

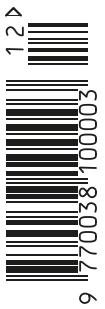
# SOLDIER

MAGAZINE OF THE BRITISH ARMY



## CHRISTMAS WISHES

Troops reveal their perfect present



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## MAKING A SPLASH

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## DOMESTIC ABUSE

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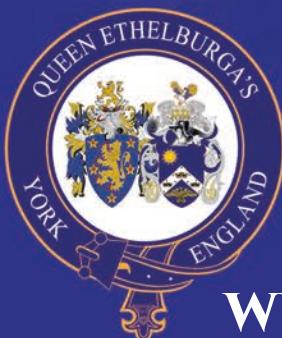
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Hannah W, Class of 2023



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Nobody would dare touch me wearing that uniform...

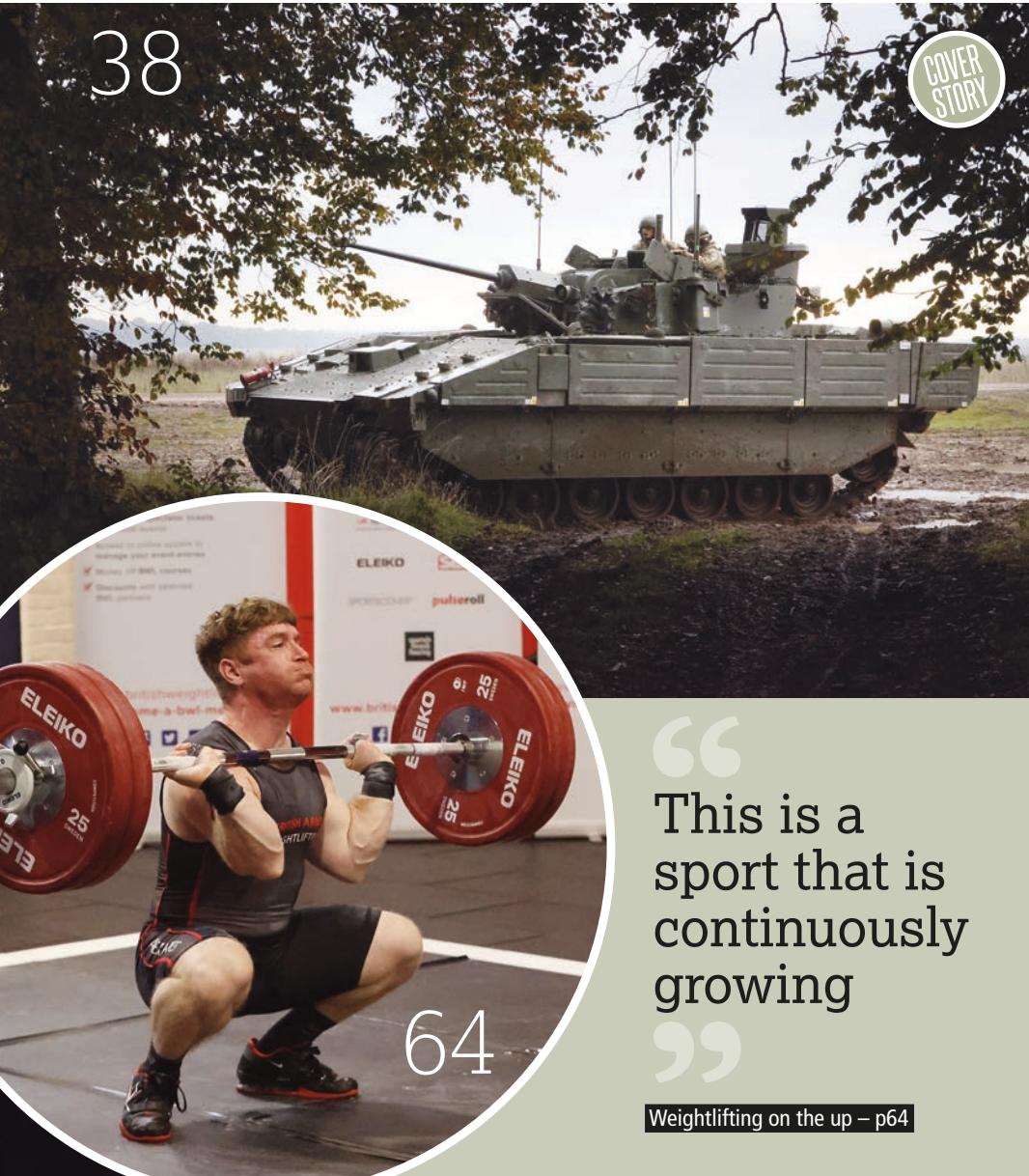
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## Army family values

AS MANY of our readers will know, Christmas can be a time of extreme highs and lows.

And among the latter, sadly, are incidents of domestic abuse – which almost double at this time of year.

December's magazine therefore seems the obvious one in which to share the inspirational story of Reservist LCpl Manpreet Maycock (shown opposite).

This remarkable Servicewoman's words illustrate how stepping into a military uniform can prove to be a major turning point.

For LCpl Maycock, the Forces community represented not just a move towards safety and strength, but to achieving professional excellence.

This is how military life should look for everyone who is brought into the fold. But for some partners and spouses, the decision to join the Army can be the start of their abuse.

No matter how desperate or complex your situation at home is – and regardless of whether you are the one in green or not – please know that the Service family can help you.

Read the advice offered on page 46, turn to our welfare directory on page 52 or find someone else – on or off the patch – who you trust.

Wishing all our readers across the military family, and world, a safe and happy Christmas.

**Sarah Goldthorpe • Editor**

### Where to find *Soldier*

#### ➤ Printed copies

Sent to Army sites at the start of the month.

#### ➤ Facebook, X and Instagram

ALONG with news and glimpses behind the scenes at *Soldier*, we publish a link to the latest magazine at [facebook.com/soldiermagazine](https://facebook.com/soldiermagazine) and on X, formerly Twitter (@soldiermagazine).

#### ➤ Online

DIGITAL versions of current and past editions are available on the Army website at [soldiermagazine.co.uk](https://soldiermagazine.co.uk). Just click on the "read it now" tab.

#### ➤ Purchase

If you're not in the Army you can buy *Soldier* from your high street magazine retailer or directly from us at [subs@soldiermagazine.co.uk](mailto:subs@soldiermagazine.co.uk) (£23 for 12 issues in the UK).



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Picture: Sgt Luke Johnston, Rlish

## Combat medics must prepare for illegal attacks, says top officer

**A**RMY medics must be prepared to face an enemy that shows "a flagrant disregard" for international law and openly attacks them, the UK's most senior military clinician has said.

Surgeon General Maj Gen Tim Hodgetts said Russian forces fighting in Ukraine had a proven reputation for placing medical facilities in their sights – with hundreds of Geneva Convention breaches confirmed by independent monitors.

And he told *Soldier* that Army top brass were now adapting protocols to better protect British field hospitals and prevent assaults against them.

"Among the most important lessons of the Ukraine conflict is the flagrant abuse of international law shown by the Kremlin," Maj Gen Hodgetts explained. "With the red cross symbol being ignored, we must be better at camouflage and dispersal – looking to areas such as underground car parks to set up hospitals."

The senior doctor, who has operational experience in Iraq, Afghanistan and Northern Ireland, stressed that closer working with Nato allies was critical – with a host of good practice already being shared.

It was also important to adapt medical techniques to the injuries expected in future wars, he said, and Ukrainian clinicians training in the UK were sharing their experiences.

The general outlined how every conflict confronted medics with a particular pattern of injuries.

He added: "Northern Ireland saw so-called coffee-jar bombs cause serious fragmentation injuries; in Iraq there were armour-piercing IEDs.

"Conventional weapons are being used in Ukraine – missiles, rockets and indirect fire attacks are inflicting high-energy injuries, with huge damage to upper and lower limbs as well as devastating facial wounds."

A conflict of this type meant the role of combat medical technicians was critical – and hospital help was needed near the front.

Rapid evacuation was also required – but with helicopters vulnerable to attack, armoured vehicles were also key to keeping casualties alive.

"The Army recognises this need and is modernising," Maj Gen Hodgetts continued. "Many deaths in combat occur before a casualty reaches a hospital – so having trained soldiers with the right first aid kit is important."

The surgeon general assured troops they would be well looked after if they found themselves in the casualty chain. Medics adapt their equipment and training constantly.

"Personnel can also have the confidence that we will continue to horizon scan, looking at emerging technologies and kit to improve our work," he concluded. ■

# UNDER FIRE

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“  
We must  
be better at  
camouflage  
and  
dispersal  
”



# GLOBAL SITREP



## 1. KENTUCKY HANGING TIGHT

EIGHT soldiers from B Company, 1st Battalion, The Royal Irish Regiment crossed the pond to test their skills on Exercise Airborne Ranger.

Based at Fort Campbell in Kentucky, the visiting troops completed two courses at The Sabalauski Air Assault School

alongside students from the US Army. The trip was aimed at boosting interoperability and their capabilities as part of the 16 Air Assault Brigade Combat Team.

Among the drills covered were how to rappel and fast rope from a Blackhawk helicopter, while Lt Jamie Parke was awarded the honour of "Ruck March Champion" on a 12-mile final test tab that he completed in a time of 2hr 8min.

## 2. TURKS AND CAICOS ISLANDS HURRICANE HELP

TROOPS from across 3rd (UK) Division have embarked on the training mission of a lifetime to the Caribbean.

Seven personnel, including four from 22 Engineer Regiment, will spend around a month helping local military units in Turks and Caicos and the Cayman Islands further develop their disaster response procedures.

Hurricanes are a particular risk in the region, with the peak season falling between June and November.



## 3. BELIZE JUNGLE SCHOOL



INFANTERS took to the jungles of Central America to help counterparts from various Caribbean nations hone their trade craft.

Exercise Macaw Reach – a series of nine different courses – covered sniper training, planning, range management, drill and jungle tracking.

The 50-strong British contingent was formed by instructors from the Coldstream Guards, Infantry Battle School, 4th Battalion, The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment and Royal Air Force colleagues.

Organised by the Land Regional Coordination Cell (Belize), the training was primarily for the Belize Defence Force, but also for personnel from other countries including Jamaica, Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago.

## 4. FALKLAND ISLANDS HISTORY'S LESSONS

TROOPS from 2nd Battalion, The Rifles attended a battlefield tour and memorial ceremony at the site of fierce fighting with Argentine forces.

The soldiers, on the last leg of their tour as the islands' Roulement Infantry Company, took part in a study at Two Sisters, where 3 Commando Brigade engaged South American occupiers on the heights around capital Port Stanley in 1982.

Members of the Welsh Guards had arrived on the Falklands to relieve their Rifles colleagues as this issue went to press.



## 5. GERMANY COMBAT SUSTENANCE

RESERVIST logies headed for Nato Forward Holding Base Sennelager for a shakedown of soldiering and trade skills.

Drivers, suppliers and chefs from 159 Regiment, RLC took to the training area for Exercise Halberd Rise – the unit's first overseas annual camp for a decade.

Commanding Officer Lt Col Adam Heather said he had been impressed with the commitment and ability shown by personnel during the manoeuvres.

"Having this opportunity is fantastic," he said.

"Coming to Germany means we can not only practise movement overseas but also do our planning and drive our vehicles, all of which replicates a real deployment."



Picture: Duncan Campbell

## 6. FRANCE TOUGH STRAITS

PERSONNEL from the Land Warfare Centre made landfall near Calais after a gruelling cross-Channel swim.

The six-strong relay team hit the waves in the early morning off Folkestone, working an hour each in the water during the demanding 14-hour outing.

Clad in nothing but shorts, they braved strong currents and relentless waves as they navigated the Straits of Dover – one of the world's busiest shipping lanes.

But their perseverance paid off as they finally stepped ashore in France, with their efforts raising cash for the Army Benevolent Fund.

Team member Ssgt Liam McEvoy (RA) said: "Trying to judge the swell when taking a breath and not taking in sea water every stroke was the hardest challenge."



# INTELLIGENCE FOR THE ATLAS?

Brief the team now:



Email: news@soldiermagazine.co.uk  
Facebook: facebook.com/soldiermagazine  
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## 7. SOUTH KOREA MOUNTAIN MASTERS

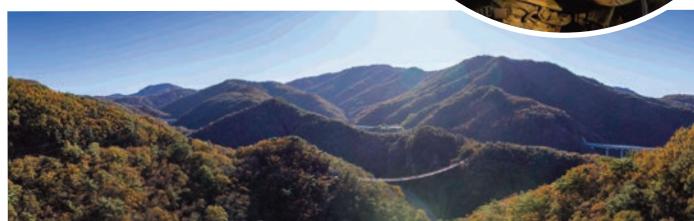
### 8. ESTONIA BOLD STEPS

MULTINATIONAL drills in Tapa saw soldiers from the First Fusiliers battlegroup integrated into the 1st Estonian Brigade.

Scenarios on the two-week Exercise Bold Fusilier, in which French, Canadian and Polish units were also involved, included fighting in forests and trench clearance.

Battlegroup CO Lt Col James Fern, whose troops recently replaced The Queen's Royal Hussars on Op Cabrit, said the package would help increase Nato's warfighting ability.

"Like at the gym, where you get stronger by sets and repetitions – it's exactly the same for combined arms manoeuvre," he added.



Pictures: Cpl Sion Lucas, RLC

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A 16 Medical Regiment soldier surveys earthquake damage in Turkey earlier this year

Picture: Sgt Robert Weideman, RLC; Claire Mann; Capt Richard Ainsworth-Masiello, QARANC

# Calm in a catastrophe

Personnel rewarded for their cool heads and clever thinking

TOOPS serving on the front lines of humanitarian action and global counter-terrorism are among those to receive royal recognition for their work.

A total of 14 Army personnel are singled out in the latest round of operational honours and awards for their efforts on a range of critical deployments.

They include Maj Alanda Scott (RE, shown right) – 2iC of 32 Engineer Regiment – who receives a King's Commendation for Valuable Service after working with the United Nations in Somalia.

And Capt Richard Ainsworth-Masiello (QARANC, shown far right) – a mental health nurse from 16 Medical Regiment – is being made an Associate of the Royal Red Cross after taking part in relief efforts following February's earthquake in Turkey.

Maj Scott was recognised for her contribution to a raft of projects, including humanitarian initiatives, during her tenure as a military adviser in Africa.

"She fostered outstanding relationships and built high levels of

trust through her professionalism," the officer's citation said. "Her understanding of the complex political landscape enabled her to engage with the correct individuals and avoid placing herself at odds with clan and governmental dynamics."

Maj Scott admitted being honoured to receive the award. "It was a necessary and humbling task – I was lucky to be a part of it," she said.

Capt Ainsworth-Masiello was also taken aback to receive recognition after working with Army, Royal Air Force and aid teams in Turkey. Deploying to Turkoglu – close to the earthquake's epicentre – he provided vital mental healthcare to personnel and locals.

His citation highlights an "exemplary contribution" throughout the operation's taskings having deployed at short notice.

Capt Ainsworth-Masiello said he was humbled by the scenes he had witnessed as well as the resilience shown by the civilian population facing the disaster.

"It is an experience I will reflect on for years to come," he concluded. ■



“  
It is an  
experience I  
will reflect on  
for years  
”



## LECONFIELD GOES FOR GREEN

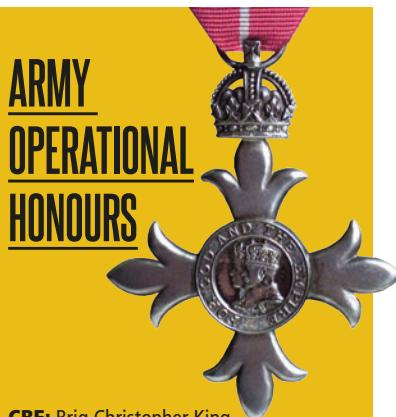
TWO net-zero multi-occupancy buildings have been completed at The Defence School of Transport in Leconfield to accommodate students on short courses.

The project includes sustainable features and smart technology. There are 112 bed spaces across two- to three-person rooms plus ablutions and drying and utility rooms.

### Talkback is on WhatsApp



Put your gripes to the Army's top brass on  
**07973 614782**



**CBE:** Brig Christopher King

**OBE:** Lt Col Martin Windsor, RLC

**MBE:** Lt Col Paul Martin, R Irish; Maj Sam Tooth, REME

**Associate of the Royal Red Cross:**

Capt Richard Ainsworth-Masiello, QARANC

**King's Commendation for**

**Valuable Service:** WO1 Jamie Forbes, RA; Capt Robert Jenkins, RE; Sgt Michael Ogden, Gren Gds; Cpl Navin Rai, QOGLR; Maj Alanda Scott, RE; Maj Laurence Wilson, RA; Maj Paul Young, REME

**United States Bronze Star Medal:**

Lt Col James Christie, Scots; Lt Col Ashley Wiseman, RA



## TRENCH TRIUMPH

RESERVISTS on Op Interflex pooled their diverse civvies street skills to build a trench system that more accurately replicates the designs being used in Ukraine.

The British instructors took the initiative to construct the fortifications at a training area in East England.

Maj Glenn Thomas (R Irish) – leading Interflex Reservists as OC Sphinx Company with 19th Light Brigade – said: "Our troops had all the skills – we didn't need to call on any specialist support."

"The trench now spans some 800 metres and is far more realistic than some of the designs that we have previously used."



# 'Shot in arm' for Reserve training



Picture: Cpl Nathan Tanuku, RLC

## Artillery tests out more realistic standards for troops

UNNERS are forging ahead with plans to streamline training for Reservists and up the number of qualified personnel in the process.

Some 120 troops attended a two-week pilot course at the Royal School of Artillery in Larkhill, with a further 130 spread between Otterburn, Altcar and Pirbright.

Aimed at reducing the time it takes Reservists to complete trade-specific training, the move follows the decision to drop the so-called equivalence policy, which required part-time personnel to meet exactly the same overall standards as Regulars.

As the school's deputy commandant, Lt Col Andy Welsh (RA, pictured) explained, the old system led to a shortage of fully qualified personnel.

"If a course is six weeks for a Regular soldier and you break that down into two-week packets, plus

refreshers, you had training that could take three or four years," he said.

"And most of those courses were second in command and detachment commander-level – so lance corporals to sergeants – which are very important roles.

"By centralising resources we are delivering a much more efficient model. This is the shot in the arm that was needed."

The pilot, which involved seven regiments, saw troops upskilling on the likes of the L118 light gun, multiple launch rocket system (pictured above on Reserve training in 2020) and ground-based air defence.

Lt Col Welsh added that it had "bitten a gap" out of the shortfall in qualified soldiers and could serve as a blueprint for other formations in the Field Army.

A decision on formal rollout of the programme is expected next year. ■

“  
You had  
training that  
could take four  
years  
”



## ARTILLERY ATTITUDES

Troops from 101 Regiment ponder training overhaul

"It's good because if people feel like they can make progress it helps keep them engaged. A big challenge in the Reserve is the different demands on us. I work shifts as a train driver and have two young children. We also have to do all of our ITRs and a two-week camp each year."

Bdr Kieran Power



"I'm FTRS now but used to be a teacher and would never have got between four and 12 weeks off to do courses. Allowing Reservists to qualify in bite-sized chunks around their civvies employment means we can put forward more people to support the Regulars when needed. All in all, it's a win."

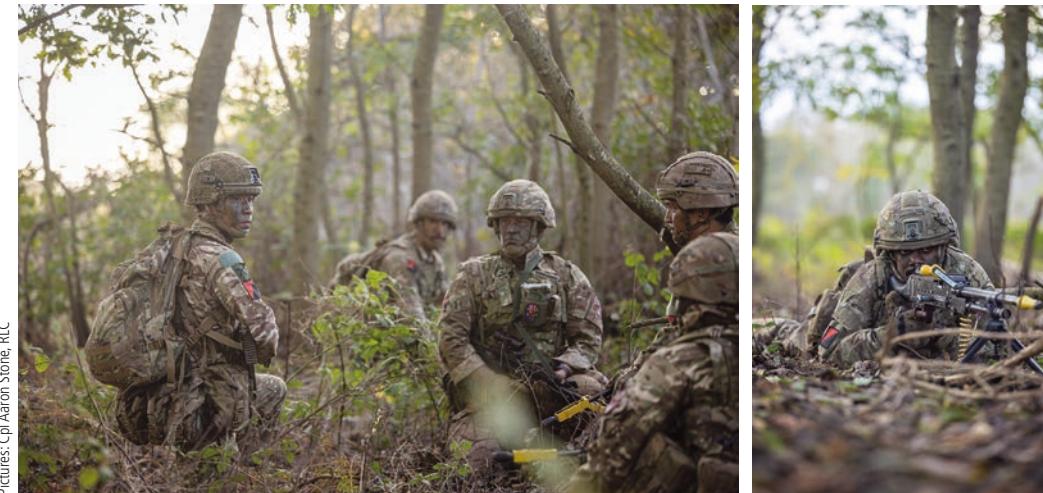
Sgt Lucy Baker



"By being able to adjust our work life and do our training we will gain knowledge and be more confident in our jobs. It will make the Army stronger – if we have skill fade the force as a whole is weaker."

LBdr Mohammad  
Taufiq Alam





Pictures: Cpl Aaron Stone, RLC

■ AIRBORNE loggers faced a two-week test of stamina to prep them for the first rung of the promotion ladder. Some 30 soldiers were put through their paces on the Friday Woods Training Area as they prepared to make the leap from private to lance corporal on a course run by Colchester-based 13 Air Assault Support Regiment, Royal Logistic Corps.

# Another dose of realism

## Junior officers taken into the field to get better faster

THE captains' warfare course has been overhauled to include a field phase for the first time.

Those promoted to the rank will now attend five weeks of classroom-based learning, before students deploy into command posts for a week-long simulation of a brigade-level op.

Following trials, the new format is due to be officially rolled out in 2024 and is part of wider efforts to upgrade officer training to better reflect modern conflict.

Brig Karl Harris, director of Shrivenham's Land Command and Staff College, which oversees the package, said global instability made it all the more vital that commanders at every level become highly skilled in the art of land warfare.

"We have a generation of junior officers who will provide the bulk of talented staff in our formation HQs, as well as being the leaders of today and the future, who need to be not only proficient but expert in combined arms manoeuvre," he said.

"In the recent past we've been focused on planning – which is really important – but arguably to the detriment of execution.

"All plans are undermined when in contact with the enemy, so we have to be agile in our delivery."

A total of 52 personnel took part in the most recent course – one of five delivered each year and a compulsory step for all those



Pictures: Graeme Main

promoted to captain.

Instructor Maj Tom Wythe (RL) said subordinates should feel reassured about the increased investment in developing their leaders.

"Practising skills that are taught in a classroom in a field environment adds a whole new element of realism – and will enable students to go to future jobs and perform to a higher standard," he added.

"Time spent in training is never wasted. You can only ever get better and it will hopefully avoid errors being made when it matters."

To make the most of learning, the officer urged troops to attend the course as soon as possible upon receiving their third pip. ■

“  
The environment adds a whole new level of realism  
”

**Q: What can others do to prepare for the captains' warfare course?**

**A:** "My advice would be to not turn down trawls, as bone as they sound – go and gain as much experience as you can across the Field Army, so you come here armed with that and ready to add value to your group."

Capt Phil Birkett, REME



## A NEW PHASE

■ CIVIL servants, personal trainers and even a brain surgeon were among the first to complete a new-look phase one training course for Reservists.

The troops passed out of Army Training Centre Pirbright after completing a shorter syllabus that has combined modules one and two, and brought the package in line with a revised common military syllabus under Future Soldier.

WO2 Gareth Triggs (RE) – who oversaw the cohort as CSM Normandy Company – said the trailblazing recruits had shown huge promise during their stint there.

He told *Soldier*: "We are running four of these courses every year, and the Reservists are showing real commitment – they are a pleasure to train."

● Final Word – page 74

## MERCI FOR THE MEDAL

■ A GUNNER'S close ties with French forces was marked with a special award as he retired from the Army.



Lt Col Richard Carter (RA) was presented with the Medaille de la Defense Nationale Bronze by France's ambassador to the UK.

The officer, who has also received the US Defense Meritorious Service Medal for his work on Op Shader, said he had been left "humbled".



## OFFSHORE CENTRE OPENS

■ SEAFARING personnel can look forward to a full season of events and training in 2024 following the completion of work on the new-look Army Sailing Association Offshore Centre.

The two-year project at the Gosport-based facility involved the reconstruction and refurbishment of a grade-two listed building, converting a derelict Victorian police barracks into a new headquarters equipped with training rooms, kit, stores, and offices.

Included among the activities on offer are Royal Yachting Association skipper and crew courses, as well as programmes in sea survival, first aid, shortwave radio and marine engineering.

The centre will also be a base for Army, corps and regimental yachts in the marina, with favourable berthing and membership arrangements. Visit [sailingbritisharmysport.com](http://sailingbritisharmysport.com)

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Pictures: National Memorial Arboretum

## FESTIVE FEELS

■ THE focal venue for remembrance in the Midlands will be lit up in spectacular style during the yuletide season again this year. Visitors to the National Memorial Arboretum can see the 150-acre woodland site in a kaleidoscope of colour until December 23 in its nightly *Illuminated Arboretum* display. Entry is every 15 minutes between 1630 to 1930 and costs £24 for adults and £14 for children aged five and over. Visit [thenma.org.uk](http://thenma.org.uk)



## Game over for Gazelle

A MUCH-LOVED Army aircraft has headed for the history books after a special flypast to celebrate half a century of sterling service around the globe.

Marking the retirement of the Gazelle, three of the helicopters took off from Aldergrove in Northern Ireland on a UK sortie over bases including Shawbury, Middle Wallop and Andover, where it has been a familiar sight.

The formation – flown by 5

Regiment, Army Air Corps crews – was met with appreciative waves from those who have worked with the helicopter over the decades.

First entering service in the mid-1970s, it has served in a diverse range of roles from reconnaissance to medical evacuation and as a training platform.

Built by Aerospatiale and Westland, the Gazelle has assisted on operations in locations including Northern Ireland, the Balkans and Iraq. ■

“  
Our families  
are true  
unsung heroes  
who go above  
and beyond  
”



The 2023 award winners

## A FAMILY AFFAIR

NOMINATIONS are being sought for the third annual Celebrating Forces Families Awards.

Included among the categories are inspirational family member of the year and overcoming adversity.

The ceremony is backed by the MoD and, due to its growing popularity, will move to a new venue at the Leonardo Royal Hotel in London for 2024.

The window for nominations was launched by Air Cdr Wendy Rothery and will remain open until December 15. She said: “Our families are true unsung heroes who routinely go above and beyond to support the entire Armed Forces community; they fully deserve the formal recognition that these awards bring.”

Nominations can be made at [celebratingforcesfamilies.co.uk](http://celebratingforcesfamilies.co.uk)

## CODE FOR CARE HOMES

■ AN INNOVATIVE programme that supports care home staff responsible for looking after ex-military personnel is being rolled out across England.

Under the Veteran Friendly Framework – a collaboration between good causes Royal Star and Garter, The Royal British Legion and NHS Veterans' Covenant Healthcare Alliance – carers must prove themselves in areas such as drawing up bespoke care plans and combating social isolation.

Ten homes are accredited to the initiative with another 20 in the pipeline.



## TRIBUTE TO MILITARY ASBESTOS VICTIMS

■ A MONUMENT honouring past and present Armed Forces personnel suffering from asbestos-related cancers has been unveiled at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire.

The sculpture – commissioned by charity Mesothelioma UK and funded by private donations – is made up of more than 60 stone pieces representing the building blocks of life and public service.

Artist Graeme Mitchenson, who produced the piece, said it had been an honour to create a focal point that also recognised "those who have and are continuing to suffer from this awful disease".



Picture: Graeme Main

“  
The extraordinary experiences we undergo shape our lives  
”

## Lasting connections?

■ EARLY six in ten veterans would like to spend more time with former military colleagues but rarely take the opportunity to do so, a study has revealed.

A survey of 5,000 ex-military personnel found that 58 per cent of them wanted to meet up more often with old comrades.

But a third only met up on the likes of Remembrance Day once a year and nine per cent had no contact at all.

The findings come from the organisation behind the Veterans' Railcard. They also flagged that half of leavers felt lonely or isolated after departing the military.

Former Royal Marine and television presenter JJ Chalmers encouraged ex-Servicemen and women to keep up with their old colleagues after seeing the research.

"It is imperative we embrace our

exceptional community and ensure connections last," he added.

"The extraordinary experiences we undergo during our time in the Forces shape our lives." ■

### View from the GROUND

"There's wanting to see old comrades and then there's getting round to doing it. It took me years to re-engage after leaving. It was only after meeting up with two ex-colleagues at the funeral of a friend that I started properly seeing the veteran community. After a few minutes of talking, it was as if we had never been apart."



Steve Davies (ex-RGJ),  
Founder, Cranbrook Breakfast Club

## FEARLESS FUNDRAISING



## GIVING SOMETHING BACK IN GIBRALTAR...

VETERANS, civilians and serving personnel joined forces for an epic 12-hour relay run of the 1,398ft high Rock of Gibraltar.

More than 20 runners took on the charity challenge while also giving back to the local community

by spending the day before the race with Gibraltar Clubhouse – an organisation that offers work-based programmes for those with mental health issues.

Donate at [justgiving.com/campaign/gibraltar-2023](https://www.justgiving.com/campaign/gibraltar-2023)

Funds raised:  
**£1,750**  
For: Waterloo Uncovered



# Ground view

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

IT IS hard to believe that 2023 is drawing to a close – and that I am approaching the final lap of my tour in this role as I prepare to hand over to a successor in the summer of next year.

The last 12 months have been a mixed blessing. On one hand, events have underscored how unpredictable the world has become. On the other, the UK and its allies have continued to show that aggression can expect to be challenged.

Of note, British Army instructors and their Nato partners have now trained some 30,000 Ukrainian troops, who have returned to fight the Russian forces invading their home in a conflict now entering its third year.

Elsewhere, in the Balkans, soldiers from a battlegroup centred on 1st Battalion, The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment are working alongside alliance colleagues as they help to keep the peace in a volatile Kosovo.

And all the while, the Army has maintained its busy programme of other commitments throughout the world, from Cyprus to the Falkland Islands.

Away from operations, however, our troops have

been instrumental in bolstering national pride.

I recently attended the Army Sports Awards, where both individual and team achievements were celebrated.

These were all the more impressive when you consider that our men and women are often competing at the highest levels alongside a ferocious pace of work.

The annual showcase is also one of our great displays of inclusion and diversity. There are personnel from the most junior to generals – Reservists and Regulars – present as the Service comes together to mark success.

Sport is one of our great recruitment draws – the Army firmly believes in it and a soldier of any rank with the talent, commitment and drive can find the opportunity to progress a very long way in their discipline.

Many have gone on to compete in the likes of the Olympics and Commonwealth Games, adding to their country's medal haul.

So it is right to reflect on all our achievements as the year draws to a close. And we should be proud to tell the wider world about them.

If you seek challenge, Army life will not disappoint.

If you seek challenge, Army life will not disappoint

“ ”



CALLING OUT

call out unacceptable behaviour.

As soldiers, we should feel that we can speak up.

There was a panel discussion at the event, where very senior officers were present. And while it is too early to talk about conclusions, rest assured that there were some useful conversations relating to the systems we have in place.

I will keep you in the loop with an update soon.

## UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

**Q** Any movies on the holiday hit-list?

**A** Ridley Scott's *Napoleon*, definitely



## Christmas days



IT ONLY remains for me – as I sign off for 2023 – to thank you all for the outstanding job you are doing in your service at home and across the world.

As always, my thoughts are with those deployed or working over the holidays.

As somebody who spent one Christmas on Op Herrick and another on guard duty in Germany, I'm well aware of the sacrifices that troops are making.

I'll be out and about visiting a few of you in the run up to – and on – December 25.

Please continue to speak to me about Army life, the elements you are enjoying and, most importantly, where we can do better.

I wish you all a happy and peaceful Christmas.

# THE BIG PICTURE

London, United Kingdom

## The King's speech

THE Household Cavalry Regiment proudly escorted King Charles III and Queen Camilla from Buckingham Palace to the House of Lords as the monarch took part in his inaugural state opening of Parliament. The first such event to be held in its full glory since the pandemic, some 1,400 members of the Armed Forces guarded their commander-in-chief as he prepared to give his address at the Palace of Westminster. Among them were troops from across the Household Division who delivered a polished show of pomp and ceremony.

Pictures: Sgt Rob Kane, RLC; Giles Anderson





NEED TO  
KNOW

EXPERIENCE / NUTRITION / HEALTH



# Fluid SITUATIONS

Expert advice on  
staying hydrated  
when the  
temperature drops

► WINTER tends to be the time of year when we layer up – and the emphasis is on avoiding a soaking rather than gulping down water.

But even though slaking a thirst might not have the same priority as in the summer heat, staying hydrated in the colder months is critical, especially during phys.

If anything, frigid temperatures can sometimes hasten the effects of fluid loss, and this makes keeping a water bottle close by all the more important.

We asked Aldershot-based exercise rehabilitation instructor Sgt James Duran (RAPTC) for his go-to tips on keeping topped up as the weather closes in...

## Why is winter hydration important?

It's crucial because cold weather can mask the sensation of thirst – cold air tends to be dry too, increasing the risk of moisture loss through respiration. Your body must humidify the air it takes in and this uses more liquids.

## Is dehydration less obvious in the cold?

You may not notice how much water you lose. If you don't feel thirsty, which is often the case in the winter, you may not replenish that lost fluid.

## What symptoms should you look out for?

Mild dehydration can affect mood and mental performance – these can be easily missed when you're already in a negative mindset about being in the cold.

## Any thoughts on hydration reminders?

Drinking plenty is essential for maintaining bodily functions, supporting circulation, aiding temperature regulation, health and performance in cold conditions. Keep a water bottle handy, consume water rich foods and hydrate after a workout.

## The party season is upon us. Any thoughts on alcohol?

Pace yourself, sip slowly, include food and don't drink on an empty stomach. Stay away from triggers too. If certain people, places, or activities tempt you to drink, try to avoid them while seeking healthy alternatives.

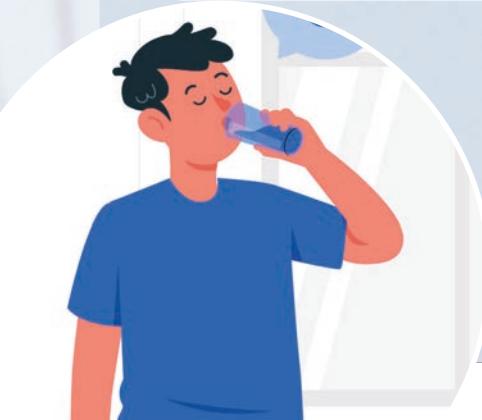
## Are warm fluids such as tea as effective?

They are a good way to keep yourself hydrated without pushing yourself to down ice-cold beverages. Drinking warm water, whether simple or infused, is useful in cold environments.



## How about eating properly?

Your body gets roughly 20 per cent of the water it needs from food. Raw fruits and veg typically provide the most water content. Broth-based soups are also great.



### IN NUMBERS

# 20

Percentage of water intake from food



### CV

**Name:** Sgt James Duran

**Cap badge:** Royal Army Physical Training Corps

**Enlisted into:** Royal Tank Regiment

**Current role:** Exercise rehabilitation instructor

**Joined up in:** 2012

# Damage limitation

How to enjoy Christmas without piling on the pounds

► IT'S easy to overindulge during the holiday season and end up retaining extra mass. And as the years pass, these intermittent binges can drive weight gain and lead to other health problems.

Ali Macdonald, founder and CEO of human performance specialists Resilient Nutrition, has been there – freely admitting that his love of mince pies and mulled wine left him feeling “fat, gross and tempted by extreme ploys to get back on track”.

More recently, however, the former Reservist – who served with numerous cap badges during a 15-year-career – has found a middle ground that allows him to enjoy festive favourites without gaining an ounce.

These are his top tactics for surviving the holidays in good shape...

● **Eat within an eight-to-ten-hour window** each day, for example 1000-1900. You'll probably consume fewer calories without trying. The great thing is that you don't need to change what you eat and drink, only when you do so – and it's especially helpful for cutting mindless late-night snacking.



(tablespoon) could slow your eating speed and thereby food intake. You may not want to eat a roast dinner with a teaspoon, but there will be times when you can try the trick, such as when you're tucking into Christmas pud.

● **Go for a walk after meals** – it's good for your metabolic health, even if it's only 15 minutes.



● **Do resistance training over Christmas** to help you ensure any weight you gain is healthy weight. As little as five minutes of bodyweight exercises per day can help.



● **Get more sleep over the holidays** to reduce your appetite and support your ability to make healthy food choices. Tiredness tends to do the opposite – a great excuse to ditch that alarm.



● **Drink 500ml of water** as you start your meal or snack. Studies have shown this reduces the amount of food people go on to eat.

● **Up your protein.** A fist-sized portion of eggs or dairy, for example, at breakfast might help you reduce your daily calorie intake while supporting muscle mass.

● **Eat protein together with fibre-rich food** to help control your blood sugar and appetite. Start your meals with a chunk of protein-dense goodness and a big pile of vegetables and you'll surely end up chowing down on less sugar-laden processed food later.



● **Control your portions.** Using a small plate and/or cutlery (such as teaspoon instead of a

# Festive faux fizz

Hydrate while you celebrate with this crimbo mocktail

## Ingredients:

- 100g tinned rhubarb, drained, plus two tbsp rhubarb syrup from the can
- 2 tbsp caster sugar
- 1 ball stem ginger, sliced
- 4 tbsp non-alcoholic rhubarb and ginger flavour gin
- 1 lime, juiced
- “Nosecco” (alcohol-free sparkling wine), chilled

## Method:

**1 Put the rhubarb, the rhubarb syrup, sugar, stem ginger and one tablespoon of water in a small pan and bring to a gentle simmer, breaking up the rhubarb with the back of a spoon.**

**2 Remove from the heat and leave to infuse** for one hour. **Strain into a jug**, pressing the rhubarb through to release all the juice. **Discard the solids and leave to cool completely**. This will keep in the fridge for up to two days.

**3 Put one tablespoon** of the prepared **rhubarb ginger syrup** into the bottom of four champagne flutes. **Divide the lime juice** between the glasses, about one teaspoon each.

**4 Add the non-alcoholic rhubarb and ginger flavour gin** to each glass and stir. **Top the flutes up** with the **chilled nosecco**.



Recipe taken from  
[bbcgoodfood.com](http://bbcgoodfood.com)  
- for more mocktail ideas scan QR code



For more expert insights into health and fitness head to [resilientnutrition.com/blogs/news](http://resilientnutrition.com/blogs/news). Readers of Soldier can also get 15 per cent off products by entering “SOLDIER” at the checkout

# ‘We did not dare to speak its name’

How one NCO is leading the charge to inform troops about the menopause

► WHEN Sgt Jodi Stickland (AGC (SPS)) began to experience a range of mystery mental and physical symptoms, she was at a loss as to their cause.

As the mood swings and muscle pain intensified, the Larkhill-based clerk began to fear for her health.

It had not occurred to her that she was undergoing the perimenopause – a time when the ovaries gradually stop working.

Now the 41-year-old has dedicated her spare time to informing others about the condition. She told *Soldier* her story...

**G**IT WAS an impossible feeling to pin down but I knew within myself that something was not right – that my mind as well as my body was out of kilter.

I was finding activities that I had taken in my stride more demanding. Multitasking had always been a strength but now there was an all-consuming brain fog. My breasts were sore and there was muscle pain – PT was becoming a nightmare.

Back then – in 2020 – I had put this down to a combination of getting older and a new job as a regimental accountant that didn’t play to my strengths. It had never occurred to me that I had entered the perimenopause.

I did know that both my mother and grandmother went through the menopause around 40 – earlier than normal – and there was a good chance I’d follow the same pattern.

But such things were rarely discussed. They both described the issue as “the change”. Like Lord Voldemort in the *Harry Potter* books, we did not dare to speak its name.

Nonetheless, life was bad enough for me to visit the medical officer, only to be told I was suffering from stress. It was plausible enough – things had been demanding with the job and life generally so I kept calm and carried on.

But my health became worse; more breast pain, hot flushes – and the brain fog was thicker. There were mood swings, too, and anxiety. I even began to think I might have early onset Alzheimer’s. I was scared – my symptoms tied in with the condition.

Then I saw a section on the ITV1 show *Loose Women* where presenter Davina McCall was sounding off about the perimenopause and something clicked. She seemed to be describing exactly how I was feeling – and this was confirmed by my own research carried out on the internet.

I opened up to my husband, who was really supportive, especially as he had been dealing with his own demanding personal and professional life.

A nurse later pointed me online to the Menopause Doctor, Dr Louise Newson, and the *Balance* app. These were invaluable and I was put on a trial course of hormone replacement therapy after putting my case to the MO.

I had oestrogen gel – the symptoms alleviated. I was then directed to a menopause clinic at Tidworth after meeting a Royal Navy clinician on a military health network.

I poured out my heart to the nurse there – she was absolutely brilliant; she took some blood and confirmed that HRT should continue. I have not looked back since.

At the moment, I have good and bad days. But at least I understand the condition and the nurses at the clinic keep a regular eye on me.

Now I want to help others. Women make up 11 per cent of the Army. Many female personnel will go through the menopause in service – and in some cases they will experience symptoms earlier than normal.

My hope is that others will learn from this – that women will have a better understanding of what might happen and that colleagues will help them deal with it on the way.





# Menopause management

**Leaders can help female colleagues dealing with the menopause. Sgt Stickland shares a few tips...**



## Open up

It's important that commanders foster a culture in which personal issues can easily be discussed. Sheding stigmas makes management far easier

## Put policies in place

Women need to feel they are heard and respected. Build the right procedures – potentially working more flexibly – to deal with menopause issues

## Tailor support

Making adjustments, for example in areas like PT, can make a big difference. But smaller changes can help too, such as desk fans to help with hot flushes

## Environment matters

Think about giving women spaces where they can discreetly manage medication – particularly on exercise. They may have to apply the likes of cream or patches to more intimate body areas

## Keep reading

There are a number of resources on the menopause – start by contacting me at [jodi.stickland748@mod.gov.uk](mailto:jodi.stickland748@mod.gov.uk) for details of the Army Menopause Network. Elsewhere the *Balance* app ([balance-menopause.com](http://balance-menopause.com)) is a valuable resource. And Dr Louise Newson – at [drlouisenewson.co.uk](http://drlouisenewson.co.uk) – is also great



L403A1 - A1W





PMD@EDGARBROTHERS.COM

SINCE 1947

# WARRIOR

Welsh Cavalry face



Report: Becky Clark Pictures: Graeme Main

# RUINS

## ultra-realistic combat drills in the Mojave Desert

“Everybody thinks that they’re ready for war, but we make you come out and prove it – and we make you prove it in the most unforgiving environment that we can create.”

I don’t think you’ll find another institution that takes its best and brightest and just beats them down to the edge of failure, then picks them up and says, ‘alright, better luck next time’.”

**A**WARM welcome it is not. But Brig Gen Curtis Taylor, commander of the US Army’s National Training Centre (NTC) at Fort Irwin, has a stark message for inbound troops – they will be shown no quarter.

Quite the opposite, in fact. What awaits them in the Californian desert is as stern a test as many will have encountered in their military careers – or as the officer calls it, “the ultimate audit of readiness”.

Because, with the threat of conventional war between major powers no longer just an abstract concept, this isn’t the time to pull punches.

He continues: “In a world where, if you don’t win the first battle you might not be around for the second, you’ve got to make sure you trigger, prior to conflict, that great ingenuity and adaptation that has marked every war fought since our country’s founding.”

“Our mantra is that we have to replicate what that first battle is going to look like as realistically as we possibly can and then expose our soldiers to it.”

“If they’re a good unit, we’re going to turn the volume way up. If they’re struggling, we’ll turn it down a little bit.”

“As they find their flaws they can then adapt, learn and become better.”

So while it might not feel that way out in The Box, as the training area is known, taking a pummelling is likely to be a positive sign.

Here, the hostile terrain is the least of troops’ worries. Its peaks and ravines are teeming with a free-thinking opposing force whose sole purpose is to make life difficult for up to ten visiting units each year.

A peer-standard enemy with an arsenal of armour, artillery, drones and cyber capabilities at their disposal, the so-called Blackhorse regiment also enjoy a distinct



# NEW TOYS

Innovation was also a focus of Exercise Diamondback and 1st The Queen's Dragoon Guards deployed to California with a raft of cutting-edge kit to assist in their core mission – finding the enemy while remaining covert themselves, often at depth...

## Surveillance and target acquisition

As well as drones, now a familiar fixture on many training packages, the troops were equipped with new HikMicro thermal imaging sights (shown right), which provide high resolution visuals – by day or night – to enable better location of opposition call signs in the barren desert

## Communications

In addition to their chest-worn Android situational awareness kit, comms took a step forward through the use of the recently introduced L3Harris AN/PRC-167



multi-channel radio (far right). Among its benefits, this next generation system has greater reach and reduces the chance of detection and interception by the enemy



#### Power

With self-sufficiency crucial to operating at reach, the QDG used lightweight, easily portable solar panels (right) to recharge their electronic devices. Set up and packed away in minutes, they are especially effective in sunny desert environments

#### Concealment

Remaining physically and electronically under the enemy's radar is key to outwitting a peer adversary. Techniques include making



call signs seem as insignificant as possible by avoiding clustering together and disguising antennas. The British troops also trialled new camouflage that incorporates protection from hostile thermal imaging sensors. Green on one side and sand-coloured on the other, the

sheets are see-through from underneath, but with fewer gaps, they conceal movement from the outside better than traditional nets – as well as offering shelter from the sun's rays



#### » home advantage.

"They're utterly ruthless," says Maj Arthur Purbrick (RL), officer commanding B Squadron, 1st The Queen's Dragoon Guards – the latest British outfit to be on the receiving end of their attentions.

"They operate vehicles that look different to ours. They behave differently. And they are determined to win because they are being evaluated operationally too.

"We don't have something like that in the UK, where the opfor are told, 'that's your command, think like a force such as Russia or Hamas, or whatever, and go and create havoc'.

"They're just constantly on your back, forcing you to take new decisions and reposition.

"But when you are training you look for three things. You want to test soldiers' ability to live in the field and in combat.

"You also want to test your headquarters' capacity to think on their feet, decide and act – and I mean that all the way from junior troop leaders to generals.

"And third off, you want a huge area that is going to test you geographically and I don't think that can be achieved anywhere else in the world except here."

At 1,200 square miles, the NTC is America's largest proving ground, allowing formations to manoeuvre across an extended frontage that also puts command and control, comms and resupply under real-world pressure.

While hunkering down in a secure compound is tactically sound in counter-insurgency operations, the key to survival in a conventional war, against an enemy with precision fires and sophisticated surveillance technology, is dispersal and remaining hidden – bread and butter to the reconnaissance experts of the QDG.

Embedded alongside the US 4th Squadron, 10th Cavalry Regiment, they've swapped their usual Jackal vehicles for Humvees for the duration of Exercise Diamondback – which centres on a mission to support a fictional European ally in repelling an adversarial neighbour.

Although the landscape at Fort Irwin is a world away from the green expanses of Eastern Europe, training staff at the NTC pride themselves on quickly incorporating lessons from ongoing conflicts – drone swarms and a trench system being two examples recently transposed from the Ukrainian front line.

The latest innovation even saw the creation of a fake

»

# RECCE REWARDS

Known as the Welsh Cavalry, the QDG are the only light cavalry outfit in 1st Deep Recce Strike Brigade. *Soldier* asked them why the role appeals...

“

*I just like the idea of being a bit sneaky. Going around and trying not to get caught is quite exciting. I knew I wanted to do some sort of surveillance intelligence role but also do soldiering too, so the recruiting office pointed me in this direction. Joining the Army was the best decision I've made. I'm absolutely loving it.*

Tpr Sam Mansbridge



*It's quite a thrill to push past enemy lines undetected and gathering information in a timely manner that could affect the whole battlespace. Depending on what we might find, decisions can be changed within minutes, or even seconds. You're part of a mission that has much wider consequences for those behind you.*

Lt Freya Logan



*You've got the mounted and dismounted elements, so you're doing different types of stuff – you're not just stuck to one role, even as a driver. You have a bit more freedom. I always like to be busy and this is the perfect job.*

Tpr Connor Bennington

”





» river – a gully marked with blue dye – to force the brigade to conduct a wide-wet gap crossing, as they would almost certainly have to if called on to conduct warfighting operations in the likes of the Baltic states.

And for the Poland-bound QDG, who will deploy as Nato's enhanced forward presence alongside their American colleagues next year, such authentic drills couldn't have come at a better time.

"This is by far the best exercise I've ever been on," says LCpl Conor Bateson, from the squadron headquarters element.

"The sheer scale of it is absolutely mental – the realism too. It's a very good learning experience.

"And it's good to go back to basics and test our skills."

In terms of standout moments, the 24-year-old says he managed to strike a blow against the opposition when he brought down a helicopter with an anti-tank rocket launcher.

"We heard it in the vicinity and then one of the sentries spotted it, so we grabbed the AT4, which is an unguided munition and made our way up onto a high feature," he recalls.

"It was about 300m away – we had clear line of sight, so I took two shots and its laser engagement system went off. Then we heard it was a confirmed kill.

"It was a good feeling. As SHQ we're not as far forward as the other troops so it doesn't happen an awful lot, but I think it was down to our concealment – we're very hard to spot.

"Helicopters only get a certain amount of flying time so the more you can send them back to regenerate, the less time they have to look for us, which is good for everyone else too.

"It certainly lightens the mood to know that they're making our lives difficult, but we're making theirs slightly more difficult as well."

However, with 800 NTC observer-mentors integrated at every level of the brigade to monitor performance, there is no opportunity to bask in self-congratulation – the pace remains »



# KNOW YOUR ENEMY

Numbering some 1,000 troops, Fort Irwin's resident opposition, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment – or Blackhorse – are a force to be reckoned with.

A peer to peer-plus standard enemy, they are armed with a fleet of visually modified platforms representing real-world threats such as Russian T-90 and BMP-3 tanks and Mi-24 Hind helicopters, as well as various artillery and unmanned aerial systems.

In addition to precision fires, they can bring the full force of their cyber, electronic, information and psychological warfare capabilities to bear on exercising units – along with notional chemical and biological weapons.

Throw in guerrilla and criminal elements, simulated media, cameos by genuine special forces troops and actors playing local civilians

and it's clear they provide one of the most complex, realistic tests of combined arms manoeuvre anywhere in the world – so much so that American top brass believe China is in the process of replicating the model.

A deployable unit in their own right, Blackhorse hone their craft over ten exercises each and every year – and in more bad news for visiting troops, they enjoy doing it.

"It's so much fun – the best job I've ever had and maybe ever will," Capt John Badgley tells *Soldier* as the home team prepare to defend Razish town – one of 12 urban combat facilities at the NTC.

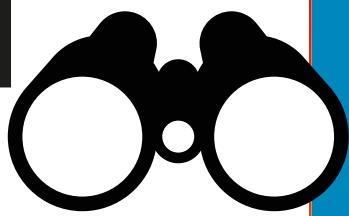
"They remind us daily to do our very best, which is what practice is all about.

"I'm not rooting for the rotational units as such, but ultimately we're part of the same Army, so I want them to come here and do their very best too.

"We show them the signature we have, so they can then take those lessons down range onto a deployment and go win by crushing an enemy."

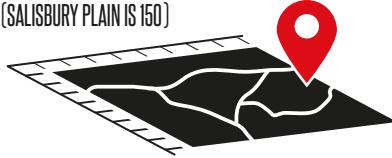
## IN NUMBERS

### FORT IRWIN



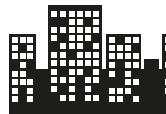
**1,200**

SIZE OF THE NATIONAL TRAINING CENTRE IN SQUARE MILES  
(SALISBURY PLAIN IS 150)



**800**

NUMBER OF OBSERVER-MENTORS OVERSEEING TRAINING



**12**

TOWNS AND VILLAGES AVAILABLE FOR URBAN COMBAT TRAINING

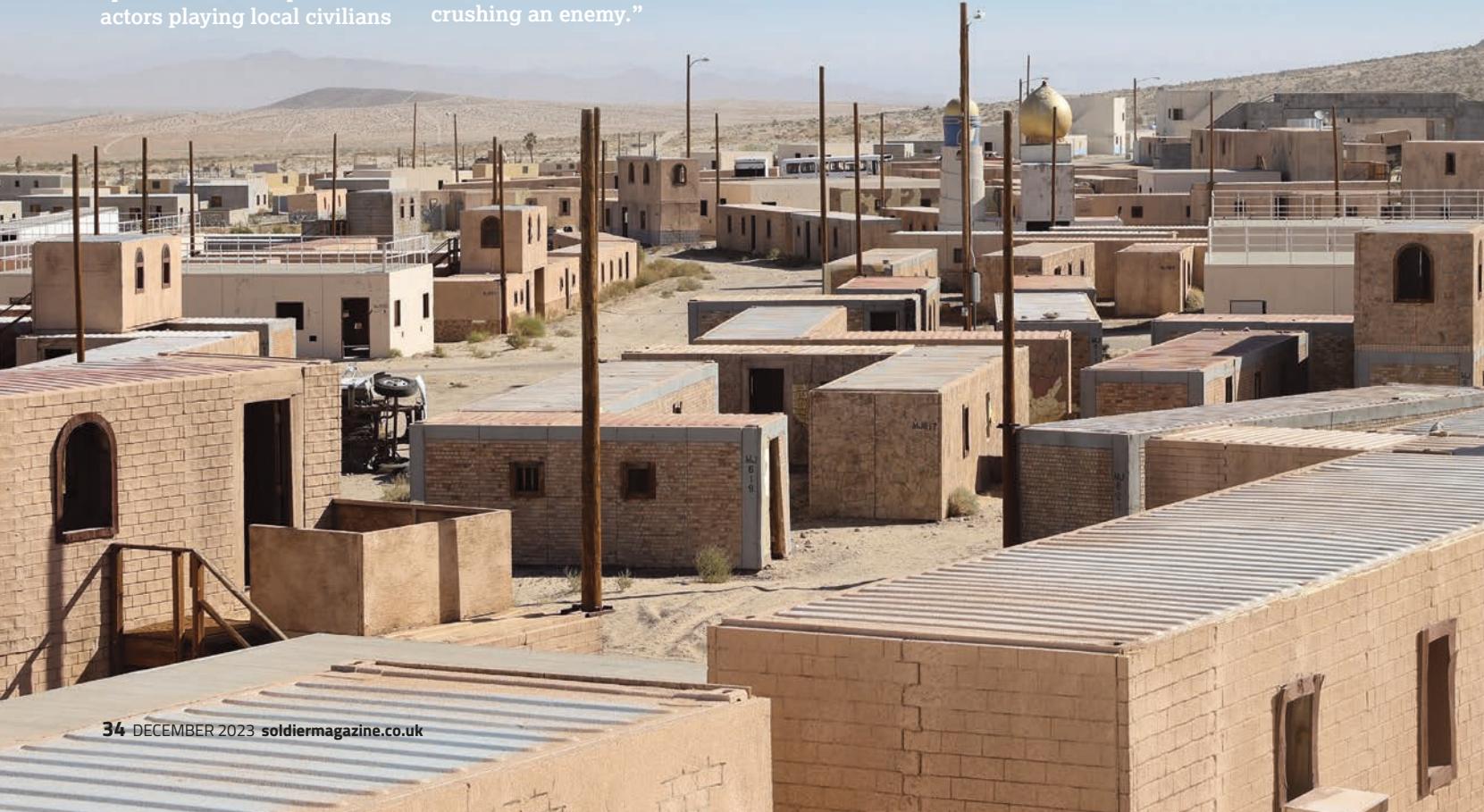
**4,500**

NUMBER OF EXERCISING TROOPS ON PACKAGES SUCH AS EXERCISE DIAMONDBACK



**130**

BRITISH PERSONNEL DEPLOYED, INCLUDING THE QDG AND ATTACHED ARMS FROM ACROSS THE 1ST DEEP RECCE STRIKE BRIGADE COMBAT TEAM



» relentless for the duration of the two-week package.

If the British troops are acquitted themselves well, Maj Purbrick is clear that their success lay in prior preparation.

He says they arrived with the right kit (see pages 30-31), determined to integrate quickly with their American hosts and ready to sustain themselves at range – as well as, crucially, being up to speed on developments in the world's war zones.

"We looked around us, at Ukraine, Israel and Nagorno-Karabakh and observed the lessons," he goes on.

"The further out your supply chains are, the more likely you are to fail. We've been able to avoid drones because we learnt from those conflicts how to shoot them down as well as to camouflage ourselves.

"And the reason we have been good at rear area security is that we are never complacent.

"However, for all of this, the most important part is the soldiers. They are phenomenally capable and have that mindset of never taking things at face value.

"And that comes from the experiences in Mali and Cabrit – we get better and better each time.

"But we don't let the pressure off for a single second. We sweat now so we bleed less later."

There seems little doubt that the QDG will emerge from their desert boasting on top form for their Poland deployment.

Moreover, having taken a host of specialist cap badges from across the 1st Deep Recce Strike Brigade Combat Team with them to America, the benefits will also be felt by their parent formation as it continues to evolve.

And with other British units slated to make the journey to Fort Irwin next year and beyond, more personnel can look forward to the same immersive experience – if they're up for the challenge. ■

# DESERT LIVING

Squadron Sergeant Major, WO2 Harry McKinnon, shares top tips for troops headed to the Mojave...

## HOT AND COLD

People look up the daytime temperatures before they come but forget that the difference between day and night can be considerable. It feels a lot colder when the sun goes down, especially after you've acclimatised. Your jungle sleeping bag won't be enough to keep you warm

## DRY RUN

You need to drink a lot in the desert, but water can be bland at the best of times, particularly when it gets warm, so bring small bottles of squash to make it more palatable

## TRAVEL ACCESSORIES

Because it's so hot and dry here you'll also definitely need your issued lip balm and sun cream. Foot powder and decent socks are also important, particularly for dismounted troops

## CRITTER CAUTION

There are scorpions and tarantulas here. Be disciplined about putting one boot upside down on top of the other when you take them off so that something doesn't crawl into them

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

We are eating American rations. They're okay, but one guy brought plain tortilla wraps, which work well with the burrito filling option. It changes it up and makes it feel more like a proper meal

## GET COMFY

The ground is hard and rocky, so don't forget a decent roll mat – not a blow-up one, which will pop – or some form of low camp bed to take yourself two or three inches off the stones

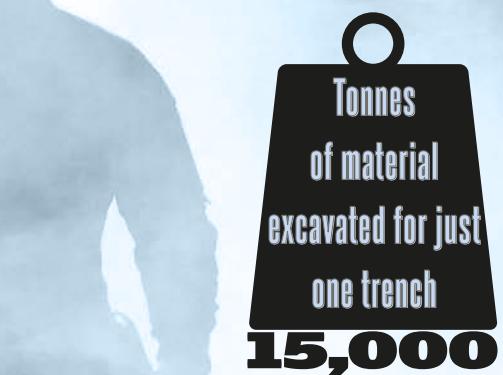
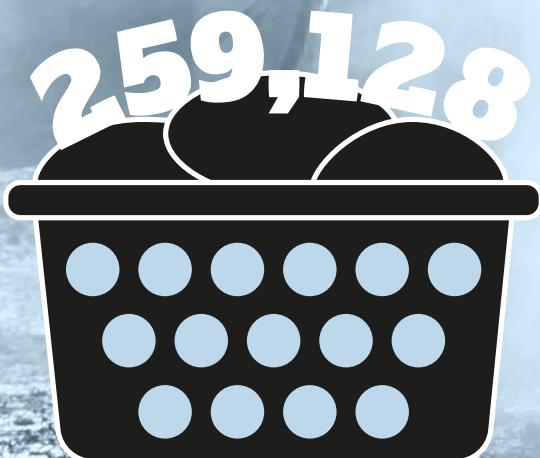


## IN NUMBERS

# OP INTERFLEX

Head-turning stats from across the training estate

**T**HE British Army's effort to support and train Ukrainian troops has been up and running for 18 months now. And by the end of the year some 30,000 fighters will have been put through a five-week programme, helping the country to repel its Russian invaders. *Soldier* grilled the estate experts at the Defence Infrastructure Organisation to find out some of the lesser-known figures behind Op Interflex...

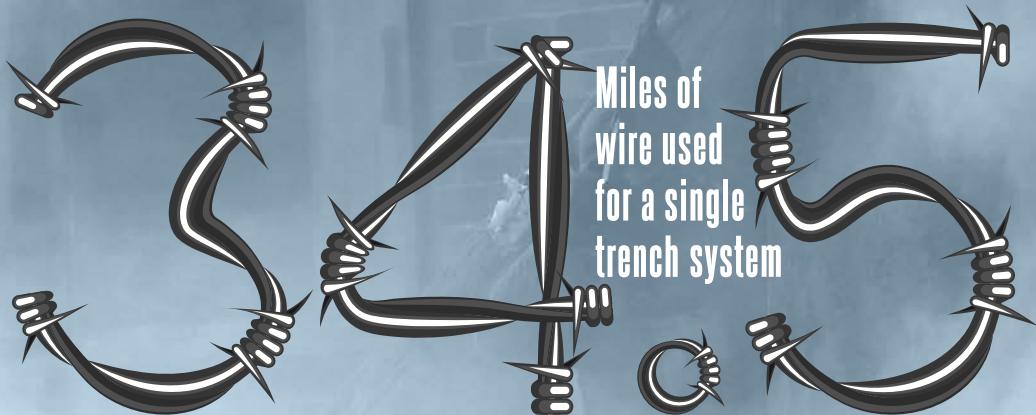


50

Classrooms  
provided  
for lessons

MORE THAN  
**3.24m**

Meals served to the  
Ukrainian visitors and  
their support staff  
in a year – equating  
to 43% of all meals  
served across the UK  
training estate



Miles of  
wire used  
for a single  
trench system

Miles of  
scaffolding board  
used by the Royal  
Engineers to  
construct a trench  
in the South West

**1976,932**

Extra “bed nights” provided in a year



Replica  
Russian  
trench  
systems built  
for battlefield  
drills



# ‘It’s actually

**Troops deliver their verdict as Ajax makes a long-awaited splash**



“  
You wouldn’t  
think it’s 40  
tonnes – it’s so  
light to control  
”

good”

Report: Becky Clark Pictures: Graeme Main

**I**T IS no secret that the procurement of the Army’s new armoured cavalry platform has been troubled.

Having hit the headlines for all the wrong reasons – particularly when concerns over excess noise and vibrations halted trials – the Ajax programme is currently five years behind its original delivery date.

But as previous defence secretary Ben Wallace insisted in February, the project has now “turned a corner”. And it will come as a relief to senior officials that the first troops to use the vehicle in the field have recently given it a decisive thumbs-up.

As members of the Household Cavalry Regiment told *Soldier* during a demonstration on Salisbury Plain, “it’s actually good”.

Not just hollow praise, this was the genuine assessment of driver Tpr Warren Smith (RHG/D). And he should know, having been part of the vehicle’s earlier testing schedule at the Armoured Trials and Development Unit in Bovington.

“I think attitudes are shifting,” he went on. “Obviously it was in the newspapers long before we got hands on, so it was easy to be negative or cautious – but people are more open-minded about it now.

“And the more they get trained up and use it, the more they are realising it’s mechanically sound and better than maybe they initially thought.”

Boasting enhanced mobility, lethality and survivability, Ajax and its five variants (see page 41) come bristling with a raft of sophisticated sensors and surveillance tech – plus an electronic architecture that

can integrate into modern comms systems.

Suffice to say, it’s a digital revolution in comparison to its decidedly analogue predecessors, Warrior and CVR(T) – the latter of which entered service in 1973.

“You could fix the fan belt on a CVR(T) with a pair of tights it was so basic,” added Tpr Smith. “And the most advanced thing the driver had was a little dial telling him what gear he was in.

“Ajax is so complex – the engineering is amazing. You’ve got the cameras, sights and sensors.

“Personally, as part of the PlayStation generation, I found it fairly easy to adjust to. The touchscreens translate across from how you would use your phone or iPad – so you don’t really need to be taught the symbols and pictures to know what you’re doing.”

Colleague and gunner, LCpl Adam Lugg (RHG/D), agreed that automation had made his role much less labour-intensive.

“Instead of me having to crank handles to get the turret to turn I can just play on a joystick and it will move a lot quicker and easier,” the NCO said.

“Inside, the screen shows us what the camera is seeing and will also bring up different systems for us to monitor – so we can see fuel and power states, how much ammo there is left and if there are any faults.

“Before, with CVR(T), we’d have to crawl around the vehicle and physically check everything, although there was decades of legacy knowledge on what to do if things went wrong.

“With Ajax it’s going to take a while to fully understand what it can do and how to get things working really quickly.” ▶

Judging by their recent performance on Exercise Scorpion Cyclone – part of Iron Titan, the Army's largest manoeuvre in more than 20 years and Ajax's tactical debut (*Soldier*, November) – the Household Cavalry crews are well on the way to getting the best out of their new ride.

And while it only involved six vehicles, the package made clear the capability the platform will ultimately bring to parent formation, 1st Deep Recce Strike Brigade Combat Team.

Not only did they hold up mechanically – covering a combined 700km in ten days with no breakdowns – but troop leader Lt James Bird (LG) said they outperformed expectations in key scenarios, notably hunting down a Royal Lancers call sign at night.

"They were in positions of overwatch and we were told to find and destroy them," said the 25-year-old.

They were in Warrior under thermal sheeting and cam nets, so doing their best to hide and be relatively hard to find.

"And before we'd even crossed our line of departure, from a position where we were all concealed, we were able to identify them.

"And the best thing – which I think is clear testament to how much more advanced Ajax is – was that it was one of the drivers who detected the target.

"So they were able look through their screens in the cab and see the cameras that the gunner or commander were using, and spot the enemy first, which is just a huge step forward compared to what has gone before."

Meanwhile, a hide-



“ Noise-wise I don’t think you can notice a difference. With the headsets we’re using now and all the precautions in place it’s not really any louder than CVR(T). ”

LCpl Adam Lugg,  
Gunner



## From the horse's mouth

“ You wouldn’t think it’s 40 tonnes – it’s so light to control. You can mash the throttle – it’s quick to accelerate – but it can also stop within its own length so you can really throw it around and have some fun. ”

Tpr Warren  
Smith, Driver



“ The systems are much more intuitive, but you’re also incentivised to use them because they work so much better – as opposed to on Warrior, for example, when kit such as the thermal imaging camera wasn’t great. ”

Lt James Bird,  
Troop leader





## In numbers

**589**

vehicles, including variants, that the programme will eventually deliver

**5.5bn**

cost, in pounds, of the contract with General Dynamics Land Systems UK

and-seek serial between the troop's vehicles also demonstrated the platform's ability to remain covert.

"One of them went off to hide somewhere – we didn't know where he was going to be," continued Lt Bird.

"And he was able to get deep enough within a wood block so that it took us a while to find him, even though he had no camouflage or thermal netting.

"We also found – in terms of the noise of the vehicle – that even if you just dip into some dead ground, and someone is on the other side, it's very difficult to hear it.

"So that was pretty impressive too."

## The Ajax family



**Ajax**

Recce and artillery variant



**Ares**

Troop carrier



**Athena**

Command and control



**Apollo and Atlas**

Recovery and repair



**Argus**

Engineering recce support

Despite the relatively basic nature of the drills, the officer said the package had given them plenty to think about as the integration of Ajax progresses – not least around movement patterns and sharing information between platforms as well as faster threat analysis.

The learning curve will no doubt be steep and there is still some way to go before the vehicle takes its place in the Army's fleet of front-line fighting assets.

However, if early indications are anything to go by, it will one day pack a potent punch – and that day might just turn out to be worth the wait. ■

## Back on track



Outgoing armoured cavalry programme director, Col Kieran Sheldon, gives a progress report on Ajax

### What stage is the programme at now?

The production of the vehicles has been split into "capability drops" to enable us to get the Field Army on Ajax early and maintain production capacity. The Service is currently operating drop one, which is for training, doctrine development and some low-level experimentation. While it looks exactly like the final model, there are some systems on it that continue to be upgraded as we move towards the design of the fully deployable vehicle.

### Can you give a timeline?

Capability drop three – the more mature design – is currently in production in the factory, which the Army will take receipt of in 2024, with the aim of achieving initial operating capability in the latter half of 2025. Full operating capability is scheduled for 2029.

### Which units currently have it?

The Household Cavalry Regiment, but we're fielding to them as a battlegroup, so that includes 26 Regiment, Royal Artillery and 6 Battalion, REME, who have the equipment support variants.

### Have the issues with noise and vibration been fully addressed?

The reality of armoured fighting vehicles is that they are quite noisy and that a track hitting the ground does cause vibration. The challenge in Ajax

was to overcome that so crew and systems are appropriately shielded from those effects. We've worked really hard with General Dynamics, Defence Equipment and Support and specialists from across industry to ensure a safe and legislatively compliant platform that the Field Army can now operate with absolute confidence.

### What lessons have been learnt from the difficulties the project has faced?

Looking at the programme's past there were some over-optimistic assumptions about how quickly things could be done. We have learnt a lot individually and collectively across the Army, DE&S and the MoD. Various reports and reviews have been read and taken on board, with lessons embedded – key among those is the importance of relationships and collaboration, as well as the need to have open and frank conversations to mitigate any challenges.

### Any final thoughts as you prepare to hand over?

I think over two-and-a-half years we've had a really successful transition from a programme that was often described as troubled, with obvious safety and technical challenges, into one that is absolutely now on track to deliver a much-needed capability into the Service as it goes through a decade of modernisation. I'm very proud of what the team have achieved and I thank them for their efforts. ■

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“ I wanted to make  
myself stronger so that no one  
could hurt me again ”

A Servicewoman's powerful story of survival – with the help of her military family





**L**ANCE Corporal Manpreet Maycock is the first to admit she cuts an unlikely figure as a soldier. And at just 5ft 2ins, were you to pass her in the street you might well agree. But spend ten minutes with the diminutive 45-year-old and you quickly realise she embodies the less visible military qualities in spades – toughness, resilience and that palpable inner grit that so many personnel exude.

As she tells her story, it becomes clear that these traits were always part of her character. Although it took her reaching rock bottom – and a chance glimpse of an Army recruitment advert – for her to truly harness them.

Originally from India, LCpl Maycock moved to the UK as part of an arranged marriage in 2000. And while she won't dwell on the details, the relationship was characterised by physical and psychological abuse.

Far from home and isolated, she had nowhere to turn. By the time she mustered the courage to leave several years later in around 2010 – defying family and cultural expectations in the process – she had two children.

For a few nights they slept rough in her car, until fortunately she was able to rent a flat.

While the future was still far from secure, things were about to take an unexpected turn.

"I was in survival mode, trying to fix my life and find the courage," she recalls.

"I saw this poster in the street of a female soldier – and I was really struck by it. I didn't even know girls could join, but it made me wonder could brown girls join, could girls of my height join?"

"I didn't know the answers, but it had a massive impact on me. I thought 'maybe this is the way I start again'.

"When you are in an atmosphere of violence you just want it to stop. I wanted to make myself stronger, so that no one could ever hurt me again.

"My thinking was that surely nobody would dare touch me if I was wearing that uniform."

After making enquiries with a local unit, LCpl Maycock decided the Army Reserve would allow her to continue earning money while undergoing training.

She was excited to have found what seemed like the ideal solution, so she was dismayed to find friends being less than supportive.

Describing one colleague's reaction, she continues:

"He thought I was stupid. He said: 'They'll mobilise you and you have two children. The sergeants will be shouting at you'.

"I replied that I was used to being yelled at every day – what's the worst they could do? If I followed their instructions and did everything I was supposed to, why would they shout?"

Undeterred – and dealing with difficult divorce proceedings – she threw herself into learning the ropes of basic soldiering.

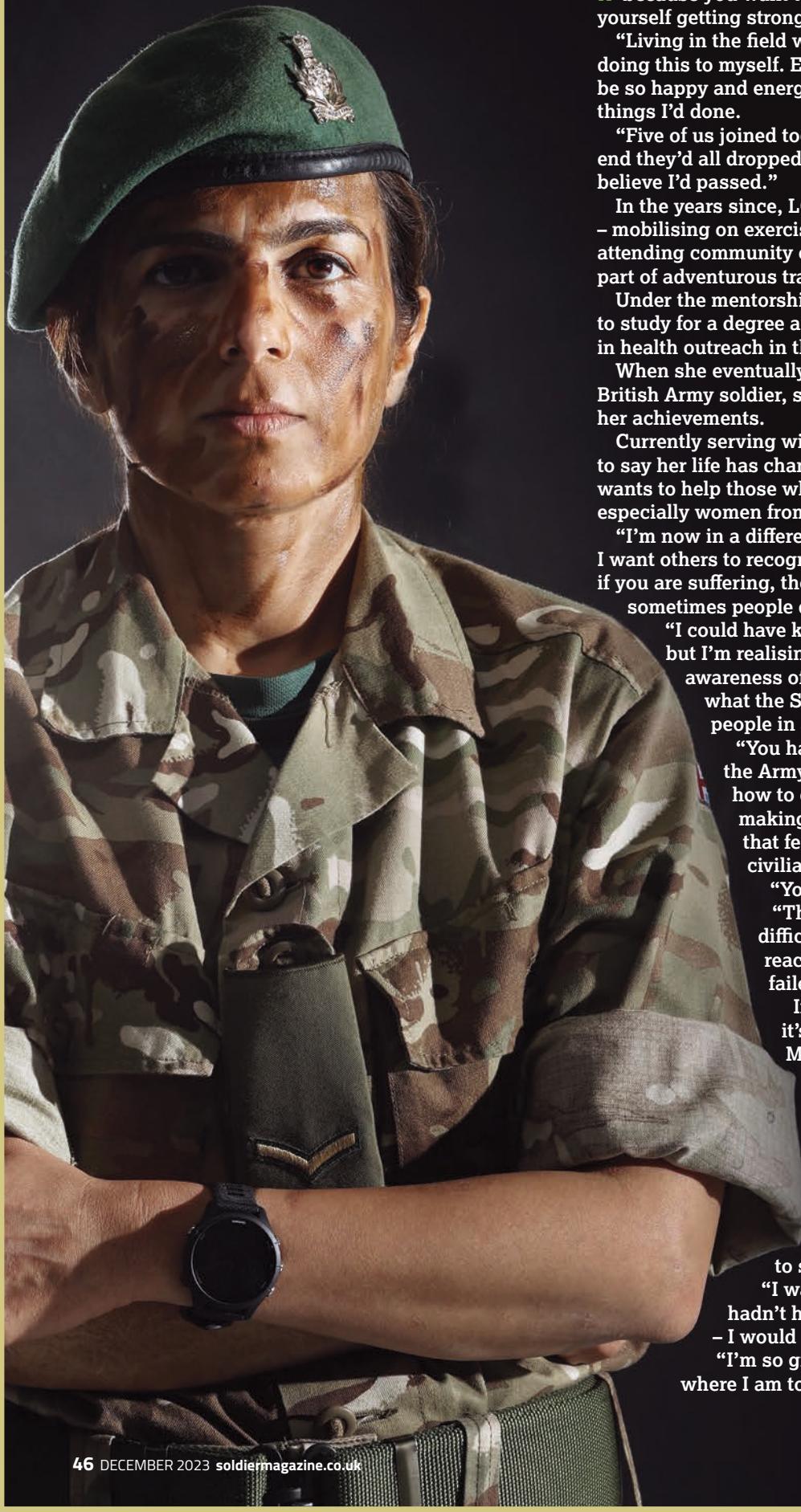
"I'd go there week after week and I loved it," she says. "The unit was fantastic but I'm not sure they believed I could do it either. I was very quiet and had issues talking to people, especially men."

"When someone asked me to pick up the magazine during weapons training, I didn't understand what they meant."

"I'd never done any running or sport of any kind, so PT was horrible. But there was excitement too, »



“  
You can't buy the  
confidence the  
Army gives you  
– it teaches you  
how to survive  
”



» because you want to make that positive change and you see yourself getting stronger.

“Living in the field was a big shock – I’d question why I was doing this to myself. Every time I went home, though, I would be so happy and energetic, telling everyone what amazing things I’d done.

“Five of us joined together – four boys and me – but by the end they’d all dropped out and I was the only one left. I couldn’t believe I’d passed.”

In the years since, LCpl Maycock has fully embraced Reservist life – mobilising on exercises abroad to the likes of Canada and the US, attending community engagement events, and taking up skiing as part of adventurous training.

Under the mentorship of a more senior comrade, she also decided to study for a degree and found the self-belief to apply for a new job in health outreach in the NHS – a role she is passionate about.

When she eventually told her parents about her double life as a British Army soldier, she was shocked to find they were proud of her achievements.

Currently serving with 7 Military Intelligence Battalion, it’s fair to say her life has changed completely – so much so that she now wants to help those who might be in the position she once was, especially women from ethnic minority backgrounds.

“I’m now in a different space – I’ve remarried,” she says. “And I want others to recognise what I didn’t for a very long time – that if you are suffering, there is support out there. Ask for it, because sometimes people don’t know how to help.

“I could have kept quiet with my pocket full of courage, but I’m realising more and more that you need to raise awareness of these hidden problems in society – and of what the Service as an organisation can do to support people in achieving success.

“You have to find your own way, but I’d recommend the Army to anyone. It teaches you how to survive, how to deal with difficult situations, decision making, how to look after each other as a team – that feeling of togetherness you cannot get in any civilian job.

“You can’t buy the confidence it gives you.

“There’s no doubt it’s mentally and physically difficult, but it’s about pushing through that to reach your goal. If you don’t even try, you’ve failed already.”

In terms of triumph-over-adversity stories, it’s hard to find one more inspiring than LCpl Maycock’s – or for that matter, a better example of the Army’s ability to unlock potential.

Having found her voice – and inner fortitude – this Servicewoman is surely cause for hope for other women, and men, dealing with the reality of abuse.

“I think it’s important to tell people I’ve come from the lowest point in my life and if I can do it, anyone can – they don’t need to suffer,” she concludes.

“I was unfortunate to be in that situation but if it hadn’t happened, I wouldn’t have joined the Reserve – I would still be in that rut.

“I’m so grateful to God and the Army for where I am today.” ■

“  
If you are suffering, there is support out there. Ask for it, because sometimes people don’t know how to help  
”

## Is domestic abuse happening to me?

As part of her mission to help others, LCpl Maycock says it's important to know that domestic abuse comes in many different forms. Some women may not even recognise their relationship as abusive.

Here are some signs to look out for:



### Physical violence

Hitting, slapping, pushing, shaking, spitting and hair-pulling

### Sexual abuse

Forced sex or disregard of a partner's unwillingness to have sex

### Verbal cruelty

Taunting, name-calling and insults

### Financial control

Restricting a partner's access to money or preventing them from taking a job

### Psychological abuse and coercive control

Isolating someone from friends and family, monitoring their movements, dictating who they can speak to, controlling what they wear, accusing them of flirting or having affairs, depriving them of necessities such as food, sleep and warmth, gaslighting (making someone doubt their own reality), using phrases such as "you made me do it", insisting they do all the cooking and cleaning

### Red flag

If your friends or family voice concerns, listen to them. They will most likely have waited a long time before saying something to avoid upsetting you, so take it seriously

### Seek help

Speak to a friend, trusted colleague, Army welfare officer or chaplain for support. Further resources can be found on page 52 of this magazine



# All I want for Christmas...



Familiar faces of 2023 tell us what's at the top of their festive wish list this year

*"There are many things I would like for Christmas, but being of a certain age and easily pleased I am looking forward to having a house full of family and watching my five-year-old grandson bouncing off the wall on a sugar high knowing he will be going home with mum and dad at the end of the day. Apart from that, a cheeky wee lottery win would be welcome.*

*But I know which one I am more likely to see this year!"*

**Capt Mike Dunnigan, Scots**

Featured in November's coverage of Scottish Reservists training on Ex Sava Star in Croatia

Interviews and pictures: Soldier staff; Shutterstock



*"If somebody had some serious cash to spare on me, the ideal gift would be a top-of-the-range PC graphics card. This would massively improve my gaming with better frame rates and other features. I'd be glued to first-person shooters for the festive period – notably the new Modern Warfare title."*

**Sgt Foggy Moore, RA**

Led the charge in August's Final Word about aspects of military life that would make a good video game



*"I can't ask Santa for a new car, so my Christmas gift came early at last month's Army Sports Awards when the ladies tug of war team were named team of the year. As their coach, this is something we have been striving towards for many years and it highlights – through training and competition – how brilliant they have been over the past 12 months."*

**Capt Gareth Wyatt, RA**

Head coach of the Army ladies tug of war team



*"I'm preparing to leave the Army in early 2024 after a career spanning more than 20 years and am currently signing off with a charity bike ride around the UK. If you could offer me any present at all it would be a good future, and health and happiness for my family."*

**SSgt Phil Armitage, RHA**

Discussed his Army tenure on our November veterans' page





*"I'd like thousands of cheap training drones to help personnel across the Service become really proficient operating UAS and deploying them tactically as quickly as possible."*

#### **Maj Steve Watts, Rifles**

Told us how the Combat Manoeuvre Centre is staying abreast of drone warfare developments in the August issue

*"I would like The Scots Guards: Standard Settings of Pipe Music, Volumes 1-3 – three amazing books from a top band that should form the basis of any piper's collection."*

#### **Gnr Rob Procter, RA**

A member of 103 Regiment, Royal Artillery Pipes and Drums, the Reservist shared his tips for getting into Army bagpiping in the June edition



*"It's boring but I really appreciate getting hampers. Christmas has become very consumeristic, and I often find myself not actually needing anything yet receiving a bunch of random stuff from family because they feel obliged to gift me something. Usually it isn't required and is often donated or regifted. However, a food hamper is great because we all need to eat."*

#### **Cpl Cameron Eden, RLC**

The man behind the Savvy Squaddie YouTube channel – and regular contributor to our Cash column.



*"For me, Christmas is a time to reflect on life and my wish is that this festive season enlightens us all to find our purpose in serving the greater good and bringing peace, joy and happiness to the world. And I wouldn't be an RAPTC instructor if I didn't also wish everyone the strength to work off those mince pies!"*

#### **Sgt Fabion Walker, RAPTC**

Our January cover star



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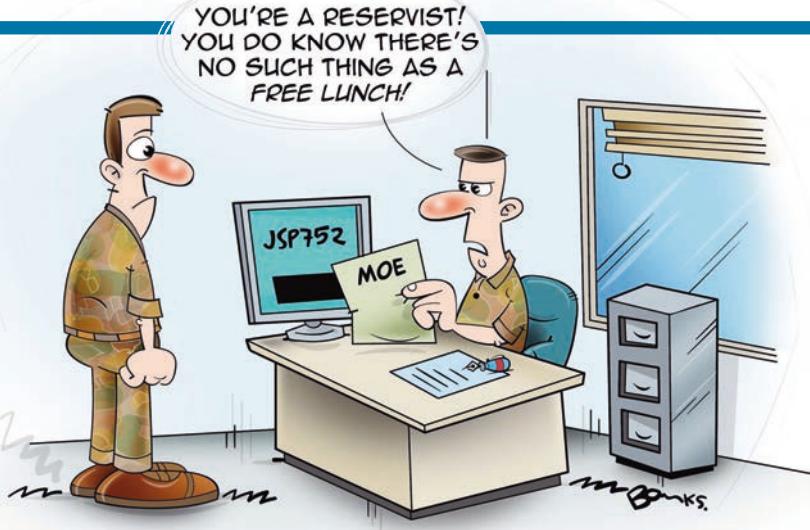
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As part of my leaving process, I decided to use my ELCs to take four NEBOSH Certificates...It was because of the Environmental Certificate I realised that the renewables sector was where I really wanted to be.

Luke Strudley  
Wind Turbine Technician,  
Siemens Gamesa

”


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## Eating out policy leaves bad taste

WHEN reading the rules in **JSP 752** about claiming meal out expenses (MOE) it struck me that this is an allowance no one in the Reserve can actually use.

It states these personnel can take advantage of the allowance twice a month if, for duty reasons, they need to purchase a meal in a commercial outlet.

But in the next paragraph it declares that anyone who occupies Service family accommodation, substitute Service family accommodation and privately-owned or privately-rented housing cannot claim it.

Given that all Reservists live in privately-owned or rented properties this surely means none of them are eligible. Do many, if any, Reservists live in SLA?

I suspect it only benefits a tiny minority of Regular personnel too – and they can forget it if they live on the patch or their own home, or if packed meals are available from the cookhouse or mess. – **Capt Dave Somerville, RE**

**Lt Col Iain Wallace, Army Remuneration Policy, Army Headquarters, replies:** The aim of MOE is to contribute towards the additional

costs of regularly purchasing meals at a commercial retail outlet.

This is valid when food is normally sourced from a Service messing facility but personnel are prevented from using it by their duties.

It's primarily aimed at single and unaccompanied soldiers and members of the Volunteer Reserve.

You are correct in that the criteria are strict and comprehensive – that's a necessity to ensure our allowances are justifiable with His Majesty's Treasury and Revenue and Customs.

**JSP 752** does not set out every applicable scenario but instead offers freedom to the chain of command to make judgment calls based on scenarios that are appropriate.

The criteria also ensure other subsistence-related allowances are not compromised, that money spent on MOE is an appropriate use of public funds, and the tax-free nature of the scheme is not threatened.

For information, the Army spent around £65,000 on MOE last year. Although it's a small amount its continued use justifies its existence.

“  
None of  
them are  
eligible  
”

## ‘WAITING FOR THIS MEDAL IS LONG SERVICE IN ITSELF’

● SINCE qualifying for my Long Service and Good medal (LSGC) I have been unable to obtain a definitive answer with regards to whether it is actually being issued.

I know I'm not the only one affected by the delay, apparently caused by work to clarify its qualifying policy, but the number of those concerned is growing.

– **Name and address supplied**

**Maj Joshua Moyle, Personnel Policy Branch, replies:** Applications are now

being processed by the MoD Medal Office and those who qualify are receiving the award.

Delays in issuing the LSGC and Volunteer Reserve Service Medal are a result of limited capacity within the Medal Office, nothing else.

Please remain patient and trust that your application is being processed as quickly as possible.

Please refrain from contacting the MoD Medal Office directly as this only delays the team.

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

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# BULLET POINTS

Bite-sized data to keep you in the know

## COMPETITIONS

### OCTOBER 2023

**HOAY winner (£200 Rotary Commando Field Watch):** Sue Manning, Army Reserve Centre, Tyne and Wear.

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

## SEARCHLINE

**Calling all Staffords!** Did you serve, or know anyone who served, in the 1944 Normandy campaign with the North or South Staffords, 59th (Staffordshire) Division? August 2024 will mark the 80th anniversary of their finest hour, the first successful crossing of the River Orne, which will be commemorated at an event in France. Contact 01543 434394 or [curator@staffordshireregimentmuseum.com](mailto:curator@staffordshireregimentmuseum.com) for details.

## WELFARE

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

### Army HIVE

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



## ARMY HERITAGE BRANCH

### Mission

To be the staff custodian of Army heritage on behalf of the executive committee of the Army Board and the Army heritage committee (AHC), and to coordinate and assure all aspects of this activity in order to:

- optimise the benefits of heritage for the Army and the nation in terms of ethos, engagement and education, underpinning the image, reputation, and sense of identity of individual regiments and corps
- provide decision makers with a reference point between the past, present and future

**The branch develops policy as directed by AHC and maintains a close dialogue with all directorates, branches, formations, HQs, arms, Services to ensure heritage is considered during planning and decision making.** It also acts as a focal point for dialogue with the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, museums and other relevant bodies.

The branch, based at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, provides an understanding of the Army's contribution to society through museums in the UK. It also publishes *Heritage News* on a quarterly basis. To receive or contribute to this periodical, email [jeremy.fowler107@mod.gov.uk](mailto:jeremy.fowler107@mod.gov.uk)

finance, non-UK nationals, education, employment, deployment, resettlement, military discounts and local area information.

[army.mod.uk/hives](http://army.mod.uk/hives)

### Forcesline

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

0800 731 4880

[ssafa.org.uk/get-help/forcesline](http://ssafa.org.uk/get-help/forcesline)

### Army Welfare Service

Contact directly via [rc-aws-iat-0mailbox@mod.gov.uk](mailto:rc-aws-iat-0mailbox@mod.gov.uk) or 01904 882051/2053

### ALCOHOL AND SMOKING

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

### Drinkline

A free, confidential helpline 0300 123 1110

### NHS support

[nhs.uk/livewell](http://nhs.uk/livewell)

### BULLYING/HARASSMENT/ DISCRIMINATION

#### Army Mediation Service

0306 770 7691 or mil 96770 7691  
[army-mediation-0mailbox@mod.gov.uk](mailto:army-mediation-0mailbox@mod.gov.uk)

#### Army Speak Out Helpline

0306 770 4656 or mil 96770 4656  
[army-speakout@mod.gov.uk](mailto:army-speakout@mod.gov.uk)

#### Defence BHD Helpline

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

### CHILDCARE/CARING/FAMILIES

#### Army Families Federation

The independent voice of Army families, offering confidential advice and support 01264 554004  
[aff.org.uk](http://aff.org.uk)

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

Discover My Benefits  
[discovermybenefits.mod.gov.uk](http://discovermybenefits.mod.gov.uk)

### DEBT AND MONEY PROBLEMS

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

### Forces Pension Society

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

[forcespensionsociety.org](http://forcespensionsociety.org)

### Joining Forces Credit Union

Saving and affordable loans for the Armed Forces community from not-for-profit financial cooperatives [joiningforcescu.co.uk](http://joiningforcescu.co.uk)

### Money Helper

Government-backed money and pensions guidance with a wealth of in-depth guides, tools and calculators [moneyhelper.org.uk](http://moneyhelper.org.uk)

### National Debtline

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

[nationaldebtline.org](http://nationaldebtline.org)

### StepChange Debt Charity

The UK's leading debt charity offering free, confidential advice 0800 138 1111

[stepchange.org.uk](http://stepchange.org.uk)

### GAMBLING

#### National Gambling Helpline

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

### GRIEF

#### Cruse Bereavement Support

0808 808 1677

### SSAFA support groups

People who have been through a similar tragedy, giving you the opportunity to talk though your emotions with an understanding group [supportgroups@ssafa.org.uk](mailto:supportgroups@ssafa.org.uk)

### HOUSING

#### Joint Service Housing Advice Office

The MoD's tri-Service focal point to provide Armed Forces personnel and their dependants with civilian housing information 07814 612120

[rc-pers-jshao-0mailbox@mod.gov.uk](mailto:rc-pers-jshao-0mailbox@mod.gov.uk)

### Single Persons Accommodation Centre for the Ex-Services

01748 833797  
[spaces.org.uk](http://spaces.org.uk)

## Veterans Gateway

A first point of contact for veterans seeking support  
[veteransgateway.org.uk](http://veteransgateway.org.uk)

## INJURY/SICKNESS

### Personnel Recovery Centres

These centres can be found across the United Kingdom. To find out more about your local service, speak to your unit welfare team, search for Army Recovery Capability on Defence Connect or send an email to [rc-pers-arc-0@mailbox@mod.gov.uk](mailto:rc-pers-arc-0@mailbox@mod.gov.uk)

## LONELINESS

### Armed Forces and Veterans Breakfast Clubs

A network of clubs to enjoy breakfast and banter, while combating social isolation [afvbc.net](http://afvbc.net)

### Samaritans

Someone to talk to, night or day, for free and without judgement  
[116 123 samaritans.org](http://116 123 samaritans.org)

### The Royal British Legion

Contact the friendly team for information about local groups and

support services

0808 802 8080

[britishlegion.org.uk](http://britishlegion.org.uk)

## MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

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

### Combat Stress 24/7 Helpline

0800 138 1619

## Headspace

All British Army personnel and civil servants can access this mindfulness app for free with an @armymail.mod.uk email address

[work.headspace.com/britisharmy/member-enroll](http://work.headspace.com/britisharmy/member-enroll)

### Mind – The Mental Health Charity

0300 123 3393  
[mind.org](http://mind.org)

> continued overleaf

# HOW OBSERVANT ARE YOU?

No. 979



a £180 sports bra and tights set!



EIGHT details have been changed in this picture of a Royal Logistic Corps soldier hard at work back in 2021 as he offered up some top Christmas cake decorating tips for *Soldier's* festive issue.

Circle all the differences on the left image and send the panel to HOAY 979, *Soldier*, Ordnance Barracks, Government Road, Aldershot, Hampshire GU11 2DU along with your contact details – including email address – by December 29.

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

Alternatively, email a photograph of the image highlighting the differences to [comps@soldiermagazine.co.uk](mailto:comps@soldiermagazine.co.uk)

The first correct entry drawn after the closing date will win a £65 DynamiX Star sports bra (available in sizes A-G) from Anita

Active along with a pair of £114 sports massage tights.

Previous winner of the Red Dot Design Award, the bra has an innovative Power-X back which creates complete stability and a "less bounce" effect. It's easy to put on and take off thanks to adjustable straps at the front. And the concealed moulded cups are lined with hydrophilic terry cloth and separated by a transparent mesh, which keeps the skin cool while giving the impression of a lower cut neckline.

The tights are made with textured fabric featuring 3D nubs which tone and massage while the compression relieves muscle strain.

To find out more log on to [ouhlala.co.uk](http://ouhlala.co.uk)

The winner's name will appear in the February 2024 issue and all the usual competition rules apply (see opposite page).



### > continued from page 53

#### NHS

General mental health support  
[nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters](https://nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters)

#### Op Courage

A specialist NHS service for Armed Forces leavers, Reservists, veterans and their families. Search for "Op Courage" on [nhs.uk](https://nhs.uk) to find your local team.

#### Samaritans

116 123 [samaritans.org](https://samaritans.org)

#### The Ripple Pond

A self-help support network for relatives of physically or psychologically injured troops and veterans  
0333 900 1028 [theripplepond.org](https://theripplepond.org)

#### Togetherall

A safe, online community where people support each other anonymously  
[togetherall.com](https://togetherall.com)

#### RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN/ABUSE

##### Aurora New Dawn

Safety for survivors of domestic abuse, sexual violence, stalking  
02394 216 816 [aurorand.org.uk](https://aurorand.org.uk)

#### ManKind

Support for male domestic abuse victims  
01823 334244 [mankind.org.uk](https://mankind.org.uk)

#### Relate

Relationship support [relate.org.uk](https://relate.org.uk)

## RESETTLEMENT

This year the **Career Transition Partnership (CTP)** has supported more than 310,000 Service leavers in its 25 years as the official provider of Armed Forces resettlement. Regardless of service, time served or reason for leaving, all members of the Armed Forces can benefit from CTP support. Here are **six top tips** to ensure you make a smooth transition to civvy street:

**1. Prepare yourself** and get engaged early. Too often the CTP hears from workshop attendees who wished they'd started sooner. Remember, regardless of your reason for leaving, you're entitled to CTP support – embrace it.

**2. Make a plan.** Confirm your timelines, set yourself "smart" goals (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-based), and identify what path you want to pursue. CTP career consultants can help you on a one-to-one basis to ensure you find the right option.

**3. Prevent making snap decisions.** Instead, research the sector you want to work in and people to talk to. The CTP team can support you by introducing you to a wide range of employers and providing detailed guides on various sectors as well as an ongoing supply of vacancies.

**4. Identify what skills gaps you**

**might have** and give yourself time to mitigate against these through some vocational training or a civilian work attachment. The CTP can advise and offer a wide range of qualifications and experience for you to add to your already considerable bank of transferable skills.

**5. Explore and promote your brand.** Who are you beyond the uniform? How are you going to let the world know you exist? The CTP will work with you to develop and hone your CV and LinkedIn profile to ensure you make a good first impression.

**6. Perform well in interviews by practising** with friends, family, your network and online digital tools. Let the CTP support you so you land the right outcome at the right time.

#### Where to start with resettlement

- Speak with your local unit resettlement information staff, who can offer advice on your entitlement.
- Contact your Service resettlement adviser (SRA) to discuss your resettlement package and available funding. You can find their details on [ctp.org.uk/contact-us/sra-contact](https://ctp.org.uk/contact-us/sra-contact)
- Register with the CTP via JPA and one of the team will contact you to book your first appointment.

#### CTP TRAINING COURSES 2023/24

- LCL L3 Certificate in Refrigeration, Air Conditioning & Heat Pump Systems
- Domestic Electrical Installation Full Scope
- 18th Edition Wiring Regulations
- C&G 2391-52 Level 3 Award in Inspection and Testing
- C&G 2391-52 Inspection & Testing Resit
- EAL L3 Certificate in Traction and Rolling Stock Systems
- EAL L3 Award in Programmable Logic Controllers
- IMI L3 Certificate in Cycle Maintenance
- Hard Landscaping and Bricklaying
- Plastering
- Plumbing
- Property Maintenance
- Cisco Certified Network Associate

- CompTIA A+
- CompTIA Network+ and Security+
- CompTIA Cyber Security Analyst
- Strategic Finance for Non-Financial Managers
- Executive Mini MBA
- Director Development Programme
- QMS ISO 9001:2015 Lead Auditor Level 3
- Level 5 Certificate in Service Improvement (Lean Six Sigma – Green Belt)
- APMG Change Management
- Management of Risk
- IWFM L4 Certificate in Facilities Management
- CIPD Level 5 Associate Diploma in People Management
- First Aid at Work Level 3 Award
- Managing Safely (IOSH)
- NEBOSH National General Certificate (SQA Level 6)
- NEBOSH Certificate in Fire Safety
- NEBOSH Health & Safety Management for Construction

Information about all training courses can be found on [ctp.org.uk](https://ctp.org.uk) and troops can attend any of the below employment fairs in 2024 across the UK. Book via [ctpevents@ctp.org.uk](mailto:ctpevents@ctp.org.uk)



CTP provides support for up to two years post-discharge, during which time troops can access its full suite of support. After two years, you have life-long employment support through the Forces Employment Charity ([forcesemployment.org.uk](https://forcesemployment.org.uk)).



## FESTIVE DIARY

A flavour of the Christmas activities on offer across military museums...

#### Imperial War Museum, Duxford

Limited spaces still available for Christmas parties as this issue went to press. Visitors can dine under the wings of iconic military aircraft illuminated in true festive spirit. [iwm.org.uk](https://iwm.org.uk)

#### National Army Museum, London

Pensioners from the Royal Hospital perform carols on December 10 with a 1940s-themed dance evening, Jingle Bell Live, later that evening. A creative workshop for youngsters – Tiny Troopers – on December 20. [nam.ac.uk](https://nam.ac.uk)

#### Museum of Army Flying, Middle Wallop

Santa visit with craft activities on December 2 and a concert with the Army Medical Services Band on December 9. [armyflying.com](https://armyflying.com)

#### The Tank Museum, Bovington

A yuletide programme runs from December 16 until January 1. Festive-themed displays including an armoured-theme elf trail and free Christmas card colouring. [tankmuseum.org](https://tankmuseum.org)

#### National Memorial Arboretum, Staffordshire

Walk through the 150-acre woodland site in the Illuminated Arboretum nightly displays from December 7-23. [thenma.org.uk](https://thenma.org.uk)

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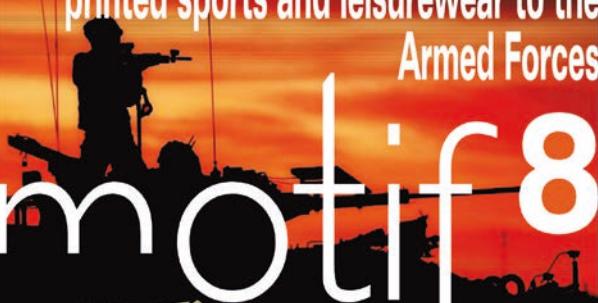
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# REVIEWS

## PICK OF THE MONTH

### Napoleon

New Ridley Scott picture gets dose of military reality

IT WAS a period of history in which huge empires clashed and when new tech was changing the way wars were fought.

The early 1800s were – by all accounts – an era which began to define the world as we know it. Amid intense competition for territory between the major European powers, theatres of conflict soon erupted across the globe.

This appetite for conquest was driven by a legion of legendary military commanders and *Napoleon* – a new movie by director Ridley Scott – explores the life of the most infamous of them all.

The fact that cannon captured from the French emperor's troops well over 200 years ago are still displayed at the entrance to Old College in the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst is testament to a legacy that resonates well into the present day.

Casting Joaquin Phoenix in the lead role, the film – which was set for release as this issue went to press – encompasses the major campaigns of the dictator's life.

Recreating such intense fighting required hundreds of extras to be schooled in the discipline, weapons and tactics of the day, but ex-Para Paul Biddiss – the senior military adviser on the picture – was at hand to help.

"It has been a really interesting project but also a complex undertaking that required a lot of research and digging out a few history books," said the former soldier, who went into the movie business after a 24-year Army career and now has a parade of hit Hollywood films under his belt.

"The Napoleonic era was a time when tactics were changing with the introduction of new kit

such as the musket, for example – and it was particularly brutal.

"In the Infantry the soldiers moved towards the enemy in columns and were then ordered to charge with their bayonets at the last possible moment."

Biddiss explained that troops were required to stay in the line despite being targeted by small arms fire and pulverised by artillery.

"You can only imagine how it must have been with cannon fire ripping into formations," he continued.

"It is vital to understand these realities so I always do a fair bit of reading as a starting point – I tend to go to the journals of fighting men to find out about life back then and get inside the heads of the people who were actually involved."

Biddiss then set about selecting 500 extras to play his troops from 2,000 hopefuls before running a boot camp in Hounslow, West London, to teach successful applicants 19th century soldiering basics. They handled period equipment – with authentic weaponry including replica muskets plus batteries of functioning artillery pieces.

"As well as learning how to load and fire weapons safely, our people needed to know the military drills of the time," he added. "And they all had to be ready to go and take part in filming after three weeks."

"Fortunately, Ridley Scott is a brilliant director – he expects a great deal from everyone on set but he is extremely thorough and appreciates hard work."

Biddiss was also keen to praise his recruits for strong performances during the battle scenes – from recreations of Napoleon's spectacular victory at Austerlitz in what is now the Czech Republic to the horror of the Russian front and a close-run clash with the allies at Waterloo.

Filming took place at locations around the UK, mainland Europe and Malta – with many younger extras taking away a keen appreciation of combat.

"Equipment and tactics change throughout history but the template of the soldier is consistent from age to age," Biddiss added.

"Those who serve tend to have a similar mindset, whether they are modern special forces or an infantryman under the command of Wellington."

"I think people came away with an understanding of all this – some who have never served actually expressed an interest in joining today's British Army."

The veteran admitted that the military adviser role also has a personal resonance for him.

"Obviously we're dealing with history but some of the locations we've filmed in are areas where I trained and worked as a soldier," he concluded.

"It makes you reflect and brings back a fair few good memories."

"But I have no regrets about taking up this life in the film industry and helping others to do the same – I'm really enjoying the work and people involved."



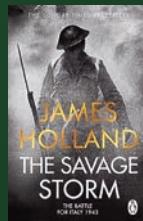
INTERVIEW: CLIFF CASWELL, SOLDIER

## MOVIES



# The best of 2023

Soldier's review team select their top five reads from the past year

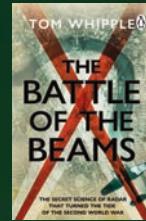


### The Savage Storm

by James Holland

FOR me, the best military history is the kind that brings to life the experiences of the ordinary soldiers and civilians whose misfortune was to be caught up in conflict. Once again, James Holland does not disappoint on this front as he turns his attention to the battle for Italy in 1943. Packed with fascinating first-hand accounts, the book reveals how grand strategies translate into brutal reality for those on the ground. Don't miss it.

WO1 Mike Owens, RE



### The Battle of the Beams

by Tom Whipple

AN account of how radar technology altered the course of the Second World War could have been a dry affair, but this title reads more like a well-paced spy thriller. It's the gripping tale of how young scientist RV Jones worked out how the Germans had harnessed radio beams to ensure the accuracy of their bombers – then lobbied the British top brass to develop countermeasures that would eventually turn the tide of battle. Highly recommended for anyone with an interest in the conflict, not just technical types.

Alistair Clark, ex-R Signals



### Attack Warning Red!

by Julie McDowell

PARANOIA about armageddon was as much part of this reviewer's 1980s childhood as cheesy pop songs and the Sinclair Spectrum – now Julie McDowell has sorted myth from reality in her outstanding history of Cold War defence. Examining the likely realities of conflict if tensions with the Soviet Union boiled over, it is a threat that resonates dangerously into the present day. An unsettling festive read.

Cliff Caswell, Soldier

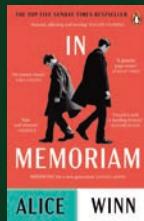


### Adventureholic

by Neil Laughton

THE theme of this well written and easy-to-read book can be described as: "Okay, I've nearly died climbing Mount Everest, what do I do next?" As the author – former Royal Marine Neil Laughton – reveals, his subsequent adventures included scaling the highest peaks on each continent, playing golf at the North Pole, crossing the Sahara in a flying car and retracing Shackleton's route across the South Atlantic. If you want a trip round the world's most challenging locations then join this genuine British eccentric on his entertaining journey.

Andy Kay, ex-RS



### In Memoriam

by Alice Winn

THIS tale of a closeted love affair between two schoolboys, set against the backdrop of the First World War, received rave reviews when it was published in March, and rightly so. The reader is kept in agonising suspense – both willing the protagonists to confess their true feelings and fearful of the fate awaiting them in the trenches. Poignant and utterly gripping, it's the perfect stocking filler for fans of military fiction.

Becky Clark, Soldier

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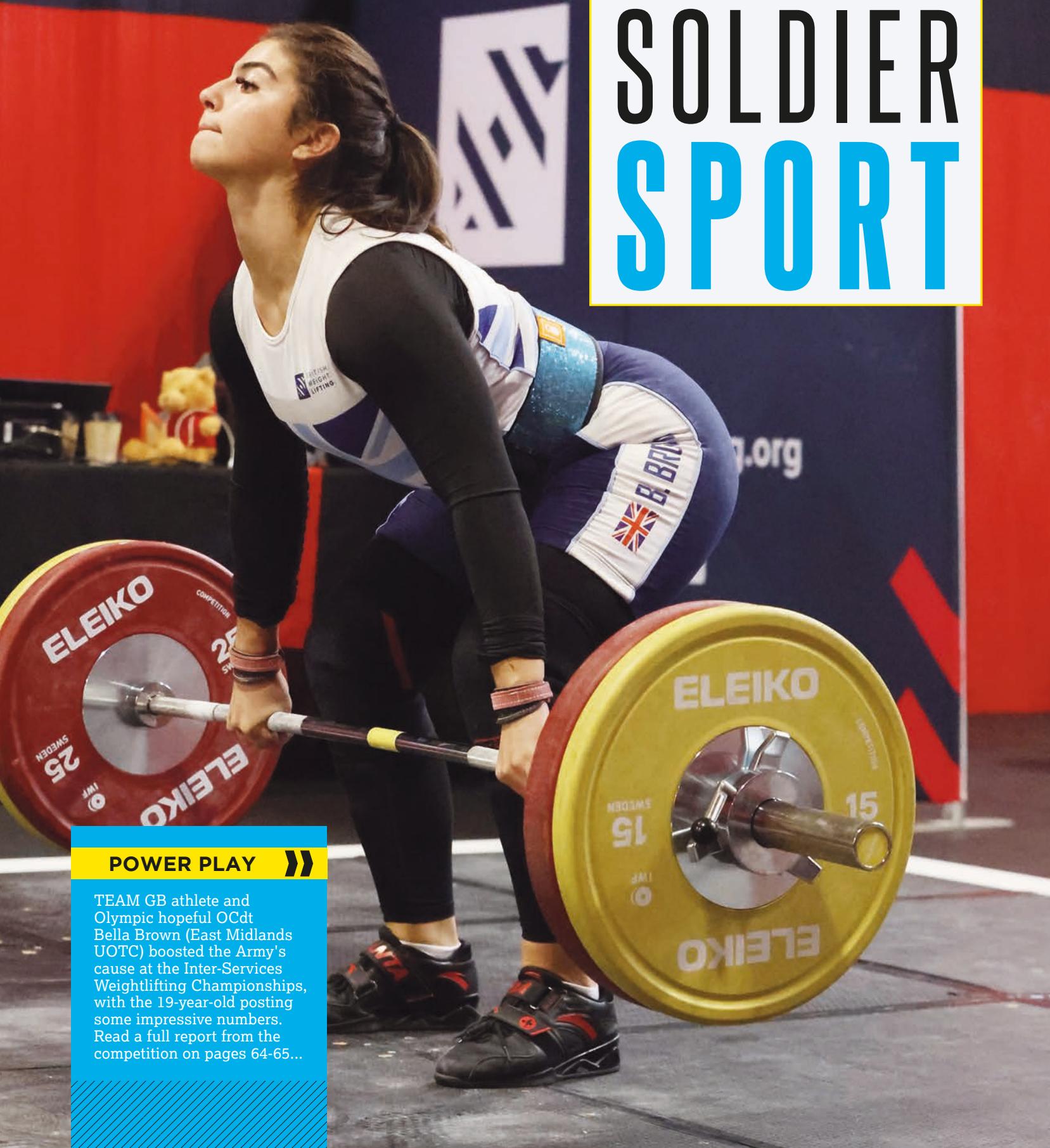
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# SOLDIER SPORT



## POWER PLAY »

TEAM GB athlete and Olympic hopeful OCdt Bella Brown (East Midlands UOTC) boosted the Army's cause at the Inter-Services Weightlifting Championships, with the 19-year-old posting some impressive numbers. Read a full report from the competition on pages 64-65...



Pictures: Graeme Main, Alligin Photography and Jon Rowley

# ANNUAL HONOURS REFLECT DIVERSITY OF SUCCESS

**M**AJOR honours were shared across seven disciplines as the Service toasted a year of athletic success at the Army Sports Awards.

A bronze medal at the Modern Pentathlon World Championships – an effort that saw her hit the qualifying mark for the Paris Olympics – was the highpoint of 2023 for 2Lt Kerenza Bryson (RLC), and she was duly named sportswoman of the year.

The Reservist (pictured right) took the prize ahead of national boxing champion Pte Jerry-Lee Palmer (RLC) and Fijian netball ace Sgt Dee Bolakoro (RE).

“It is such a privilege and I feel very honoured,” Bryson said on collecting the award.

“To be up against such strong competition says something about female sport in the Army – we’ve got so many athletes who are successful and inspiring. I’m really proud to be part of that.”

There was more success for

the Reserve in the sportsman of the year category, where Spr Cameron McDonald (RE) sealed the honours following a stellar year on the rugby union field.

A heavy goods vehicle driver by trade, he was capped by Germany in sevens and the sport’s full code and scored a hat-trick in the Army-Navy game.

He later appeared for the UK Armed Forces at the International Defence Rugby Competition.

“This is not an individual sport, and the main thing is the 14 players around you,” McDonald (main picture) said. “Each team has been great for me, and I wouldn’t be here without them.”

Welsh amateur boxing champion Gdsm Joe-Louis Wright (WG) and Lt Sam Curry (AGC (ETS)), a bronze medallist in the modern pentathlon mixed relay at the European Games, were the other nominees.

As reported in *SoldierSport* last month, the Army women’s tug



**"I'M  
REALLY  
PROUD  
TO BE  
PART OF  
THAT"**

of war squad were named team of the year. Their coach Capt Gareth Wyatt (RA), who is also secretary of Army Tug of War, was nominated in the official of the year category but missed out to cricket umpire WO1 Ben Hood (AGC (RMP), pictured top left).

As chair of the UKAF Association of Cricket Officials, he has used his position to provide development opportunities across all three Services, while umpiring a host of high-profile fixtures.

“To be recognised for my officiating and support to Service cricket is humbling, but being awarded this is a true honour,” he said. “I hope it inspires others to attend one of the many Army Sport officiating courses.”

Boxing referee SSgt Gordon Bruce (RAPTC) – who, among other appointments, officiated at the England Boxing National Elite Championships finals – completed the list of nominees.

Victories at tournaments in Africa and Europe saw judo star LCpl Christi-Rose Pretorius (AGC (RMP), pictured below) named Army sport's rising star.

Aged 20, she sits third in the world junior rankings and is on course to represent Zimbabwe at the Paris Olympics.

Netball's Pte Amy Howell (RAMC), who has signed with Super League side Surrey Storm, and distance runner Lt Kate Olding (Int Corps) – an Inter-Services half-marathon and ten-kilometre road race champion – were also in the frame.

Lifetime achievement awards were presented to Lt Col (Retd) Bill Herlihy and WO2 Ian Lester (RAPTC). The former provided more than 50 years' service to Army and UKAF tennis, the more recent of which saw him spend a decade as secretary of the Army Tennis Association.

A former corps level and Army masters player, Lester is a basketball stalwart who has refereed at all levels of the military and domestic game – taking the whistle for six International Basketball Tournament finals.

Success in swimming, athletics and orienteering saw Sgt Zoe McCosh (ACF) named cadet sportsperson of the year, while 8 Training Battalion, Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers were the Army Sports Trophy major unit winners.

AFC Harrogate and 165 Port and Maritime Regiment, Royal Logistic Corps took the minor unit and Reserve equivalents. ■



## AWARDS IN NUMBERS

**GOLD MEDALS WON BY 2LT KERENZA BRYSON AT THE SOFIA WORLD CUP EVENT IN MAY**

**2**

**UKAF VICTORIES PLAYED IN BY SPR CAMERON MCDONALD AT THE DEFENCE RUGBY WORLD CUP**

**3**

**WORLD RANKING EVENTS COMPLETED BY LCPL CHRISTI-ROSE PRETORIUS BETWEEN MARCH AND AUGUST**

**10**

**ARMY TENNIS TITLES WON BY LT COL (RETD) BILL HERLIHY**

**28**



## TARGET TALENT TAKES AIM

HERE was no shortage of potential on show as the Army clay target shooting team held its latest talent identification day.

More than 60 personnel tested their aim at Bisley with the hope of catching the eye ahead of final selections for the various squads for 2024.

Included among them was Sgt Nadine Cooke (RAMC, pictured), who was one of 15 Servicewomen vying for a place on the female development squad that was launched two years ago.

“Females are a massive minority in this sport,” the squad’s admin officer, Maj Victoria Gordon (RAMC), told *SoldierSport*. “But we have a good pool to select from, which highlights the fact there is some real potential out there.

“Everything is going in the right direction.”

LCpl Eve Wild (AGC (MPGS)) started in the sport in 2021 and has made rapid strides since – finishing second to Gordon at the last Army Championships.

As a transgender athlete, she said the squad has been

extremely welcoming and is now looking to progress as far as she can.

“It has been an amazing couple of years,” Wild added.

“To be accepted in a female sport for who I am has been fantastic. The plan now is to push for a place on the Army squad and continue to better myself. I’d also like to become the first transgender female to win a Clay Pigeon Shooting Association event.”

Elsewhere, the Army’s Olympic development squad has been another source of success with Rfn Gary Young (Rifles) and WO2 Mark Robinson (REME) selected for England in the skeet and trap disciplines respectively.

“The aspiration is for them to push for Team GB,” said the set-up’s Maj Jason Wright (AGC (RMP)).

“People should not be put off by the word ‘Olympic’. This is a sport that is open to all – you have to start somewhere.”

“It is possible to go from zero to hero, but it takes time and we have the resources to allow personnel an opportunity they would not normally get.” ■



MAKE GAINS: FOR DETAILS ON HOW TO GET INVOLVED VISIT THE SET-UP'S DEFENCE CONNECT PAGE OR FOLLOW @BRITISHARMYWEIGHTLIFTING ON INSTAGRAM



# GATHERING MOMENTUM

## ARMY LIFTERS HIGHLIGHT STRENGTH OF SPORT AT INTER-SERVICES SHOWDOWN

OLYMPIC hopeful OCdt Bella Brown (East Midlands UOTC) was among the star performers as the Army's weightlifters flexed their muscles against their Forces rivals in Aldershot.

The Team GB athlete lifted 82kg in the snatch, followed by a 107kg effort in the clean and jerk, to lead the charge in a competitive women's field that also featured three-time British Army Warrior Fitness (BAWF) champion SSgt Charlotte Spence (RAPTC, pictured near left, bottom).

The duo headed the female field but with the final numbers crunched it was the Royal Air Force who celebrated overall victory, with the soldiers second.

Brown's effort came on the back of a bronze medal at the European Junior and Under-23 Championships in Bucharest, and she was due to compete at the equivalent event at world level as this issue went to press.

"That was a lot better than I expected," the 19-year-old told *SoldierSport* as she reflected on her performance in Romania. "I did six out of six lifts and could not have done any more – I went in ranked eighth, so to finish third was great."

"In many ways it gave me the kick up the backside I needed. I'd just finished my first year at university and it made me realise I could be good at this."

Brown, who is studying history at the University of Nottingham and aims to commission from Sandhurst and serve in the Intelligence Corps, started in the sport four-and-a-half years ago.

With a background in acrobatic gymnastics and then cross fit, she began

weightlifting as a way of supplementing those disciplines and her talent soon came to the fore.

"After my first competition I was selected for Team GB," the under-76kg star (pictured right) explained. "I lifted 66kg in the snatch and 85kg in the clean and jerk – I had just turned 15.

"I have progressed so much since then and the 2028 Olympics in Los Angeles is my main goal. I've got the World Juniors coming up and that is a whole different level of competition; it will be about improving on my totals and beating those who finished ahead of me at the Europeans."

Despite a busy schedule of studying and training, Brown – who has clocked personal bests of 92kg in the snatch and 113kg in the clean and jerk – was delighted to find the time to compete in her first Inter-Services competition.

She added: "There is a real connection, and we are here competing for each other, which is something you don't always get in an individual sport."

The Team GB athlete is just one of the success stories stemming from what is a relatively new discipline in military circles – this was just the fourth Forces competition.

SSgt Sian Peters (QARANC) is a European masters champion and world silver medallist, while Pte James Beaumont (R Yorks) and Cfn Joe Woodham (REME) are part of the Army's talented athlete scholarship scheme.

WO2 Chris Williams (RAPTC), head of performance for Army and UK Armed Forces Weightlifting, said the number of participants is continually



**"I COULD  
NOT  
HAVE  
DONE  
ANY  
MORE"**

rising and it could soon reach the levels seen in powerlifting.

"The top three females from BAWF are lifting with us and we have more than 50 people turning up at our regular workshops," he said.

"There is a crossover with the Army physical training system, and the popularity of cross fit and BAWF has helped. It is also an individual sport with a team aspect, which I think appeals.

"The aim now is to get category two status from Army Sport, which will help us grow. Looking further ahead our goal is to produce national champions and have athletes at the Commonwealth and Olympic Games."

The set-up's growth has also been boosted by its relationship with British Weightlifting, who had representatives at the Inter-Services as the organisations formed closer ties.

Education operations manager Ashleigh Smeaton was among those present and she was impressed by the talent that was on display.

"It is a good opportunity to network and from an education perspective, make a few contacts," she said.

"We did well at the last Olympics, and this is a sport that is continuously growing. Being here allows us to expand our membership base."

"Personnel are physically fit and have the strength needed to move across to weightlifting, so it is a good relationship for us to have."

"The Army have supported us at some major competitions, and we have offered help on the education and performance side. That integration is only going to grow in the future." ■



# A VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS FROM THE SIDE BY SIDE TEAM



Throughout the UK we are celebrating the lead up to Christmas with a range of great tasting 'Winter Feastival' treats. These include a variety of festive themed street food with the Christmas Turkey & Stuffing Dinner Burrito, The Big Pig Blanket Dog, Stuffing & Apple Relish The Festive Veggie Dog, Stuffing & Apple Relish The Camemburger. Look out for them at a site near you!



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RING RETURN: THE ARMY WERE COMPETING IN A TOURNAMENT WITH SWEDEN, MERSEYSIDE AND TYNE TEES AND WEAR AS THIS ISSUE WENT TO PRESS

## SPORT SHORTS



### Defeat for Dainton

ARMY star Bdr Bethan Dainton (RA) made a losing start to her reign as Wales rugby league captain as the side slipped to a 14-4 defeat to France.

Injury ruled the dual-code international out of her side's 60-0 loss to England a week later.

Elsewhere in the sport, the Army men enjoyed a 22-6 success against Kells ARLFC in their remembrance fixture, while Fijian international Gnr Mitieli Vulikijapani (RA) has signed a one-year contract extension with Super League outfit Hull FC.



### Top of the table

TABLE tennis players returned to action as the Army set-up staged their latest round robin tournament.

Spr Dom Weston (RE, pictured) led the charge with victory over Sgt Avi Shahi (R Signals) in the final of the men's open competition.

Sgt Hilary Greig (AMS) claimed another women's title as she defeated Pte Bethany Brewer (RLC) in their respective final. Shahi was also named most improved player, with Sig Jamie Marriot (R Signals) best newcomer.

The next Army Championships will be held in February. See the British Army Table Tennis social media channels for more details.



Picture: Ssgt JP Kastein, AGC (SPS)

## BAHRAIN BEATEN AS FORM CONTINUES



**"IT WAS  
THE  
BEST I  
HAVE  
EVER  
BOXED"**

ARMY boxers produced a dazzling display in front of a passionate home crowd at ITC Catterick to score a 6-1 win over their rivals from the Bahrain Royal Guard.

The soldiers forced stoppages in four bouts to claim a second international scalp of the season following their triumph over the German Bundeswehr at ATR Winchester two weeks earlier.

"We knew it was going to be tough as they are an experienced team," head coach Ssgt Shane Sadler (RAPTC) told *SoldierSport* as he reflected on the latest success.

"But we were well prepared, and the boxers performed brilliantly on the night.

"It is quite hard for them at the moment; we are challenging them in training and sparring but it is paying off – their fitness didn't even come into question."

Pte Lewis Harvey (RLC) was named boxer of the night, while Sadler praised the performance of Cpl Nick Wright (R Signals) in his impressive victory over LCpl

Nurkhan Mussabeyev.

Pte Lucas Forinton (R Anglian, pictured above) was another to catch the eye after stepping up from the Army development team, forcing a third-round stoppage in his clash with Pte Omar Budhaei.

"I was nervous going in, but I feel like that before every bout," the 60kg fighter said.

"I won the first round comfortably but by the third it felt closer than it actually was.

"I was happy with the win and to be part of the show; it was great to come back to ITC Catterick and fight."

Cfn Niamh Brookes (REME, pictured left) also triumphed via a stoppage, this time against Sgt Maryam Khamis at 54kg.

"It was probably the best I have ever boxed," she explained. "With it being against an international fighter and in front of a big crowd, it was a great result."

"I did not know a lot about her or her style, so it was a case of figuring it out in the ring and that will be good experience for the future." ■



Pictures: Graeme Main and Army Sport/Cat Gwyn

# RESERVISTS EMBRACE ARMY'S SPORTING DIVERSITY

ARMY Training Unit (ATU) North has been reflecting on a year of sporting achievement that has seen its personnel triumph at Service level as well as on the international stage.

WO2 Hayley Hall (RE) has led the charge for the Reserve outfit as she continued her long run of success in karate.

A former Army and UK Armed Forces sportswoman of the year, the athlete has claimed numerous medals at home and abroad over the past 12 months – including silver at the European Masters Games and gold at the WKUF World Championships in Scotland.

“That was the fourth time I have won at the worlds, and it was nice to do it at a home event,” she told *SoldierSport*.

“The Masters Games was great. I’d never competed there before; the Army sent a large squad and it was brilliant to see some of the other teams and be around them.

“The opportunity to do sport with the ATU has been amazing and I’ve been quite fortunate that competitions have fallen when training is not on. But when it is scheduled, they have been supportive in terms of me getting away.

“I think it’s an important part of the Army offer, particularly when it comes to the mental wellbeing of personnel.”

Hall will push for further honours in 2024, as will WO2 Glen Sarah (RLC) – who was finally crowned Royal Logistic Corps squash champion.

The 53-year-old was a beaten finalist on five occasions prior to this season and attributed his success to his efforts on the civilian circuit, as well as completing his level one and two coaching qualifications.

“You are never too old to win,” he said. “It was all about having more time on the court, that has really helped me improve.”

Elsewhere, WO2 Ian Mahan (Mercian) finished 12th in a field



**“THIS IS  
QUITE A  
LOT FOR  
A SMALL  
UNIT”**

of 74 players at the Infantry Golf Championships and helped the Infantry A team to the Inter-Corps semi-finals.

Footballer LCpl Gavin Day (RE) received his Army cap having played 25 games for the Reserve first team and this year lined up for the masters’ side, while LCpl Michael Hayden (R Yorks) has made regular appearances in the Army Cycling Road Race Series. He also finished second in the novice ranks at the Army Triathlon (North) sprint race.

And ex-Regular Sgt Jon Marshall (RE) has competed in cross country and endurance mountain bike events throughout the year, claiming third place at the Ten Under the Ben race at the foot of Ben Nevis and first in his age category at the 10@Kirroughtree.

“This is quite a lot for a small unit and a diverse set of individuals,” said CO Lt Col Dickie Fairbairn (RRF) while reflecting on the successes. ■

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## UKAF HIT THE ROAD

THE UK Armed Forces men's rugby union team squared off against the Polish national side as they made a historic overseas journey for their annual remembrance fixture.

As well as commemorating Armistice Day, the match marked Polish Independence Day and was the first time the military outfit had faced international opposition since 2010, when they locked horns with Samoa.

It was also just their second game against an international rival on foreign soil.

Four Army players were named in the starting line-up as UKAF slipped to a narrow 17-14 defeat when a penalty try was awarded to the hosts in the dying embers of the contest. A successful penalty kick moments later sealed the tourists' fate.

LCpl Epeli Kotobalavu (RLC, pictured above) had earlier crossed to tie the match at 7-7.

There was also disappointment for UKAF's female team, who succumbed to Premiership Women's Rugby side Bristol Bears in their remembrance match.

Skipped by SSgt Jade Mullen (AGC (SPS), pictured below) they conceded six tries on their way to a 38-10 defeat at Kingsholm.



## LATE STRIKE ENDS TROPHY DROUGHT



**A** LAST-gasp goal from LCpl Jordan Hardaker (RE) saw the Army men seal a dramatic victory over the Royal Air Force to claim the honours at the Inter-Services Indoor Hockey Championships.

The attacker fired home towards the end of the contest to secure a 6-5 win and ensure the soldiers lifted the trophy for the first time in ten years.

Hardaker's strike came just seconds after skipper Cpl Scott Rawlings (REME) equalised from a short corner and was just reward for the late pressure applied on the airmen's goal.

The action proved to be a fitting finale to an end-to-end affair in which the RAF's Cpl Scott Perry scored four goals.

Rawlings (pictured above) and Capt George Bissett (RE) bagged braces, with Capt Tom Bolton (AAC) also converting ahead of Hardaker's moment of magic.

At the other end, the soldiers were indebted to the form of goalkeeper Cpl Nick Bull (AGC (SPS)), who made a succession of fine saves.

"We had a game plan and stuck to it to the last minute," Rawlings told *SoldierSport*.

"The stakes were high, and we had to trust in that plan and our coaches. We managed to pull through and took our chance in the dying moments."

"I've been on the Army team for five or six years and this is the first time we have won in that time. It feels glorious; it is a fantastic achievement and a well-earned team effort."

"It is always tough against the RAF. We were ahead last year and lost, we had the lead this time round and then fell behind, but it is great to get the win."

"We now want to build on this in the outdoor season."

A late strike also proved decisive in the under-25s competition, as the Army downed the Royal Navy 3-2 to lift their respective trophy, having already beaten the RAF 7-0.

However, there was disappointment for the women as they slipped to a 6-2 defeat against their light blue rivals in the tournament decider. ■

## » SQUASH



### RECORD BREAKERS

THREE defence records tumbled as Army athletes flexed their muscles at the Forces Strongman Midlands competition.

Staged at Gamecock Barracks in Nuneaton, the event was the second of four heats in the quest to find the Service's strongest man and woman.

Cpl Faye Bolton (RLC) was the first to post a new military record as she knocked almost 17 seconds off the vehicle pull – hauling a 1.6-tonne Land Rover across the 15-metre course in 31.27 seconds.

Cpl James Goode (RLC) then set a new best for the maximum overhead log as he lifted 110kg on his way to winning the male novice event.

"I'm really happy," he said. "It was my first strongman event and 110kg was a new personal best. To then win my overall category was fantastic."

WO1 Sheridan Lucas (RLC) and Capt Helen Broadbridge (AGC (ALS)) completed a record-breaking day when they were tied in first place in the women's maximum overhead log – each lifting 50kg.

Sheridan went on to win the women's title.



## CORPS TEST PUSHES COURT GROWTH



**"WE  
HAVE  
MORE  
DEPTH"**

**M**ORE than 100 players and 16 teams took to the courts in Aldershot for the annual Inter-Corps Squash Championships.

After three days of action, the Royal Engineers' A team topped the division one standings, with the Army Medical Services taking the division two title and the Royal Army Physical Training Corps A side the division three equivalent prize.

Capt Sachin Thapa (R Signals) was named player of the tournament.

"This is the launch event for the season," Lt Col (Retd) Dave Campey, secretary of Army Squash, told *SoldierSport*.

"We are trying to encourage more female participation and have asked all teams to bring at least one female player.

"We have got more strength

in depth now, but we are still struggling in terms of women. Our main effort this year is to attract players at grassroots level and we are looking to run taster events at the Regional Command festivals of sport to generate some interest."

The event came on the back of a strong showing at the UK Armed Forces Individual Championships, where Maj Elaine Radcliffe (RAMC) claimed the women's trophy and Reservist Pte Connor Watson (R Yorks) the under-25 crown.

The Army Individual Championships will be held in Aldershot from February 27-29, with the full UK Armed Forces Championships following on March 21 and 22.

Follow **@ArmySquash** on X or visit the British Army Squash Facebook page. ■

- **THE Army American football team suffered a disappointing end to the season as they were beaten by the Royal Air Force.**

The 41-18 reverse in Abingdon meant the light blues were crowned the inaugural Inter-Services champions following their earlier victory over the Royal Navy. Defeat for the soldiers came on the back of a 30-0 loss to Bristol Apache (pictured) a month earlier.



Picture: Chris Cope



# MONTH IN SPORT

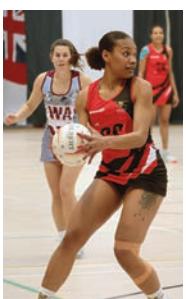
## December's key dates...



**WHAT:** Inter-Services Indoor Archery  
**WHEN:** December 2  
**WHERE:** NAEC Stoneleigh  
**NEED TO KNOW:** With beginners' courses proving popular the sport has been attracting a steady influx of new talent. Can the Army team end the year on a high?



**WHAT:** Inter-Corps Water Polo, Diving and Swimming Championships  
**WHEN:** December 5 to 7  
**WHERE:** Aldershot  
**NEED TO KNOW:** The Royal Engineers will look to defend the men's swimming crown after a narrow triumph last time out, while the Army Medical Services will be the women's team to beat



**WHAT:** Army v Ireland Emeralds  
**WHEN:** December 9  
**WHERE:** Nottingham Arena  
**NEED TO KNOW:** The Inter-Services champions have the honour of testing themselves against international opposition in what will be a curtain raiser for England's second game in a three-match series with South Africa



## PACE REMAINS HIGH IN ONLINE SERIES



**"IT GIVES RIDERS A CHANCE TO RACE"**

THE Army Cycling Union's (ACU) eRacing scene is continuing to thrive in the post-Covid era with more than 200 riders taking to the saddle for the autumn series.

Originally designed as a way to compete during pandemic restrictions, the sport has remained a firm fixture on the calendar with its latest contest – featuring six online races in six weeks – drawing to a close late last month.

The Infantry claimed the team prize, while a host of awards were presented in the various individual categories.

Spr Jennifee Hudson (RE) was victorious in the women's points event, with LCpl Charlotte Glass (R Signals) winning the general classification.

Army rider WO2 Ian Evans (PWRR) secured the points and general classification prizes in the men's A category, a feat repeated by WO2 William Steele (Coldm Gds) in a D category that featured Sgt Wayne Fell (REME, pictured).

Capt Simon Hale (R Anglian)

and WO2 Stuart Murray (RE) were the respective B and C category points champions, with WO1 Steve Barham (REME) and veteran Patrick Weir taking the overall crowns.

"It is organised over the winter months and gives the riders who are stuck indoors a chance to race," explained the ACU's eRacing secretary SSgt Kev Osborne (RA).

"There can be a bit of apprehension with road racing, so this allows individuals to compete in a safe environment – there are no consequences if they blow up, so to speak."

Events are staged via the online platform Zwift and streamed, with commentary, on YouTube. The format also allows riders to dip in and out depending on their schedule.

"Simon Hale only did four races but won them all, while Jennifee Hudson came in for the last three and was first in each," Osborne continued.

"We've got a good relationship with Zwift HQ, which allows us to do different things, and we're getting lots of positive feedback." ■



I want to start looking at mobilisation, although it's a big decision, especially with a full-time job. But my employers have been great - I'm a civil servant in Whitehall and was granted special leave for my military training.

**Gdsm Alex Healey, SG**



The Army will give me more opportunity to develop my clinical skills - I'm already a civilian physiotherapist with the NHS and looking forward to training as a combat medical technician.

**Pte Georgina Robson, RAMC**

Interviews: Cliff Caswell Pictures: Graeme Main



I want to step up to gain more responsibility at my unit. I love sport too and was a civvy personal trainer in Dubai before joining the Reserve.

**Pte Imogen Adshead, PWRR**



I have an important decision to make - whether to apply for the Regular Army. Service life is great. I'm 22 now and if I enlist full-time then it will be for the long haul.

**Spr Samuel Jones, RE**



I'm really tempted to try P Company or the all-arms commando course, although I would need to put in some work as my fitness is not yet up to that standard. But I am still only 20 so there is plenty of time to prepare.

**Pte Lewis Stark, RLC**



After joining the Infantry at the age of 33, I want to find out where my limits lie. I work for a communications company in civvy life and the Army has led me down new fitness avenues. I'm loving my running in particular.

**Rfn Christopher Bragg, Rifles**

## Opportunity knocks

We asked Reservists completing their initial training battle camp about their military goals in the coming year...

I work for a luxury travel firm in civilian life and joining the Reserve in my late 20s means I have some new opportunities. I'd like to look at deploying and, as a surfer, the adventurous training opportunities are a big pull.

**Pte Marina More, Int Corps**



# LEVEL PEAKS



*Wishing our serving personnel near and far  
a Very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.*



## WE SUPPORT FORMER SOLDIERS WITH THEIR HOUSING NEEDS

Reece served in The Rifles Regiment but had to leave the Army early due to a back injury.

Launchpad, the homeless charity which we proudly fund, provided him with secure and safe accommodation.

Now settled, Reece is able to work hard towards securing stable employment.



To find out more about our work visit  
[armybenevolentfund.org](http://armybenevolentfund.org)

Army Benevolent Fund is a registered charity in England and Wales (1146420) and Scotland (SC039189) and registered as a company limited by guarantee in England and Wales (07974609).