

SOLDIER

ROLLING THUNDER

Changing face of prairie programme

DIGITAL DEPLOYMENT

Laser system goes down a storm in international training packages

INSIDE: POWER PLAY • TOURING CARS • PROJECT JAMES

BRIGHT YOUNG THINGS

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“It’s the bad memories that stop you from living properly. When I went to sleep at night it was like I was drowning and it’s because of that you are scared to go to bed. If it wasn’t for SSAFA I would have ended up on the streets.”

More than 25 years after serving in the Falklands War, **Clinton**, 49, is still carrying the mental scars. When SSAFA Forces Help met him he was unable to sleep for the nightmares caused by Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and his debts had spiralled out of control.

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SOLDIER

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Cover picture (left): A soldier from 1 Rifles issues commands during an exercise on Copehill Down

Picture: Graeme Main

Background image: British troops have been getting to grips with the brand-new Ex Prairie Thunder in Canada

Picture: Steve Dock



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those of the British Army or the Ministry of Defence.



“Bloody Services... Once upon a time we could enjoy some peace and quiet on the Downs.”

● Marathon man – Pages 45-47

Herrick only half the story

AS inspirational as the operational acts of the British Army are, it is easy to forget that the force's selfless service spans a far greater area than the battlefields of Afghanistan.

The six months of long days and hard fights of Op Herrick are a central part of a deployment conveyor belt that whirrs into life well before troops' boots touch down in Helmand.

That personnel are able to jump straight into mentally- and physically-taxing roles in theatre without skipping a beat is no accident. It happens because the soldiers involved have spent several months perfecting their skills and drills in purpose-designed exercises around the globe.

Never ones to pass up an opportunity to rub shoulders with our maple syrup-eating cousins, *Soldier* spent part of last month immersed in the wilderness of the Canadian prairie to check out the latest additions to British Army Training Unit Suffield.

The first thing we noticed was that Medicine Man – the twice-yearly exercise of legend – was gone. In its place stands the impressively-named Ex Prairie Thunder.

Designed from the ground up to provide a “hybrid” training package that focuses as much on current ops as it does on other forms of warfare, the new exercise combines the best previous serials with Afghan-specific drills.

He was too professional to admit it, but the intensity of the training almost broke *Soldier's* correspondent. The set-up is so detailed that in less than a week he found himself sitting alongside troops on a 15-hour road convoy, cutting about with mechanics (Pages 28-29) and even spending time undercover with the soldiers playing the opposition force (Pages 26-27).

‘Six months of long days and hard fights are a central part of a deployment conveyor belt’

His tales of hardship fell on the deaf ears of his uncaring colleagues at *Soldier* HQ, but the fact he had experienced so much in such a short time highlighted just how hard troops work to ready themselves for deployment.

The Desert Rats in Canada are far from alone. The 1st Battalion, The Rifles are due to go to Afghanistan in 2011 and are set to commence training for that imminently.

But rather than preserve energy levels for the long slog ahead, the tireless soldiers have been put through their paces on Salisbury Plain to keep them prepared for their role as the Spearhead Lead Element, which can see them

tasked to move anywhere in the world at just 24-hours' notice (Pages 31-33).

It is not just the deploying Servicemen and women who have picked up the pace. The staff at the Services Cotswold Centre have continued to add to the respite facility to provide the entire Armed Forces

community with a place to go should they need it for any reason (Pages 38-39).

And you need not take our word for it. One of England's most-famous sportsmen, Golden Balls Beckham himself, achieved a personal ambition when he flew to Camp Bastion to personally salute the people he regards as heroes (Page 41).

Finally – and please forgive us for being self-congratulatory – *Soldier* last month scooped the British internal magazine of the year award from both the Chartered Institute of Public Relations and the Institute of Internal Communications.

We are obviously very proud, but on behalf of the team here I would like to dedicate the awards to the Service people we write for and about. Keep up the good work. ■



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Picture: Steve Dock

Professional job: British soldiers on Op Herrick 11 showed “courageous restraint” during a difficult tour, according to their commander

Afghan policy wins hearts and minds

THE focus on supporting civilians rather than fighting insurgents is helping bring stability to Afghanistan, according to a recently-returned commander.

The arrival of Brig James Cowan, who led 11 Light Brigade during Op Herrick 11, in theatre last year coincided with US commander Gen Stanley McChrystal's announcement of a fresh emphasis on building governance in key areas of Helmand province.

And speaking during his first media briefing since returning, he said that the policy had already paid dividends.

“We made it our business to be the vanguard of McChrystal's plan by empowering the people, establishing security shuras and appointing the heads who would convince young men to join in protecting the community rather than wrecking it,” he explained.

“We have the right approach and the right tactics to succeed. It's reversible in a situation as testing as Helmand and progress is fragile, but we will continue to do more of the same and focus on the people rather than the Taliban.”

Brig Cowan oversaw a testing deployment during which 61 British soldiers were killed as international troops and their Afghan partners expanded security around key locations.

The tour also saw the opening of the Helmand Police Training Centre which has gone on to produce between 100 and 120 new policemen every six weeks.

The senior officer admitted that the mistrust of the police had seen them become “as much a part of the problem as the solution”, but added that the “virtuous spiral” created by increasing the capacity of the Afghan National Security Forces was an important factor

for the country's future.

“We chose not to disinvest in the police but the opposite, by opening the Helmand Police Training Centre modelled on best practice,” he said.

“It produces people who hold the confidence of Helmand because they are Helmandis themselves.

“The work we were able to put in to the Afghan National Army and the Helmand Police Training Centre means we will get to a point where Afghans take control and that allows us to leave when the conditions are right.”

Despite the number of casualties during Op Herrick 11, Brig Cowan said that he wanted people to remember the positive outcomes of the tour and reserved special praise for the “courageous restraint” his men had shown in only engaging the enemy when absolutely necessary.

“I salute the men of my brigade who showed that [restraint] in the face of severe provocation,” he added. “I want to focus less on the losses than the successes. We owe it to the families to let them know that their relatives died creating progress.”

2.5 THE NUMBER IN THOUSANDS OF STUDENTS WHO ARE EXPECTED TO PASS THROUGH HELMAND POLICE TRAINING CENTRE EACH YEAR. THE LASHKAR GAH FACILITY OPENED IN JANUARY

More bucks for your bang

THE operational allowance for soldiers serving in conflict zones has been doubled.

Prime Minister David Cameron announced the development during his first visit to Afghanistan since taking office in May (pictured).

The boost, which has been backdated to the May 6 General Election, means that troops will receive a tax-free daily payment of £29.02 – up from £14.51.

Defence Secretary Dr Liam Fox said: "I am delighted that we have doubled the operational allowance for those of our troops who are engaged in the very highest areas of conflict.

"In doing so, we have fulfilled a key commitment set out in our coalition programme."

Under the new payment rate, personnel completing a six-month tour of Afghanistan or Iraq or serving as part of the Coalition Task Force Iraqi Maritime programme will receive £5,280.88.

Servicemen and women who have earned operational allowance between May 6 and June 30 received the old rate in their June pay, but a compensating payment taking the rate increase into account was due to be added to this month's pay run.

The operational allowance is handed over in the form of a single lump sum paid at the end of the tour.

Cash boost targets IEDs

AN extra £67 million has been promised by the Government to combat the threat of explosive devices in Afghanistan.

The money includes £40 million to buy more protected vehicles for counter-IED teams and an additional £5 million for the purchase of remote-controlled vehicles.

The remaining funds will be spent developing other capabilities, including the military working dog strength.

The money will come from the Treasury Reserve and the majority of it will be spent during the current financial year, with the remainder coming in 2011/2012.

Prime Minister David Cameron announced the move during a visit to Afghanistan where he told troops that their mission was not to build a "perfect model society".

He said: "We are here to help the

Afghans take control of their security so we can go home."

As well as buying new kit and equipment for the battle with Helmand province's deadly bombs, Mr Cameron said that the number of dedicated counter-IED teams will be doubled.

He also told soldiers that the Military Covenant would be rewritten and re-published to ensure that Service personnel are well-respected and supported, adding that their work in Afghanistan was helping to make Britain a safer place.

He explained: "I can sum up this mission in two words – it is about national security. Clearing Al Qaeda out of Afghanistan, damaging them in Pakistan, making sure this country is safe and secure will make us safe and secure back home.

"This mission is about that [national security], pure and simple."

6 THE NUMBER OF IMPROVISED EXPLOSIVE DEVICES ARMY EXPERTS CLEARED FROM A 2,500 METRE STRETCH OF ROAD DURING OP TOR MAHKE ZI, A MAJOR MOVE TO PUSH TALIBAN FIGHTERS OUT OF SOUTHERN NAD-E-ALI DISTRICT

Troops show greater staying power

FEWER people are leaving the military than at any time in the last five years, new data has shown.

Latest Armed Forces manning figures reveal that the number of personnel returning to civvy street between March 2009 and 2010 fell 15.1 per cent compared to the previous 12 months.

More than 21,800 new recruits signed up for Regular service during the same period and the trends have helped the military reach 99.5 per cent of its full-time trained strength, up from 97.2 per cent in 2009.

Under Secretary of State for Defence Andrew Robathan said: "These new recruits will receive world-class training which will equip them to deal with security challenges in the years to come.

"They will benefit from initiatives

to help the Armed Forces and their families, including our commitment to double the operational allowance.

"As a former soldier, I understand the many challenges and opportunities that a career in the Armed Forces can offer and I would recommend it to anyone.

"I wish our recruits every success in their new roles."

Since April 1 last year, the number of females serving in the Regular Armed Forces has risen from 12.1 to 12.2 per cent for officers and from 8.9 to nine per cent for other ranks.

There has also been a rise in the number of Regular troops from ethnic minority backgrounds from 6.56 to 6.65 per cent.

The total strength of the Armed Forces stands at 177,840 against a target of 178,750.

NEWS IN BRIEF

MORE than 1,600 influential Afghans travelled to Kabul last month to attend a National Consultative Peace Jirga.

Representatives of both houses of parliament and tribal leaders were among

the delegates at the two-day conference.

The jirga drew up a 16-point action plan to give President Karzai a mandate to begin a process of negotiation with insurgent leaders.



Picture: Cpl Russ Nolan, RLC

THE massed ranks of the Household Division form up on Horse Guards Parade to mark the Queen's birthday with a Trooping the Colour ceremony. The monarch was joined by other members of the Royal Family as more than 1,400 soldiers took part in the parade. The 1st Battalion, Grenadier Guards had the honour of trooping their new colour just six weeks after returning from a tour of Afghanistan. Commanding officer Lt Col Roly Walker took charge of the event, which also featured music from 400 personnel representing ten different bands and corps of drums. The earliest records of Trooping the Colour date as far back as 250 years ago.

Pooled resources pay off

WOUNDED soldiers will receive even greater rehabilitation after the opening of a new gym and pool complex at Headley Court.

Prince William visited the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre in Surrey to unveil the £11.3 million facility, which was funded by Help for Heroes and the Ministry of Defence.

The new building contains state-of-the-art equipment including a 25-metre swimming pool with five lanes, a movable floor, counter-current jets, jacuzzi and a top-of-the-range aqua jogger (pictured).

Commanding officer Col Jerry Tuck said: "It is a privilege to receive the key to the new Help for Heroes rehabilitation complex.

"This groundbreaking project is a fabulous expression of support for Service personnel by the people of the UK who have put so much imagination,

effort and enthusiasm into making this a reality."

The multi-million pound project, which was completed with £8m of Help for Heroes' money and £3.3 from the MoD, also includes the refurbishment of the Battle of Britain gymnasium.

The facility has been fitted with a sports-sprung floor and a cardiovascular suite complete with the latest anti-gravity treadmills.

A gait laboratory for biomechanical research, treatment areas for physiotherapy

and consulting rooms have also been included in the complex, construction of which started in December 2008.

Bryn Parry, founder of Help for Heroes, said: "Today there are patients swimming in the Headley Court Help for Heroes swimming pool. It is an historic day for Help for Heroes and we are deeply grateful to everyone who has made this dream a reality."



Royal appointment for cadet helpers

ADULT volunteers serving with the Cadet Forces took centre stage at a special reception held to mark the movement's 150th anniversary.

The Duke of Edinburgh was the guest of honour as more than 1,300 people converged on London's Guildhall for the event, which

was also attended by dignitaries including new Defence Minister Andrew Robathan.

He said: "Today we are celebrating our adult volunteers.

"The Cadet Forces could not function without these outstanding individuals."

NEWS IN BRIEF

AN Army nurse has set up a support group to help military personnel affected by Multiple Sclerosis (MS).

SSgt Mary Wilson plans to run the Talkback club in Catterick Garrison every other Wednesday at Oaktree Cottage, Hipswell Road, with the first session scheduled for July 14.

The group is open to all Servicemen and women and their families or carers and will be run on a one-to-one basis, although SSgt Wilson will arrange larger meetings if the need arises.

She said: "There is still a stigma attached to managing a long-term illness and unfortunately in the military some people do not make the effort to educate themselves about the problems MS can cause. I hope people will get in touch for support or perhaps even to extend Talkback to other medical centres throughout the UK."

For more information about Talkback, contact SSgt Wilson on 01748 873058.

CHILDREN from Armed Forces families are being invited to pick up their pencils and enter an art competition for the chance to win an all-expenses-paid break in London.

The Victory Services Club (VSC) wants kids to draw their interpretation of life as part of the military community for the contest, which is open to youngsters of all ages.

The best budding artist and up to five members of their family will receive train fares to the capital courtesy of hmforces.co.uk along with VSC accommodation and days out.

Send your drawings to Jill Quick, Victory Services Club, 63-79 Seymour Street, London W2 2HF including your name, age and contact details by September 30.

GOOD DRILLS

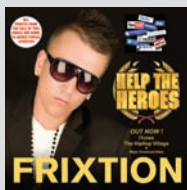
SUPER SWANAGE

RESIDENTS in the Dorset town are offering 100 nights' free hotel accommodation to serving and retired military personnel after signing up to the Heroes Welcome scheme.

As well as getting free rooms in the picturesque setting of Swanage and the Isle of Purbeck, soldiers will get discounts at bars and other businesses. Visit www.heroeswelcome.co.uk for more information.

RIGHTEOUS RAPPER

EIGHTEEN-year-old Adam Gates – known in music circles as Frixtion – is donating all profits from the sale of his debut single *Help The Heroes* to military causes. Cash from all downloads of the song will go to Project 65, while other charities will benefit from an affiliate sales programme. Buy the song on iTunes or by logging on to www.hiphopvillage.com



EXPLOSIVE PERFORMANCE

A STAGE production of BBC TV show *Dad's Army* almost went off with a real bang when prop hand grenades were discovered to be live.

A cast member from the show, in South Wales, brought the munitions to rehearsals after finding them during a clear out of his father-in-law's garage. But a fellow actor realised they were still active and the police were called in to carry out a controlled explosion.



OVER-EFFICIENT GERMANS

DAREDEVIL Royal Logistic Corps skydivers Maj Alastair Macartney and WO1 Spencer Hogg were challenged by armed German police after being mistaken for UFOs during a jump in Bad Lippspringe.

The police accosted the pair after receiving reports of "mysterious bat-like aliens" in the skies – actually the loggies wearing poppy-branded jumping suits.

BAD DRILLS

Lynx effect hits Afghanistan

A FLEET of upgraded Lynx helicopters have taken to the skies over Afghanistan.

The Mk9A airframes, which have been overhauled with Op Herrick in mind, have been fitted with increased firepower and more powerful engines to cope with the hot and high Afghan flying conditions.

The helicopters will carry out a range of roles in theatre, including convoy overwatch, support helicopter escort, reconnaissance and surveillance and troop movement.

Maj Max Lytle (AAC), officer commanding 672 Squadron, welcomed the new assets.

He said: "We are playing an important role in protecting our ground forces and carrying out surveillance, boosting performance in Afghanistan's challenging conditions."

The upgraded Lynx comes with an improved communication system, new surveillance equipment and the M3M machine gun – a 0.50" calibre weapon capable of firing more than 850-rounds-a-minute.

The aircraft joins the Chinook, Merlin, Apache and Sea King in the aerial arsenal available to Joint Helicopter Force (Afghanistan), which is commanded from Camp Bastion.



Picture: MoD/Crown Copyright

New Helmand command established

MILITARY leaders in southern Afghanistan have created a new command set-up to manage the increasing numbers of Afghan and international troops in theatre.

Under the revised arrangements, which are shown below, the existing Regional Command (South) (RC(S)) has been split in half with the creation of Regional Command (South West) (RC(SW)).

RC(S) has its headquarters in Kandahar and takes in the provinces of Dai Kundi, Uruzgan, Zabul and Kandahar, while RC(SW) encompasses Nimruz and Helmand, where its HQ will be based.

RC(SW) will become fully-operational over the summer, when its first commander will be Maj Gen Richard Mills of the United States Marine Corps. British officer Brig George Norton will serve as his deputy.

The move will also see command of the 1,100-strong UK battlegroup based in Sangin and Kajaki transferred from the control of Task Force Helmand to the United States Marine Corps' Regimental Combat Team North.





INDIE rockers Shakey's Brother showed their support for the Armed Forces by playing 91 gigs in just 12 days to raise money for Help for Heroes. The Burnley five-piece performed their 2010 Fifa World Cup song *England 'Til I Die* at every Football League ground in the country before putting on a final show outside the iconic Wembley Stadium in London. As well as playing live, the band, pictured outside Aldershot Town's home, sold copies of the single and made collections at each venue. To find out how to purchase the three-track release, log on to www.shakeysbrother.com

6 THE NUMBER OF FOUNDING MEMBERS OF THE COMBINED CADET FORCE. SCHOOLS AT FELSTEAD, ETON, HARROW, HURSTPIERPOINT, ROSSAL AND RUGBY ARE CELEBRATING THE ORGANISATION'S 150TH ANNIVERSARY THIS YEAR

Online oracle keeps troops in the know

SOLDIERS are being encouraged to log on to a growing online community designed to be a one-stop shop for operational learning.

The Army Knowledge Exchange (AKX) was launched in January by the Land Warfare Development Group to provide vital operational information to commanders ahead of deployments.

The site now attracts as many as 1,700 visitors every day and spokesman Lt Col Judith Dando (AGC(ETS)) is keen for more personnel to get involved.

"We want to ensure that commanders and others across Land Forces have access to the most up-to-date and relevant information [regarding] current practice and operational knowledge," she said.

"The initial aim of the AKX was to place vital information in the hands of our commanders when they need it, wherever they are in the world. Now we want to ensure that those preparing for deployment have the essential knowledge they need."

AKX functions as a giant online library containing up-to-the-minute

documents outlining the latest tactics, doctrine and information.

The data on the system is uploaded by subject matter experts in fields including counter-IED and equipment capability and Lt Col Dando said it went a long way to dealing with historic criticisms of Army operations.

"We got bad press after Op Telic in that we didn't seem to be adapting the way we operated fast enough. We simply weren't learning our lessons," she explained.

"We realised that we needed to become a more adaptive and agile organisation and one way of doing that was to shorten the 'lessons loop' between learning the lessons, changing the way we operate and getting it out so that our people are trained to work in a different way.

"We needed to be able to react much quicker and find a way of getting that knowledge into one place. We now have a one-stop shop for Land environment operational knowledge."

Another key AKX component is the commanders' reading list. Users

can access a collection of suggested pre-deployment texts depending on their rank along with a recommended timescale, beginning 18 months ahead of operations, for them to be read.

And although the system has been designed with commanders in mind, Lt Col Dando hopes that the inclusion of an Army Collaborative Environment forum will help AKX become an arena for discussion where soldiers of all ranks can learn from each other.

"This is targeted at commanders at all levels, but we want this to be of interest to Land Forces of all ranks and are looking at how we can make it more user-friendly," she said.

"We are also trying to encourage collaborative working via the forum. This gives the opportunity for a soldier, regardless of their rank, to talk to the most senior officers and vice versa.

"Experience is being gained right across the Army and we want to encourage a climate of debate where people can tap into that expertise."

● <http://lfportal.landforces.r.mil.uk/AKX/default.aspx>

NEWS IN BRIEF

A FORMER Royal Engineer is hoping to raise more than £1,000 for charity when he cycles from San Francisco to New York.

Peter Hitchings will start the 3,500-mile challenge on August 1 and will divide the money between Help for Heroes and the Rett Syndrome Association UK.

To support his fund-raising, visit www.justgiving.com/Peter-Hitchings

THE East Anglian branch of The Parachute Regiment Association has dedicated three new standards during a ceremony at Colchester Garrison Church.

More than 100 members attended the service, which was jointly conducted by Padre Les Ivory, Padre Antony Felton-White and Padre Robin Richardson.

The standards were then paraded through Merville Barracks, home of 16 Air Assault Brigade, under the review of the brigade's deputy commander Col Hugo Fletcher.

EIGHTY members of a group for bereaved Service families honoured their fallen relatives during a conference in Scotland.

The SSAFA Forces Help Support Group for Bereaved Families gathered in Edinburgh for the event, which included a visit to the Scottish National War Memorial.

Visit www.ssafasupportgroups.org.uk for more information about the charity's support groups.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

TRAINING for Junior Entry recruits is being refreshed to develop soldiers with greater operational effectiveness.

From September this year, the Army Training Regiment at Winchester will be renamed the Army Technical Foundation College (ATFC(W)) and will deal solely with troops wanting a career in a technical trade.

Soldiers under training at the facility will now be taught how to use the general purpose machine gun following a request from theatre.

Their counterparts at the Army Foundation College in Harrogate will get to grips with the light machine gun following a similar request from commanders on Op Herrick.

ENTRIES are being sought for the 2010 Army Photographic Competition.

The contest is open to all Regular and TA personnel, as well as staff and cadets from the Combined Cadet Force, Army Cadet Force and University Officer Training Corps.

Ministry of Defence civilians who work directly for the Army and dependants and partners of serving personnel can also enter.

Photographs can be submitted in eight categories, including two video and multi-media sections.

All entries must have been taken between November 30, 2009 and October 29, 2010, which is the contest's closing date, and should be sent to Command Master Photographer, AM&C, Marlborough Lines, Monxton Road, Andover, Hants SP11 8HT.

Email CGSMediaCommA-AMC-MediaOps-Phot@mod.uk for more information.

THE World Cup took centre stage for July's spine line competition.

The names on the side of the cover – Monzon, Desailly, Beckham, Deco and Zidane – are all footballers who have been sent off during the showpiece event's finals.

We have again teamed up with Jelly Belly, www.jellybelly-uk.com, to offer up one of the company's selection boxes of gourmet jelly beans. To enter, tell us this month's link. Answers to the usual address or comps@soldiermagazine.co.uk by July 30.



Picture: Mike Weston

Force for good: A Light Infantry soldier plays football with a child during a patrol in Northern Ireland

CGS: Bloody Sunday should not define Northern Ireland campaign

THE outcome of the Saville Report into the Bloody Sunday killings should not overshadow the successes of Op Banner, according to the Chief of the General Staff.

Speaking after the publication of the inquiry into the 1972 incident in Northern Ireland, Gen Sir David Richards agreed that "serious failings" from Army personnel led to the deaths of 13 people.

But the senior officer stressed that "lessons had been learned" in the ensuing years and changes have been made to the way the Army trains, works and operates.

He said: "We should remember that the overwhelming majority of the military personnel deployed over 38 years in Northern Ireland conducted themselves with utter professionalism, restraint and humanity.

"The cost was high, with 651 Service personnel killed and over 6,000 wounded.

"They played an important role in protecting the people of Northern Ireland, providing much-needed stability and thereby helping to set

the conditions for the peace Northern Ireland enjoys today."

The Bloody Sunday Inquiry, chaired by Lord Saville, was established in 1998 following campaigns led by families of the victims, who were shot dead during a civil rights demonstration.

While the report concluded that "the immediate responsibility" for the deaths belonged to members of the Armed Forces, no evidence was found to suggest the shootings were in any way premeditated.

Prime Minister David Cameron echoed Gen Sir David Richards' view that Bloody Sunday was not the defining story of Op Banner.

He said: "Our Armed Forces displayed enormous courage and professionalism in upholding democracy and the rule of law in Northern Ireland.

"Without their work the peace process would not have happened."

The Saville Report was the most expensive inquiry in British history, costing £191 million. The full report can be viewed by logging on to www.bloody-sunday-inquiry.org

'Military atmosphere' key at new Services hospital ward

A DEDICATED ward for military personnel has opened its doors at Birmingham's brand new Queen Elizabeth Hospital.

Operational casualties will now be taken care of at the facility, which offers single rooms and four-bed bays in a 30-bed section specifically for Service members.

A communal space for patients, quiet room for relatives and more

Forces and civilian staff than in a normal NHS ward have also been included to build a much-stronger military atmosphere.

The hospital will become the new home for the Royal Centre for Defence Medicine (RCDM), which will be moving from Selly Oak Hospital over the next 18 months.

RCDM head Brig Chris Parker said: "Armed Forces personnel

injured on operations deserve the very best medical care we can provide. The treatment they receive at Selly Oak is already first class and we will continue to build on that at the new hospital."

Vital departments including orthopaedics, burns, plastic surgery and critical care have already moved to the new hospital, with other specialities to follow.

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IN MEMORIAM



GNR ZAK CUSACK (20)
4TH REGIMENT,
ROYAL ARTILLERY
KIA MAY 26 – AFGHANISTAN

A "COURAGEOUS, compassionate and charismatic" soldier died from a gunshot injury suffered during a patrol in southern Afghanistan.

Gnr Zak Cusack, of 4th Regiment, Royal Artillery, was serving as part of Combined Force Nahr-e-Saraj (South) when he was fatally wounded by insurgent forces near the village of Enezai.

The 20-year-old, from Stoke-on-Trent, attended the Army Foundation College in Harrogate in 2006 before being posted to 4 RA in Osnabruck, Germany.

He was on his second tour of Afghanistan having previously deployed on Op Herrick 7.

The fitness enthusiast leaves behind mother Tracey and father Sean, who said in a statement:

"We are justly proud of not only the job he did, but of the complete person we all knew and loved. For such a young man, Zak's infectious sense of humour, appetite for life and truly-romantic heart inspired so many others."

Lt Col Chris Squier, commanding officer of 4 RA, described Gnr Cusack as a "big man" with the personality to match.

He added: "Young, fit and with a healthy love of life, he was always close to, or at the heart of, the action."

Maj Matt Birch, who trained with Gnr Cusack in Canada, remembered him as a "fit and resourceful" soldier who worked tirelessly for others. He said: "Zak personified the spirit of an artilleryman at its best."



CPL TERRY WEBSTER (24)
1ST BATTALION,
THE MERCIAN REGIMENT
KIA JUNE 4 – AFGHANISTAN

BRAVE Infantry soldiers have been continuing with their mission in Afghanistan despite the deaths of two comrades.

Cpl Terry Webster and LCpl Alan Cochran, both of 1st Battalion, The Mercian Regiment, were killed by small arms fire during a foot patrol in the Nahr-e-Saraj area.

LCpl Cochran died during the firefight, while Cpl Webster passed away at Kandahar after being evacuated from the battlefield.

The pair had played an important role in improving the lives of hundreds of villagers living in the area during their tour.

Cpl Webster, who was born in Chester, enlisted in the Army in 2002 and joined the Royal Signals a year later before transferring to 1st Battalion, The 22nd (Cheshire) Regiment – 1 Mercian's predecessor – in 2006.

The Northern Ireland and Iraq veteran's wife Charlotte said: "Tez was passionate, loyal and determined. He was a fantastic dad to Liam and Jess and the perfect soulmate to me."

Lt Col Andrew Hadfield, commanding officer of 1 Mercian, said that Cpl Webster had proved himself to be a highly-capable soldier and commander who always led from the front.

He added: "Terry was totally committed to his profession and he was forging a strong career path; when others played football, he would put on his combats, boots and webbing and pound out the miles."

Pte Christopher Boon described Cpl Webster as an "inspiration".

He said: "His death will not be in vain as I

shall prosper through trying to be half the man he was and always will be."

Welshman LCpl Cochran (23), who was also a veteran of Northern Ireland and Iraq, joined the Army in 2006 and passed out of the Infantry Training Centre Catterick before joining 1 Mercian in 2007.

In a statement, his family remembered him as a "proud soldier" who died doing the job he loved.

They said: "We are proud of the fact that Alan was prepared to do his duty helping the people of Afghanistan."

Lt Col Hadfield said the junior NCO was "the most selfless of men". He added: "His friends described him as having a heart of gold, being totally unselfish and having the worst dress sense in the battalion."

Pte Ian Brookshaw, whose sister Claire was LCpl Cochran's fiancée, said: "I'm proud you were going to be my brother-in-law and I am proud that I fought alongside you for four years."

"You died in the job you loved and helping another injured soldier. You're a kind-hearted man and you'll never be forgotten."

Maj Rich Grover, officer commanding B (Malta) Company, recalled LCpl Cochran as a quiet man who let his actions do the talking.

He explained: "He had an attitude that every commander wants in their team; you knew he would never give up no matter what the challenge. A harder worker would have been nigh-on impossible to find. He had a personality that endeared him to everyone."



LCPL ALAN COCHRAN (23)
1ST BATTALION,
THE MERCIAN REGIMENT
KIA JUNE 4 – AFGHANISTAN



LBDR MARK CHANDLER (32)
3RD REGIMENT,
ROYAL HORSE ARTILLERY
KIA JUNE 8 – AFGHANISTAN

A WINTER sports star who threw himself into all aspects of Army life was killed during a small arms battle in Helmand province.

LBdr Mark Chandler, of 3rd Regiment, Royal Horse Artillery, was attached to 4th Regiment, Royal Artillery when he was fatally wounded in Nad-e-Ali District during a patrol carried out to prevent insurgents intimidating residents.

The 32-year-old joined the Army in 2004 and was a veteran of Op Telic 7. He was twice crowned Army luge champion and was also an accomplished skier.

Lt Col Stuart Williams, commanding officer of 3rd Regiment, Royal Horse Artillery, praised LBdr Chandler as a remarkably-talented junior NCO who showed a real grit for soldiering.

He said: "Fit, committed, loyal and a true professional, he was a rising star within the regiment and had a bright future ahead of him."

LBdr Chandler had been serving with Anzio Company, 1st Battalion, The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment in southern Afghanistan as a fire support team assistant.

Company commander Maj John Fry said: "[He] was an unforgettable character; full of life, confident in his ability and an all-round good bloke. He bonded immediately and was always regarded as one of the company irrespective of the cap badge he wore."

Capt Tim Haskell added: "Nothing ever seemed to daunt 'Bing'. He was a person everyone could look to for help and advice."

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IN MEMORIAM



PTE JONATHAN MONK (25)
1ST BATTALION,
THE MERCIAN REGIMENT
KIA JUNE 9 – AFGHANISTAN

A SOLDIER who volunteered to deploy to Afghanistan while waiting to start a new career on civvy street has died in an explosion.

Pte Jonathan Monk, of 1st Battalion, The Mercian Regiment, was killed when an IED detonated during a foot patrol held to improve freedom of movement for residents of the Upper Gereskh Valley.

The Londoner had left Regular service with 2nd Battalion, The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment in March 2009 to join the Fire Service but agreed to mobilise with 1 Mercian after a delay in the recruitment process.

His family said in a statement: "The Army was in his blood. He had great energy and drive and tremendous courage and determination."

Pte Monk enlisted in the Service in 2001, joining 2 PWRR after finishing basic training.

He completed tours of Iraq, Northern Ireland and Afghanistan and was remembered by 1 Mercian CO Lt Col Andrew Hadfield as being "always to the fore" when bullets were flying.

He said: "He was the epitome of the combat infantry soldier. We will remember his ready smile, quick wit and cool head under fire."

Cpl Leo Quinn, who first met Pte Monk in January this year, said the junior soldier had made a lasting impact on him.

He added: "You were always there for advice; even on the last day before you left Camp Bastion you spent time giving advice to me. For this I owe you."



LCPL ANDREW BREEZE (31)
1ST BATTALION,
THE MERCIAN REGIMENT
KIA JUNE 12 – AFGHANISTAN

A "DEDICATED soldier and leader" who had served for 14 years was killed by an improvised explosive device in Helmand province.

LCpl Andrew Breeze, of 1st Battalion, The Mercian Regiment, was on an operation to clear an area near Check Point Kingshill, near Babaji, when the blast happened.

The junior NCO was an experienced soldier having deployed on operations three times to Northern Ireland, twice to Iraq and once to southern Afghanistan.

Lt Col Andrew Hadfield, CO of 1 Mercian, said LCpl Breeze continued to go on operations despite knowing the risks he faced.

He added: "Throughout his service he had been no stranger to danger and approached

his work with discipline and determination, but always with a ready smile."

Capt Rupert Pye-Watson, commander of 1 Mercian's Javelin Platoon, recalled how he was always able to rely on LCpl Breeze.

He said: "Nothing was too much effort for Breezy. He always sought to achieve things in a cheery and unassuming manner."

Sgt Robert Carr remembered his comrade as "part of the furniture" of the anti-tank platoon, adding: "He was always there to give advice to the younger generation. He will be sorely missed and the world is now a darker place."

Sgt Andy Hawkins said: "Andy was great at his job and enjoyed doing it. He would never moan or complain, he would just crack on."



CPL TANIELA ROGOIRUWAI (32)
1ST BATTALION, THE DUKE OF
LANCASTER'S REGIMENT
KIA JUNE 15 – AFGHANISTAN

A RISING star of the British Army described as "one of life's leaders" was killed during a firefight with insurgents in Afghanistan.

Cpl Taniela "Rocco" Rogoiruwai, of 1st Battalion, The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment, died of his injuries after being shot while on patrol in the Nad-e-Ali area of Helmand.

The Fijian joined the Army in 2000 and his tough-yet-compassionate style saw him rise to the rank of corporal. He had recently passed the platoon sergeant's battle course and was set for his next promotion.

Cpl Rogoiruwai had completed tours of Northern Ireland and Iraq before deploying on Op Herrick.

Lt Col Frazer Lawrence, commanding officer

of 1 Lancs, said he was "greatly saddened" by Cpl Rogoiruwai's death.

He added: "He was an outstanding soldier – tough and stoic but with an infectious smile and mischievous sense of humour. His performance in Afghanistan was outstanding."

Cpl Peter Cakaunitabua said: "Rocco was a morale-finder for the lads that he worked with and pushed people to the best of their ability, which enabled them to be successful.

"His wisdom, knowledge and understanding made him a good leader in his work."

Kgn Filimone Matanibukalevu, who joined the Army with Cpl Rogoiruwai, said: "He was a true friend. He was a great man who was an inspiration to those around him – a true Fijian."



KGN PONIPATE TAGITAGINIMOCE (29)
1ST BATTALION, THE DUKE OF
LANCASTER'S REGIMENT
KIA JUNE 15 – AFGHANISTAN

BRITISH troops are mourning the loss of a Fijian soldier who was "professional to his very core" after he was killed in Afghanistan.

Kgn Ponipate Tagitaginimoce, of 1st Battalion, The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment, died from his injuries after being shot while coming to the aid of a comrade in the Nad-e-Ali District of Helmand province.

The 29-year-old had been serving in 1 Lancs' reconnaissance platoon, which had been improving security in an area of Nad-e-Ali well-known for its insurgent activity.

Lt Col Frazer Lawrence, 1 Lancs' commanding officer, said Kgn Tagitaginimoce's first thought was always for those around him.

He added: "Tagi was softly spoken,

unassuming and utterly reliable.

"His sheer presence calmed those around him and made light any dark period – his good cheer was infectious."

CSgt Richard Shipton recalled the Fijian as an "incredibly competent soldier", adding: "During the tour his performance has been fantastic. He was always ready for any task or timeline and always a volunteer.

"He never once complained at any task, even when those around were not so forthcoming."

Kgn Tagitaginimoce was a keen fan of rugby and comrade Kgn Jonathon Jenkins described him as an "amazing player". He said: "No matter what time it was, day or night, he would always be there for you."

IN MEMORIAM



TPR ASHLEY SMITH (21)
THE ROYAL DRAGOON GUARDS
KIA JUNE 18 – AFGHANISTAN

AN "utterly dependable" soldier died in a blast in Afghanistan after bravely volunteering to join a team tasked with clearing an area of improvised explosive devices.

Tpr Ashley Smith, from York, was killed in action when one of the bombs detonated in the Nahr-e-Saraj area of Helmand province in the early afternoon of June 18.

The 21-year-old, of The Royal Dragoon Guards' Viking Group, was remembered by parents Sandra and Dave as caring deeply about his friends and family.

They said: "Everyone that knew Ashley loved him and he was the best son any mother and father could have wished for."

Tpr Smith joined the Army in 2008, attending

the Army Training Regiment (Winchester) before moving to the Armour Centre in Dorset to train as a Challenger 2 gunner. He joined The Royal Dragoon Guards in Catterick in 2008.

Lt Col James Carr-Smith, CO of The Royal Dragoon Guards, described Tpr Smith as being "full of energy, very popular and tremendously good company".

He added: "He loved the camaraderie that the regiment offered and he loved soldiering."

Lt Nicholas Chew, who arrived at the regiment at the same time as Tpr Smith, said: "Ash was one of those people who you knew was kind of heart and always well-meaning."

"He was a sensitive guy that would never wish ill on anyone."

Services praised as Marines suffer black month

DEFENCE secretary Dr Liam Fox has paid tribute to the sacrifices being made by Servicemen and women after the number of British fatalities in Afghanistan passed 300.

The death of Mne Richard Hollington, of 40 Commando, saw the figure reached last month.

He was taking part in a reassurance patrol for local nationals when he was wounded after being caught in an explosion. The 23-year-old died from his injuries eight days later.

On hearing news of his passing Dr Fox said: "Our Armed Forces are the best in the world, operating daily in the most dangerous and demanding conditions. Some have made the ultimate sacrifice to ensure this essential mission succeeds.

"My thoughts, and those of the nation, are with the families and friends of all those Servicemen and women who have fallen, but our resolve and determination to see the mission through remains steadfast."

Chief of the Defence Staff, Air Chief

Marshall Sir Jock Stirrup added: "We remember everyone who has given their life in the line of duty and honour the significant progress they have helped to deliver in Afghanistan.

"In theatre today, our people will be more determined than ever to deliver their task of supporting Afghans to build for their own future."

40 Commando has suffered heavy losses in recent weeks.

Mne Steven Birdsall, of Bravo Company, died at Birmingham's Queen Elizabeth Hospital as a result of a gunshot wound he suffered while serving in Sangin.

The 20-year-old was providing security to soldiers from the Royal Engineers who had been tasked with reinforcing the defences at one of the UK checkpoints in the district.



Mne Anthony Hotine



Mne Steven Birdsall



Mne Richard Hollington

Mne Anthony Hotine, of Alpha Company, was killed in an explosion while conducting a joint reassurance patrol with the Afghan National Army.

The 21-year-old was operating in the area around Patrol Base Jamil, in Sangin, where the Marines have been helping to create a secure environment for government officials to deliver vital services to their people.

Two further Marines from 40 Commando were killed in Sangin district on June 21 and 22.

Their identities had not been released at the time of going to press.

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THE BIGGER PICTURE

THE Duke of Gloucester is engulfed by the familiar red tunics of the Chelsea Pensioners as he reviews the Founder's Day Parade at London's famous Royal Hospital Chelsea.

The parade is held annually to mark the facility's establishment by King Charles II in 1682. The hospital, which has just opened a new accommodation block for 34 veterans, houses 300 former soldiers with an average age of 83.

Picture: Lawson Dodd PR



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STORMING THE PRAIRIE

**DESERT RATS TAKE TO THE GRASSLANDS OF
BATUS FOR NEW HYBRID TRAINING PACKAGE**



Standing firm: Vehicles from 7th Armoured Brigade move over crossing point "Reid Coulee" en route to the brigade forming up point for the final dawn attack of Exercise Prairie Thunder

Picture: Steve Dock



CANADA

BRITISH ARMY TRAINING
UNIT SUFFIELD (BATU)

Report: Richard Long
Pictures: Steve Dock

WITH the Army maintaining a strict focus on supporting current operations, the training offered at one of its premier proving grounds is moving with the times.

For decades the vast prairie at British Army Training Unit Suffield (Batus) has been a playground for the Service's big tanks and heavy armour in an impressive live firing package.

But with the advent of Exercise Prairie Thunder, visiting soldiers can now expect to see their skills and drills tested to the limit as hybrid manoeuvres sit firmly alongside the more traditional training.

The new-look approach maintains the kinetic element of its predecessor Exercise Medicine Man, but the latter part of the 24-day examination sees Tactical Effects Simulation Exercise (TESEX) gear replacing ammunition as the troops face a live enemy on the ground.

Soldier was invited to Canada to take a closer look at Exercise Prairie Thunder and learn more about the challenges it has created for personnel in the field.

"The change is part of a drive to make sure the training we deliver at Batus is more relevant to current operations," explained Maj Mike Ross (Mercian), part of the training and tactical team in Alberta.

"We deliver hybrid foundation training based on a threat that consists of conventional, irregular and terrorist activity all in the battlespace at the same time.

"This training reflects the complexities of current operations. Exercise Medicine Man had a more conventional focus, it was Cold War tactics with mass ranks of armour.

"This training replicates what it is like to work within centres of population and have civilians in the battlespace. It shows what conditions are like in theatre and is more complex and relevant to operations."

The Royal Scots Dragoon Guards battlegroup was the first to experience the revamped training package and the soldiers faced a stern test of their capabilities in what proved to be an intense exercise.

With the live firing completed, the troops tackled an array of serials that included IED drills, working with an indigenous police force, occupying forward operating bases, river crossings, patrolling in urban areas with local populations and neutralising insurgent forces.

Batus provided a convincing backdrop for these scenarios courtesy of its impressive infrastructure that features villages with facilities such as markets, mosques and police stations, all of which are manned by Afghan civilians to provide extra realism.

The change in approach was obvious to Lt Col Jonathan Biggart, CO of the Scots DG.

"The last time I was here was in 2002 as a Challenger 2 squadron leader," he said.

"The initial part of this exercise was quite similar, certainly with the live firing, but the hybrid training in the TESEX phase has been completely different.

"It has been valuable training in testing and challenging terrain and I think my officers and soldiers will have learned a huge amount. I have no doubt that it will prepare them very well for the Afghan-specific training."

With the expansive prairie creating infinite

opportunities, the exercise allowed all elements of the visiting 7th Armoured Brigade to test their mettle.

A small handful of soldiers from 111 Provost Company took part in the training and were pleased to see their unique skills called into action.

"As Royal Military Police we came into play in the counter-insurgency phase with a mix of search, arrest and detention tasks, all of which went quite smoothly," explained Lt Edward Ford.

"We have also done evidence handling. Some of the evidence we recovered stimulated another serial so we made a real impact, which was really good from our point of view.

"I have learned quite a lot. It could have been better but there were always going to be some teething problems at the start.

"I have been working with a small team which includes two new guys. They have performed well and it has been great to see them come out of their shells."

The exercise also saw elements of the Royal Marines training on the prairie for the first time as part of their preparations for future operational deployments.

Cpl Graeme Murphy, of X-Ray Company, 45 Commando, said Canada had provided a valuable training opportunity and was pleased to see personnel responding well to the challenge. "We have had lots of new guys joining and this was their first major exercise together," he added.

"I don't think the Scots DG lads knew what to expect but we hit it off well from the start, the banter has flowed and everyone has got on well.

"There are a lot of young lads in the company and they have had the opportunity to mix with a civilian population.

"They have not seen anything like that before so it is a good stepping stone to our pre-deployment training."

With the new-look Batus experience set to welcome thousands of troops in another busy season, early indications suggest that Exercise Prairie Thunder is meeting the demands of the Army in 2010.

"Batus has changed," Lt Col Biggart said. "It now covers the whole spectrum of operations within a 24-day period." ■

Thunder on the prairie: Elements of 7th Armoured Brigade test their skills and drills in the new-look training package at Batus



Report: Richard Long
Pictures: Steve Dock

AS training on the Canadian prairie shifts its focus to reflect current operations, exercising troops need to face the challenge posed by a fully-functioning enemy.

Such an honour was bestowed upon personnel from the 9th/12th Royal Lancers in the first Exercise Prairie Thunder to be staged at British Army Training Unit Suffield (Batus).

With The Royal Scots Dragoon Guards battlegroup leading the charge across the vast grasslands, the soldiers were tasked with going head-to-head with their 7th Armoured Brigade colleagues as the 24-day training package shifted from live firing to serials in the Tactical Effects Simulation Exercise (TESEX) phase.

Soldier spent a day with the enemy force to learn more about the alternative Batus experience and the benefits the training provides.

"The 9/12 L battlegroup is being tested in the same way that the main battlegroup is being tested by the brigade command and the Batus staff," explained Maj James Gasson-Hargreaves, squadron leader of B Squadron.

"I would argue that it is more challenging as the enemy force as you are operating with unfamiliar kit, tactics, techniques and procedures.

"But we also have similarities to the main battlegroup in the fact that Batus is a difficult environment to operate in."

The opposition force was encouraged to move away from conventional tactics for the serials and Maj Gasson-Hargreaves found the perfect way of taking the fight to the enemy.

"For my tank company I used the analogy that we were both cowboys and Indians," he said.

"I told them to manoeuvre like cowboys and fight like Indians. I gave them a box to work in and I left them to it. We found it to be very successful and I have learned to have more faith in my subordinates."

Commanding officer Lt Col William Fooks said creating a complex enemy threat was a challenging task but was delighted with the way his soldiers performed.

"We amalgamated armour and conventional forces with insurgent groups and we were given much more flexible rules of engagement," Lt Col Fooks explained.

"We were actually encouraged to strike at the soft belly of the battlegroup. We had the ability to run an influence campaign with flyers for the local population and we were trying to attack the

headquarters in different ways.

"When it came to the planning stage it was quite complicated as we had so many different capabilities we could use to effect the enemy's ability to fight.

"It has been really interesting to see the guys take to the task, it has given them the opportunity to have a really good scrap. That rivalry spurs them on.

"As we are armoured troops there has been a bonding between vehicles and crews, they have shown really good equipment husbandry.

"The Scots DG had 500 fighters and 100 vehicles, we had 100 troops and 30 vehicles so we were outnumbered.

"But by being very devious and trying to get inside the enemy's decision-making process it became an intellectual game."

Cpl Jason Mann was last in Batus in 2007 and he was quick to notice the difference in how enemy forces are created.

"It is a lot more organised now," he said.

"Before we would get up two hours before a battle but this time we were receiving routes. We were actually operating as an enemy force rather than taking part in skirmishes."

Once the fighting was over, the 9/12 L switched from an enemy force to a civilian population as Exercise Prairie Thunder neared its conclusion.

The soldiers were based in villages across the proving ground where they were asked to interact with the main battlegroup in roles ranging from market traders and shop owners to police officers and farmers.

Afghan civilians from Canadian firm ACS were also embedded at the settlements, giving personnel an ideal opportunity to gain valuable cultural training ahead of future deployments.

The soldiers joined the daily prayer times and were able to learn some basic phrases and customs at informal lessons in the village.

"It is very good," Tpr Perry Chase said. "It gives us an opportunity to meet Afghan people and find out what it is like in their country.

"We are learning about religion and how they go about things so when we get there we know what to expect."

Lt Col Fooks added: "Within half-an-hour they were chatting to the actors and actresses, learning some Pashto and playing games.

"They are really interested and they are taking this opportunity to learn." ■





Main picture, Taking aim: LCpl Rob Farkins (9/12 L) plays insurgent and arms himself with a rocket propelled grenade launcher in the village of Pakshar during Exercise Prairie Thunder

Left, On the move: A 9th/12th Royal Lancers' Scimitar CVR(T) drives through a village on a reconnaissance patrol

Below left and above, Market force: Afghan nationals and soldiers from Bravo Sqn, 9/12 L role play in the village of Pakshar on the Batus training area



FRIENDLY FIRE

9TH/12TH ROYAL LANCERS SQUARE UP
TO BRIGADE COLLEAGUES IN CANADA

Report: Richard Long
Pictures: Steve Dock

AS the operational tempo quickens across the Armed Forces, there has never been a greater demand for supplies, reliable kit and vehicles.

While British Army Training Unit Suffield (Batus) has traditionally been the proving ground for front-line soldiers, the Canadian prairie has now expanded its repertoire to give supporting personnel the chance to perfect their equally-important skills and drills.

Exercise Prairie Thunder saw a Combat Service Support battalion put through its paces on the grasslands for the very first time.

The 235-strong force featured soldiers from the Corps of Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers and The Royal Logistic Corps who were tasked with supporting the main battlegroup in a variety of roles.

"The guys are thoroughly enjoying it and it is training we would never normally do," Lt Col David Easton, CO of 2 REME, told *Soldier*.

"In the past we have been here in support of the combat soldiers but now there are enough of us to support the battlegroup and train ourselves.

"The first ten days was live firing and half the battalion got to go. That is something we do not often enough.

"After that we had to rehabilitate the battlegroup. They came in with broken vehicles and we fixed them as well as providing showers, food and other welfare stuff.

"Batus has always been about live firing and rolling tanks across the plain.

"But Afghanistan and current operations makes people realise that everyone is in the fight."

With Lt Col Easton taking the lead, his second in command came from 2 Logistic Support Regiment, RLC.

The battalion also included personnel from 45 Close Support Squadron, RLC; 23 Pioneer Regiment, RLC; 19 Tank Transporter Squadron, RLC; and 11 Armoured Company, REME.

"The combat battlegroup can only support itself for five days," Lt Col Easton explained.

"Every two days we have been

restocking fuel, ammunition, food, rations and water.

"We go out and set up distribution points and the supply trucks come to us. In the stabilisation phase we could deliver directly to the battlegroup in combat logistic patrols. That is what we are doing in Afghanistan.

"This is the only training area and exercise that has the space and distance for us to travel and get any meaningful training from. Other exercises are too short or the areas are too small."

WO2 Kurt Roberts, of 45 Close Support Squadron, was pleased to see personnel meeting such challenges head-on in what proved to be a hectic exercise.

"We had 40 guys involved in the live firing range package and others were providing real-time support, doing ammunition, fuel and water runs.

"We had to balance our own training with supporting the battlegroup, which at times proved difficult.

"Normally exercises are seven days long so this has been a real test for the new lads.

"With the squadron potentially going to Afghanistan next year it has been a great opportunity to look at each soldier individually and identify who we feel will be up for the challenge."

The 24-day training period provided numerous challenges for the battalion to overcome.

Drivers had to confront a vast array of weather conditions, from severe blizzards to torrential rain and howling winds, all of which provided valuable experience behind the wheel.

The REME set up rehabilitation points across the prairie where vehicles were repaired within a 24-hour period while the crews were offered welfare support.

The weather also provided other tests as a number of vehicles became bogged down and the battalion was tasked with leading the recovery.

"Young soldiers have been driving in everything from sand storms to two feet of snow," said Maj Dylan Read, the officer in charge of 45

Close Support Squadron.

"Soldiers have been living off the

sides of vehicles for three weeks and that teaches them a lot.

"The highlight will be the combat logistic patrol. We will have in excess of 30 vehicles linking with the battlegroup and Batus is fantastic for that kind of training.

"You have a training area where you can drive for several hours in any direction, it is very similar to what we are going to do when we deploy."

Exercise Prairie Thunder also served as a stern test for 23 Pioneer Regiment, as its soldiers were given the role of providing force protection for the combat logistic patrols.

"This is all about getting experience," SSgt Michael Avant said.

"Our pre-deployment training starts in September and this is an ideal opportunity to work on our skills and drills.

"We do not really work with the driving units. As Pioneers we are normally involved in artisan tasks but we now have a role as force protection. The lads have enjoyed it. It has been a good trip." ■

THEY CAME IN WITH BROKEN VEHICLES AND WE FIXED THEM AS WELL AS PROVIDING SHOWERS, FOOD AND OTHER WELFARE STUFF





Left, Brief encounter: Soldiers from 2 Logistic Support Regiment work on a ground model in preparation for a Convoy Logistic Patrol briefing

Middle and main picture, Arte et Marte: Soldiers from 11 Armoured Company, 2 Combat Service Battalion REME work on a Challenger Armoured Repair and Recovery Vehicle power pack at the Equipment Casualty Collection Point during Exercise Prairie Thunder

Bottom left, Breakdown cover: Vehicles bogged down on the prairie are recovered by 45 CS Sqn, 2 Log Supt Regt

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Built to last

**Super-fit Rifles showcase
their stamina ahead of upcoming
Herrick deployment**



Report: Stephen Tyler
Pictures: Graeme Main

OF all the skills British soldiers are blessed with, their incredible stamina is sometimes overlooked.

Well-earned R&R breaks aside, deployed troops carry out hard graft civilians cannot even begin to imagine during the long

working days of a six-month tour of duty.

That they are able to do so is partly thanks to their natural physical prowess, but their ability to last the distance also comes from rigorous pre-deployment training.

Whether it is roaming the prairies of Canada or patrolling in Kenya, Service personnel put in the hard yards on exercise for months before they set foot in theatre.

For soldiers from 1st Battalion, The Rifles, who will be deploying on Op Herrick 14 next April, that training has taken on an added intensity thanks to their status as the Armed Force's Spearhead Lead Element (SLE) – a battalion of troops ready to deploy anywhere in the world at 24 hours' notice.

They have been exercising on Salisbury Plain to keep themselves sharp for that role, but commanding officer Lt Col James de la Billiere told *Soldier* that the serials will also put his men ahead of the curve when their pre-deployment training starts in earnest later this year.

"Doing this training makes our programme busier, but it structures it at the same time," he said. "We have a very specific programme from now to the time we are deployed and there are opportunities within that which we can use to prepare ourselves for both tasks."

The battalion's riflemen spent three weeks on Salisbury Plain conducting hybrid foundation training designed to test their general skills and drills rather than being focused solely on Afghanistan.

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

THE latest generation of tactical engagement simulation equipment provides a realistic edge to military training exercises.

Working along the same lines as Laser Quest games, the kit uses a series of sensors on helmets and webbing and a laser attached to each rifle to tell troops when and where they have been hit, along with the severity of any injuries.

The movements of each individual soldier are also tracked and recorded and a video showing how attacks unfolded can be used for post-conflict briefings.

"It brings an element of reality to our training," said Lt Col de la Billiere. "It has had an immediate impact because it really challenges us on command and control."

"There is also an element of pride in that senior NCOs want to make sure they get through the exercise unscathed."



But while the exercises themselves may not have been dreamt up with Op Herrick in mind, it was easy to see where their outcomes delivered universal benefits.

Soldier joined the troops during a mission in which they were tasked with entering and clearing an enemy-infested street in Copehill Down.

Although the Cold War-era buildings of the village bear little resemblance to those found in Helmand province – barring newly-installed compound walls surrounding some of the structures – coordinator Maj Henry Bettinson (WG) said that the skills personnel would have to show during the serial were easily comparable.

Directing staff pump the sound of gunfire through speakers at either end of the street, providing a confusing din that has the potential to drown out communications, while simulated artillery fire throws explosions and smoke into the mix.

The net result is a disorientating battle space not too far removed from the kinetic realities of Afghanistan.

“The challenges that we face [on Op Herrick] are replicated in this village – it doesn’t matter what the cosmetic feel is,” explained Maj Bettinson. “Like you find in Afghanistan, the commanders can’t always see all of their troops as the visibility is closed right down.

“With all the noise the radios might be ineffective, so what we are looking for is good communication and for every soldier to be a link man and tell each other what is going on.”

As the Commando-trained 1 Rifles’ troops worked their way into the village, they came under heavy resistance from an opposition force comprised of Royal Marines.

An initial move to take the first compound left nine casualties and required some quick thinking from the company commander to reassess his strategy, bringing almost immediate progress along the street.

But although small arms fire represented their major threat, the troops also had to contend with simulated improvised explosive devices activated by pressure plates and trip wires and even a suicide bomber.

Maj Bettinson said that adding different elements into the mission trained Servicemen to constantly be aware of their surroundings – whether that be on Op Herrick or on SLE duty elsewhere in the world.

‘The challenges that we face [on Op Herrick] are replicated in this village’

“What we are asking our soldiers to do is very difficult,” he added. “They are doing an awful lot and in situations like when you have a suicide bomber they are having to make split-second decisions that can have very important strategic consequences.”

In addition to the contemporary environment, the exercising troops encountered a further layer of realism courtesy of their tactical engagement simulation exercise equipment.

The laser system provides real-time data about who has been injured by bullets or bombs and allows commanders to view detailed after-action reports.

Rfn Chris Cosgrove said that using the gear further enhances the value of the training, adding he had noticed a slight

increase in tempo as a result of his battalion’s SLE role.

“It makes it quite realistic because you get the sense that you are actually being shot at,” he said. “Every exercise helps in one way or another and this has been very useful.

“We have been a little busier than usual because of SLE, doing things like getting our kit ready to go if we are needed. Our fitness work has also been intensified.”

With pre-deployment training still to come, 1 Rifles are at the beginning of a long road of preparation ahead of deploying to Afghanistan in April next year.

But the staying power of soldiers is second-to-none and the professionalism the riflemen displayed on Salisbury Plain shows they will be fit to do what is asked of them from now until the end of the tour. ■

High tempo: Soldiers from 1 Rifles face a busy year combining their role as the Spearhead Lead Element with pre-deployment training for Op Herrick





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Report: Richard Long
Picture: Steve Dock

WITH demand for fully-functioning kit and vehicles continuing to grow, it is crucial the Army has a comprehensive picture of what equipment it has at its disposal.

Earlier this year the Joint Asset Management and Engineering Solution (James) was rolled out across the Service to address the needs of Interim Whole Fleet Management.

The system is able to indicate what the vehicle is, where it is, who owns it, what it is doing and what it is going to do as well as describing its current fitness status, modifications and information about its configuration.

With more than 140,000 platforms logged and 15,000 users now online, the James team should have every reason to sit back and revel in the pride of its accomplishments.

But instead of resting on their laurels, the brains behind the project are about to launch the second increment of their asset management capability.

James (Land) is due to commence service in October and will log an array of kit to help in the planning and execution of equipment support within units and throughout the maintenance chain.

With around nine million pieces recorded, the deployable system will produce detailed information at the click of a mouse.

"We are talking about sights, weapons, generators and a myriad of equipment," project manager Lt Col Struan Robertson told *Soldier*.

"It is all about asset management. This will tell

us what we have got, what it is doing and what configuration it is in.

"It is a revolution in how we manage our assets and capability within the Army."

With weaponry and Bowman radio also included, the database will provide a significant improvement on the slow-moving paper trail that personnel previously faced.

But to ensure the new system records an accurate account, the developers have been determined to create a user-friendly programme so personnel, regardless of rank, can log regular kit updates.

"It must be usable for soldiers, sailors and airmen," Lt Col Robertson said.

"If they can use it we will get good data. The driving mantra behind this project is that if it cannot be used by a soldier it is too difficult."

James (Land) will interact with the supply chain to enable the requisition of spares to support repair tasks. The information will also have global visibility and will be shared with industry contractors so they are kept in the loop.

The first phase of the project has been well

received and Sgt Darren Morrissey (1 RTR) said he had already benefited from it.

"There were a few teething problems at first but you expect that with any new system," he said.

"As a busy troop sergeant and fleet manager, James is an invaluable tool.

"It allows me to monitor the vehicle states and prioritise work more effectively.

"I can also plan the maintenance of my tanks so they are ready to roll when needed."

The programme has also proved to be a valuable tool at the Land Training Fleet (LTF) in Warminster.

"James is vital to the management of my fleet," said Lt Col John Russell (PWRR), CO of the LTF.

"At the click of a finger we have an overview of the entire fleet and its serviceability. James (Land) will add capability management and engineering aspects to that, giving us even greater benefits. We are most looking forward to its introduction." ■

Logging on: WO1 Andy Tolley (REME, right) demonstrates the capability of the James Unplugged Device to WO2 Andy Evans (REME)

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Power struggle

Energy experts launch assault on batteries

Report: Stephen Tyler
Picture: Sgt Keith Cotton

NEW batteries which significantly lighten the load on dismounted soldiers are on their way to theatre.

Commanders in Afghanistan issued a plea for the weight of essential power sources for radios and other communications equipment used on front-line patrols to be reduced.

And just months later, a team of energy experts at Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S) and the Integrated Soldier Systems Executive (ISSE) at Abbey Wood have come up with an ingenious solution tailor-made for operations.

The Soldier Portable Charger (SPC) harvests energy from used batteries, solar panels and even vehicles and transfers it into a soldier's spares.

While the weight savings may seem minor given that each battery weighs 3.75kg at most, the Urgent Operational Requirement's (UOR's) value is clear if you consider the bulk carried over lengthy missions.

Rather than only having to carry one unit, an eight-man section taking part in a 40-hour patrol currently has to contend with a hefty 60kg burden in batteries alone.

"A major factor in developing this UOR was the weight in batteries required during that 40-hour mission," explained project manager Peter Flowers. "That's a ridiculous amount to be added just for power supplies, so we sat down last autumn and worked out how we could do something about it."

"One of the things we discovered was that [the batteries] were saying they were empty even though they may have had between ten and 20 per cent power remaining."

"The SPC takes that energy out and transfers it to another type of battery. That means that if you take

rechargeable batteries, you only need one on the radio and one on charge and you can then take four of each type off the patrol."

The ability to charge batteries on the hoof is made a simple task thanks to the system's versatility.

During daylight hours a solar mat – which is no larger than a piece of A4 paper when folded and only one square metre when deployed – can be hooked up to the SPC unit along with the battery that needs charging and the power begins to transfer.

Energy can also be scavenged from vehicles such as tractors using the same plug-and-play method.

In addition, the ISSE team has created a portable charger that sits in the trunk of a quad bike to provide another option for portable power.

"We don't know how much energy it will save because it is mission dependant," explained Mr Flowers. "But if you have an engine running, why not do something with it?"

As well as tackling the problem of providing all-important energy, the UOR has done battle with the weight of the batteries themselves.

At present, the only unit used for larger

equipment on patrol is the lithium ion power supply (LIPS) 10, which provides six hours of juice in a 3.75kg block.

Although the units are useful for longer missions, their large capacity adds needless weight to shorter patrols, so the DE&S experts have developed LIPS 11 and LIPS 12 batteries which weigh 1.5kg and 2.25kg and provide enough power for two and four hours respectively.

"We have effectively taken the LIPS 10 and chopped it into thirds," explained Mr Flowers. "You can now take the lower-power battery if you need it. We're not dictating to commanders on the ground what they should use, we're just putting the right clubs in their bag."

A total of 4,556 of the units are being deployed to Op Herrick, with the first 1,000 arriving in theatre this month and the remainder being delivered in batches in August and September.

Each kit comes with an instruction sheet and the UOR has been handed to the Operational Training and Advisory Group to allow soldiers to practice using it during pre-deployment training. ■

IN CHARGE



The Soldier Portable Charger unit gives troops on patrol a mobile source of power generation

LIPS SERVICE



LIPS 10 - Bat life: Six hrs - Wt: 3.75kg
LIPS 11 - Bat life: Two hrs - Wt: 1.5kg
LIPS 12 - Bat life: Four hrs - Wt: 2.25kg

QUADS IN



A charging unit fitted in the trunk of a quad bike provides added energy for a patrol's batteries

Pictures: Mike Weston



Haven for heroes

Reinvigorated centre puts Service families first

Report: Stephen Tyler
Pictures: Steve Dock

NESTLED in the picturesque Wiltshire countryside near Bath, the Services Cotswold Centre seems as far removed from the operational front line as it is possible to get.

Comprising 60 purpose-built chalets set in peaceful landscaped grounds, the facility gives off the calming aura you would expect from an idyllic rural retreat.

But the centre's serene exterior belies the massively important role it plays in the Army's increasingly well-used welfare chain.

For all of the mission's successes, Op Herrick creates an inevitable emotional and physical fallout – not just on those deployed but on their families as well – and the Services Cotswold Centre provides the perfect setting in which affected individuals can put the pieces back together.

Capt Nick Beighton (28 Engr Regt) admits that he had never heard of the centre before the fateful day last October when, less than one month into his first tour of Afghanistan, he stepped on a pressure plate IED during a recce patrol in Babaji.

The subsequent blast cost the officer both of his legs and left him with a broken pelvis and severe internal injuries. He was evacuated to Camp Bastion and woke up ten days later in a hospital bed in Selly Oak.

As he began his recovery, the strapping engineer, who stood six feet seven inches tall before the accident, squared up to the prospect of undergoing rehabilitation and physiotherapy at Headley Court.

Capt Beighton also had to contend with the logistical dilemmas his injuries created. Going back to his regimental home in Germany was out of the question and being in a wheelchair meant that he needed specially-adapted accommodation.

The answer to his problem was provided by the Cotswold hub. Two of its chalets have been fitted with disabled-access ramps, low-level kitchen counters and specialist bathrooms and the Royal Engineer took advantage of the facilities to get away from the stresses of rehab for a two-week break with his partner.

"It's been ideal," he told *Soldier*. "It was up in the air as to where we would be able to stay as I couldn't go back to Germany, so I was interested in coming here.

"The facilities are brilliant. They have all the adaptations that I need and it gives us a bit of peace and quiet where we have been able to hide from the world for a while, shut

the door and read a book in front of the fire.

"I have brought my stubbies [false training legs] with me so that I can continue to lead on my own rehab – I can't expect Headley Court to do that for me and I don't want to go back there and have to start from the bottom of the hill again.

"This is a brilliant place for people if they need it. It isn't very widely known about and that's maybe because you would have no

reason to know about it unless you were in a certain set of circumstances, but it is good to know that it is here."

Built in 1950 to house the labour force constructing the huge tunnel network under the nearby village of Corsham, the centre

evolved into a transit camp for military personnel due to deploy around the world by ship from Portsmouth.

It then became a respite centre for Service families, but developed an unenviable reputation according to current commandant Lt Col (Retd) John Wyatt.

"It became known as something of a dumping ground for difficult families," he said. "Despite that, it was recognised that it

‘The facilities are brilliant. They have all the adaptations that I need and it gives us a bit of peace and quiet’



The Services Cotswold Centre is a peaceful, secure setting for any military family needing short-term housing between postings, on leaving the Armed Forces, for welfare purposes, on home leave or just for a short break in the country.

Accommodation costs just £7 per night or £10 for families on Rest and Recuperation breaks.

For a full list of facilities and to find out more about the centre, visit www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceFor/ServiceCommunity/TheServicesCotswoldCentre.htm or email scc-receptionist@mod.uk

Left, Scenic setting: The Services Cotswold Centre is a perfect base for visiting attractions including Lacock Abbey and village

could potentially have a big part to play in the welfare support we offer our families."

Thanks to the hard graft of all those involved in the centre from the time it took on its current title in 1990 to the present day, that role is now being fulfilled.

After overcoming the very real threat of closure due to a lack of funding in the late 1990s, the home-from-home for the wider military community has gone from strength to strength.

The current set-up includes not just the fully-equipped chalets but also a bar, sports facilities and an amenities centre.

An on-site nursery and Lypiatt Primary School – which currently provide educational and emotional support for a combined total of around 50 children – ensure that youngsters staying there do not miss out on important lessons.

"I'm very proud of the school and we are incredibly lucky to have it here," added Lt Col Wyatt. "We have a fantastic head teacher and, because of the numbers, the teachers are able to give almost personal attention to the children. That makes it very special."

The nature of modern Service life means that the adapted chalets are likely to continue to prove their worth in the future.

But operations also place a strain on relationships and the Services Cotswold Centre is an ideal place for families to start

to put things back on track.

Regardless of the circumstances that draw people into the facility, Capt Beighton believes it is another example of the ever-improving welfare arm of the Services.

"My experience is that I didn't have to worry about other things," he said. "My sister lives in New Zealand and was flown over to the UK. They even looked after her visa, so I was very impressed with the process."

"The main focus for me is to get better and the Royal Engineers and Army as a whole have been excellent in letting me concentrate on that."

"I am very keen to be doing something, but equally I don't want to be given a job out of sympathy – I want to be able to make a meaningful contribution."

With the facilities and reputation of the Wiltshire asset transformed, Lt Col Wyatt is now hoping that the final piece in the rejuvenation jigsaw will be for more Service personnel to realise the centre is there for them.

"This is the jewel in the crown of the welfare package," he said. "There is simply nothing else like this and families who need a safe place to stay for a short time for whatever reason should know that we are here to help." ■



Pushing on: A break at the Services Cotswold Centre has helped Capt Nick Beighton (RE), who lost his legs in an IED explosion, on the road to recovery

Picture: Mike Weston








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Becks' appeal

Football star urges nation to get behind their troops

Interview: Joe Clapson

AS England's footballers boarded a plane to South Africa for the 2010 World Cup, one of the country's greatest players was awaiting a flight of a different kind.

For while Gerrard, Rooney and company sat in comfort on a commercial craft, world-famous midfielder David Beckham was at RAF Brize Norton preparing to board a C-17 Globemaster to Afghanistan.

The former captain – ruled out of the showpiece tournament by injury – took advantage of his end-of-season downtime to fulfil a long-held ambition and show his gratitude to the British Army's front-line soldiers in person.

"It's something I've wanted to do for years and I've always admired the job our troops do," Beckham told *Soldier* in an exclusive interview. "It's been tricky with my football career to actually get out there but my injury provided a window of opportunity. I'm just so glad I did it.

"I must admit there was an element of nerves on my behalf before the trip.

"All the troops are so focused; you can see it in their faces.

"They have left behind family and friends and made so many sacrifices for our country. They are true heroes."

The former Manchester United, Real Madrid, AC Milan and now LA Galaxy midfielder displayed his dedication to the Forces by spending three days

at Camp Bastion, the main British base in Helmand province.

Dressed in combat trousers, Beckham toured a number of Army units during his time in theatre, including the military hospital and an Apache gunship crew.

He was also given lessons in weapon-handling and welding and even managed to squeeze in a light-hearted penalty shoot-out with soldiers from 1st Battalion, The Royal Gurkha Rifles.

Beckham explained: "I was overwhelmed by the courage shown by everyone out there and the stories I was told of the bravery that occurs on a daily basis.

"The morale is incredible; it was a privilege to be there. These people put their lives on the line for us and we owe them a huge debt."

As well as discovering more about the day-to-day roles of Service personnel deployed on Op Herrick, Beckham experienced first-hand the tragic reality of the conflict when a Serviceman was killed in action during the visit.

"You see the flags at half-mast and you can feel the tension here," he explained.

"Generally at the base, though, it really is amazing to be around and you feel the love from everybody."

Beckham used his hotline to the England team, who he joined in South Africa after his trip to Helmand, to pass on some "truly inspiring" messages of good luck from the troops to the players.

And although the eyes of the English

football-loving public were trained firmly on events in South Africa during the World Cup, the sportsman hopes that his time on the front line will help divert the attention on to the people he believes are Britain's true heroes.

"I represent my country on the pitch but what these men and women do is so much more than that," he said. "I was lucky to meet many people and nobody was afraid to chat or joke with me, which I loved.

"I'm in awe of them; it shouldn't be the other way around. The trip was amazing and the experience was more than I could ever have hoped for.

"Hopefully my visit will help raise awareness of the unbelievable job these guys do. They are truly heroes and make me proud to be British." ■



Stay Safe
David Beckham
+

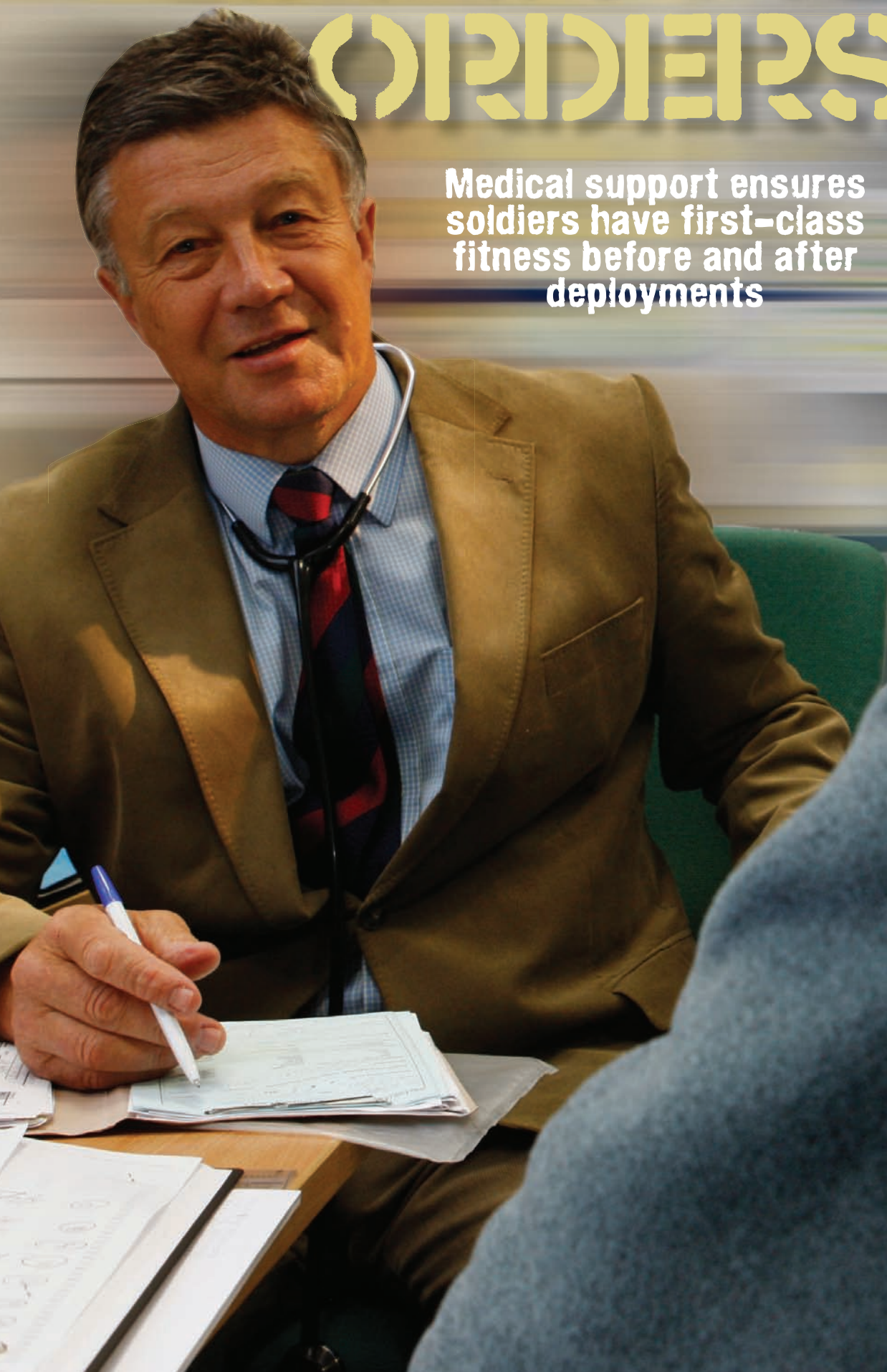
Saluting real heroes:
England superstar David Beckham chatted with scores of British soldiers during his three-day visit to Camp Bastion

Pictures: Crown Copyright/MOD 2010



DOCTORS' ORDERS

Medical support ensures
soldiers have first-class
fitness before and after
deployments



Report: Cliff Caswell
Picture: Graeme Main

PATROLLING in the lethal countryside of southern Afghanistan, LCpl Phil Le Gros discovered the Taliban's tactics did not discriminate against British soldiers, be they serving with the Regular or Territorial Army.

Caught in an explosion near Sangin in Helmand province during last summer's tour with 19 Light Brigade, the young TA sapper was left with his jaw smashed and eardrum ruptured. He had become another casualty in the most brutal fighting that the Armed Forces had seen in half-a-century or more.

But he was treated as anything but a statistic. Evacuated from the front line to the main base at Camp Bastion, the soldier was swiftly set on the path to recovery. Now back on British soil and under the care of the Army health professionals at the Reserves Mobilisation and Training Centre (RMTC) in Chilwell, he is making strong progress in his battle to return to full fitness and civilian life.

"The help I have had has been good throughout the whole medical chain," said the NCO, who took a break from working in IT for a banking chain to join 38 Engineer Regiment. "Being injured will not stop me from doing another tour – I was in the wrong place at the wrong time but I consider myself very lucky.

"The staff here at Chilwell have been great and the rehabilitation that I have been going through to help me get back to my civilian job has been excellent."

Medical staff at the RMTC have certainly seen their workload rocket with the Army's involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Tasked with making sure Reservists are fit to deploy to the front lines of worldwide military operations as well as ensuring they are mentally and physically sound to return to civilian life, the team feels a keen sense of responsibility towards every individual.

There have also been changes to the system in recent years. Following concerns that TA personnel did not have the support of the military infrastructure available to Regular colleagues, there is now more of an emphasis on dealing with psychological injuries through initiatives including the Reserves Mental Health Programme.

Lt Col Huw Timothy (RAMC), who heads up the medical assessment centre at Chilwell, stressed that fitness was crucial both before and after deployments and said his staff were always extremely thorough in their examinations.

"Members of the TA have to meet the same health standards as the Regular Army and we are scrupulous in screening for conditions such as high blood pressure, asthma, obesity and cardiac murmurs that can present problems," he added. "We have to make sure that it is safe for the person concerned to deploy.

"We take the whole process here extremely seriously and I can promise that if you come back from theatre with an injury we will do our best to manage it though the appropriate care pathway, whether that is a GP, the Defence Medical Centre in

Birmingham or relevant NHS facility."

As well as helping Servicemen and women take the right route to recovery, doctors at Chilwell are on hand to assist soldiers. As many on the team have served on the front line themselves, personnel can be assured that they will be well understood.

"Being in this role you must really have experience both as a GP and of the Armed Forces," said Dr Alvin Skinstad, who deployed on operations with the Rhodesian Army during his military career. "We have the capability here at Chilwell to provide services in a matter of days that would take the NHS six months.

"It is great to be here at the RMTC – there are some real unsung heroes who are

making a valuable contribution to our war effort. The troops are bloody good too; they want to get on with their recovery and most want to go on operations again."

Maintaining and encouraging the enthusiasm of TA volunteers is crucial. The services of Reservist soldiers are in demand in an army that has come to depend on their competence and professionalism on operations. Taking good care of them before and after they deploy is a vital factor in keeping them fit and healthy.

To this end, the medical teams at the RMTC have been pivotal in keeping this key asset in shape and ready for the rigours of theatre as well as making sure the troops are fully prepared for the resumption of civilian life on their return.

Every soldier, Regular or TA, counts in such a busy schedule of operations. Whether the Reservists are deploying to Afghanistan, Cyprus, the Falkland Islands or elsewhere, RMTC Chilwell is the beginning and end of every operational journey. ■

Main picture, One-to-one: Dr Alvin Skinstad, a veteran of the Rhodesian Army, helps injured Territorial Army soldier LCpl Phil Le Gros on the path to recovery

Below, Moving on: Physiotherapy teams are available at Chilwell to assist soldiers in conquering any medical problems they have suffered on operations

‘The help I have had has been good throughout the whole medical chain’





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Marathon MAN

Soldier's Joe Clapson joins super-fit Servicemen to take on gruelling 131-mile charity challenge

Report: Joe Clapson
Pictures: Graeme Main

WALKING 131 miles in five days would be a daunting challenge. Running the same distance over some of south west England's steepest terrain would be simply ridiculous.

But that is exactly what 167 entrants signed up for when they agreed to take on the inaugural Forces March from Ilfracombe, in Devon, to the Wiltshire town of Bulford to raise funds and awareness for British Forces' charities.

Without reading the small print, or listening to the exact nature of the race, I had agreed to enlist as one of those competitors.

It sounded like a no-brainer; spend the May bank holiday in the sunshine raising considerable cash for Project 65 alongside civilians and military personnel.

I was to run as part of the Commando Logistic Regiment (CLR) team, which was made up of personnel from the Army and the Royal Marines.

Bouncing with energy at the Devon start line was a thoroughly mixed bag of competitors ranging from expert marathon runners to elderly veterans doing their bit. >>



“At the 21-mile point it dawned on me what the hell I was doing and the fact that we had another four days of it”



Among the Army representation was a team from 2nd Battalion, The Rifles; a group from the University of Oxford Officer Training Corps wearing full kit and carrying bergens; and a seriously-quick Parachute Regiment Provost team.

At 1000 we were on our way and the theme of the next five days instantly began – running up huge hills.

For those familiar with skiing terms, we spent most of day one running up what would be classified as black runs. If little holes had been dug into the roads these hills would have been called climbing walls.

To add to the fun someone had organised a cloudless sky and scorching heat for the entire route.

My CLR team was made up of SSgt Simon Todd (REME) and Royal Marines Mne Joe Hogan, Mne Mark Birrell and Cpl Rob Wilmott. We ran together for 16 miles before my legs started to move slower.

Having never attempted a marathon before and conscious that the furthest I had ever run was 17 miles on flat ground, I was waiting for the notorious “wall” that long-distance runners speak of. With five miles to go I felt like I had run straight into it.

Then, as if by request, a Sea King helicopter flew past on a training exercise and swooped down with Navy personnel giving the thumbs up.

This manoeuvre served not only to lift my spirits but also to highlight the amazing tri-Service backing for those involved in this unique experience.

After five hours and 50 minutes of pounding the pavement I was home and jumped straight in the cold stream at the bottom of the field we were

to camp in for the night.

Then came the post marathon analysis. “At the 21-mile point it dawned on me what the hell I was doing and the fact that we had another four days of it,” said SSgt Todd. “There were far too many hills and it was far too hot.”

The general consensus across the whole campsite was similar. We had all completed a very difficult marathon and could not quite believe we had more than 100 miles still to do.

Armed with invaluable sachets of endurance sports supplements handed to us by Mountain Fuel managing director and former soldier Darren Foote, we were at least well-nourished and never short of calories.

Mel Deane, fitness guru at Richmond Rugby Club, was also vital in ensuring we paced ourselves and knew when and what to eat.

Loaded with two litres of water on my back and some carbohydrate gels in my running pouch I set off for the short second day – just 24 miles.

Up until mile 19 I had managed to keep a constant pace before my legs became dead weights and my feet were ready to fall off.

At the last water stop a well-intentioned steward tried to lift my mood. “It’s two miles to the finish as the crow flies,” he said.

Unfortunately I was showing no signs of sprouting wings, which meant I had five miles to contend with.



Uphill struggle: Steep inclines along much of the course made the going especially tough



Pit stop: Taking on sufficient water and food was vital to keep energy levels topped up



ankles and legs were so sore I felt like collapsing, but with just five miles to go and a chair I cranked my music up and edged towards the day's finish line.

As I shuffled slowly to the shower block, I crossed paths with fellow marchers in similar states of disrepair. One was Kevin Hale, brother of Capt Mark Hale, who was killed in Afghanistan on August 13, 2009. Kevin's Undentable Trust team had entered in honour of Capt Hale and were soldiering on in spite of shin splints.

It took me 30 minutes to complete the 100-metre distance to the shower and several attempts to climb the one step into the cubicle. In such a poor state it was impossible for me to attempt the last day but the rest of the team managed it in impressive fashion.

For my own peace of mind I forced myself to run the last mile, as I needed mental closure by crossing the finish line.

This extreme event is a new benchmark for endurance runners and walkers but it transcends athletics and sport. The Forces March served to capture in a nutshell the incalculable high regard and support felt for military personnel of all generations.

Side-by-side, civilians and soldiers marched for five days to show their passionate support for the Armed Forces; the fallen, the injured, the veterans and those still proudly serving. ■

But the support from current and ex-Servicemen and women, The Royal British Legion and members of the public was incredible throughout and kept everyone going.

Project 65 was set up in 2009 to mark the 65th anniversary of D-Day and those taking part in the Forces March were retracing the footsteps of the soldiers of 6th Airborne Division, who in 1942 were training for the daring liberation of Europe.

On day three, with 29 miles ahead of us, Team CLR was desperately trying to remain positive.

"When we get to 16 miles we're over halfway for the five days," was one attempt at inspiration.

The first three miles were made up of a relentless

25 per cent incline that climbed into Quantock Hills.

As I shuffled on, wondering why I had failed to pack an ice pick, I noticed four-wheel drive vehicles struggling to make progress in first gear.

By the time I reached relatively flat ground I was in agony, with the muscles on the lower front of both legs in serious discomfort.

A support driver offered me a lift to the next water stop and although it was depressing to have to pull out, I accepted. I could not have continued. My plan was to rest my legs and put a strong effort into day four.

After an evening of standing under cold water and holding frozen peas on my legs, I was back at the start line the next day with my ever-cheerful but increasingly-tired fellow runners.

By now the numbers of competitors had dwindled dramatically, with injury causing many to pack their bags and head for home.

At 20 miles my feet,



Watered down: A cold stream provided welcome relief at the end of the first day



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'Ditch the decoration divide'

HAVING read the operational honours list in April's *Soldier* I was immensely proud of all those decorated. However, I was once again surprised at the high number of officers receiving awards.

The officer corps makes up approximately 17 per cent of the Army but received 47 per cent of the honours. The figures increase to a staggering 57 per cent for the tier one to three awards.

In addition to this, the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) can be awarded to any rank that displays exceptional leadership in the field but to date no DSO has been presented to a member of the other ranks.

Equally, senior officers still hold the privilege of only being allowed to be awarded an OBE and above. This is not the case for those across the rest of society.

The awards system seems to have been devised by officers and be administered by officers for officers and undermines the sterling work and outstanding leadership that is being shown by Service personnel from the other ranks on operations.

The antiquated honours system needs to be reviewed as officers are not the only ones who lead. – **SSgt Aslett, DICS.**

Brig Mike Griffiths, DPS(A), responds: You raise the question of the balance of awards between officers and other ranks and back this up by using some statistics from the most recent list.

Those you have chosen are sadly not sufficiently detailed to tell the whole story. As a reminder you should note that the operational lists cover awards both for gallantry and for meritorious service.

In the case of the former in the list to which you refer, both George Crosses, all six Conspicuous Gallantry Crosses, 12 of the 19 Military Crosses, three out of the four Queen's Gallantry Medals and one of the two George Medals were awarded to other ranks.

In the case of the meritorious awards, they reward those who are invariably engaged in planning and running operations in HQs at all levels or in command of units or sub-units. These posts are mainly filled by officers due to the nature of the work involved and it is, therefore, unsurprising that the majority of such types of award are given to them.

As to your other points, I confirm that, to date, only officers have been awarded

the DSO but have to stress that your assertion that no other ranks have been appointed OBE is incorrect. In fact four have. You also might like to know that the Army's Lower Honours Committee, which is responsible for the recommendation of awards of the OBE and MBE for the half-yearly lists, comprises five members, one of whom is a WO1.

Finally, as I write this response I have just finished grading Meritorious Service Medal citations – 54 potential recipients for a decoration that is focused on the best of the other ranks and recognises their exceptional meritorious and long service. I think the system is as fair as it can be.



There's no shame in showing support

AS the widow of a soldier, I was dismayed to read the letter from a serving sergeant who disagrees with the public show of respect being displayed at Wootton Bassett whenever there is a repatriation, "Shun media circus and respect fallen from afar" (June).

I have been to Wootton Bassett (pictured right) even when I have not known any of the guys being repatriated, but do not consider myself to be a "grief tourist".

I just wanted to be there to mark the fallen's final journey home in that remarkable place and I am glad that so many others feel the same way.

I attend a Remembrance service every year, but with so many of our current Servicemen and women now paying the price in Afghanistan I no longer feel that showing up once a year to show my support is enough.

I would rather see 100 "grief tourists" turn up in Wootton Bassett than have nobody there. Do our fallen deserve to only be remembered by those who actually knew them and by the rest of us once a year?

I truly hope that SSgt P Martin's family never have to endure that final journey for him. – **Name and address supplied.**



Picture: Sgt Dan Harmer, RLC

● *Soldier* are pleased to offer the author of this letter a three- or four-night break for four in Pontin's Self-Catering Classic accommodation at a choice of four coastal Holiday Parks: Brean Sands in Somerset; Camber Sands in East Sussex; Prestatyn Sands in North Wales and Southport in the North West.

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Tempers rise over cut to 'fuel'

AND many others in my platoon are outraged with the decision to cut Home to Duty Travel (HDT), the timing of which has generated the most anger.

The recession is still a reality for most people and it has been common knowledge for some months now that UK fuel prices would climb to record highs. So what does the MoD do? Help soldiers out with a rise in HDT? No. Keep HDT rates the same to give soldiers a chance to cope financially? No. The MoD has cut HDT by around 20 per cent.

We understand the need for the pen pushers in Whitehall to find ways to save money when they are not too busy filling in claim forms, but are they really this out of touch? Is this the best they can do or was it simply the easiest thing to do? It's also enraging that this cut was not even announced, which suggests that the "powers that be" know they are in the wrong.

Will a genuine reason for this cut be offered and what are the plans for the years to come? – Pte Bennett, MPGS, Donnington.

● The HDT I receive has been reduced by £45.50 per month at a time when petrol prices have started to rise over the £1.20 a litre mark. Can someone please explain this change? There must have been some kind of mistake. – **Name and address supplied.**

● NEW tax year, higher fuel prices and a cut in HDT rates. Crazy! Can anyone explain why? I'm sure I'm not the only one who has been affected but this change has left me about £90 a month worse off. I live in my own house and it seems like I'm getting punished for it. – **Bdr C Dyer, 14 Regt RA.**

● ONCE again the system surprises us. Without any prior warning, I discover via my pay slip that my HDT has been reduced by around £80 per month. I am worse off now than I was before this year's pay rise.

How can anyone justify reducing the rate of HDT when petrol prices are rising. – **WO2 P Grant, ITC Catterick.**

● WHEN I looked at my pay statement in April I was shocked to see that the HDT allowance had been cut dramatically – despite fuel prices going through the roof! Surely the Army should be encouraging soldiers to purchase their own properties and commute to work. At the moment it seems that those like me who do are being penalised, especially when I'm saving the MoD money on Single Service Accommodation and Food and Incidentals Allowance. – **Sgt D Work, ACIO Chesterfield.**

● CAN anyone tell me why no one communicated the reductions in certain allowances to military personnel and why it was only through word of mouth that this news reached the Service community? Cynically, I would suggest the cuts were made to coincide with the release of this year's pay rise in the hope that the spin associated would cover up the fact that many Armed Forces personnel are now out of pocket.

The military sold off Service accommodation and encouraged personnel to buy their own properties, others do so to provide stability to their families, and yet those individuals are being punished by reductions in key allowances at a time when petrol prices are at an all-time high.

Granted times are hard but as a military we should be far better at communicating than we are. – **Name and address supplied.**

● I notice, with some confusion, that the HDT rate has been reduced from £12.78 per day (for a 50-mile trip) for 2009/2010 to £10.26 for the same journey in 2010/2011.

According to an AA report, the price of unleaded petrol rose from a UK average of 90.6p per litre in March 2009 to 118.1p per litre in March 2010. With that hike in mind, why has HDT been reduced by £2.52 per day when the cost of travelling to my place of duty has risen by approximately £1.70 per day? Could it be that the money the Government is saving is being used to pay for retention bonuses? – **SSgt Bromilow, DCAE(A), Arborfield.**

● PUBLIC and Private HDT daily rates were cut in April in line with the reduction in the Motor Mileage Allowance, which is now 25p per mile. The revised rates can be found in JSP 752 (Chapter 1, Section 6).

I currently have a 128-mile round trip commute from home to an Army Careers Office and was previously just about breaking even in respect of fuel costs. As of April, I am out of pocket.

Why is it that current fuel prices and the rise in the cost of living have not been considered?

– **Sgt T Savill, ACIO South Shields.**

allowance

Brig Mike Griffiths, DPS(A), responds:

After a flurry of letters on this topic I write to provide the rationale behind the change to Motor Mileage Allowance Private Car Rate (MMA PCR), how it was announced and some detail to show how the allowance is calculated.

All 99 military allowances remain under constant review. As part of this process MMA PCR was reviewed before April 2010. Applying the extant formula correctly would have reduced the rate to 23p per mile.

The Adjutant General and his fellow Principal Personnel Officers (PPOs) indicated that they could not agree to such a large drop (from 31p per mile) and consequently Services Personnel Policy offered the alternative solution of aligning the rate with the MoD civilian mileage rate for private travel, which is based on Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs' (HMRC) Approved Mileage Allowance payments and is a rate commonly used by many other Government departments.

All PPOs agreed this change before it was implemented, acknowledging that it would be unwelcome but also that it would release funds for higher priority areas.

The changes were announced in a signal to the chain of command on March 31 and followed up by a letter on April 1. These explain further details behind the changes and copies will be available in your units.

Focusing on MMA PCR, the formula for calculating it was based on the costs of a 1.8-litre Ford Mondeo at the three to four year point. The current AA guide indicates that the running costs (fuel [at 116.1p per litre], tyres, servicing, parts and labour) of such a car are 22.83p per mile. Therefore it is concluded that 25p per mile is adequate recompense for mileage driven for Service reasons.

It is of note that for the first 10,000 miles of business travel (which excludes miles incurred under Get You Home, HDT or travel to training courses and medical appointments) anyone may reclaim tax relief on the difference between MMA PCR and HMRC's Higher Approved Mileage rate (40p) directly via their tax return.

The MoD is working within finite resources and needs to put these to best possible use, particularly in support of current operations. In this light, and against the background of an overall two per cent pay award in April, the doubling of Operational Allowance, the introduction of Unpleasant Living Allowance for those at the "sharp end" of operations and reducing the qualifying period for Longer Separation Allowance, a rate set above that which the previous formula for MMA PCR would have produced is actually an achievement and should be recognised as such.



Picture: Cpl Russ Nolan, RLC

CONTRARY to the feature in *Soldier* last month, "Guards of honour", the Welsh Guards (pictured above) are not the first British soldiers to march on Red Square in Moscow. Members of The Royal Regiment of Scotland's pipes and drums, alongside a number of other British Army pipe bands, marched there in September 2007. – [Ryan Gonsales](#).

Spar a thought for hard up heroes

WHY do we allow SPAR shops situated on Army camps to rip soldiers off?

I recently visited a serving friend's son who is currently in basic training at Pirbright and was shocked when I was charged £1.50 for a small coffee. Disgruntled, I began to price other items and found that goods used daily by soldiers, such as razors, boot polish and toothpaste, were massively over-priced.

After taking a look in other shops in the area I found that items in the SPAR store were between 20-50 per cent more expensive than elsewhere. I am currently based in Minley and found prices in the SPAR shop here are also overinflated.

Young soldiers get paid little money as it is and do not need the MoD allowing companies on to our camps who are prepared to take advantage of Service personnel or their families. – [W02 P R Yates, Blackwater](#).



"That'll teach them for charging £1.50 for a thimble full of coffee."

Brig Mike Griffiths, DPS(A), replies: The SPAR shops you write about are not under MoD control, some are independently owned (like a franchise) while others are now part of multi-activity contracts.

They cannot compete with the major supermarkets on price due to their relatively small and restrictive customer base which means they have to charge what the market will bear to make a profit.

SPAR shops should be likened to a village or corner shop rather than a supermarket – they are there for convenience and for that convenience you tend to pay higher prices.

Not many of these shops are profitable and often work at a loss written off against other parts of the business and we, the British Army, are keen to see these shops survive as a welfare support to soldiers and their dependants.

Where the prices are considered too high the chain of command will engage but they need comment like yours to do so. They have it now.

PS...

WHEN commenting on the topic of internet users selling Army clothing and equipment on eBay, "Bad drills" (June), you quoted a Defence Clothing Team spokesman as saying "soldiers should return all unneeded kit through the quartermaster's store".

Having made numerous attempts at trying to do just that, I now have three boxes full of surplus gear which I would love to put back into the system.

The reality is most clothing stores I have come across can't be bothered with the hassle. Perhaps your spokesman could pass on his message to those who work in these stores. – [Name and address supplied](#).

Courtship curtailed by rules

I SEPARATED from my wife in July 2009 but have retained my married quarter as my son is currently in sixth form at a secondary school.

Since the split I have met a lady who lives in Germany and with whom I get on very well. However, I have been told by the estate warden and families officer that I am not allowed to have female visitors at my accommodation as cohabiting is not permitted in the Army.

I understand that rules must be obeyed but surely it's about time this particular regulation was relaxed. I am 46, my son is 18 and my daughter is 21 and both get on well with my new partner, who doesn't want to sleep at my address, just visit me.

As things stand I will need to move into

a civilian flat if my relationship is to move forward. – *Name and address supplied.*

Brig Mike Griffiths, DPS(A), writes: Your estate warden and families officer, although no doubt well intentioned, are being somewhat over zealous in the application of the rules.

Cohabitation, which is prohibited in Service accommodation, is defined as a situation where the property becomes the home of another person.

There is therefore no reason why your friend should not visit you.

There are restrictions on the length of visits (no more than 28 days in a total of 93), but these do not apply in the circumstances you describe.

PS...



"I am fully aware that number 28 is vacant Cpl Harrison, but moving your mother-in-law into it from your own quarter is quite out of the question."

HOW refreshing to hear the lone voice of reason, common sense and compassion from Maj D Walker (Retd), who, if he had been in a position to do so, would have been prepared to make an effort in order to help another person [Miss Joanna Robson, who was critical of the Army for not allowing her and her husband-to-be to move into a married quarter more than two weeks before their wedding date].

The majority of your respondents on the matter should be ashamed of themselves and might do well to remember that two wrongs do not make a right.

How can anyone contest Miss Robson's perfectly reasonable request if the quarter was, as she stated, unoccupied?

How illogical to not, as an exception, allow the quarter to be used. Doing so would have brought more revenue into the coffers than if it had remained empty.

What a shame that our system so typically takes pleasure in disadvantaging others and, rather than adopting a "give and take" attitude to get the best out of people, adopts a "take and take" stance.

If the Army wives who responded think that hardship is the way forward, why not take on some more and forgo a few other pleasures in life – that seems to be your philosophy.

The world would be a much better place if there were more Maj Walkers in it and less of the other respondents.

I suspect that Maj Walker did a great deal for morale and retention while he was serving. Shame on the rest of you. – *Maj G Austin, RAMC, Warminster.*

AT a time when we are all being asked to tighten our belts and to rationalise our spending, shouldn't those in "officer in command" appointments be doing the same?

Rather than hiring cleaners at public expense, have they actually thought about doing a little bit of tidying up themselves? The rest of us, especially those of us who live in our own homes, have to.

Likewise, could they not drive their own cars to work – again like the rest of us – and only use Service transport when on Service business? – *Name and address supplied.*

Close but no cigar

I DEPLOYED to Camp Buehring, Kuwait on Op Telic 11 as part of a team responsible for acclimatising soldiers on their arrival in country. Can I still claim a Telic award? – *Spr Stonestreet, 32 Engr Regt.*

Lt Col (Retd) Peter Lockyer, SO1 medal office, replies: Unfortunately, Spr Stonestreet's role placed him outside of the theatre of operations. No doubt there are many others like him.

If he took part in convoys, the instruction from PJHQ was for individuals to maintain a personal record and for units to maintain a register.

Thus, if ever the rules were changed to include aggregate service, there would be a good chance of recognising time spent in Iraq.

There were many who did not serve inside Iraq and Spr Stonestreet looks like one of them.



More colourful courses, please

I AM sure *Soldier* receives a lot of letters about resettlement, but I am trying to decide on a suitable course for myself and can't find anything that appeals.

I am not interested in plumbing, becoming a gas fitter or painting and decorating, but would like to explore what it takes to be a nail technician, fashion designer or even masseur.

Why does it always feel like I am in a man's world? – *LCpl C Kirkland, AGC(SPS).*

Col Hugh Russell, AD Ops DETS(A), responds: Ask in the right place and you will be amazed at the range of opportunities available.

LCpl Kirkland should make an appointment with the Individual Education & Resettlement Officer (IERO) at her local Army Education Centre.

The IERO will be able to advise how to find a civilian training organisation or local college that runs suitable courses



which will enable her to follow her second career choice.

If LCpl Kirkland has served at least six years she is also entitled to register with the Career Transition Partnership (CTP), which will assign her a personal consultant for up to two years after she has left the Army.

The CTP are based in nine regional resettlement centres across the UK and Germany and will be able to provide information about all the careers she mentions. The IERO will be able to help her make contact with the CTP.

Dream team counter-attack

CAN I pick a better Army team than the one selected by *Football Punk*, "Starting XI", in June's issue? Well, I'd certainly like to nominate an alternative line-up.

A number of those plumped for by *Punk* – such as Billy Wright, Dave Mackay, Sir Tom Finney, Duncan Edwards and Jim Baxter – would be in most teams, but I was amazed at some of the omissions.

With all due respect to Maik Taylor, between the posts I would go for Gordon Banks (R Signals), England's all-time great goalkeeper and a World Cup winner. Banks played for Chesterfield, Leicester and Stoke, making a total of 510 appearances and was capped 73 times for his country. Having kept goal during England's 1966 victory, Banks also wore the number one shirt during the 1970 World Cup in Mexico.

In the middle, I would drop Gary Holt in favour of Sir Bobby Charlton (ex-Royal Army Service Corps), arguably England's best-ever player.

A European Footballer of the Year, he played a vital role in England's 1966 World Cup victory, played 606 games for Manchester United and scored 199 goals for the Red Devils.

Furthermore, while wearing a United shirt he won the FA Cup, three league championships and the European Cup – scoring a brace in the final against Benfica. Named in the PFA Team of the Century, Charlton played 106 games for England and scored 49 goals.

Speaking of Charltons, Justin Whittle has to go in favour of Bobby's brother. Jack Charlton played 629 games for Leeds United and was a member of England's World Cup-winning team. The National Serviceman was voted Footballer of the Year in 1967, won the league championship in 1969 and went on to manage Middlesbrough, Sheffield Wednesday, Newcastle and the Republic of Ireland, who he took to the World Cup for the first time in 1990.

Up front, Phil Stant is a decent player, but



Football Punk's all-time Army XI... 1. Maik Taylor, 2. Billy Wright, 3. Dave Mackay, 4. Duncan Edwards, 5. Justin Whittle, 6. Gary Holt, 7. Sir Tom Finney, 8. Jim Baxter, 9. Lee Bradbury, 10. Phil Stant, 11. Guy Whittingham

in his place imagine a striker who scored 122 goals in 166 games in the top flight. That was the record of Tommy Taylor, formerly of the Royal Artillery. He scored 26 goals in 44 games for Barnsley before joining Manchester United and his goal to game ratio was even better for England with 16 goals in 19 games. The beautiful game was robbed of Taylor's talents when he was killed in the Munich air crash in 1958.

Welshman John Charles, regarded as one of the world's greatest players during the 1950s, would also feature in my forward line. Nicknamed "the gentle giant", Charles played for Leeds, Juventus (where he scored 95 goals in 155 games) and Roma among others and finished his career having never been booked.

The Welsh international won Serie A

championships in 1958, 1960 and 1961, the Coppa Italia in 1959 and 1960, and was Italian Player of the Year in 1958.

Former physical training instructor Nat Lofthouse, who scored 255 goals in 452 games for Bolton Wanderers and a marvellous 30 goals in 33 matches for England, completes my strike force. – Ray Routledge, SO1 Media and Communications, 4 Div.

Richard Lenton, editor of *Football Punk*, types: Sure, Sir Bobby could play a bit but your team selection fails to take into account the fact that old football was rubbish. My scouts tell me you're a Southampton fan so it's no wonder you don't recognise a winning XI when you see one. Ignore the man, Holty.

I AM writing regarding the Army's use of Body Mass Index (BMI).

Soldiers in my unit were recently tested and a number of personnel scored badly despite flying through their physical assessments.

At the other end of the scale, one individual had a perfect BMI but failed miserably when it came to proving his fitness.

The test is an unfair measure. A rugby player, for example, has a naturally bigger body and will struggle to score highly, while a runner will do so easily. I represent my corps and the Army as a runner and find the test a complete waste of time.

– W01 G P Felton, Gn Sp Tp, Brunei Garrison.

Brig Mike Griffiths, DPS(A), replies:

As an Army-level athlete it is perhaps understandable that you consider the annual Body Composition Measurement a



"He's been in there four hours already – I'm guessing it's BMI testing tomorrow."

waste of your time. However, it has been introduced to identify personnel not so accomplished, whose body weight poses

a serious health risk and may benefit from the advice and support that will follow.

Differing body shapes have been taken into account, which is why the grading is derived from a reliable combination of BMI and waist circumference using standards recommended by the World Health Organisation.

While there will always be exceptions, there is a clear link between those who are extremely overweight and those failing their basic fitness tests. But being within normal weight categories doesn't indicate fitness either, which requires regular exercise.

The assessment, which only takes two minutes, provides an annual reminder of the importance of maintaining a healthy body weight.



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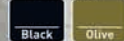


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Picture: Sgt Ian Forsyth, RLC

Premier pledge: Prime Minister David Cameron, pictured during a visit to troops in Afghanistan, has promised to “do the right thing” by Forces’ families

Covenant will not come cheap

B RITAIN'S new Government has made a good start in living up to its promises to the military community.

The doubling of the operational allowance to £29.02 per day is great news for those on and preparing to go on operations. It was certainly welcome in our house. While it doesn't compensate for hubby being away, it does mean that when he comes home we can have some quality time away together as a family.

The Prime Minister, David Cameron, also pressed the British public to remember the incredible job done by the Armed Forces, not only those who make the front pages but those who deliver the post, feed our soldiers and keep their vehicles rolling.

Mr Cameron reminded us of the respect owed to veterans and urged us to remember the many thousands of families who spend every day supporting our troops.

In addition, the PM has pledged to rewrite the Military Covenant in a bid to ensure that Service personnel have the support they need and that their families are treated with the dignity they deserve.

Writing in the *Sunday Telegraph*, Mr Cameron said: “Doing our duty means doing the right thing by the families back home.

“I'm not going to stand by while these families deal with extra worries... [like] having to put up with poor housing. I – along with my Defence Secretary, Liam Fox – am going to make sure that we take action on these things.”

Another pledge of the coalition is to change the rules so that Service personnel

(and, I hope, their dependants) only have to register to vote once on the Service register.

Such a change will certainly ease the admin when you move but, as I've said before, registration isn't the issue – it's the physical act of voting that poses problems.

The narrow election window means that those who have no trusted proxy available have a scant 11 days in which to vote. To really stop the Service community being disenfranchised, changes must be made to the voting process.

Including Service children as part of the proposals for a pupil premium could have a significant impact on the education of our children, and for the better.

Providing extra funds to mitigate the impact of mobility on a child's education will assist schools in coping with ever-changing class sizes and the disruption that children face every time they move.

But at the same time, many papers have recently reported that Continuity of Education Allowance (CEA), which costs the MoD more than £100 million a year, could be under threat.

For those of us who move every two years and have seen the detrimental impact of this on our children's education, the allowance is vital in ensuring their future.

Sending your child to boarding school is not cheap, even with CEA helping out, and requires long-term financial commitment

from parents. Any changes to this allowance could have a significant impact on the retention of NCOs and officers, who have until now seen the CEA as an important part of their terms and conditions.

Savings from efficiencies all too often mean doing the same thing with less people; too many of us know over-stretched soldiers and civil servants doing the work of three. This wearing of three hats only adds to the pressure on soldiers and their families, often resulting in long hours at work and an inability to take leave.

With the Strategic Defence and Security Review looming, it's not great news.

At a time when the MoD is already under severe budgetary pressure, the move to double the operational allowance

will cost £58 million. So if Her Majesty's Treasury does not provide the funding for this increase it will have to be found from further savings in the MoD budget.

If the new administration is to see through its commitment to Britain's Armed Forces, then it must invest in a comprehensive welfare system. The American Department of Defense has a budget of \$1.5 billion to underpin its commitment to Service families. Without a similarly proportional investment, any promise to restore the covenant would not be credible, and that sort of money cannot be found from internal savings. ■

“Without proportional investment any promise to restore the covenant would not be credible”

BULLETIN BOARD

DEFENCE DIRECTORY

Armed Forces Christian Union: 01252 311221; www.afcu.org.uk

Armed Forces Humanist Association: www.armedforceshumanists.org.uk

Army Benevolent Fund: 0845 241 4820

Army Welfare Service: 01722 436569; www.army.mod.uk/soldierwelfare/supportagencies/aws

Army Families Federation: 01980 615525

British Limbless Ex-Service Men's Association: 0208 590 1124; www.blesma.org

Career Transition Partnership: 0207 766 8020

Children's Education Advisory Service: 01980 618244; enquiries@ceas.detsa.co.uk

Confidential support lines: UK 0800 731 4880; Germany 0800 1827 395; Cyprus 080 91065; Falklands #6111; from operational theatres Paradigm Services *201; from anywhere in the world (CSL operator will call back) 0044 1980 630854. Lines open 1030-2230 (UK) every day.

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

Family Escort Service: 0207 463 9249

Forces Pension Society: 0207 820 9988

Joint Service Housing Advice Office: 01722 436575

Medal Office: 94561 3600 or 0141 224 3600

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

National Gulf Veterans' and Families' Association Office: (0900-1700); 24-hour helpline 0845 257 4853; www.ngvfa.org.uk

Regular Forces' Employment Association: 0121 236 0058; www.rfea.org.uk

Royal British Legion: 0845 7725 725

RBL Industries Vocational Assessment Centre: 01622 795900; www.rbli.co.uk

St Dunstan's charity for blind and visually impaired ex-Servicemen and women: 0207 723 5021; www.st-dunstans.org.uk

South Atlantic Medal Association: 01495 227577

Services Cotswold Centre: 01225 810358

SSAFA Forces Help: 0207 403 8783; Western Europe 02161 472 3392

Service Personnel and Veterans Agency: 0800 169 2277 (from UK); 0044 1253 866043 (from overseas); Medical Assessment: 0800 169 5401

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

WRVS: 02920 232668

DEFENCE DIARY

Until January 2011: The Ministry of Food Exhibition. The story of food from farms and gardens, to shops and canteens. Imperial War Museum, London. Tel: 0207 416 5000.

Until September: Camouflage exhibition. Free for the whole family at Imperial War Museum

in Manchester. The Quays, Trafford Wharf Road, Trafford Park, Manchester M17 1TZ. Tel: 0161 836 4000.

July 7, 14, 21 & 28: Royal Military School of Music Concerts in the Park. Three or more bands at every concert. Bring your own blankets, chairs, picnics and wine. Refreshments available on site. Gates open at 1800, concert starts at 1950. Adult tickets £10, concessions (under 16s, OAPs, students, MoD 90 holders and TW2 residents) £8. Season, group and family tickets available. Payment in advance by credit or debit card or on the gate. Cheques payable to the Accounting Officer MoD, Concert Secretary, Royal Military School of Music, Kneller Hall, Twickenham, Middlesex. Tel: 0208 744 8633.

July 17-18: Cholmondeley Pageant of Power. Grounds of Cholmondeley Castle, Cheshire. Event for all the family, including a military tattoo. Supporting Help for Heroes. Contact 0845 0941 007 for tickets.

August 6-8: Gloucestershire Steam and Vintage Extravaganza at Cotswold Airport. Discounted tickets available to buy online at www.steamextravaganza.com or on the gate. Public enquiries contact 01453 890891.

August 14-15: IMPS Military Show & Vintage Aircraft at the Headcorn Aerodrome, near Maidstone, Kent. Entry free to Service personnel on production of ID card. For vehicle entry contact M Dunlop on 01303 267271 or email Mgdunlop@aol.com

September 4-5: The Battle of Britain Air Show. Imperial War Museum Duxford. For details visit www.iwm.org.uk/duxford

September 11: Charity Ball. Troop Aid is holding a charity ball to raise funds at the National Motorcycle Museum, near Birmingham. The objective of Troop Aid is to supply the basic essentials when casualties return from serving their country overseas. Tickets are £50 and include a three-course meal and wine. Call 07914 464507 or book online at www.troopaid.co.uk

September 25: Rhythm Force 2010. Open-air contemporary music festival at Kneller Hall, Twickenham. Status Quo, Hayley Westenra, The Soldiers, plus rock, pop and soul groups from the Corps of Army Music. Tickets costing £20 and £12.50 for concessions can be purchased from www.ticketmaster.co.uk or phone 0844 847 1742. Further details can be found at www.army.mod.uk/music/concert/default.aspx

SEARCHLINE

Neil "Mac" McNulty is looking for ex-members of **79A "C" Company Army Apprentices** who attended the College at Chepstow between September 1978 and December 1980. It is proposed to hold a reunion in May 2011 if enough members can be traced. For further details email Mac at neil.mculty1@ntlworld.com or rmonrem-225-sqms@mod.uk or telephone on 0121 541 4203.

A researcher is looking for British veterans who served with **Raymond Westerling**, a legendary leader of the Dutch Special Forces during the Indonesian National Revolution 1945-1950. Westerling joined the British Army (Commandos) in 1942 and became a sergeant instructor, before being sent to Indonesia as part of Force 136

working with the counter-insurgency unit of the 26th Indian Division and The South Wales Borderers in the city of Medan on Sumatra. Contact Fredrik Willems at Moerbeistraat 24, 6523KN Nijmegen, The Netherlands or email fredrikwillems@hotmail.com

Calling all ex-Chefs, Army Catering Corps and Royal Logistic Corps, Regular and TA. **Leslie Croombs** would like to hear from you with a view to meeting and exchanging experiences. If enough interest is generated maybe we could start a branch in the Morecambe and Lancaster area. The venue for the first meeting is the York Hotel, Morecambe. Contact Leslie Croombs (ex-Sgt ACC) on 07966 240954.

Chris Anderson, an ex-Queen's Regiment medic, now a staff nurse in Margate Hospital, is trying to write a book containing a collection of nursing/medical anecdotes and requires funny stories about military medical situations. Please send them to Chris by email chris.anderson@ekht.nhs.uk or ca76@hotmail.co.uk

REUNIONS

Royal Green Jackets Regimental Association: Annual Veterans day will take place at ATR (W), Sir John Moore Barracks, Winchester on July 10. Attendance is open to all past and present riflemen. Wives and partners are also encouraged to attend. Contact Maj (Retd) Roy Stanger, TSU, Worthy Down, Winchester, Hants SO21 or phone 01962 887916 or email oispsvcswdsu@dcppa-wd.mod.uk

Airborne Logistic Officer's Club: A dinner will be held on July 23. Open to all Para-trained serving and ex-serving officers, Regular and TA, of the RLC, RAOC, RCT, RASC, ACC and The Royal Pioneers. The following day is the 16 Air Assault Bde Open Day in Colchester which will add to the occasion. Contact Maj Ash Loudon, 63 CS Sqn, 13 Air Asslt Sp Regt RLC, Merville Bks, Colchester CO2 7SW or Capt Will Ross, AO 63 CS Sqn, 13 Air Asslt Sp Regt RLC or email ashloudon@gmail.com or william.ross824@mod.uk

Light Infantry Golf Day: Reunion to be held at Breadsall Priory Golf Club on July 30, arrive for 1000. Further details from CSjt Ron Owen on 94451 2172 or 0115 957 2173.

53 (Louisburg) Battery Royal Artillery: Reunion to be held at 5 Regt RA, Marne Bks, Catterick DL10 7NP on July 30-31. Contact SSgt Bennett on 01748 875746 or email 5ra-53bty-atism@mod.uk or Sgt Burtenshaw on 01748 875855 or email 5ra-rhq-remoasst@mod.uk

Birgelen Veterans Association (BVA): Tenth reunion of the BVA will be held at the Cavendish Hotel, Torquay, from September 17-20. Applications will be restricted to the first 100 members. Apply by visiting the website at www.birgelenvets.org or to the secretary Cyril Harding, 14 Park Close, Abergavenny, Mons NP7 5SU.

11 Sphinx Battery Association RA: Reunion to be held in the Queen's Hotel, Newport, South Wales on September 18. Further details from Mal Roberts on 07786 437037 or visit www.11sphinxbtyweb.co.uk

622 Squadron Army Air Corps: A reunion for personnel who served with the squadron while stationed in Munster. Function to be held in London on September 18. Interested personnel should log on to the 662 Sqn page by visiting www.armyaviation.co.uk

Royal Hampshire Regiment: Reunion luncheon for Territorial battalions at Newburgh House, Winchester SO23 8UY on September 25, 1200

for 1300. Contact Maj Ian Taylor at 4 Cedar Wood Close, Fair Oak, Eastleigh, Hants SO50 7LB, phone 02380 694771 or email ian.p.b.taylor@btinternet.com

Glosters Band and Drums: Reunion at the TA Centre, Eastern Avenue, Gloucester GL4 3BD on October 2. Details from Neil Webb, 1 Oakhurst Close, Churchdown, Gloucester GL3 2SS or phone 01452 855236.

Royal Horse Artillery Association: AGM and reunion will take place at the Victory Services Club and St John's Wood Barracks on October 2-3. Attendance is open to past and present members of the RHA unit. Details from R J Whiteway, The Hideaway, 18 Immenstadt Drive, Wellington, Somerset TA21 9TP, phone 01823 665650 or email rhaassn@hotmail.co.uk

129 Battery RA Old Comrades' Association: Reunion for all past and present members and attached personnel of the battery. Venue is the Central Club, Blackpool on October 22-23. For details contact by email williehenry885@hotmail.com or visit www.129dragonsoca.co.uk

Devon Festival of Remembrance: Will be held in The Princess Theatre, Torquay on November 11 at 1900. Further details of participants and tickets sales will be published later.

Royal Engineers 29 Clerk of Works (E) Course: Reunion will take place in the RE WOs' & Sgts' Mess at Brompton Barracks on November 13. All course members, instructors and wives/partners encouraged to attend. Details from Lt Col R Jones on 0207414 2004 or 07785 787311 or email rhy1@aol.com or gary.jones415@mod.uk

APPOINTMENTS

Col: C W Owen, late Kings, to be Asst Head of Armed Forces Bill Team Discipline, in Sep; R C Couzens, RA, to be Asst Head of Deep Target Attack Capability in Sep; N R M Borton, Scots, to be Asst Director Organisation, HQLF in Jun; G R Le Fevre, late Int Corps, to be Asst Director G2, HQLF in Dec; I A Horn, APTC, to be Vice President Army Offr Selection Board in May; G H F S Nickerson, late SG, to be Programme Sp Office Team Leader, Land Eqpt, Defence Eqpt and Sp in Aug; M C Neate, late RA, to be British Liaison Offr in the USA Trg and Doctrine Comd, British Defence Staff (US) in Jul; R J Wakefield, RA, to be Senior British Liaison Offr, Germany in Apr; I J Bayless, late RA, to be Branch Head, Defence Planning Land, HSACT in Oct; A H Johnstone, late R Signals, to be Section Hd (Op Assessment Section) JFCB in Sep; G K Gibbs, late RE, to be Asst Head JEOD and Search Staff, HQLF in May.

COMPETITIONS

Haircut winners: WO2 I Bailey, BOWTAG North; Cpl Kelly Thomson, Service Police Crime Bureau.

Give 'Em Hell Malone winners: J Milne, 77 AEC Deepcut ALC; WO2 G Baxter, Med Ctr, BFPO 40; J Holliday, Bath; Sgt J Dunwoody, 2 Sig Regt; Cpl T Calvert, RAF Akrotiri.

The Bridge winners: Lt Lucas, 7 Regt AAC; Sgt Dickinson, 1 Lincs, Op Herrick; R Hiles, Isle of Skye; C McCann, Bessacarr; WO1 P Storrs, Shrivensham.

Fixer winners: M Woods, Frimley, Surrey; WO1 N O'Leary, 101 Log Bde.

Spine Lines winner: WO2 D Eyes, SHAPE, BFPO 26.

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Picture: Sgt Andy Malthouse, RAF



TEN details have been changed on this photograph of members of 1st Battalion, The Royal Anglian Regiment standing next to their namesake locomotive at Liverpool Street Station. Circle the differences in the upper image and send the panel to **HOAY 824, Soldier**, Ordnance Road, Aldershot, Hampshire GU11 2DU by July 30.

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

May competition: First correct entry drawn at random and winner of the £100 was **Pte K Chikuku**, McMullen Bcks, Marchwood. Runners-up **Sgt N Wallace**, AFC Harrogate and **Mrs Dawn Malloy**, Imphal Barracks, each win a £25 gift voucher.



FORMER Defence Secretary "Basra Bob" Ainsworth could well make a shock move into Hollywood's A-list if this month's *Freeze Frame* entrants have anything to do with it.

A glittering movie career may seem a million miles away from the pressures of Government, but *Soldier's* cadre of captioners appeared not to think the career change too outrageous.

Mr Wayne Baker set the ball rolling with the retro-flavoured "Look, it's Bobo-cop! I wonder if he'll give me his autograph", while SSgt Marie McChesney (ACIO Lancaster) has gone down the George Lucas route with the sci-fi chic of "Young Bob Skywalker... I am your father".

But with Bob's step onto the silver screen more likely to involve the blockbusters of the future rather than the hits of the past, we couldn't look beyond the entry of Capt J Morris (203 (Welsh) Field Hospital (V)).



Picture: Harland Quarrington

"United States Secretary of Defense Robert Gates was unmoved by British counterpart Dr Fox's support for the English hip-hop scene, insisting it still had nothing on old-school Snoop Doggy Dogg."

WIN A BOOK: Write your own caption for the photo above and send it to us by July 30. The best, in our opinion, will win a copy of *Helmet for My Pillow* by Robert Leckie.

His up-to-the-minute offering of "After artistic differences on the set of *Iron Man 3*, 'Basra Bob' Ainsworth willingly stepped up for the role of Tony Stark" wins him a copy of *The Battle of Waterloo*, by Jeremy Black

All that is left is to find out whether this month's star, new Defence Secretary Dr Liam Fox, has the x-factor.

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www.armywivesunited.co.uk

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www.sftf.mod.uk

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

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www.forcesequine.co.uk

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www.nfassociation.org

The "Not Forgotten" Association for disabled ex-Service personnel aims to provide entertainment and recreation for war-wounded personnel to alleviate the tedium of their lives and give them something they can look forward to.

www2.armynet.mod.uk/armysafety

This Chief Environment and Safety Officer (Army) website provides up-to-date advice on safety and environmental issues affecting the Army.

www.facebook.com/britisharmy

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www.blesma.org

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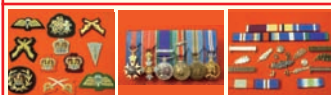
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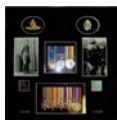
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JULY'S SCORCHING LINE-UP

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Mass appeal: *Bourne* series collaborators Matt Damon and Paul Greengrass team up once more in *Green Zone*, a politically-charged thriller about the hunt for Iraqi WMDs

Picture: Copyright: © 2010 Universal Studios. All rights reserved.



Action Man: Matt Damon dons camouflage as he goes on the hunt for Iraqi WMDs in *Green Zone*, which is out to own on DVD now

Damon's in the Zone

Fiction and reality combine in Hollywood hunt for weapons of mass destruction

Interview: Stephen Tyler

FOR all the successes of the multinational mission in Iraq, the early days of the conflict were overshadowed by the fruitless hunt for weapons of mass destruction (WMDs).

The belief that Saddam Hussein was harbouring munitions capable of inflicting huge numbers of casualties across the globe led to the invasion and country-wide search of the Middle Eastern nation.

But the fact that nothing was found remains a major cause for debate in some quarters and the issue forms the backdrop for director Paul Greengrass's latest blockbuster, *Green Zone*.

Set in the aftermath of the invasion in 2003, the film follows Chief Warrant Officer Roy Miller (the thoroughly-convincing Matt Damon) as he attempts to track down WMDs in Baghdad.

The subsequent labyrinthine plot bears a striking similarity to Greengrass and Damon's *Bourne* series of films, but the director said his latest work is much more grounded in reality.

"People know the kind of films Matt and I have made before so it was always going to have

a certain drive and inquisitive quality," he said during an interview in London.

"It's going to feel like it's addressing what's going on with a real-world point of view and attitude. It's not *Bourne* – it's one step with him into different territory."

The film kicks off at a frantic pace as Damon's character gets sucked into a global conspiracy when he is tasked to lead a team to sites across Iraq looking for hidden WMDs.

Miller's doubts about the weapons' existence are solidified after a dangerous search of an industrial facility turns up nothing more than porcelain bathroom equipment.

His suspicions are heightened by journalist Amy Ryan (Lawrie Dayne) and the story twists and turns as Miller finds out just how deep the deception goes.

For Damon, the opportunity to appear in a film which has such obvious real-world parallels was one of the key factors in convincing him to sign up for the project.

"I didn't have to be persuaded [to be in the film] because it seemed like fertile ground to make something from," he said.

"There was so much there and the question was could we make something that had audience

appeal in a film about a fictional character in the real world?"

Although the pace of *Green Zone* suffers at times from the intricacies of its own story, the action sequences dotted throughout provide an enjoyable balance between style and substance.

The movie's take on a real-life subject of such importance feels lightweight and the overlap of fact and fiction is at times hard to buy into.

But on the whole, this is a well-paced military movie which relies on more than kinetic battles to endear itself to the audience.

While its title is more likely to conjure up images of a verdant swathe of Helmand province than Baghdad's international zone, Damon hopes that *Green Zone* will have a broad appeal to the general public.

"If you engage any American in a discussion about the world, Afghanistan will come up first and then the issue of the economy and jobs," he said. "Iraq isn't on the front pages, but whether or not it's in the forefront of people's consciousness there will be an appetite for this type of film."

● *Green Zone* is available to buy on Blu-ray and DVD on July 12 ■

From a Russian prison camp to an underground fight club, *Soldier* checks out the latest DVD releases...

The Perfect Sleep out on July 26

THIS delicious Film Noir is brimming with violent intensity and attitude. The film's narrator and hero **Anton Pardoe** has returned to an unnamed city ten years after fleeing men who wanted to kill him. He wants revenge, they want revenge, everybody is getting killed and he is beaten, stabbed, skewered, strangled and whipped but fights on. He has one friend, a sinister physician who kills people clinically, slicing and dicing with a useful explanation of the death to follow. Great visual noir photo cinema and excellent fight sequences, but if you blink you'll lose the plot. One to watch.



WO2 Ritchie Downing, 3 AAC

Edge of Darkness out now

THIS untypical **Mel Gibson** thriller had me hooked from the very start. Gibson is superb throughout the film, switching easily from hardened cop and Vietnam master sergeant to doting father. The circumstances surrounding the death of his daughter are both mysterious and wholly-believable in this new world of political cover-ups and dubious business ethics. Unlike many thrillers, and to the film's credit, the action comes thick and fast from the off. The assassin (**Ray Winstone**), though, steals the show with his brooding lack of malevolence to his victims – though his mercy is his eventual undoing.



Capt Jim Berry, R Irish

In Transit out now

THE story of German prisoners of war in a female-run Russian prison camp in the winter of 1946 is a new and unexplored film subject. There are many things to like about *In Transit* – the acting is good, the cinematography pleasing and the costumes and atmosphere faithfully-realised. On the other hand there seem to be unnecessary snippets of artiness which only aid to slow the pace of the film. All-in-all the relationships between characters are enough to create a watchable movie. I would suggest you rent rather than buy but I anticipate this title being offered at competitive prices in the not-too-distant future.



Tpr Alistair Campbell-Grieve, RY



Controversial conflict: Chief Warrant Officer Roy Miller battles to find the truth behind the intelligence suggesting Iraq is a haven for deadly weapons

12 out now

TWELVE illegal street fighters of varying styles and backgrounds are assembled to fight for a £500,000 pot fronted by a cynical and vicious underworld syndicate. I am sorry to say that this British film underlines the fact that low budget sometimes leads to low quality. More clichéd than a weekend of WWE wrestling with only nodding acknowledgment to side plots, the script is corny and predictable (I actually lip-synched one line, it really was that transparent). With fight scenes reminiscent of a wedding reception in the Queen Vic, I can only hope that the less-than-subtle hint to a sequel is forgotten.

Capt Neil Johnson, AAC



Win... Life During Wartime

TEN years after his critically-acclaimed *Happiness*, indie filmmaker **Todd Solondz** revisits the tangled personal lives of three sisters and the people they love. The past haunts the present and challenges the future in this dark but humorous satire. The question of forgiveness and its limits is a key theme intertwined with intersecting love stories. The kind people at Evermere Entertainment have given *Soldier* five copies of the DVD to give away. To have a chance of winning, tell us the name of the man behind the film. Answers on a postcard to the usual address or by email to comps@soldiermagazine.co.uk

Closing date: July 30



Win... Shrink

KEVIN Spacey stars as Henry Carter, L.A.'s top celebrity psychiatrist in this quirky comedy-drama. Carter coaches an A-list clientele but, disillusioned with his career, his life takes a nose-dive after the death of his wife. His only hope of salvation could come from his first pro-bono case – for a beautiful-but-troubled teenage girl with family problems. Our friends at Lionsgate Entertainment are offering five readers the chance to win a copy of the DVD. To enter, tell us which city Henry Carter works in. Answers on a postcard to the usual address or send an email to comps@soldiermagazine.co.uk

Closing date: July 30





China comeback: Brutal duo Kane and Lynch unleash mayhem in the backstreets of Shanghai in IO Interactive's sequel

Lynch mob's return

Ultra-violent gaming pair back in action to take on China's criminal underworld

Preview: Stephen Tyler

ANYONE who battled their way through the first *Kane and Lynch* game will recall the titular duo's hard-to-love personalities.

Where most flawed fictional heroes make up for their shortcomings with good intentions – *Die Hard*'s John McClane for example – this video game pair made no attempt to hide their downright violent natures.

Tasked with recovering a crime syndicate's stolen money or face having their family members executed, ex-mercenary Kane and self-medicating psychopath Lynch readily embarked on a worldwide killing spree.

Their murderous rampage, played out in 2007's *Kane and Lynch: Dead Men*, divided opinion between reviewers who appreciated the game's plot and pace but criticised its mechanics and overly-brutal storyline.

Developer IO Interactive took the feedback on board and has come back nearly three years later with the equally hard-hitting sequel, *Kane and Lynch: Dog Days*.

Final details about the title, which is due for

release later this year, remain sketchy, but the action now takes place in the seedy criminal underworld of Shanghai.

The series' movie-like presentation has also been tweaked after IO Interactive consulted with gamers to find out exactly what they wanted from the brutal twosome's return.

Their response was to ask for a visual style more in line with the user-generated videos found on the likes of YouTube and general manager Niels Jorgensen was happy to oblige.

"Gamers are always looking for something new and that is exactly what they are going to get with *Kane and Lynch 2: Dog Days*," he said. "A special thanks to gamers worldwide for their feedback. They are certainly in for a shock as we, with immense pride, welcome back our two dear, violent and somewhat unfortunate friends."

Although final details about the single player campaign remain under wraps, the developer has confirmed that the multiplayer mode will feature the return of the Fragile Alliance system.

Players work alongside others as part of a criminal gang, but have the option to betray their team at any point. Succeed and they make off with the loot all to themselves. Fail and they respawn as cops aiming to prevent the heist.

"We've been working hard on making it a much more expansive, rewarding and captivating experience," said Jorgensen. "The gritty visuals bring new intensity and realism to multiplayer."

The visceral nature of *Kane and Lynch*'s adventures into criminal underworlds across the globe have attracted interest from outside of the gaming fraternity.

DC Comics – the publisher responsible for drawing the adventures of superheroes including Superman and Batman – recognised the franchise's potential and has signed a deal to produce a comic book series about the pair.

New York Times artist Ben Templesmith will take charge of drawing the cover, while Chris Mitten will lead the way for the rest of the title.

Jorgensen said that he was excited about Kane and Lynch's crossover into new forms of media.

"We could not be happier about this partnership and expansion into comics," he said. "Who better to work with than DC Comics?"

Hank Kanalz, of DC Comics, added: "Kane and Lynch are two of the most interesting video game characters I have ever seen."

"I think this new series will show the diversity of our line of books as our creators capture the essence of these two criminals." ■

From going on stage with Green Day to some international espionage, we fire up the latest releases...

Green Day Rockband for Xbox 360

THEIR particular brand of pop punk may not appeal to everyone, but play *Green Day Rockband* and you can't fail to admit that the American trio's music is catchy. From the youthful exuberance of the *Dookie*-era to the more melancholic recent releases, this game lets up to six players recreate a staggering 47 hits using the guitar, drum and microphone attachments. The gameplay follows the tried-and-tested formula of the previous *Rockband* titles and provides some genuinely amusing moments when played with friends. An undeniably fun game, but of little concern to anyone without a passing interest in Green Day.



Out now

Alpha Protocol for Xbox 360

THIS third-person action game about a shadowy group operating outside the government earns extra points for trying something different. Rather than follow the well-travelled straight shooter path, it invokes role playing game elements which, for the most part, work well. Players earn experience points which can be traded in to increase their secret agent's abilities, while frequent dialogue between characters requires split-second button pressing to choose whether to be aggressive, suave or professional in responses. A poor targeting system and predictable enemies detract from what is otherwise an entertaining title.



Out now

Assassin's Creed: Director's Cut for PC

ALREADY assured of legendary status from its first release, *Assassin's Creed* looks likely to sneak back into the charts courtesy of this special edition. Following the titular assassin's adventures in the Holy Land during the 12th century, this updated version adds in four new game modes which provide an interesting diversion for veterans who have already mastered the single player game. The graphics were cutting-edge when the game was first released and time has not been too cruel on them. Fans of the series should give this a go, while it is a perfect introduction for newcomers to tackle.



Out now



Shanghai surprise: The return of the engrossing Fragile Alliance multiplayer mode should add greater replay value to *Kane and Lynch: Dog Days*

The Sims 3: Ambitions for PC

THE second update to Electronic Art's time-swallowing *The Sims 3* focuses on careers – and it's almost got as many on offer as the Armed Forces. From realistic roles such as firefighting to slightly more surreal paths including ghost hunting, the opportunities to earn some virtual cash are as varied as they are interesting. Certain jobs – the stylist and tattooist choices, for example – allow you to wield your creative skills on the other Sims in the game, bringing new haircuts, clothes and skin art to life. While this is certainly an amusing addition to the series, it is probably best left to the most hardcore of *Sims* aficionados.



Out now

Fifa 11 for Xbox 360, PS3 and PC

LOOK closer at the picture to your right and you'll be forgiven for thinking the line between fiction and reality has blurred beyond distinction. EA Sports' footballing juggernaut returns for *Fifa 11* later this year and the developer has gone to great lengths to make this title the most visually-attractive to date. Early screenshots show photo-realistic faces, kits and stadia which could pass for the real thing on first glance. The game's licence means that players will be able to take charge of the usual array of famous – and not-so-famous – teams from the world's best leagues when the title hits stores later this year.



Out this autumn

EA Sports MMA for Xbox 360

THE *UFC Undisputed* series has staked its claim to the mixed martial arts – MMA to fans – fighting game crown, but heavyweight developer EA Sports is set to throw its hat into the ring with the release of *EA Sports MMA*. Featuring the best-of-the-rest from outside of the Ultimate Fighting Championship, the game offers up brawls in square, circular and hexagonal arenas. A career mode allows players to create their own fighters and EA will be hoping to provide a less-clunky attack and defence system than its UFC rival. Early screenshots suggest the game will at least look the part when it is released late this year.



Out in October



Remembering the past: Rockers Oasis serve up a definitive back catalogue of their historic 15-year career in *Time Flies*, out now

The final chapter

After 15 years of sibling rivalry Oasis bow out with complete singles collection

Review: Richard Long

WHEN Britpop stalwarts Oasis announced they were splitting in August last year, it was nothing new for long-serving fans of the iconic band.

From the moment they crashed into the mainstream in 1994, the spats between brothers Noel and Liam Gallagher attracted almost as many headlines as the music itself.

However, the numerous disputes were always followed by reconciliation as the band continued for another album or stadium tour.

But 2009 had a sense of finality about it and the release of *Time Flies* draws a tidy line under an unforgettable chapter in music history as the brothers Gallagher go their separate ways, this time for good.

With 26 tracks and more than 130 minutes of music, this two-disc set celebrates the work of Oasis from start to finish.

But at first it is hard to imagine who this album is actually aimed at, unless you buy the deluxe version which features a selection of 36 music videos as well as their last recorded live show at

The Roundhouse in London.

Die-hard fans will undoubtedly own every recording the band ever made, but on the other hand it serves as a timely reminder of the brilliance the indie rockers created in their mid-to-late 90s pomp.

Debut album *Definitely Maybe* was an undisputed high and the raw energy and excitement it offered is captured here.

Early singles *Supersonic* and *Shakermaker* have a simple formula in terms of rhyming lyrics and guitar riffs but this does not detract from the fact they have very much stood the test of time.

Stadium anthems *Cigarettes and Alcohol* and *Live Forever*, hit tracks that could easily be considered as the band's zenith, are simply superb and reflect everything that was once great about Oasis.

The second album *What's The Story Morning Glory?* yielded further chart success and hits such as *Wonderwall*, *Some Might Say* and *Don't Look Back in Anger* reflect a time when the Gallaghers, and their supporting cast, seemingly had the world at their feet.

The now-legendary gigs at Maine Road and Knebworth confirmed they were one of the hottest acts on the planet, but little did we know that this

was their defining moment.

Immense anticipation surrounded third album *Be Here Now* and when it was finally released in 1997 it met with mixed reviews at best.

Listening to *Time Flies* makes you wonder if such criticism was fair. *D'You Know What I Mean* and *Stand By Me* are solid enough offerings while *All Around The World* has a certain charm, despite its elaborate and unnecessary repetition late on.

While hindsight does these songs justice the same cannot be said for tracks such as *Who Feels Love?* and *The Hindu Times*. These were turgid and uninspiring on their release and they remain so now.

The later albums failed to match those early highs but as a fan I still found myself buying these records in the hope Oasis would recapture that magic. Ultimately I was always disappointed.

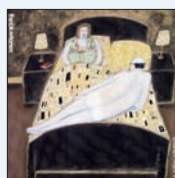
I'm Outta Time was the final nail in the coffin, a shocking song that suggested one of the biggest bands for a generation were, as their track said, out of time.

Though *Time Flies* does exactly what it says on the tin, anyone with a passing interest would be better served by firing up those early defining albums, along with a few B-sides, to truly remember Oasis at their best. ■

From Britpop's immovable object to the new Lily in the musical meadow, we try the best of the rest...

A New Athens by The Bluetones

A *NEW Athens* marks the first release from **The Bluetones** since their critically acclaimed self-titled album in 2006. This is the sixth studio offering from the London-formed group, who achieved notable success in the 90s thanks to hits such as *Slight Return*. If you ignore the opening tune, which may well have been sampled with the help of a Casio keyboard from the early 80s, the rest of the album delivers some really great guitar-led tracks backed up by solid drums and gentle lyrics that sweep you along on a majestic journey. It's hard to pick a favourite song among this selection and The Bluetones have successfully shown what surviving the Britpop era can lead to.



Ray Kalaker, civvy

Dirty Sweet by American Spiritual

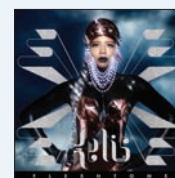
SAN Diego's own classic rock quintet **Dirty Sweet** return with their second album and it by no means fails to deliver. Jam-packed with 11 songs that tackle everything from blues to proto-rock, you get picked up and carried to the end by a wave of influences. You feel like you're listening to **Led Zeppelin** one minute and **Seasick Steve** the next. *Get Up, Get Out* and *Crimson Cavalry* both drew me in straight away with their heavy rhythms and were closely followed by ballads like *Star-Strangled Banner*. This is simply good all-round music and I can only assume their live act must be amazing. If you are reading this then your next move should be to download this album as soon as possible.



Sgt Matt McLeish, R Signals

Flesh Tone by Kelis

I WAS disappointed at this new album from **Kelis**. Her previous songs, on the 2006 release *Kelis Was Here*, were far better than those offered on this recording. She has gone from pop to dance, which really doesn't suit her. *Flesh Tone* sounds like a revival of a **Ministry of Sound** club classics CD from 2004. A departure from the Kelis we are familiar with, this record is poor. I had hoped that the awful track *Acapella* was just a low point and that the rest of the album would be better. I was wrong – it was worse. With all the attention she had leading up to this release, I was certainly hoping for something stunning. In my opinion this is a bad album, rushed and more than a little desperate.



LCpl Kerri Gilding, AGC



Time to say goodbye: Last year's split proved to be the final straw for Oasis, who bid farewell with a new album featuring their most famous tracks

American Slang by The Gaslight Anthem

AFTER making a superb breakthrough with 2008 release *The '59 Sound*, New Jersey quartet **The Gaslight Anthem** return for another assault on the UK markets. With a running time just shy of 35 minutes fans could have a reason to feel hard done by, while the songs themselves fall slightly short of their predecessor. Opening track *American Slang* offers an energetic and enjoyable introduction and *Bring It On* points to the obvious influence **Bruce Springsteen** has had on the group. On the whole this is a decent enough effort but there is a feeling that it lacks any real progression in the music. You could even argue that the band has taken a slightly backwards step.

Stephen Tyler, Soldier



Eliza Doolittle by Eliza Doolittle

WITH a voice as crisp as a packet of Walkers this young lady delivers some strong messages in her lyrics. Her style can be described as a solid, acoustic, lovable variation of pop and fans of **Fairground Attraction** and **Edie Brickell & New Bohemians** will adore her punchy lyrics and energy. Imagine **Lily Allen** with a beehive, signed to Atlantic Records and doing her thing in the 60s or maybe **Amy Winehouse** without the booze and scandal – that is essentially **Eliza**. While I enjoyed listening to this album I just couldn't get Lily Allen out of my mind and, unfortunately, Eliza's talent is going to go unappreciated as the vacancy for Lily Allen has been suitably filled by... Lily Allen.

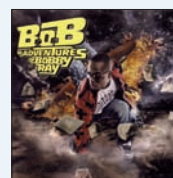
Pte Gary Parker, RLC



The Adventures of Bobby Ray

HIP-hop newcomer **Bobby Ray Simmons**, aka **B.o.B**, has been making waves in the USA, with his debut release boasting a number-one single and album. The 21-year-old has worked with some impressive collaborators (**Eminem**, **Lupe Fiasco**, **Rivers Cuomo**) to produce *The Adventures of Bobby Ray*, which suggests he is an artist held in high regard. While this is decent enough you shouldn't get too carried away. Hit single *Nothin On You* is more radio friendly than out-and-out hip-hop but *Airplanes* offers an impressive rock edge in what is a diverse album. This is definitely worth checking out but there may well be better to come further down the line.

Richard Long, Soldier





Air supremacy: *Fire Strike 7/9*, published by Ebury and out now, showcases the skills of the Army's Joint Terminal Attack Controllers

Salute to radio stars

Latest Afghan account hails unique role of Operation Herrick's 'contact winners'

Interview: Stephen Tyler

FACED with the might of the British Army's Infantry in 2007, it was the man with the stubby black aerial poking out of his backpack that struck the greatest fear into the hearts of the Taliban.

The insurgents operating in the Green Zone north of Qada Kalay had good reason to fear the soldier, Sgt Paul "Bommer" Grahame, for every time he appeared in a contact, devastating bombs began to fall from the sky.

Sgt Grahame (LD) was serving in Helmand province as a Joint Terminal Attack Controller (JTAC), the man responsible for coordinating air strikes on enemy positions.

Utilising a variety of platforms including F15s, Harrier jump jets, A10 tank busters and Apache gunships, the NCO was shot at, blown up and mortared as he took the fight to the Taliban from the very front lines of Op Herrick 7. His actions were instrumental in the successes of 2 Mercian, who his five-man 19 Regiment Royal Artillery fire support team was attached to, and they have now been brought to life in *Fire Strike 7/9*.

Written using Sgt Grahame's combat notes from theatre and the creative input of *Apache Dawn* author Damien Lewis, the book is a gripping insight into a role that packs more punch than almost any other in Afghanistan.

"I honestly think it's one of the best jobs in the Army," Bommer told *Soldier*. "Although the mission has moved on to IEDs, it was all kinetic on my tour. The contact winner was air power so there was plenty of opportunity for me to do what I was trained for."

Sgt Grahame signed up for the testing four-week JTAC course at RAF Leeming after serving for ten years as a CVRT commander.

He said: "The teaching and instructing at RAF Leeming and the way they conduct the course is just fantastic."

"The knowledge they have is second-to-none and the instructors are the best of the best. The bottom line is that if you learn the skills right then people don't get hurt."

None of the build-up to the tour made it into the book, but the reasons why soon become apparent. Almost all of *Fire Strike 7/9*'s 300-plus pages are filled with wall-to-wall action.

It is the staggering amount of contacts that drives home just how difficult and yet important

the JTAC role is. Imagine, for instance, knowing your comrades are surrounded by the enemy and in need of assistance, but also realising that dropping any kind of munition carries the threat of wounding your own men. It is a situation Sgt Grahame faced on more than one occasion, but in each case he used his gold-standard training and ability to improvise to save his colleagues' lives.

"Maj Simon Butt, a 2 Mercian company commander, understood the air and what I could give him," Sgt Grahame added. "He would ask me to do my work, although he didn't rely on me he had so much trust in me."

"The 2 Mercian lads were great as well. Usually if you go on a course or exercise and you're the external man, it takes a little bit of time to bed in. In Afghanistan I was treated like one of them from the start."

While it does not skimp on stories of combat from the infantryman's perspective – Sgt Grahame went on scores of patrols after all – *Fire Strike 7/9*'s appeal lies in its focus on a largely unheralded but massively-important role.

Tales of front-line fighting in Afghanistan are not hard to come by, but Sgt Grahame's experiences of bringing air power to bear cast an entirely fresh perspective on the conflict. ■

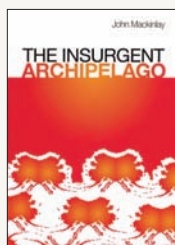
From disparate dissidents to determination and defiance in Omagh, a scan of this month's literary releases...

The Insurgent Archipelago by J Mackinlay

JOHN Mackinlay

attempts to understand the development of modern insurgencies from their Maoist-defining origins. He expertly captures the complexity of counter-insurgency (COIN) when dealing with the many dimensions of insurgencies and advocates the use of decentralised and organic methods to defeat them. Suggesting that disparate dissidents have used globalisation to unite in an attempt to undermine state actors, the book gives an in-depth appreciation of the modern insurgent and how he stays ahead of the COIN practitioner. The requirement of intellectual rigour and the author's academic style make this a heavy read.

Maj Eddie Elms, AGC



White Ship, Red Crosses by Nicci Pugh

WIDELY recognised as a long overdue and essential historical narrative of medical care during the Falklands War, this nurse's tale describes the fascinating events and personal experiences of those that served and were treated aboard the hospital ship *Uganda*. "Heal Navy" was a phrase attributed to the *Uganda* during the conflict and this book explains why the tag was so deserved. From the ship's 60-hour transformation from children's educational vessel to fully-functional hospital to its journey home, **Pugh** was at the centre of the action and has recounted her experiences with passion, pride and a mix of medical detail and humour.

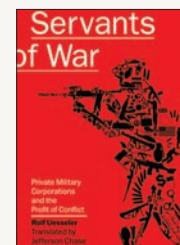
Capt Jim Vincent, RLC



Servants of War by Rolf Uesseler

THIS book offers an in-depth expose into the growing use of private military corporations/ companies by both state and non-state actors in support of their interests. Often operating in a legal no-man's-land, **Uesseler** discusses how "hired guns" are functioning throughout the world and reveals how they make a profit from conflict. The worrying consequence is that security is overshadowed by the desire of companies and their shareholders to make financial gains; compromising justice, peace and stability while escaping public scrutiny. An excellent text for those interested in the commercialisation of conflict.

Capt Fraser Dowling, AGC

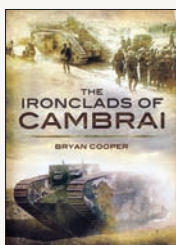




Bommer command: Sgt Paul Grahame (LD) served alongside 2 Mercian as a Joint Terminal Attack Controller on the front lines of Op Herrick 7

The Ironclads of Cambrai by B Cooper

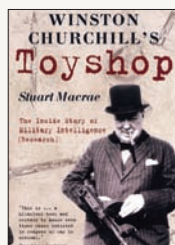
HERALDING the era of mechanised warfare, the famous battle of Cambrai in late 1917 saw the first use of tanks en masse and brought cheering crowds into the streets of London where church bells rang in celebration. Pen & Sword's reprinting of this classic, with a striking dust jacket by Jon Wilkinson, is very welcome. **Bryan Cooper** tells a vivid and exciting story, and it is not to belittle his work to say that research has advanced so far since 1967 that it should be read rather as a period piece than for new insights. Historians today would see tanks as a key part of the all-arms-battle rather than a war-winning weapon.



Dr Rodney Atwood, military historian

Winston Churchill's Toyshop

FIRST published in 1971, **Col Stuart Macrae's** *Toyshop* tells the story of an unconventional "back room" of the War Office during the Second World War. Formed in 1939 at the behest of Winston Churchill who wanted results unencumbered by the usual bureaucratic delays, Department M.D.1 was tasked with designing and developing secret weapons for use by the three Services. The limpet mine, PIAT anti-tank weapon, bridge carrying tank and sticky bomb were among the weapons originated by M.D.1, which was given the sobriquet Churchill's toy shop. An absorbing book to read and written with a sense of humour.



Lt Col (Retd) Dawson Pratt, R Signals

Aftermath by Ruth Dudley Edwards

THE explosion of a massive Real IRA bomb in the centre of Omagh on August 15, 1998 killed two unborn babies, five men, 14 women and nine children and is remembered as the worst massacre in Northern Ireland's modern history.

This moving title tells the story of that terrible day and, more importantly, it describes the aftermath faced by the families of the victims and the survivors of the atrocity. The determination and resilience of the Omagh families and their long struggle to bring terrorists to justice is both impressive and admirable. This is not a book I would normally read but I am glad I did.



Maj Mike Peters, AAC



Water wizard: The Chilly unit, seen here attached to a Camelbak hydration system, uses filters to keep water temperature down

Troops' liquid asset

Chilly unit aims to keep a lid on rising temperatures of water in hydration systems

Review: Stephen Tyler

AS the British climate tries its best to provide temperatures worthy of the summer months, the number of people complaining that it is just too hot rockets.

Office workers used to wrapping up against the chilly winter period suddenly find themselves sweating through mild heat waves that barely trouble the 30 Degree mark on a thermometer.

But compare their lot to the troops serving in Afghanistan and any lingering sympathy goes straight out of the window.

While the British workforce graft their way through eight-hour days in air-conditioned offices, soldiers can be out on the ground for days in temperatures approaching 50 Degrees.

The rigours of modern operations have placed a significant importance on water intake, an issue that has been revolutionised by mobile hydration systems from the likes of Camelbak.

The backpacks, which come with inbuilt water reservoirs and flexible drinking tubes, allow personnel to keep their fluid levels topped up even in the most demanding situations.

But despite its undoubted value, the technology is not without its limitations. Take a hydration system out for extended periods in the relentless heat of Helmand, for example, and the water soon begins to heat up.

This issue was noticed by Welsh equipment manufacturer BCB International so the company set about finding a way to keep liquid cool without creating a significant weight increase.

Their solution arrived in the form of the Chilly Water Cooling System. Looking at first glance like an uninspiring lump of plastic, the rectangular box, which retails at £45.99, promises to prevent water from heating up quite as quickly.

Soldier took advantage of last month's rising temperatures – albeit well short of those in Afghanistan – to put the gadget to the test.

Initial impressions were good. Although slightly clunky in its hard plastic casing, Chilly is lightweight and the design means that it attaches neatly to the upper back of a hydration system.

Once in place, the end of the drinking tube attached to the reservoir clips into one side of the unit, with the other end – the one you drink from – hooked into the other.

There are no mechanical parts, no consumable pieces and no batteries. Instead, the water is

drawn across a series of filters which lowers its temperature before it reaches the thirsty user.

With the system in place, we filled the reservoir with water and left it in direct sunlight outside *Soldier* HQ for an entire day. In the interests of science, we did the same with a second hydration system without the cooling kit fitted.

BCB International were keen to stress that Chilly does not deliver chilled water – indeed, that would be impossible without a much-larger, much-heavier unit.

Instead, they argued, liquid drawn through Chilly's filters remains at a palatable temperature for much longer than if it had gone unfiltered.

Keen to put the claims to the test, we clamped down on the drinking hose of the regular system in our test to see how warm it had got. Even with temperatures in the mid-20s, the water was more than lukewarm.

Next up was the Chilly-equipped bag. A quick drink later and it seemed that BCB International had marketed its product well. While the water was definitely not cold, it was noticeably cooler than the untreated fluid.

While it does not solve the problem of overheating water, Chilly is certainly a step in the right direction. ■

From muscle-building meal bars to fire-starting gel sachets, we check out the latest kit offerings...

Maximuscle Progain Flapjack

ARMY catering means that soldiers have a distinct advantage over civilians when it comes to eating the correct amount of calories each day, but for anyone looking to build muscle without piling on the pounds, Maximuscle's Progain Flapjack is a useful tool. Containing 22g of protein and 318 calories per bar, it certainly packs a lot into its 90g frame. The inclusion of creatine supports lean muscle and strength gains and probiotic ingredients aid digestion. We tried the mixed berry flavour which tasted overly-sweet and left a strong aftertaste, although it is much more palatable and easier to swallow than alternative products on the market.



www.maximuscle.com/progainflapjack

Maximuscle Promax Meal

HAILED by makers Maximuscle as being "one of the highest-quality and best-tasting high-protein bars ever made", these stodgy chocolate treats have a massive billing to live up to. Containing 21g of protein and less than three grammes of saturated fat, the bars are a good choice for anyone on a low-fat diet. The low glycaemic index and high fibre content promotes a feeling of fullness which should stop consumers from snacking on unhealthy treats. The chocolate flavour tasted authentic, although it was noticeably sickly and *Soldier* struggled to get through a bar in one sitting. The two-bar-a-day recommendation is certainly more than enough.



www.maximuscle.com/promaxmealbars

Win... Maximuscle goodies

If you are looking to increase muscle and keep fat to a minimum, getting your diet spot on is vitally important. Thankfully for those of us without a physical training instructor's knowledge, Maximuscle products offer a simple method of topping up on healthy calories and protein without overloading on fat. The company's powders, bars and drinks are used by top athletes around the world and we have a box of Promax Meal and Progain Flapjacks to give away to one lucky winner. To get your hands on the bars, simply tell us how much protein is in a Progain Flapjack. Answers on a postcard to the usual address or email comps@soldiermagazine.co.uk



Closing date: July 30



Cool customer: BCB International's Chilly unit attaches to most portable hydration systems to provide users with a way to keep water temperatures down

ENGO Blister Prevention Patches

WITH recent research from the United States Army suggesting that 40 per cent of all soldiers suffer from blisters during their training, this ingeniously-simple product could prove invaluable. Consisting of an adhesive strip measuring less than three inches wide, ENGO's Blister Prevention Patches are applied to the inside of footwear rather than to the foot itself. This prevention-is-better-than-cure philosophy works because the resilient material used to create the patches lowers friction, countering the rubbing effect that causes blisters. Even better, each of the easily-applied patches lasts for up to 300 miles before wearing out.



www.GoENGO.co.uk

Greenheat Charcoal and Fire Starter

WITH barbecue season well and truly upon us, the yearly question of how to best get your charcoal white-hot has resurfaced.

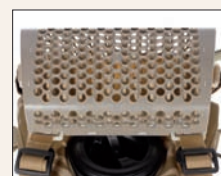
Although fire-starting sachets are not new, Greenheat is hoping to add something different to the market with its Charcoal and Fire Starter gel. Designed for campsite fires as well as barbecues, the packets are remarkably easy to use. Simply tear the sachet, squeeze the gel over the charcoal or wood, lay the empty packet over the top and cover before lighting. The gel is smokeless, odourless and non-toxic and it even boasts impressive green credentials as it is made from an entirely organic base.



www.bcb.in.com

Win... Camelbak with Chilly unit

IF you want to hit the great outdoors this summer without lugging bottles of water around with you, a portable hydration system is an essential purchase. Add an inline liquid-cooling system into the mix and you are left with a piece of kit ready for the best that military service and civvy street can throw at it. We have teamed up with the kind people at BCB International to offer up Camelbak Hydration Systems fitted with Chilly cooling units to two lucky readers. For your chance to win, tell us where BCB International is based. Send your answers on a postcard to the usual address or by email to comps@soldiermagazine.co.uk



Closing date: July 30

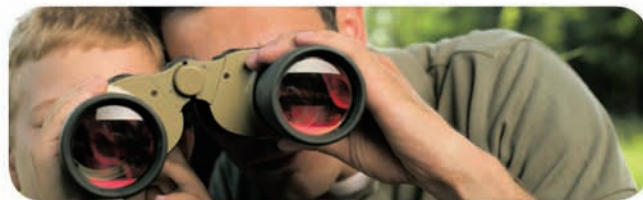


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WOOLWICH CUP



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POTGIETER
LEADS THE WAY



THE FAST AND THE FURIOUS



Race ace: Matt Hamilton, who is supporting Help for Heroes, takes to the track during the Oulton Park stage of this year's British Touring Car Championship

Interview: Richard Long
Pictures: Nick Dungan

IN the increasingly-competitive world of motorsport, lucrative sponsorship deals can often be the deciding factor between success and failure on the track.

With fractions of a second separating the winners from the losers, teams

are continually searching for the extra investment that will help fine-tune their cars and give glory to their drivers.

Race ace Matt Hamilton has yet to enjoy such benefits and in his debut season in the British Touring Car Championship (BTCC) he has been competing without a main sponsor.

But instead of leaving his Honda Civic Type-R without the customary

logos and emblems of such cars, the 20-year-old decided to use the lack of sponsorship as an opportunity to show his support for the Armed Forces.

"We did a charity kart race in aid of Help for Heroes at the start of the season. We raised £14,000 for what is a great cause," Hamilton told *SoldierSport*.

"When the British Touring Car Championship started we didn't have a



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2006: Formula BMW Rookie Cup race winner; 5th in Formula BMW UK Championship Rookie Cup; Formula BMW Frank Williams

Sportsman Trophy; named Formula BMW World Final top English rookie
2007: Formula Palmer Audi race winner; Racing Steps Foundation finalist
2008: 6th in British Formula Ford Championship; Formula

Palmer Audi race winner; vice champion in the Formula Palmer Audi McLaren autosport shoot-out
2010: Wins first points in British Touring Car Championship; Youngest HiQ Champagne Moment winner

main sponsor and instead of having a blank car we decided to use the Help for Heroes logo.

"We have had some Army guys down at the track, they have been in the garage and we have shown them around and given them an insight into a race weekend. I really enjoy doing that and it is nice to give something back to the people who are doing great things for our country."

Hamilton is using this season as a stepping stone to success and he hopes to gain the valuable experience that will hold him in good stead for future campaigns.

"It is a great series and I am racing against drivers I have looked up to since I was ten years old," he explained. "I got in at the end of last year and this is my first full season."

"I am driving a seven-year-old car with a five-year-old engine so we are using this season as a learning curve and we hope to make a full assault next year."

With encouraging progress being made on the track the driver praised the support he has received from his team, RH Motorsport, which is based in Watford.

"They are just five miles away so I can go down and help set things up, it is quite good having the team so close," Hamilton said.

"They are putting in a great amount of work and all their efforts are greatly appreciated. They are a knowledgeable team and we are doing the best we can with an older car against bigger teams with newer engines."

Such efforts have already brought their rewards this season.

Hamilton took his first BTCC points at Brands Hatch, where he also became the youngest winner of the HiQ Champagne Moment award, an accolade voted for by fans in an online poll.

"Brands Hatch has been the highlight of the year. There was heavy rain all

weekend and that tends to level things out in the power stakes," he said.

"That was our most competitive meeting and we got a lot of recognition for it."

"I am in a car that is not expected to win races so there is no pressure on me and it gives me a chance to learn."

"When we get our hands on the new equipment next year the experience I have gained will be priceless."

And Hamilton has been quick to highlight why the BTCC is so popular with fans across the country.

"It is a great series," he said. "All the spectators have their favourite drivers and there is lots of rivalry and banter going on."

"There is no other series like it. You can

have two or three lead changes every lap and it is so easy to go from first to last in one corner."

"The pushing and shoving makes it more exciting and the race is never over until the chequered flag flies."

As well as facing the challenge of a first full season in the BTCC, Hamilton has been concentrating on his studies at the University of Derby, where he is working towards a degree in sports psychology.

But he happily finds time to collect for Help for Heroes during the pit lane walkabout at each race and if any Service personnel want a behind-the-scenes look at his car and team they are more than welcome.

"We are always happy to do that," Hamilton concluded.

"It is great to show people around, especially guys from the Army. They are doing a fantastic job."

● To follow Hamilton's progress during the current BTCC season, log on to www.matthamiltonracing.com ■

'You can have two or three lead changes every lap and it is so easy to go from first to last in one corner'



HEROES' HONDA

Car: Honda Civic Type-R

Chassis: Arena Chassis # 1

History: Ex-Arena (Andy Prillaux), Syncro (James Kaye)

Top Speed: 155mph

0-100: 4.5sec

Torque: 285nm

Engine: Honda 2000cc 16v

Transmission: Six speed X-Trac sequential

Suspension: Front – MacPherson Strut, Rear – Independent Multilink

Weight: 1,150kg (with driver)

Fuel tank: 60 litres

Wheels: Team Dynamics

Brakes: AP

Tyres: Dunlop

Lubrications: Miller Oils

Picture: Jeff Bloxham



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BRITISH ARMY BOXING PRESENTS...



FINAL BELLES

ABA CHAMPIONSHIPS, JUNE 5-6, PORTSMOUTH

Interviews: Richard Long
Pictures: Steve Dock

A RMY fighters capped a fine season for the women's boxing team with a double success at the national amateur championships.

LBdr Lorna Redfern (RA) and LCpl Emma Bailey (RLC) secured emphatic wins in their bouts as the squad recorded its best results at the Amateur Boxing Association (ABA) finals.

The duo were among three fighters who travelled to Portsmouth for the event, where the unfortunate Pte Alana Murphy (RLC, below left) failed to make it a clean sweep as she slipped to a 27-15 defeat in the 63.5kg category.

Coach Cpl Kris Lang (RLC) was thrilled with the success and believes the trio's performances point to an exciting future for the sport.

"It is the best return the females have ever had at the ABAs so we are extremely pleased," he told *SoldierSport*. "All three performed very well. Alana Murphy was just pipped at the post by a better fighter on the day. Lorna Redfern (below centre) and Emma Bailey (right) boxed out of their

skin and thoroughly deserved to win.

"This is a great return and hopefully it will be the platform for getting more girls into the sport.

"The males had four fighters in the final with one winner and we had three finalists and two winners so on the whole it has been a really successful year for the Army Boxing Association."

Capt Lydia Ratcliffe (AGC), the Army female boxing representative, believes the success in Portsmouth is a fine reward for the effort made behind the scenes in recent times.

"This is something we have been working towards for a number of years," she said. "We have had new coaches in place this season and it is brilliant for Kris Lang, these are the results he has been working for.

"With the 2012 Olympics being in London, where females will be allowed to box for the first time in the Games, there is definitely more focus on women's boxing.

"But there are still a lot of girls out there who do not realise the Army has an organised team."

Newcomer Redfern only joined the Army squad this season but has a

strong pedigree in the sport courtesy of her father, who runs a club in Scotland.

The junior NCO proved her considerable ring craft with a 15-9 win in the 51kg category, while Bailey stormed to a comprehensive 33-17 victory in the 54kg final.

"The best fight for me was Emma Bailey's," Ratcliffe said. "She had a tough bout against a girl who was brawling quite a lot. But she boxed a great fight and won by a convincing scoreline and, if I'm honest, it should have been stopped.

"This is her first year boxing with the Army team and she has really come on."

Fighters, regardless of experience, should email lydiar@armymail.mod.uk to find out more about women's boxing and training camps. ■



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Leading by example: RLC captain SSgt Ellis Langford (left) guided his team to Woolwich Cup glory

Loggies flash in Bordon

THE Royal Logistic Corps lifted the Woolwich Cup following an impressive 3-0 win over the Royal Engineers at Bordon.

Goals from SSgt Ellis Langford, Cpl Paul Douglass and Cpl Gary Adamson sealed the victory for the loggies, who became the fourth different winners of the trophy.

The team defeated the Royal Artillery, Army Air Corps and Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers on their way to the final and will return to defend their title next year.

The clash was the final fixture in another hectic season of Army football.

A goal-hungry Royal Signals team, spearheaded by Army players Sig Sam Agar and LCpl Jason Bates, won the Massey Trophy Division One title.

The team found the back of the net on 42 occasions as they recorded nine wins from their 12 matches to finish six points clear of the REME.

In Division Two, an impressive goal return from Army defender Cpl Keith Emmerson helped the Adjutant General's Corps to promotion. ■

MASSEY TROPHY DIVISION ONE FINAL STANDINGS

TEAM	PLAYED	WON	DRAWN	LOST	FOR	AGAINST	POINTS
R SIGNALS	12	9	3	0	42	22	30
REME	12	7	3	2	31	20	24
RE	12	6	2	4	20	19	20
INFANTRY	12	4	4	4	29	23	16
RLC	12	3	3	6	19	25	12
APTC	12	2	2	8	10	24	8
RA	12	1	3	8	11	29	6

MASSEY TROPHY DIVISION TWO FINAL STANDINGS

TEAM	PLAYED	WON	DRAWN	LOST	FOR	AGAINST	POINTS
AGC	8	6	0	2	16	8	18
INT CORPS	8	5	1	2	14	6	16
RAC	8	5	0	3	19	15	15
AMS	8	2	0	6	5	14	6
AAC	8	1	1	6	11	22	4

SPORT SHORTS

THE Army Rugby Union is giving Service coaches an opportunity to develop their skills courtesy of a free two-day training package this month.

Former England coach Brian Ashton will be on hand to deliver some expert advice and there will also be sessions in defensive and attacking play, game plans and set pieces.

The event will be held at Arborfield, near Reading, on July 14 and 15. For more information and to book a place call WO2 Chris Clifford (REME) on 94251 2699.

SERVING personnel are being offered a 20 per cent group discount on tickets for the World Boxing Council's Night of Champions festival later this month.

The event, at the Cardiff International Arena, will run from July 29 to 31 and will see a Great Britain team take on a rest-of-the-world squad. There will also be a gala awards dinner featuring some of boxing's biggest names.

For further ticket information visit www.wbcnightofchampions.com

WO2 Mark Stevens (RLC) is taking part in the Wainwright Coast to Coast walk this month to raise money for the military charity Help for Heroes.

The 190-mile route starts at St Bees Head on the Irish Sea and travels across the country to Robin Hood's Bay on the North Sea.

Stevens begins his challenge on July 18 and donations can be made by logging on to www.justgiving.com/MarkStevensCoast-to-Coast

TICKETS for Troops made World Cup dreams come true for six serving personnel who were flown to South Africa to watch England's clash with the USA.

The tickets were made available by National Express and were snapped up within six hours of appearing on the Service charity's website www.ticketsfortroops.org.uk

FORMER Royal Artillery officer Caroline Hallett has helped raise more than £3,500 for ABF The Soldiers' Charity by completing the Desert Ultramarathon in Namibia.

Hallett finished the 78-mile challenge in a time of 18hr 40min and was running alongside friend Allie O'Donovan, who came third and smashed the women's record for the gruelling event.

The duo were running in support of Capt Kate Philp, who lost her leg following a bomb blast in Afghanistan.

AYLESBURY Rugby Football Club raised more than £6,500 for Help for Heroes by hosting a match between Buckinghamshire County and the Royal Air Force.

The military side gained a 27-24 win on the day, which included a Second World War re-enactment and music from a marching band.

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Signals dominate T20 final

AN explosive innings from Sgt Stu Houghton guided the Royal Signals to a comfortable victory in a rain-affected inter-corps Twenty20 cricket final at Aldershot.

The right-hander smashed 63 runs in quick time as he helped post an imposing score of 134-5 in a match that was reduced to 18 overs per side.

Army ace Houghton (pictured batting) dominated an impressive 115-run opening partnership before he was caught trying one big shot too many.

His effort formed the

foundations of the team's success and with the Infantry losing early wickets in reply, the result was never in doubt.

Fellow Service star LCpl David Wade maintained the stranglehold with the ball as he restricted the opposition to 11-2 in the opening stages of their innings.

The run chase failed to gather any meaningful momentum and Wade returned to mop up the tail and seal a comprehensive victory.

The Royal Engineers also tasted Twenty20 success in Aldershot, beating the Adjutant General's Corps in the plate final. ■

Injured troops make waves

BATTLE Back athletes were put through their paces at an Army swimming training camp in Gibraltar.

Six Servicemen were invited to the week-long event as part of the ongoing initiative to provide adventurous training and sporting opportunities for seriously-injured personnel.

"When we arrived I was using my arms to swim the length of the pool before I had to stop to recover," explained Cpl Dale Messenger (RE), who suffered spinal injuries when he was shot while serving in Afghanistan.

"In the end I was doing 20 lengths in the morning and 20 in the afternoon.

"This is so worthwhile. I thought I could swim before my injury but now I've had to learn all over again. We've

got great coaches and I'm swimming more confidently than I was before."

The training camp included open water swimmers, pool swimmers, water polo players, coaches and medics.

Participants used the week to prepare for an Inter-Services race at Lake Bala, in North Wales, while the Army water polo team competed in a challenge match and tournament.

Maj Hamish McCarthy (RE), the Army's open water swimming officer, said: "This really is a great environment and the facilities are superb.

"There is tremendous camaraderie.

The water polo players went in the sea to help the Battle Back guys and there has been an excellent team spirit throughout the group." ■

SPORT SHORTS

FOOTBALLERS from the University of Gloucestershire raised more than £3,000 for Help for Heroes by completing a 24-hour five-a-side challenge.

Armed with food, sleeping bags and pizza, a total of 42 players took part in the event, which was held at the Hardwick Sports Centre in Cheltenham.

SSGT Amanda Prentice (RLC) celebrated double success at this year's Army Diving Championships in Royal Tunbridge Wells.

The athlete was victorious in the women's elite springboard and elite highboard events, with Pte Shannon Cowan (RA) taking the novice springboard title.

Cpl Malcolm Hill (RLC) won the men's novice trophy while **WO2 Dave Cox (APTC)** was crowned elite springboard champion and **LCpl Rob Hunter (RA)** was victorious in the elite highboard discipline.

CADETS from the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders Battalion were victorious in a Rugby Union sevens tournament in aid of ABF The Soldiers' Charity.

Players from the unit's A side defeated their rivals from the Lothian and Borders Battalion in the event at Stirling County Rugby Cub.

The competition formed part of a day of fund-raising for the charity and former British Lions and Scotland captain Gavin Hastings was on hand to present the winning team with their medals.

THE Light Dragoons have been crowned the 2010 champions in football's Cavalry Cup competition.

The team defeated The Queen's Royal Hussars in a penalty shoot-out following a close-fought final at Burton Court, London.

CAPT Keith Snell (RHA) took the bragging rights in the first event of the new British Army (Germany) triathlon season.

The officer was victorious in the 20km cycle and 5km run and his combined time of 58min 31sec was enough to secure first place ahead of Maj Ian Phillips (HQ 1 Div).

RUGBY Union legends from Guinness Premiership side Sale Sharks returned to the pitch to take on a Help for Heroes XV in a charity match at the club's former Heywood Road ground.

Steve Hanley, Jos Baxendell, Matt O'Regan and Barrie-Jon Mather were among the try scorers as the home side romped to an emphatic 81-19 win against the military team, which was made up of personnel from the Royal Logistic Corps.

A sizeable crowd gave generous support at the match and helped raise more than £4,000, which will be divided between the Service charity and the Sale Sharks academy.



Army deliver emphatic double

Report: Richard Long
Pictures: Steve Dock

A DEVASTATING performance from Cpl Amanda Potgieter (REME) steered the Army women to a convincing win in this year's Inter-Services Twenty20 competition.

The England ace butchered the Royal Air Force and Royal Navy bowling attacks with two brutal innings that helped set imposing Army totals which never looked like being overhauled.

Potgieter smashed an unbeaten 81 in the tournament's opening fixture as the Service side posted a healthy 194-1 for the RAF to chase.

The right-hander bludgeoned 14 boundaries in a superb knock that injected impetus into an innings that was stuttering at 5-0 after five overs.

Opener Lt Col Sarah Streete (R Signals) offered fine support with an unbeaten 38, but an ill-disciplined RAF attack haemorrhaged 69 extras through a succession of wides and no balls.

With a massive total on the board the Army was able to set attacking fields as they chased early wickets.

The RAF rarely threatened in response and disciplined bowling from Cpl Rachel Hay (AGC), who finished with figures of 3-25, and Potgieter, with 2-7, completed a comfortable victory.

With the Navy also defeating the light blues, their showdown with the Army served as a tournament decider.

Potgieter took centre stage once more, scoring a sublime 110 not out, with Streete again playing the supporting role in a total of 183-1.

Hay ripped through the host's batting

line-up, recording figures of 3-13, while Lt Caz Norris (Int Corps) claimed three scalps at the cost of just 11 runs.

Skipper LCpl Eddy Koff (RE) captured two further wickets as the Navy were dismissed for a paltry 58.

Speaking afterwards Potgieter, who helped coach the team in the lead-up to this year's competition, said confidence was high ahead of the matches following some impressive early season form.

"We went to Holland for a short tour before the Inter-Services and that was pretty successful," she told *SoldierSport*.

"We played three Twenty20 matches and won them all, including a game against a Dutch development team, so the girls came into this tournament on a high.

"They carried on with that confidence to record two convincing

RAF GROUNDED

AFTER conceding 69 extras with the ball, the Royal Air Force needed an outstanding batting performance to overhaul the Army's imposing total. But the light blues failed to deliver and crumbled to 87 all out



LEADING THE WAY

SKIPPER LCpl Eddy Koff (RE) opened the Army bowling attack and was a constant threat with a succession of line and length deliveries. The pace ace helped skittle the Navy batting line-up with figures of 2-10



ALL-ROUNDER

WITH a flurry of boundaries to her name in unbeaten knocks of 81 and 110, Cpl Amanada Potgieter (REME) also enjoyed success with the ball, taking two wickets in a miserly four-over spell against the RAF





wins. I was expecting a tougher challenge. There was a lot of talk before the tournament, about the Navy in particular. They beat Hampshire in a 40-over game so we were expecting a hard match.

"If their openers had got them off to the start they had against the RAF it could have been a very different game, but we made early breakthroughs and the wickets kept tumbling."

The batsman was also delighted with her own efforts, which yielded 191 runs as well as some important wickets.

"Obviously I am very happy," she said. "The Inter-Services is a great day and you psyche yourself up for the Forces matches."

"I have been training hard. I have played a lot of civvy cricket and I was happy with my form, but it is great to perform well in such important games."

With extras becoming an important factor in both matches, Potgieter had been keen to stress the need for disciplined line and length bowling.

"I try to be very tough with the girls

"WE MADE EARLY BREAKTHROUGHS AND THE WICKETS KEPT TUMBLING"

– CPL AMANDA POTGIETER, REME

on their deliveries as I know how strict the umpiring can be in the Inter-Services," she explained.

"In the civvy game you just cannot bowl wides. Ahead of the tournament I was perhaps a bit grumpy about it but it was worth it. We bowled a few but not as many as the RAF and Navy."

The Army has also been able to blood some new talent and with up-and-coming players contributing to another Inter-Services title, the future of the sport looks bright.

"We have a lot of new players this season and it is a pretty steep learning curve but they are all willing," Potgieter

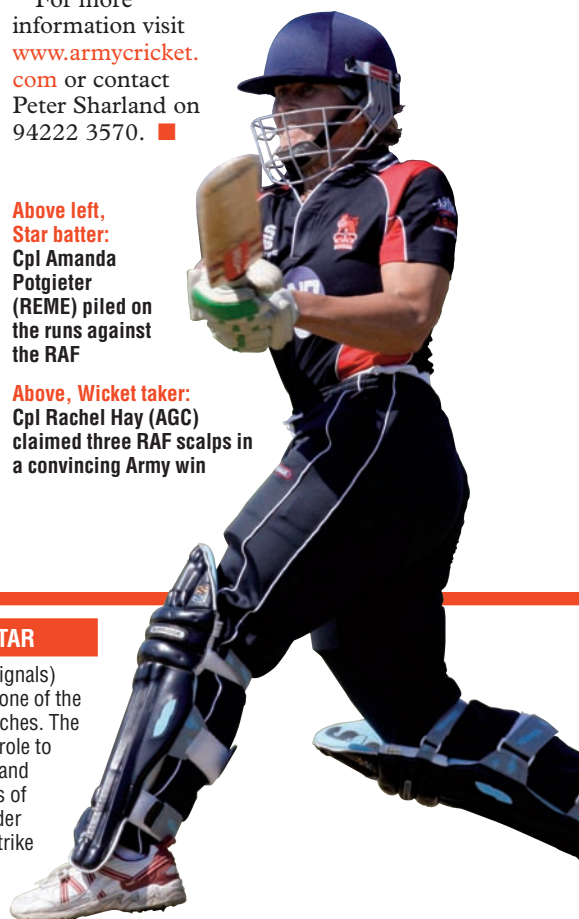
said. "They come to training and put in the hard work and that should hold us in good stead for the future."

The Army is always looking for new players to join the women's squad.

For more information visit www.armycricket.com or contact Peter Sharland on 94222 3570. ■

Above left, Star batter:
Cpl Amanda Potgieter (REME) piled on the runs against the RAF

Above, Wicket taker:
Cpl Rachel Hay (AGC) claimed three RAF scalps in a convincing Army win



CELEBRATION

THE Army women were simply too strong for their military rivals. Ruthless performances with both bat and ball ensured the team were able to celebrate another victory in the Inter-Services Twenty20 competition



SUPPORTING STAR

LT Col Sarah Streete (R Signals) proved to be the cornerstone of the Army innings in both matches. The opener played an anchor role to the flamboyant Potgieter and recorded unbeaten scores of 38 and 36. The right-hander was happy to rotate the strike and keep the scoreboard ticking as the Army piled on the runs

final word



We asked personnel from 7th Armoured Brigade about their impressions of Exercise Prairie Thunder and the training it offers

INTERVIEWS: RICHARD LONG
PICTURES: STEVE DOCK



Pte John Blacow (RLC)

Logistics is a big part of the Army and we have been able to go out on the ground with fuel and ammunition and have also been learning important drills. It is my first time at Batus and the first time I have worked with the driving units. As Pioneers we are usually involved in artisan and infantry tasks so this has given us a good understanding of different roles.



LCpl Rob Farkins (9/12 L)

I have been in the recce troop for the opposition force. We have been watching the enemy and their activity and have gone forward to attack, letting them know what we are all about. It has been good training and the vehicles have performed well. It has been tiring at times but it has also been good fun. I was here in 2007 and it is now a lot better and focused towards operations.



Tpr Lyle Davies (9/12 L)

Batus is a new experience. It has been a bit slow for me at times as I am driving the battlefield ambulance. I will be working with the Afghan civilians and I want to find out as much as I can. I am hoping to learn about the culture as well as gaining an understanding of their body language and the way they react to different things, all of which will be useful when we deploy.



Tpr Ashley Doyle (9/12 L)

It is good that we have done this [opposition force] first as it will make us more aware when we go through with the main battlegroup. This place is awesome, it gives a young lad joining the Army a good idea of what to expect when they go to Afghanistan. I think the civilian population is very important. I met a 21-year-old who was telling me all about his culture, which was very beneficial.



LCpl Steven Edwards (RLC)

This is my second time at Batus and it is completely different from my first visit. There now seems to be a focus on insurgency training whereas last time it was totally conventional. The weather has been testing. When I came before it was summer but this time we have had snow and blizzards. In the first week we had a lot of vehicles getting bogged in which gave us another challenge.



Tpr Callum Needham (9/12 L)

This is my first time at Batus. I have got some good experience of driving tanks and now we have switched to the civilian population I am playing a police driver. Hopefully I can get an insight into the cultural side as I would like to know how the Afghans have reacted to us being out there. Spending time with the Afghan civilians will be good preparation for future deployments.



Maj Simon Hirst (RLC)

The Combat Service Support training that Batus offers in a complex and unforgiving environment is second-to-none. The battlegroup logistics officer has one of the toughest jobs in planning demand, distances, direction and distribution. I have been impressed with the first- and second-line interface which no doubt will become the model for future exercises.



Sgt Darren Fildes-Smith (RLC)

We have had rain, snow, mud and wind so the benefits for the guys who have been driving is massive. At first they had no experience but now they can drive down roads sideways. It is totally different from the last time I was here as we are now in the field for the whole time. We have had a lot of new guys coming out and this has given them a great insight into what they need to do.



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