (Penguin/Viking, 514pp hardback, £20.)



suggested "To me. To you. To me." The Joint Chiefs of Staff Chuckle Brothers routine needed a little work". From WO2 D Roper, 22 Fd Hosp, Aldershot, came "We were going to put this under your

chair, but what with the new values and standards, initiation ceremonies have become a thing of the past". LCpl Dave Rawlings, 1 RRF, in Celle, went for "They don't like it up em", Captain Mainwaring".

Web watch


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www.blesma.org

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www.ngvfa.com

The National Gulf Veterans and Families Association website.

www.erskine.org.uk

Erskine, caring for ex-Servicemen and women. The charity is currently caring for over 1,000 veterans young and old throughout Scotland.

[www.info@tnauk.org.uk](mailto:info@tnauk.org.uk)

National talking newspapers & magazines. Difficulty reading the printed word? *Soldier* can still be enjoyed in audio format. To receive a free audio sample of *Soldier* contact the National Talking Newspaper Service on 01435 866102 or info@tnauk.org.uk

www.ssafa.org.uk

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www.batls.com

Battlefield Advanced Trauma Life Support – providing training in the management of trauma casualties under battlefield conditions.

www.questonline.co.uk

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www.nivets.org.uk

The Northern Ireland Veterans' Association, providing advice, support and assistance to veterans and families of those affected by the Troubles.

www.army.mod.uk/aws

The Army Welfare Service provides confidential, comprehensive and professional support to Service personnel and their families.

SERVICES

www.armywivesunited.co.uk

Free community site with message boards on a vast array of subjects that affect Army wives. Offering advice, friendship and support. Army Wives United has been online for three years and has around 1,000 active members.

www.enterprisenation.com

Website launched by Redbrick, the UK's leading consultancy for Regional Entrepreneurial Development, to provide information and inspiration to home workers across the UK.

www.forceshomes.co.uk

Finding homes for military personnel. We organise your mortgage, search for your ideal property, manage the complete purchase, arrange the letting if required, and we pay all your professional and legal fees.

www.moddiscounts.com

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www.stft.mod.uk

The Service Families Task Force website contains useful tri-Service information.

www.remerus.co.uk

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The Army Museums Ogilby Trust website, approved by the MoD as the definitive guide to regimental and corps museums.

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Official website of the British Army.

www.armyrugbyunion.mod.uk

The latest information on match reports, fixtures, ticket and equipment sales, and contact details for all Army Rugby Union teams. See how the most popular and successful sports team in the Army is doing.

www.armyaviation.co.uk

A privately-run forum dedicated to Army aviation. The forum is for ALL capbadges associated with Army aviation and all are welcome. Membership is comprised of mainly AAC personnel but we would like to see more REME faces on the site.

www.armysafety.mod.uk

Website of HQ Land Command's chief environment and safety officer.

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Garrison guide

Aldershot

COMEDY

Friday, September 7 – **Brendon Burns**, Windsor Arts Centre, Windsor

Wednesday, September 12 – **Sean Lock**, Windsor Arts Centre, Windsor

Saturday, September 15 – **Andy Parsons**, Windsor Arts Centre, Windsor

Stand-up star: Perrier Award nominee Sean Lock brings his oddball brand of comedy to Windsor on September 12

Saturday, September 29 – Adam Hills, Windsor Arts Centre, Windsor

LIVE MUSIC

Thursday, September 6 – Plain White T's, The Fez Club, Reading

Saturday, September 8 – The Police, Twickenham Stadium, Twickenham

Sunday, September 9 – Cutting Pink With Knives, The Live & Loud Bar @ The Star Inn, Guildford

Thursday, September 20 – Natasha Bedingfield, Hexagon Theatre, Reading

Sunday, September 30 – Sophie Ellis Bextor, The Anvil, Basingstoke

Bulford/ Tidworth

COMEDY

Sunday, September 9 – Ken Dodd, Pavilion Theatre, Weymouth

Friday, September 14 – Barry Cryer, The Lights, Andover

Sunday, September 23 – Lee Hurst, The Lights, Andover

Saturday, September 29 – Jenny Eclair, Southampton Guildhall, Southampton

LIVE MUSIC

Monday, September 3 – Tiny Dancers, Joiners Arms, Southampton

Sunday, September 9 – UB40, Bowood House, Calne

Thursday, September 13 – iLiKETRAiNS,

Colchester

COMEDY

Saturday, September 8 – Cannon & Ball, Spa Pavilion Theatre, Felixstowe

Monday, September 10 – Jethro, Orchard Theatre, Dartford

Saturday, September 15 – Repeat

Offender: Jimmy Carr, Pavilion Theatre, Felixstowe

Friday, September 21 – Phil Jupitus, New Empire Theatre, Southend-on-Sea

Friday, September 28 – Jenny Eclair, Corn Exchange, Ipswich

THEATRE

Monday, September 3-8 – Pygmalion featuring Tim Pigott-Smith and Una Stubbs, Yvonne Arnaud Theatre And Mill Studio, Guildford

Wednesday, September 12-23 – The Chinese State Circus: Shaolin Warriors Family, Old Deer Park, Richmond

Wednesday, September 19-22 – Macbeth Kill Bill Shakespeare, South Hill Park Arts Centre & Wilde Theatre, Bracknell

Sunday, September 23 – Basil of the Caribbean: Basil Brush, Beck Theatre, Hayes

Joiners Arms, Southampton

Wednesday, September 19 – Kosheen, Bristol Academy (Carling Academy 1 & 2), Bristol

THEATRE

Saturday, September 1 – Joseph & the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat featuring Craig Chalmers, Theatre Royal & Ustinov Studio, Bath

Wednesday, September 12-22 – The Importance of Being Earnest starring Penelope Keith, Theatre Royal & Ustinov Studio, Bath

Monday, September 2-October 13 – The Producers: Starring Cory English, Joe Pasquale and Russ Abbott, Mayflower Theatre, Southampton

Wednesday, September 26 – Singing In The Rain: Weymouth Operatic Society, Pavilion Theatre, Weymouth

LIVE MUSIC

Sunday, September 2 – UB40, The Embankment, Peterborough

Friday, September 7 – The Jesus & Mary Chain, Brixton Academy, London

Sunday, September 23 – Natasha Bedingfield, The Ipswich Regent, Ipswich

THEATRE

Wednesday, September 12-22 – Visiting Mr Green featuring Warren Mitchell, Mercury Theatre, Colchester

Wednesday, September 26 – The Magical Dance Of Ireland, Spa Pavilion Theatre, Felixstowe

No.1 for Entertainment

Ents24 is the UK's number one entertainments listings and ticketing resource, constantly updated with the latest gigs, theatre, club/bar and comedy events. For the most up-to-the-minute information, and for details about your local cinema listings, visit www.ents24.com or call our ticket hotline 0871 230 2601 to book your tickets now.



Talented all-rounder: Frank Skinner, co-writer of number one single *Three Lions* and creator of TV show *Fantasy Football*, returns to his day job – stand-up comedy – in Leeds this month

Catterick

COMEDY

Friday, September 7 – Justin Moorhouse, Darlington Arts Centre, Darlington
Sunday, September 9-10 – Frank Skinner, City Varieties Music Hall, Leeds
Tuesday, September 18-19 – Billy Connolly, Newcastle City Hall, Newcastle upon Tyne
Thursday, September 27 – Ross Noble, Grand Opera House, York
Friday, September 28 – The Happiness Show: Ken Dodd, The Sands Centre, Carlisle

LIVE MUSIC

Tuesday, September 4 – The Kissaway Trail, The Knights Club, Middlesbrough
Friday, September 7 – The Hamsters Play Hendrix, Fibbers (Barfly York), York
Wednesday, September 12 – The Gossip, 53

Degrees at University of Central Lancashire, Preston

Saturday, September 15 – Air Traffic, Leeds Met Students Union, Leeds
Sunday, September 16 – The Holloways and The Wombats, Leeds Met Students Union, Leeds

THEATRE

Saturday, September 1-8 – Starlight Express, Alhambra Theatre & Studio, Bradford
Tuesday, September 4-8 – Little Shop of Horrors, Preston Guildhall & Charter Theatre, Preston
Monday, September 10-15 – Pygmalion, Civic Theatre, Darlington
Monday, September 17-22 – Terms Of Endearment featuring Linda Gray, Civic Theatre, Darlington
Tuesday, September 18-22 – The Adventures Of Tintin, Sunderland Empire Theatre, Sunderland

DEFENCE DIARY

SEPTEMBER

1-until further notice: Helmand: The Soldiers' Story – A free exhibition built, written and contributed to by soldiers of 16 Air Assault Brigade to tell the story of their experiences fighting in Afghanistan. National Army Museum, London. Tel: 0207 7300717.

9: Winchester and District Militaria Society annual exhibition and fair, Winchester Guildhall, 1000-1400.

22-23: Salute to the 40s – A weekend of wartime-style entertainment, including two concerts each day featuring music, dance and comedy. Historic Dockyard Chatham. Visit www.thedockyard.co.uk for more info.

22-23: Voices: Ordinary people, extraordinary times – Meet war veterans and learn about their experiences. Imperial War Museum London. Tel: 0207 416 5320/5321.

OCTOBER

5: Charity Boxing Night – British Army v East of England Select, ATR Basingstoke. Tickets from £25. Tel: 01223 204363.

11: The Falklands Land Campaign: A Battalion Commander's Perspective – Lecture by Lt Gen Sir Hew Pike, Airborne Forces Museum, Aldershot from 1900. Tickets £8.50. Tel: 01252 349619.

NOVEMBER

1-30: 90th anniversary of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission – British leg of a special photographic exhibition (opening simultaneously in Canada and Australia) to mark the 90th anniversary of the founding of the CWGC in 1917. Imperial War Museum North, Manchester. Tel: 0161 8364000.

24-25: Birmingham Tattoo, The NIA. Tickets and details from www.birminghamtattoo.co.uk or 0870 9094144. Soldier has five pairs of tickets to give away. To stand a chance of winning, simply tell us the name of Birmingham's Premiership football club. Answers to the usual address. Closing date for entries October 31.

■ Got a date for the diary? Email details to diary@soldiermagazine.co.uk

Bulletin board

Defence directory

Army Benevolent Fund: 0845 2414820

Army Welfare Information Service: 01722 436569/436461; www.army.mod.uk/aws

Army Families Federation: 01980 615525

British Limbless Ex-Service Men's Association: 020 8590 1124. www.blesma.org

Career Transition Partnership: 0207 766 8020

Children's Education Advisory Service: 01980 618244; enquiries.ceas@gt.net

Confidential support lines: UK 0800 731 4880; Germany 0800 1827 395; Cyprus 080 91065; Falklands #6111; from operational theatres Paradigm Services *201; from anywhere in the world (CSL operator will call back) +44 1980 630854. Lines open 1030-2230 (UK) every day.

Ex-Services Mental Welfare Society: 01372 841600; www.combatstress.com

Family Escort Service: 020 74639249

Forces Pension Society: 020 78209988

Gulf Veterans Association: 0191 2301065

Joint Service Housing Advice Office: 01722 436575

MoD Medal Office: Medal queries to JPAC Enquiry Centre on 94560 3600 or 0141 224 3600

Mutual Support (Forces Multiple Sclerosis support group): 01666 824709

National Gulf Veterans' and Families' Association Office: (0900-1700) 01482 808730; 24-hour helpline 01482 833812; www.ngvfa.com

Regular Forces' Employment Association: 0207 321 2011; www.rfea.org.uk

Royal British Legion: 0845 7725 725

RBL Industries Vocational Assessment Centre: 01622 717202/718484; www.rbli.co.uk

Ex-Service Homes Referral Agency (ESHRA): 0207 8394466; www.eshra.com

St Dunstan's charity for blind ex-Servicemen and women: 0207 7235021; www.st-dunstons.org.uk

SAMA 82 (South Atlantic Medal Association) Falklands conflict veterans: 01495 227577

Services Cotswold Centre: 01225 810358

SSAFA Forces Help: 020 7403 8783; Western Europe 02161 472 3392

Service Personnel and Veterans Agency (SPVA): 0800 169 2277 (from UK); 0044 1253 866043 (from overseas)

Victim Support: Germany 02161 472 2272; UK 0845 3030900, www.victimsupport.org

WRVS (24-hr answer service): 02920 739016; general enquiries 02920 739016

Reunions

Staffordshire Regiment: Reunion, dinner, Sept 8, at Whittington Barracks. Displays on Sept 8-9 (1200). Contact Helen Rayson, RHQ, The Staffordshire Regiment, Whittington Barracks, Lichfield, Staffs WS14 9PY or 01543 434390.

33 Coy RAMC (BMH Fayid), Suez Canal Zone 1950-1956: Reunion at International Hotel, Burton Road, Derby on Sept 15-16 for old pals and partners. Ring for rooms at hotel on 01332 369321 and quote "Reunion RMH Fayid". Contact Bill Lowe by email wgl70@yahoo.co.uk

Dental Corps Weekend: At Home at Evelyn Woods Road, Sept 15; church parade, Sept 16. Ring Maj (Retd) John Sharp on 01276 412753 or email rhq_radc@hotmail.com

Kneller Hall 150th: Freedom of Richmond parade, Sept 20, to mark 150th anniversary of Kneller Hall. Former musicians invited to join Army Musicians Association contingent, attend church service in Twickenham and civic reception. Anyone interested in parade or joining AMA should email Maj John Carter at corpssec@hq.dcamus.mod.uk or ring 0208 744 8652.

Army Catering Corps: Army Apprentice College, St Omer Barracks looking for members of 2/85 Venning Platoon 1985-1987. Reunion dinner in Sept. Contact WO1 Jason Hill on 01206 815140 or email jason.hill352@land.mod.uk

Glosters Band and Drums: Reunion on Oct 6 at Dowty Sports and Social Society, Staverton, Down, Hatherley Road, Cheltenham. Contact Neil Webb, 1 Oakhurst Close, Churchdown, Glos GL3 2SS, tel 01452 855236.

RADC WOs' and Sgts' Mess: Reunion dinner, Duchess of Kent WOs' and Sgts' Mess, Oct 19, and dining-in new Director ADS. Serving, retired welcome. Contact Corps RSM Mick Davey, RADC, DDC Complex, Evelyn Woods Road, Aldershot GU11 2LS, tel 94222 2780 or 01252 347780.

28 Field Ambulance: Oct 20 in Nottingham. Ex-members welcome. Email Graham Mottley at graham.mottley@adsl.virgin.net

10th Royal Hussars: Reunion dinner, Oct 20, Acton Court Hotel, Stockport. Ring 01405 763235, email ronxrh3873@aol.com or visit www.xrhgb.com

IBB and IJLB: Annual reunion and meeting at RGJ TA Centre, Blakelands, Milton Keynes, Oct 27, starting at 1730. Ring secretary Ken Nicol on 01978 or email him at knthnic@aol.com

South Notts Hussars reunion: Remembrance weekend, Nov 10-11. Email wstlkraig@aol.com

5th Inniskilling Dragoon Guards: First southern area reunion. Informal meeting and curry night on Nov 16 at OUTC, Falklands House, Oxford. Ring Steve Hunt on 07880 908050 or John Walker on 01865 863235.

Searchline

Capt Lamp where are you? A colleague from UN TAC Cambodia is trying to locate you. Email Hing Channarith (Rith) at hrith@camcaf.org

Lawrence Percival and Derek Blackburn wish to trace friends from **Lloyd Troop, Basic Training at Keogh Barracks, Aug-Dec 1983: Sgt Acky Milligan, Cpl Ray Brightwell, Cpl Bos Hazelhurst, Cpl Dave Elliott, Lt J Evans, Stu Ferry, John Devenney, Scotty Taylor, Geordie Thorton, Conan Kellard, Geordie and Stevie Quinn, Geordie Nicholson, Les Piper, Iain, Frew, Bannerman** and anyone else from Lloyd Troop. Email Derek at deeks@dsl.pipex.com

Researcher seeks ex-members and relatives of the **11th Hussars (PAO)** for a book "Their Name Liveth Evermore", Roll of Honour 1939-1945 and The Cherry Picker Memorial. Contact David Eason, The Mews Cottage (Rear Flat), 1 Acacia Road, Royal Leamington Spa, Warwickshire CV32 6EF or email husrollho@yahoo.co.uk

Billy Bowes is trying to find old friend **Sgt J Murray** (wife's name Eloner). He served in 113 Coy, 8 Tpt Regt, Mulhiem, 1962-64; 13 Coy, Guided Weapons RCT, Münster, 1964-65; and Londonderry, 1976-78. He would also like to hear from anyone else who remembers Billy, ex-Cpl RASC/RCT. Email jenniferbowes@btinternet.com

Petition calls for new medal rules

AN e-petition calling on the Prime Minister to make illegal the unauthorised wearing of campaign medals, decorations and regimental insignia has attracted nearly 200 signatories.

The petition – found at <http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/Walter/> and created by veteran Don Stewart – will remain open until January 4.

An article in *Soldier* ("Chocolate box decorations", Dec 2006) on veterans' anger at the increased appearance of unofficial medals and souvenirs on parades and at reunions resulted in a flood of letters and emails to this magazine. Although there was little sympathy with those who wore insignia they were not entitled to, more than 75 per cent of those who contacted us believed the Government should recognise time spent in military uniform, and in particular those who completed National Service.

The petition was started "in response to the increasing number of individuals who attend commemoration services portraying themselves as veterans of various wars, campaigns and military units".

It states that by wearing insignia and unearned awards never presented to them these individuals denigrated the memory of the fallen and caused great distress to surviving family members of those who had fought and died, and anger and anxiety among survivors.

What's cooking, Midge?



Masters of their arts: Lt Gary Barnshaw (centre) an adult instructor with the South East London Army Cadet Force, keeps pop star and music producer Midge Ure, TV presenters Nadia Sawalha and Emma Forbes and *Strictly Come*

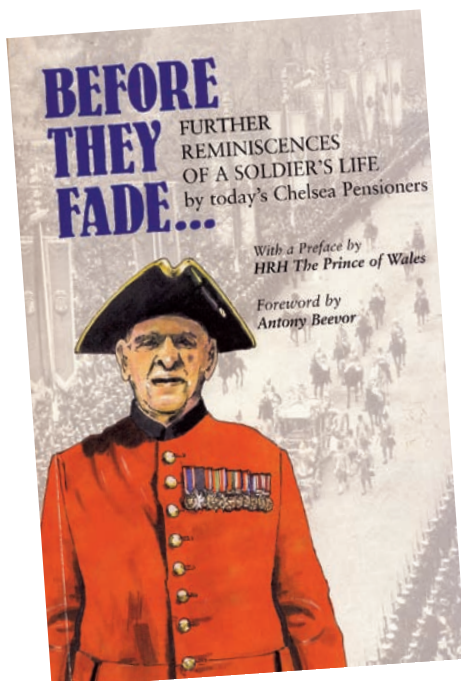
Dancing judge Craig Revel Horwood on the straight and narrow during the semi-finals of BBC 1's *Celebrity MasterChef 2007* competition.

The famous four were tasked to cater for 30 hungry cadets using field kitchens during a two-hour challenge hosted at the Cadet Training Centre, Blackheath.

Lt Barnshaw, culinary innovation manager for Heinz, was in the Army Catering Corps for seven years and the Territorial Army for eight before volunteering to become an ACF instructor.

Are you leaving the Army or the TA and looking for a new challenge? Contact the Army Cadet Force on www.armycadets.com or ring 0845 600 77 99 to find your local detachment.

Picture: Shine Productions



Book your brick

YOU can help the Chelsea Pensioners build their new infirmary by ordering a copy of *Before They Fade*, a further collection of their reminiscences of soldiering. Proceeds from sales will go towards buying bricks for the new building.

The first edition of these memories of the nation's scarlet-coated heroes was published in 2001, since when several of the original contributors have died.

This updated collection – very much a modern military history in progress, with additional tales by veterans of the Korean War and Suez campaign – includes the soldiering experiences of new arrivals to the Royal Hospital.

The Prince of Wales has written a preface and each copy sold will add £5 to the Royal Hospital's £35-million infirmary appeal fund. It is available from Robin Ollington Design, 1B Avenue Studios, Sydney Close, London SW3 6HN. (Published by the Royal Hospital Chelsea, 144pp paperback, £7.99 (£9.50 with p&p).)

Roadshows

THE Army Presentation Team wants to hear from members of the public who would like a personal invitation to its hi-tech roadshow.

The event starts with a reception, is followed by a presentation and questions-and-answers session and culminates with a finger buffet. Military personnel will be on hand to answer your questions.

Call 01276 417000 or email your name and address to apt.mod@btinternet.com with the event you are interested in attending.

Sept – 11, Burton-upon-Trent; 12, Stoke-on-Trent; 13, Wolverhampton; 25, Chatham; 26, Woking; 27, Eastbourne. **Oct** – 9, Warrington; 10, Lancaster; 11, Crewe. **Nov** – 6, Wembley; 7, Newham; 8, Bromley; 21, Sheffield; 22, Halifax.

Appointments

Lt Gen: N R Parker, late RGJ, to be Commander Regional Forces, Land Command, Aug.

Maj Gen: C C Brown, late RA, to be GOC Northern Ireland, Aug; R M M Sykes, late RA, to be Defence Services Secretary, MoD, Aug; M J Rutledge, late 9/12 L, to be Kosovo Protection Corps Coordinator, Aug, and GOC 5 Division in May 2008; T G Inshaw, late R Signals, to be Director General Trg and Education, Nov.

Competitions

Manchester Military Tattoo: Winners – Alec Coleman, Wickford, Essex; C Bernoski, Olton, Solihull. Answer: Lancashire.

British Army Badges

By Lt Col (Retd) Robin Hodges

Cap badge

THE Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment badge combines the Elizabethan Dragon awarded to The Buffs by Queen Anne, probably in 1707; the Rose worn by soldiers from Hampshire who fought for Henry V at Agincourt in 1415; and the Garter awarded to The Royal Sussex Regiment in 1832. The Prince of Wales's Coronet holds the ostrich plumes awarded to The Black Prince, taken from the helmet of the slain King John of Bohemia at the Battle of Crecy in 1346.



Formation sign

THE 1st Artillery Brigade was formed in 1997 and adopted the Ram's Head badge, first used as the sign of the 4th Division in 1916. A black-on-green subdued badge was introduced in 2004.



Specialist badge

BRITISH Airborne Forces began parachute training in 1940 with troops from almost every Arm and Service. To qualify as a parachutist all ranks must complete a parachute course and a minimum of eight descents. The Queen's Regulations state that "Parachute descents, other than forced descents, are to be made only by trained parachutists whose duties require it [and] Service personnel on authorised training courses."



Tactical recognition flash

IN 1995 The King's Royal Hussars deployed on an operational tour to Northern Ireland. The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders operated in the adjoining tactical area of responsibility and their distinctive arm badge prompted the KRH to adopt a similar sized arm badge, which was nicknamed "rhubarb and custard". The larger TRF replaced it in 2003.



THESE excerpts appear in *British Army Badges* by Lt Col (Retd) Robin Hodges, available from Court Hill Farm, Potterne, Devizes, SN10 5PN, tel 01380 723371. Email robinhodges@armymail.mod.uk



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Catherine, guides a youth club and having
fun. Seeking pen pal, 40-50. P068

Heather (43), 5'6", brown hair with
highlights, medium build and blue-
green eyes. Single with one daughter
at college. Enjoys cycling, swimming,
walking, eating out, cooking, the theatre,
the cinema and various tastes in music.
Works full time at the local hospital in
the Accounts Department. Seeking pen
pals, 30+, all letters will be answered,
genuine replies only. P069

Julie (40), 5'8" tall with blonde hair and
green eyes. Enjoys the cinema,
swimming, singing, playing the guitar,
piano and writing novels. Seeking
officers to write to, 40+. P070

Mandy (40), slim, attractive brunette
with big blue eyes, GSOH, friendly, loyal
and caring. Enjoys travelling, movies,
the theatre and eating out. Seeking
genuine single honest Servicemen,
35-45. P071

Dave (late 50s), ugly hardly any teeth
but good looking. Enjoys the country
side and animals. Genuine bloke seeks
like-minded active hirsute male pen pals,
25-45, genuine replies only. P072

Karen (40), 5'7" blonde, slim but curvy
with blue eyes. Enjoys the outdoors,
dogs, the cinema, gigs, the theatre,
motorbike rallies, nights in or out, all
the usual stuff and just joined the gym.
Divorced, legal professional, no children
or ties and looking for that special guy,
any age group. P073

Madeline (late 30s), own teeth and
hair. A gerbil and stick insect
collection. Enjoys bell ringing, Morris
dancing, brass rubbing and dolphin
training. Seeking male pen pals of
similar age. P074

Jacqui, 5'7", 30 something, curvaceous
blonde. Yorkshire bird with mundane
9-5 job. Just stopped smoking and
needs to stay occupied, pull up a
sandbag and write to her. P075

Pauline (57), 5'6", slim attractive
therapist, young outlook, kind and
excellent sense of humour. Enjoys the
outdoors, the coast, the countryside,
nature, interesting places, socialising,
salsa, tai chi and gardening. Seeking
pen pals, 50-62. P076

Belinda (26), 5'4", slim build with blue-
green eyes. Enjoys the cinema, meals
out, pubs, shopping for clothes, holidays,
the theatre, writing letters, swimming
and animals. Seeking male and female
pen pals to write to, 24-34. P077

Kirsten (28), slim blonde, single Scottish
girl who enjoys music, the gym, the
cinema, and nights out or in. Seeking
pen pals, 28-36. P078

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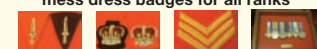
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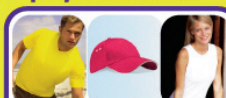
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Games

SEPTEMBER REVIEW



Parachute strike: The latest in the *Medal of Honor* series drops players into the heart of the Nazi war machine



Into the drop zone

Players assume the role of US shock troops as EA's war story goes airborne

Report: Stephen Tyler

PARACHUTING into some of the Second World War's most dangerous battlefields, the men of the American Army's 82nd Airborne Division faced a nerve-racking descent into hell.

If they lived long enough to leap out of the C-47 Dakotas that had flown them from England, the paratroopers were desperately exposed as they tried to dodge anti-aircraft rounds on their way down.

Making it to the ground without buckling under the weight of the equipment strapped to their bodies or drowning in swamps on landing was an achievement in itself and those that survived had barely a moment to catch their breath before engaging the enemy, often miles away from their comrades who were blown off course during the drop.

This nightmarish scenario forms the backdrop for *Medal of Honor: Airborne*,

the latest instalment in Electronic Art's Second World War franchise which is released on PlayStation 3, Xbox 360 and PC this month.

Gamers take on the role of one of the plucky paratroopers as they take part in the conflict's major airdrops, including Operation Husky, over Sicily, the D-Day landings of Operation Overlord and Operation Varsity, over Germany itself.

The troops' aerial ability is a key component of the game as *Medal of Honor: Airborne*'s missions begin in the air as players prepare to jump rather than at a pre-determined point on the ground.

The action unfolds depending on where the gamer lands and their subsequent decisions and EA has developed its artificial intelligence (AI) engine so that the on-screen enemy is constantly on its guard rather than only reacting when a specific checkpoint is reached.

"Allowing the player to jump

out of a plane and land anywhere on the level forces us to rethink how we do things and to redesign the levels from the ground up," a spokesman for the developers said.

"It also forced us to rethink the AI. No longer could we afford to have an AI where every time you get behind this barrel or look through that window something happens. Now we had to have one that could adapt to a player who could be anywhere and who could approach from any angle."

The added dimension offered by the aerial start to each mission was immediately evident in the late-build version of the game *Soldier* played.

Looking down on the level from above, players can scan the battlefield and choose whether they want to land in a safe zone, marked by billowing green smoke, or in isolation deep behind enemy lines.

The descent itself is a nervy affair and our first few attempts at navigating to a friendly green area failed miserably,



with our final destinations including a rooftop, a tree and, regrettably, the middle of a Nazi welcome party.

The game's organic AI also worked very well. We were able to surprise the enemy by sneaking up on them from behind or by flanking them, often while they were engaged in contacts with other Allied soldiers.

Objectives are added depending on what route players take through the large environments and the inclusion of towers, balconies and rooftops takes fighting away from the ground as well as providing key vantage points for snipers.

In-game physics have been tweaked since *Medal of Honor's* last outing and enemy soldiers now fall realistically according to where they are hit. A full arsenal of period weapons is also included.

Airborne straddles the boundary between being a natural evolution and a total revolution of the *Medal of Honor* series. The graphics are first-rate and the sound, including a superb score, is as atmospheric as you would expect to find in a top next-generation game.

But it is the free-form gameplay in which you genuinely feel that you are in control of where you go and how you accomplish your goals that sets *Medal of Honor: Airborne* apart from the competition. ■



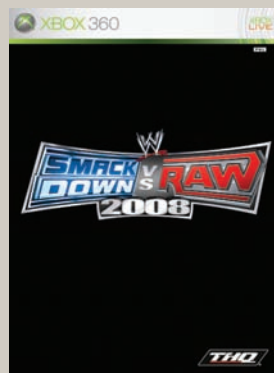
Sega Rally, Xbox 360

SEGA are getting a strong reputation for producing credible new versions of the hits of times past – and the latest offering does not look set to disappoint in the slightest. Capturing the flavour of the 1990s arcade favourite, the latest generation of *Sega Rally* is less about replicating accurate driving dynamics and more about the thrill of high-speed competition. From the late-build demo version shown to *Soldier*, it does just that. Graphics are spot on and the thrill of the race captured well. Anyone enjoying this should also check out the excellent *Outrun 2006: Coast-to-Coast*.



Blazing Angels 2, Xbox 360 & PS3

THE original *Blazing Angels* was an awkward customer. On the packaging, it looked to be a serious attempt at a Second World War combat sim. In reality, it was a light-hearted shooter with little basis in history and none in realism. The sequel is more of the same, but this time the developers have played up the cartoon element of the game with missions including an attack on a giant Zeppelin airship. Latest previews seem promising, with plenty of suitably slick airborne action. The multiplayer options look particularly good.



Smackdown vs Raw 2008, Xbox 360

CONSOLE wrestling action comes piledriving onto the next generation of machines in the latest outing for THQ's popular series. And, by the looks of the latest demo, fans will not be let down. Players can choose from a host of familiar faces before climbing through the ropes to pulverise their opponents. A raft of moves completes the fighting experience, with throws, holds and the ever-popular body slams among the ways to dispatch your foes. If you like the glamour and glitz of the US wrestling scene, you'll probably enjoy this contender.



WIN: Hour of Victory

ALREADY previewed in *Soldier*, Midway's *Hour of Victory* has been getting plenty of critical acclaim. Players get the opportunity to fight their way through wartime Europe, making use of a team of characters with specialist skills. We have five copies of the game on Xbox 360 to give away. To stand a chance of winning, tell us in which area of France did the Allies land in the D-Day invasion of 1944? Write your answer on a postcard and send it to the address at the front of the mag. Usual rules apply. Closing date is September 28.



Call of Juarez, Xbox 360

THIS gun-slinging western first-person shooter is something of a missed opportunity. Players take control of an outlaw and a Bible-toting reverend as they make their way through an immersive Wild West environment, taking part in gunfights, riding horses and solving basic puzzles along the way. The cowboy theme is entertaining and a quick-draw mode is fun for a while. However the action is rigidly scripted and there is little opportunity to wander off and explore the environment. Would-be cowboys should give *Gun* a try instead.



Darkness: Xbox 360

THIS stylish Xbox 360 port of the hit comic book is a gripping and gritty success. Taking control of a mob hitman who has been possessed by a demon, players can summon appendages from either shoulder which can be used to dispatch enemies in gruesome fashion. The voice acting is excellent, the graphics suitably moody and the story of the hitman's struggle with his mob-boss uncle is compelling. Only a slightly longer one-player game and an improved multiplayer version would have further improved this already fine title.

Music

SEPTEMBER REVIEW

The Pigeon Detectives
Wait For Me



Bird flew: The band's debut album, *Wait For Me*, shot to number three and went gold in the spring before making a chart re-entry this summer

High five: Matt Bowman, Oliver Main, Ryan Wilson, Dave Best and Jimmi Naylor spread their wings and take the summer festival limelight



Festival fever

Cooing call of success for the high-flying Pigeon Detectives

Interview: Karen Thomas

IT was a summer festival season more for ducks than birds but that didn't stop The Pigeon Detectives swooping up a musical triumph from the mud of Glastonbury and floods in Reading.

The lads from Leeds proved unflappable in the face of torrential rain, which poured down and turned Britain's premier live music venues into swamps and lakes. Tagged last year as the band most likely to take the 2007 festival spotlight, The Pigeon Detectives flocked onto the main stage and charmed audiences with their hits *I'm Not Sorry* and *Take Her Back*.

With the festival season becoming ever more crucial to netting radio airplay, The Pigeon Detectives can preen their indie rock feathers as they soar to the top of the pecking order.

"A while back you just had your big festivals like Glastonbury but now

Leeds and Reading sell out really quickly. They've got a good reputation so they always get great bands every year," rhythm guitarist Ryan Wilson told *Soldier*.

"And guitar music is a lot more popular than it used to be several years ago and everybody seems to be into it. "We're very lucky to be playing a lot of festivals and we all really like them. Now the band is doing a bit better and we get good crowds, it's just a brilliant atmosphere for us to play in."

And the crowds are cottoning onto The Pigeon Detectives' unique sound, as the band's debut album, *Wait For Me*, dived straight into the charts at number three and rapidly went gold. Wilson described their music as "indie pop" but the type of pop-rock that's not too "poppy".

"We're not hardcore rock because we have quite catchy melodies and catchy songs, which a lot of rock bands don't

have," he continued. "But we also have that rock edginess that a lot of pop bands don't have."

After a summer of showing off their music at O2 Wireless in Leeds and London, T in the Park and Oxygen, as well as Reading and Glastonbury, the band is threatening to rule the UK festival roost.

However, the success The Pigeon Detectives are now enjoying seemed further away when the fledgling five formed up in 2002. Touring with Dirty Pretty Things a year ago, as well as notching up the Kaiser Chiefs as admirers, proved the catalyst for spreading their musical wings and gaining more widespread recognition. After years of hard graft, none of them take their success or posse of Pigeon fans for granted.

"I think you always have these dreams where you want to be as big as The Beatles and you think it'll be



amazing to tour the world,” admitted Wilson, adding that the Fab Four’s songwriting and music are The Pigeon Detectives’ major influences. “But it’s just a dream so when it actually happens you sit back and think ‘a year ago I was sat in an office doing a crappy job’ and realise it is amazing.”

Now the lads have eased themselves into a naturally cool image with the band’s quirky name having a story of its own aptly founded in the festival scene.

“We used to go to the Leeds Festival as punters and about four years ago we met this Australian bloke who was travelling on his own. We kind of gave him a place to stay in our camp area and for some reason I had this random story about pigeons so he kept calling us The Pigeon Detectives.

“We just thought it was stupid but quite funny and at the time we didn’t have a band name so we thought ‘Oh, we’ll just call the band that,’” explained Wilson, and although they planned to change the name, it just stuck – as has their music.

Next month they will have returned from the Fuji Rock Festival in Japan and from touring Europe to play for packed gigs across the UK. The Pigeon Detectives are homing in on becoming a bigger and better household name. ■



Jackknife Lee (Jackknife Lee)

PUSHING out his anti-establishment sentiments and constantly shifting music, **Jackknife Lee** has sometimes been better known for his bootleg remixes. This album struggles to fit into a specific genre but it is closest to rock, complemented by the modern, funky and serious edges to it. There is a lot of good guitar work and synthesized sections to accompany the vocals, including guest appearances from **Snow Patrol**. Overall, an awesome musical endeavour from an independent artist.

Bdr Luke Stevens-Burt,
5 Regt, RA



Collie Buddz (Collie Buddz)

ANYBODY for dancehall reggae delivered by a white boy outta Bermuda? Sounds shocking but prepare to be surprised. With a slick flow of chatting and singing, which contains many hooks, **Collie Buddz** defies his background with this creditable release. Although the sounds are not as crucial as his Jamaican contemporaries, there’s a range of beats and melodies that thrill with bags of crossover potential. A tight drum and bass, and offbeat keys, complement Buddz’s lyrics and chorus backing. Log on to myspace and sample this summer banger.

Cpl Charlie Lloyd,
RLC



Damage (Kosheen)

THIS new album from **Kosheen** will most definitely not disappoint fans of their previous work, having the band’s distinctive sound on it from the start. The usual blend of electronic rhythms and the soothing vocals of Sian Evans make this album well worth the wait. *Overkill* makes its album debut after appearing in many of their live shows for years, and is the first single to hit the stores from the album although most of the tracks could also be released. Buy *Damage* if you like Kosheen. You will not be disappointed.

Lt Jim Berry,
1 R Irish



WIN signed copies of Westlife: The Love Album

THIS album from the band that has 14 UK number one singles under its belt – bettered only by The Beatles and Elvis – is 11 tracks of smooching heaven with the delectable **Delta Goodrem** lending her dulcet tones to *All Out Of Love*. And *Soldier* has three CDs and four DVDs, all signed by the lads, to give away. To stand a chance of winning, tell us who currently manages Westlife. Is it a) Louis Walsh, b) Simon Cowell, or c) Sharon Osbourne? Write your answer on a postcard and send it to the address at the front of the magazine. Usual rules apply. **Closing date is September 28.**



Our Love To Admire (Interpol)

WITH their third studio album, New York four-piece rock outfit **Interpol** have leapt out of their usual guitar-driven comfort zone into a brave new world of keyboards and string arrangements in what promises to be their most epic work to date. The songs are beautifully crafted, boasting some of the most haunting vocals I’ve ever heard. While the overall sound is less raw than previous albums, the polish complements the artful guitar work and quality musicianship. *Our Love To Admire* is a brilliant auditory experience.

Cpl Tom Robinson, 151 Tpt
Regt, RLC



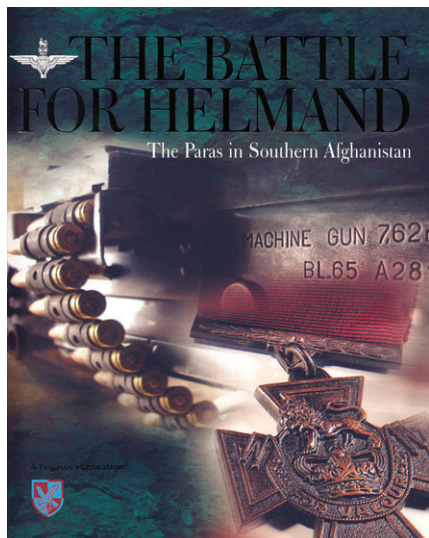
Ms. Kelly (Kelly Rowland)

THIS is the long-awaited second album from **Kelly Rowland**. Five years on from her first solo album, *Simply Deep*, Rowland shows herself as a more polished and more mature artist. Most of the tracks are in the traditional R&B mould but there are also some beautifully delivered ballads. Rowland has emphasised the personal nature of this album, both musically and lyrically. This comes across, giving the music a refreshing level of authenticity. Overshadowed by the success of former **Destiny’s Child** band-mate **Beyonce**, this album should put Rowland on top.

Pte Patrick Jordan,
RAMC

Books

SEPTEMBER REVIEW



Battlefield: C Company, 3 Para, led by OC Maj Paul Blair, moves out of Musa Quala, northern Helmand, after clearing the way for Afghan troops and relieving a Danish unit. R Irish; 51 Para Sqn RE; D Sqn, Household Cavalry; 7 (Para) RHA and 9 AAC were among those involved in the action



Close combat

Graphic story of 3 Para's 'bloody and ferocious months' in Helmand

The Battle for Helmand: The Paras in Southern Afghanistan (The Pegasus Journal/DRA Publishing, 160pp, £25*).

Review: Chris Horrocks

MANY of us will remember our 21st birthday as a day of fun surrounded by family and friends.

For LCpl Danny Kelly, of B Company, 3 Para, the big day was memorable because he lived to tell the tale.

On July 6, 2006, his company had just moved into the District Centre of Sangin, in Afghanistan's Helmand province, where it was coming under fire from the Taliban several times a day.

"Many of my mates were laughing and joking about it, saying 'cracking birthday,

mate' and generally trying to cheer me up with black humour," he said. "But for me, not many people can say they were shot at, mortared and had RPGs flying metres over their head on their 21st."

It could have been worse. UK Task Force Commander Brig Ed Butler describes the six bloody and ferocious months of 3 Para battle-group's deployment to Helmand as "the most challenging and risk-intensive command tour" he has ever undertaken.

He is not exaggerating. The Paras experienced the most intensive combat fighting since the Korean War in a period that claimed 33 lives – at the time of writing almost half of those lost since Op Herrick began in 2001. It also resulted in many honours and awards, including a Victoria Cross and a George Cross.

It was not unusual for troops, with bayonets fixed, to fight the enemy at such close range that they

could see the whites of their eyes. During those six months the 3 Para battle-group was involved in 500 contacts, firing half a million rounds of small arms and more than 13,000 artillery and mortar rounds.

The period witnessed the blooding of the Apache attack helicopter and the Joint Helicopter Force flew more than 100 casevac missions to extract 170 casualties. Engagements with the enemy lasted up to eight hours.

"Young men quickly matured beyond their years, battle-hardened by an intensity not witnessed since the Korean War," writes Brig Butler. "Some would spend weeks fighting and sleeping in their body armour and helmets, often snatching no more than a few minutes' rest between enemy attacks, and drinking water the temperature of a decent brew. Phenomenal stuff. By the end of the summer the Taliban had been tactically beaten."

The large-format, softback book succeeds in its aims to record every aspect of the tour and, more to the point,

Soldier ordering service

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to pay tribute to those who took part, including support elements.

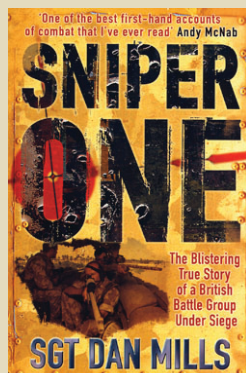
The roll-call of those killed and the list of awards (which sometimes coincide) make sobering and uplifting reading, not least the citations for Paras Cpl Bryan Budd VC, Cpl Mark Wright GC and Lt Hugo Farmer CGC, Acting Capt Timothy Illingworth CGC (LI), and LCoH Andrew Radford CGC (HCR).

This is a graphic snapshot of life on the front line, although "snapshot" does no justice to the contribution made by some superb front-line photographers, including Cpls Rob Knight and Mike Fletcher of the RLC.

The book was collated on behalf of *The Pegasus Journal* by Lt Col David Reynolds, Para (V). Among his acknowledgements are those to the company commanders who supplied notes on the action, and to the supporting units of 16 Air Assault Brigade. Not forgetting, of course, the input of the men of 3 Para such as LCpl Danny Kelly, whose 21st birthday turned out to be one he would always remember. ■

*To obtain a copy send a cheque for £25 (payable to DRA Books) to the office of *The Pegasus Journal* at 14 Mary Seacole Road, The Millfields, Plymouth PL1 3JY.

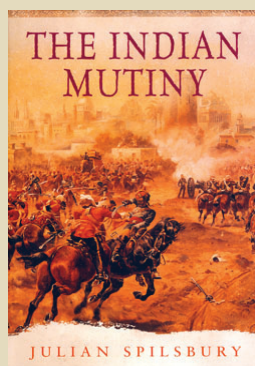
For more reviews, go to www.soldiermagazine.co.uk



Sniper One by Sgt Dan Mills

A MORTAR bomb landed on Cimic House in Al Amarah every 11 minutes for three full days during the intense fighting of August 2004. During one operation to drive out insurgents, the base was contacted 103 times in 24 hours. Under siege were Sgt Dan Mills and his sniper platoon of the 1st Battalion, The Princess of Wales's Regiment. This is his, and their, story of a tour during which Pte Johnson Beharry won his Victoria Cross. Gripping.

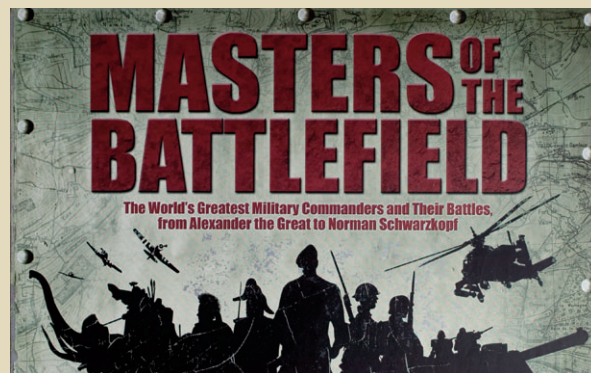
Penguin/Michael Joseph, 350pp, £16.99



The Indian Mutiny by Julian Spilsbury

MODERN India is fast becoming one of the world's economic super-powers, which makes the 150th anniversary of its "first war of national liberation", as India sees it – or, in British parlance, the Indian Mutiny – all the more relevant. Much can be read into these two opposing interpretations of the brutal uprising, but the sequence of events, the massacres, the gallantry and the retribution make for fascinating reading.

Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 373pp, £20

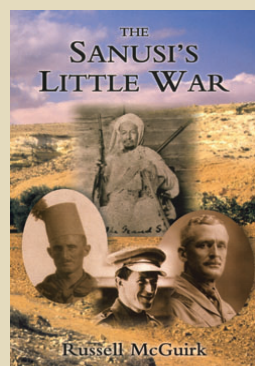


Masters of the Battlefield by Maj Gen Julian Thompson

LARGE format "book" – it comes in its own binder box – which looks at the lives and military achievements of 30 of the world's most successful commanders, from Alexander the Great to Gen "Stormin Norman" Schwarzkopf, US Army, of Gulf War 1 fame. A colourful double-page spread is devoted to each battlefield master. The tiny page-count is explained by the fact that each spread acts also as a pouch for a specially commissioned, removable battle map of the subject's most famous victory – in the case of Schwarzkopf,

Desert Storm, the operation to liberate Kuwait in 1991. Modern generals featured include Von Hindenburg (Tannenberg), Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (Gallipoli), Sir Arthur Currie (Drocourt-Quéant) and Sir John Monash (Hamel) from the First World War, and Heinz Guderian (Sedan), Erwin Rommel (Gazala), Alphonse Juin (Op Diadem), Bernard Montgomery (Normandy), and Georgy Konstantinovich Zhukov (Soviet advance on Berlin) from the Second World War. Douglas C MacArthur and Vo Nguyen Giap represent the Korean and Vietnam conflicts.

Carlton, 68pp, £30



The Sanusi's Little War by Russell McGuirk

SUB-titled "The Amazing Story of a Forgotten Conflict in the Western Desert, 1915-1917", this is a reminder of just how quirky military history can be. With the world's focus on the great battles on the Western Front, the Duke of Westminster led a column of Rolls Royce armoured cars and Model T Fords into Libya to rescue 300 Welshmen. Their mission was to recapture Sollum and overcome the forces of Sayyid Ahmad al-Sharif, the Grand Sanusi.

Arabian Publishing, 332pp, £25



Sexing the Soldier by Rachel Woodward and Trish Winter

THOUGHT-provoking thesis on the policies and practices that shape gender relations and identities in today's British Army. This is a serious academic analysis from two experts in gender and military studies and a valuable resource for anyone wishing to develop an informed view of men and women's military participation. "It is remarkable how little we know about these people, given what we ask them to do," conclude the authors.

Routledge, 144pp, £24.99

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NET EFFECT

Mixed fortunes at Wimbledon

Smashing: Army women's team member Capt Anna Barker (AGC) in action during her side's successful Inter-Services campaign

Picture: Graeme Main

World Cup wishes

Ex-officer Josh has his eyes on the prize ahead of title defence in France

Interview: Stephen Tyler
Picture: Graeme Main

WHEN England's World Cup Rugby Union team take to the fields of France this month, expectations back home will be significantly lower than they were ahead of the successful 2003 campaign.

The optimism felt across the country during the tournament in Australia was justified when skipper Martin Johnson lifted the Webb Ellis trophy after a famous extra-time victory against the host nation in Sydney.

Fast forward four years and prospects are much bleaker. Johnson has gone, results have been inconsistent and England have failed to gather any kind of momentum ahead of their World Cup defence, which starts against the USA in Lens.

But despite the country's poor run of results, Sandhurst graduate Josh Lewsey insists that England are focused on finding form in time to mount a

serious attack on the tournament.

"I was very, very happy with my fitness this season. I'm probably fitter now than I have ever been in my entire life and I'm feeling very positive," Lewsey told *SoldierSport* at London Wasps' Acton training ground before the club's Heineken Cup final victory over Leicester Tigers at Twickenham.

"We [Wasps] wanted to finish the season with a trophy so we could use that as the springboard towards our ultimate goal, which is the World Cup."

Lewsey's drive to succeed has been evident throughout his sporting and military careers. A Wasps player since the age of 18, he also had a spell with Bristol while he was studying on an Army bursary-assisted university course in the city before rejoining the London club at the age of 21.

It was his scintillating form on his return to Wasps that earned him an

England call-up in 1998 and the full-back was one of the few bright spots in that year's "tour from hell" to Australia, which culminated in the tourists being on the wrong end of a 76-0 drubbing.

Despite the promising start to his international career, Lewsey struggled to earn more caps from England coach Clive Woodward and it was his failure

to break back into the national side that convinced him to change course and pursue a new career with the Army.

"I wasn't playing international rugby as much as I would have

liked and I was frustrated because it was as if I was being left out in the wilderness," he explained. "I wanted something more from my life and if I wasn't going to play internationally then I wanted to be as good as I could be at whatever else was out there."

The solution to Lewsey's selection troubles lay behind the gates of the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, and he relished testing himself against the famous officer training programme.

As well as performing the same duties as his fellow cadets, he also completed daily rugby training and managed to remain a key member of the Wasps team, missing just one game during the season.

Indeed, on one day during his first week at Sandhurst the officer cadet completed two hours of drill in the morning, drove to Twickenham and scored a try in a cup final victory before heading back to base the same day.

"I remember wondering at the time whether David Beckham or anyone at Manchester United prepared for a cup final like that," joked Lewsey.

"I got special dispensation from Sandhurst to do my training and to go to games. They were fantastic in terms of being encouraging and making sure that it worked out.

"I would be up at 0500 most days to do my personal training and I would do more in the evening whenever I could. There were not many occasions when I had more than five hours' sleep during that whole year.

"Mentally it was fantastic and the experience I had there and the friends that I made will hopefully stay with me for the rest of my days. It was great and I urge anyone else to do it – although perhaps not both at once."

Having become a key part of

'I'm fitter now than I have ever been and I am feeling very positive'

Apo backs Fiji

FIJIAN dynamo Pte Apolosi Satala is confident his country can spring a surprise at the World Cup.

The back missed out on a place in his nation's final squad but

thinks the side can excel despite being placed in a tough opening group including heavyweights Wales and Australia.

Satala (1 Scots), who starred at this year's Inter-Services game against the Royal Navy at Twickenham, told *SoldierSport* the patchy form of the tournament's big teams could help his country progress into the knockout stages.

"We have a good chance of playing well and competing against the top teams," he said. "A lot of the favourites are not playing so well and I have my fingers crossed that we can get quite far.

"There is so much competition for places in the Fiji team because there are a lot of boys playing very

well all over the world."

Satala was a member of the bronze medal-winning Fijian Sevens team at the 2006 Commonwealth Games in

Melbourne and has been flirting with selection for the full team ever since.

His most recent appearance came in June when he travelled to Perth to take on World Cup opponents Australia in a friendly, eventually going down 49-0.

"It was a good

experience because we are both in the same pool," he explained. "It was very hard for me because it had been a while since I last played for my country and because it was a match against such a big side, but I was happy with my performance.

"We are in a very good position going into the tournament because we have a lot of very fast, very strong players." ■



● Pte Apolosi Satala



Leading light: Former gunner officer Josh Lewsey is confident England's rugby players can find the form they need to defend their Rugby World Cup crown

the national Sevens side during his Sandhurst days, newly commissioned gunner officer Lewsey was left with the dilemma of how to marry his pursuit of a full England recall with his ambition to serve with the Royal Horse Artillery.

Level-headed Lewsey was unwilling to stay in the Army unless he could devote 100 per cent of his time to the Service and he ultimately made the decision to have a second crack at a full-time rugby career.

"I realised that in life you just can't do everything," Lewsey continued. "You have to make sacrifices and specialise."

"I can hold my head up high knowing that I did the same thing as everyone else, passed every exam and went on the same exercises. I didn't want to be a

token soldier while friends of mine were away across the world fighting wars.

"In the end I did what I thought was right at the time and so be it, within a year I was lifting the World Cup."

Lewsey's versatility across the back line saw him utilised in a number of positions for club and country last season and he faced intense media scrutiny over exactly where on the pitch he was most effective.

When *SoldierSport* asked him where he preferred to play week-in, week-out, Lewsey's answer was simple.

"I honestly don't care as long as I'm allowed to settle in one position."

"If you chop and change then it is very hard to be consistent, so all I have ever asked is that I am picked in one position

and then given the chance to settle."

With a World Cup winner's medal, an MBE, several domestic honours and a Sandhurst commission under his belt, Lewsey has already achieved more than most men his age.

But the desire to be the best still burns within the 30-year-old and he is confident his future will be just as successful as his past.

"I still have a bit of rugby left in me, but I'm excited about what comes next. I don't know where it will lead and I think that's the most exciting part because most of my life to this point has been pretty mapped out," he concluded.

"Now I have choices and I'm genuinely looking forward to seeing where it will take me." ■



Sand storm: Newly-crowned Army golf champion Cpl Chris Bradley (RMP) digs his way out of a bunker during a tournament at Hampshire's Southwick Park

Bunker to bunker

Golfer Bradley marks return from Iraq with Army championship success

FORMER Scotland youth golfer Cpl Chris Bradley displayed his international pedigree with victory at the 2007 Army championships.

Playing off a +1 handicap, the Royal Military Policeman, fresh from an eight-month tour in Basra, battled through six rounds of tense knockout golf at Saunton Sands to secure the coveted trophy.

It was the first time Bradley had won the top prize in Army golf, although it was always only going to be a matter of time before the Scot's skill and experience shone through.

Speaking before a tournament at Southwick Park Golf Club near Portsmouth, Bradley told *SoldierSport* that he has worked hard on improving his game ever since he first picked up a club at the age of six.

"It was great to win the Army championship as I was playing well before it started and I thought I could do it," he explained. "It was nice to be proved right, especially because I won a couple of difficult games.

"As a kid I knew I wasn't bad and I enjoyed getting out and playing. I won various junior events, played for my

county and was picked for the Scotland under 18 squad. I got to travel all over with Scotland and I wanted to turn professional. Unfortunately I was not good enough."

Bradley's realisation that he was unlikely to forge a professional career on the fairway led him to join the Army in December 2003.

The Catterick-based player is full of praise for his RMP unit and said that the only times he has been unable to get a round in during his spell in the military were while he completed basic training and during his tour of Iraq.



But despite his recent success, Bradley remains pragmatic about his future in the game.

"The competition to become a professional player is incredibly tough," he admitted. "For every one place available there are 100 very good golfers and I didn't make it when I gave it a go before joining the Army."

"Now there is a scary amount of young talent coming through so I don't think I will try again."

Bradley is now setting his sights on helping the ten-man Army team defend the Inter-Services title at Woodhall Spa Golf Club later this month.

He also provides frequent lessons to members of his unit and hopes that his success will have a positive impact on golf's overall image and inspire more soldiers to give the game a chance.

"A few years ago there were only one or two younger guys playing golf," he concluded. "Now there are more and I hope it will create a bit of competition for a place on the team." ■

Ross on a roll

Knockout victory maintains rifleman's record

SHEFFIELD boxer Ross "The Boss" Burkinshaw has set his sights on a British title fight by the end of next year after maintaining a perfect start to his professional career.

Burkinshaw (3 Rifles) thought his bout against Bulgarian bruiser Jordan Vasilev at Barnsley Metrodome would go the distance, but the flashy northerner needed just three rounds before he dumped his opponent on the canvas with a crunching body blow.

It was the second knockout victory of an unbeaten three-fight professional career and 21-year-old Burkinshaw insists he will be ready to claim his first national title before the end of 2008.

"I'm fighting in Sheffield this month and then I want to get a Central title fight by the end of the year," the confident southpaw told *SoldierSport* after his Barnsley triumph. "After that I will be looking at a British championship by the end of 2008."

"I thought it [the Vasilev match] might go to points so I was happy to get another knockout."

"I caught him with some body shots and I could hear that they had an effect so I went for a left hook and he crumpled. I caught him well because the paramedics had to give him oxygen."

"I see myself boxing for a world title in four or five years. But right now I want to get some experience. I have had three fights as a professional and won them all, two by knockout. My record speaks for itself."

The match against Vasilev proved to be the toughest test of Burkinshaw's fledgling career as he tried to dodge the eastern European's blows.

The Army man was visibly shaken after being caught with a heavy punch during the first round, but he straightened himself up and the shock gave him the momentum to impose himself on his opponent.

"He was so strong and he caught me with a few shots in the first round that wobbled me, but I took them all and came back from it," added Burkinshaw.

"He was easily the toughest

opponent I have ever fought, including all of my amateur fights."

"I have taken big shots in sparring before and in a couple of fights, but this was the first time as a professional."

"It woke me up a bit and I knew that I needed to get my guard up to stop it."

"I was confident going in to the fight, but then I'm always confident no matter what because I know I'm good enough and I showed that by coming out of it with a win."

The Boss, who was bugled into the ring by colleagues from his battalion, was cheered on by a travelling personal army of more than 200 fans.

Such was the weight of his support that the former Inter-Services flyweight champion managed to persuade the event organisers to move his fight further up the card so it took place directly before the evening's

main event in which former Army boxer Carl Johanneson was beaten by Leva Kirakosyan.

"I felt that my fans who bought tickets shouldn't have to wait until the end of the night," explained Burkinshaw. "They had come from all over the place and I have had

nothing but good feedback from them since."

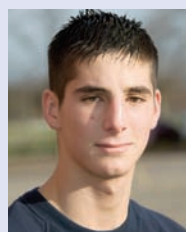
"I was talking to some people from Middlesbrough and they said that after this fight no one can tell me I don't have a chin because I took some big shots."

Now an established professional, Burkinshaw is living a dream he was convinced had passed him by when he signed up for the Army.

But a combination of willpower, determination and sheer hard work, whether he's gloved up or in his Army uniform, has propelled Sheffield's latest boxing hopeful firmly into the national limelight.

"When I was younger I always wanted to be a pro, but when I joined up I never thought it would be possible," said Burkinshaw.

"Now my career is going brilliantly, both in boxing and the Army. All I am concentrating on for the time being is winning a title and making sure I don't suffer any defeats." ■



Rfn Ross Burkinshaw



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Ship shape: Maj Suzanne Anderson (AGC) passes a ferry as she battles through the English Channel's choppy waters during the first Inter-Services relay

Channel hoppers

Swimmers dodge ships to make it to France in gruelling open-water event

Report: Stephen Tyler
Picture: Keith Jefferies

CLOSE encounters with tankers and swathes of seaweed proved no obstacle for Army open water swimmers during the inaugural Inter-Services cross-Channel relay race.

Each member of the two six-man Army teams spent two one-hour stints in the bitter water of one of the world's busiest shipping lanes to complete the gruelling race from the English port of Dover to Cap Gris Nez in France.

Despite eventually finishing in second place behind a strong Royal Navy squad, A-team member Lt Col Rob Healey (R Signals) was pleased that both Army Squads had coped with the physical and mental challenge of swimming in the dark following a midnight start.

"Swimming during the night was pretty emotional stuff," Healey told *SoldierSport*. "The sea was rough and there were huge tankers passing within a few hundred metres. You know there's a boat that you're swimming next to, but apart from that you can't see a thing and it can get quite daunting."

"Mentally it is very hard. You don't know what's below you or to the side and you can't see much in front either. You just have to go for it and swim as fast as you can."

The relay – named Exercise Channel Eagle – was organised by open water swimming enthusiast Healey and featured athletes from all three Services, including an Army B team swimming as part of the Army Air Corps' 50th anniversary celebrations.

Although the relay was officially 22 miles long, Healey estimates that having to dodge ferries and cope with the tide meant each team covered at least 30.

Healey's Army side was by far the oldest in the competition with an average age of 37, but it was only after several hours in the water that the Royal Navy's younger competitors began to pull away.

"It was very tight for the first few hours with one team and then the next moving ahead," he explained. "It wasn't until dawn that the Navy went clear. I was particularly proud of our performance because the conditions in the water were so rough."

Healey was quick to praise the efforts of his team, which included Maj Sian Edwards (RADG), Lt Col David Gagen (REME), WO2 Ian Coles (QDG), Capt Catherine Jardine (R Signals) and Maj Hamish McCarthy (RE).

Each swimmer battled through a demanding training programme prior to the relay, including competing in the Inter-Services 5km race in treacherous weather at Lake Bala in Wales.

"I have done a lot of adventurous training during my 23 years in the Army, but jumping into the rough sea in the pitch black and swimming your heart out through lumps of seaweed for an hour is pretty tough."

"The Navy deserved their win because they had the best team of swimmers, but I honestly believe we had the best spirit. It was that spirit that allowed us to split the pre-race favourites and finish second."

With a team crossing of the Channel under his belt, Healey has gone straight back into training ahead of a planned solo attempt this month.

The type one insulin-dependent diabetic is hoping a total of £10,000 will be raised from both swims, with the money to be split between Diabetes UK and the Royal British Legion.

"I have managed to book the same pilot and that will be a great help to me," Healey concluded.

"It's quite daunting having seen first-hand how far the swim actually is, but I'm looking forward to it. I can now understand why the current success rate is about ten per cent."

● Visit www.channeleagle.co.uk to make a donation towards the Exercise Channel Eagle fund or for more information about the next cross-Channel relay. ■

SPORTDIARY

ANGLING

September 2 – Masters Cup (Swynnerton); 3 – Club angler final and inter-corps championships (Swynnerton); 4-5 – Army individual finals and open plate (Swynnerton); 6 – Inter-divisional championships (Swynnerton); 7 – Team reserve open (Swynnerton); 7-8 – Army team finals (Swynnerton); 9-11 – Inter-Services game championships (Rutland); 17-21 – Inter-Services boat championships.

ARCHERY

September 9 – Inter-Services outdoor competition (Somerset).

ATHLETICS

September 5 – Honnington 10k.

CANOEING

September 7 – Inter-Services marathon championships (Nottingham); 8 – Inter-Services sprint championships (Nottingham); 14-16 – Army surf championships (Newgale); 16 – CS-Hasler marathon championships (Pangbourne); 22-23 – Inter-Services surf championships (Newgale).

CYCLING

September 22 – Army and Inter-Services 10-mile time trial championships (south England); 23 – Army and Inter-Services 25-mile time trial championships (south England).

FOOTBALL

September 3-7 – Army women's team trials (Aldershot); 6 – Women v AFC Bournemouth (Aldershot); 9-13 – Under 21/Under 23 team trials (Aldershot); 15-16 – Youth team trials (Aldershot); 15 – Crusaders v APTC (Aldershot); 16 – Youth v Radford FC Under 18 (Aldershot); 17-24 – Senior team trials (Aldershot); 17 – Army v Uxbridge (Aldershot); 20 – Army v Andover (Andover); 24 – Army v Carshalton Athletic (Aldershot); 27 – Women v Met Police (Met Police); 29 – Crusaders v RMAS (RMAS).

GOLF

September 18-20 – Inter-unit championship finals (Aldershot); 22-23 – The Graham Butler Trophy (Ferndown).

HOCKEY

September 7 – BA(G) inter-corps summer league finals; 12 – Six-a-side tournament (Gütersloh).

PARAGLIDING

September 3-7 – Inter-Services championships (Crickhowell).

ROWING

September 6-9 – FISA World Masters Regatta (Zagreb).

RUGBY LEAGUE

September 7 – Army v Royal Navy (Portsmouth); 19 – Army v Royal Air Force (Aldershot).

SAILING

September 6-8 – Little Britain Challenge Cup (Solent); 17-21 – Services offshore regatta (Solent).

continued opposite. . .

Net gain

Second spot for men but women take tennis title

Report: Stephen Tyler
Picture: Graeme Main

A DEPLETED Army men's tennis squad took the Royal Air Force to the wire before eventually relinquishing their grip on the Inter-Services title at Wimbledon.

The team took to the courts at the world famous All England Lawn Tennis Club without several key players, but it took the RAF until the final few games of a scintillating two-day tournament to secure the trophy by ten points to eight.

There was better news for the women's side, which dominated both days of play to win the Inter-Services title for the first time in three years.

Lt David Bozas (RA), who played at number one for the Army, told *SoldierSport*: "It's a shame we lost but we took the RAF all the way.

"There was one doubles game that if we had won, I am sure we would have

gone on to win the tournament.

"We lost about seven players this year through operational deployments and guys leaving the Army so I think we have done a lot better than we truthfully expected to."

Bozas led the charge during the championship's first day by coming from behind to beat the Royal Navy's Capt Dominic Crisp 3-6, 6-0, 6-3 before dispatching Air Force number one Chief Tech Marc Hughes 6-3, 7-5.

Army champion Pte Jonny Abosi (2 Mercian) thumped Navy opponent ET Hamish McKay 6-3, 6-1 in his opening game but slipped to a disappointing 7-5, 6-1 defeat against the RAF's Flt Lt Ben Salomon.

Trailing the RAF by two points going into day two's doubles matches, the Army gave themselves a chance of overturning the deficit with a straight sets victory from Bozas and Abosi.

The comeback was not to be however, as a final RAF victory meant



Sure shot: The Army pile on the runs during a convincing victory against the Royal Navy at Portsmouth



Big hitter: Army champion Pte Jonny Abosi winds up a powerful forehand during a tense 6-3, 6-4 doubles victory over the Royal Navy at Wimbledon

the airmen won their first Inter-Services title since 2001.

"I was personally very happy with my performance because I was unbeaten in the singles and doubles as the Army

number one," added Bozas, who was also full of praise for his doubles partner. "Abosi did really well all tournament. He is a cracking singles player and we have worked well together

since we started playing doubles last year. I suppose it's a good partnership because he's always nice and calm whereas I'm a bit impulsive and like to attack shots." ■

Clean sweep

Cricketers complete Inter-Services domination

Picture: Graeme Main

ARMY cricketers ended their season with a flourish by clinching an Inter-Services whitewash, writes Stephen Tyler.

The women's side delivered a third successive title with a brace of devastating displays at Aldershot, while the men eased past the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force to claim a deserved victory at Portsmouth.

Unbeaten in the 50-over tournament's three-year history, the Army's women beat the Royal Navy by 94 runs in their first game, with the Blues unable to overhaul the home team's total of 263-5.

An effective bowling display saw the Royal Air Force dismissed for 123 runs in the final match before the Army cantered to a comprehensive nine-wicket win.

Player-manager Maj Ruth MacGill (AAC) singled out

captain LCpl Amanda Potgieter (1 Staffords) for praise but said the overwhelming victory was very much a team effort.

She added: "We have had a reasonable season when you take into consideration how many players we have lost to deployments and injuries.

"To not lose a game for three seasons in the Inter-Services shows the strength of our squad and we are now looking to build on that success by developing new players for the future."

● **ASPIRING** cricket officials are invited to attend a course for umpires and scorers being held at Aldershot from October 1-5.

No previous experience of umpiring is required for the course, which will include a session with the English Cricket Board's umpires' manager.

For more details contact Maj Mike Cornwall on mil 94321 8345.

SPORTDIARY

continued. . .

SHOOTING

September 9 – Combined Services small bore target rifle v Combined Reserve Forces (Bisley); 27-28 – Inter-Services target rifle tyro match (Bisley).

SNOWBOARDING

December 1-7 – Army orphans training week (Neustift); 7-21 – Army championships (Neustift).

SURFING

September 1-2 – British inter-club championships (Woolacombe); October 12-17 – Army championships (Newquay); 18-21 – Inter-Services championships (Newquay).

TENNIS

September 12-13 – Army Medical School championships (Aldershot).

TUG OF WAR

September 19-24 – European Championships (Minehead).

WAKEBOARDING

September 10-14 – Army championships (Milton Keynes); 17-21 – Inter-Services championships (Milton Keynes).

■ Got a date for the diary? Email details to fixtures@soldiermagazine.co.uk

Feet first

The regular feature in which we ask soldiers for their views on a hot topic

We asked foot soldiers from 1 R Anglian and 1 Gren Gds what it's like to be an infantryman fighting in Afghanistan's Helmand region

LCpl Steven Veal, 1 R Anglian

This is war-fighting but I knew what I was coming out here for. You can only carry essentials and no creature comforts.

Nothing can prepare you for the heat and dust, and even the fittest people have gone down with heat injuries. The Sangin Valley was the worst place to be because we were fighting on Taliban ground so it's where they concentrated their efforts.



Gdsm Jason Warren, 1 Gren Gds

It's a stressful job because you are constantly on the ground being shot at and blown up. On operations we only have our ammo, drinking water and body armour. We use the Javelin missile, which is a good weapon system to have on the ground even with air support. Other than that, we have all our usual infantry weapons and they are all being used.



Gdsm Lee Hastings, 1 Gren Gds

It's hard work because of the heat and weight we carry on operations. The longest I was on rations was ten days and you do get sick of them. We took turns to stay between the compounds and trenches but you must wear body armour at all times unless you are sitting down or asleep. But in the trenches you could take a refreshing dip in the river.



Pte Joe Rix, 1 R Anglian

This is full-on war-fighting and it's good to do a tour that you have trained for and where you can put all your skills into practice. You know you are walking forward into an ambush and that you're going to get whacked. Sometimes the Taliban are so close you can see what they're wearing. The last operation was pretty tough as we tabbed 70km in five days.



WO2 Ivan Snow, 1 R Anglian

I'm in a WMIK that acts like a bullet magnet but we've had to dismount and go on foot. I've never seen this sort of intense fighting before and it's my 11th tour. The Taliban are a determined and fanatical enemy with a purpose and when we go into their territory it's not populated so it's a real battlefield. Everything you do stems back to your basic soldiering.



Cpl Chris Brooks, 1 R Anglian

The grenade launcher and GPMG are proven battle-winners and the troops are in high spirits. But it's physically and mentally draining because of the heat and the fighting is constant with never a lull. The combat is fast and more furious than I thought it would be but all the training has been effective and enabled us to do the job as best we can.



LCpl Jack Mizon, 1 Gren Gds

It's back to conventional fighting using everything we do in our training. It's hard because we are fighting at close quarters and although it's enjoyable, it is dangerous. At one point they couldn't get our bergens up to us and we didn't have toothbrushes for two weeks, and we slept on anything including flea-infested rugs.



LCpl Nick Price, 1 Gren Gds

This is the first tour where I've put all my infantry skills learnt in training to use in real situations. Working with the Afghan National Army in the operations mentoring and liaison team took a bit of adapting to. We take on more roles, so you could be a signaller, gunner and medic, as well as fighting. This can be very stressful, especially in the heat of battle.



Pte "Scottie" Corless, 1 R Anglian

It's one of the scariest but most exciting things I've ever done. The worst is patrolling on tip-toe waiting for a contact, but as soon as you're under fire the training kicks in. You're trained to hit the deck and you do it here quicker than a quick thing. The general purpose machine guns, which the Taliban don't like, have been real battle-winners.



Interviews: Karen Thomas Pictures: Mike Weston

Coming up . . . in SOLDIER

Combat medical training puts first aid skills and stomachs of Paras to the test and we take a first look at the contenders vying to provide the Army's next-generation armour



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