

# SOLDIER

MAGAZINE OF THE BRITISH ARMY

## RUNNING BATTLE

Winter sports season gathers pace



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OUR CONTRIBUTORS  
THIS MONTH...



**WO2 MATT  
ANDERSON, SASC**

WE FIND out what makes this senior soldier from the Army Trials Unit tick on **page 12**. From ration pack horrors to service slang and long-gone bits of kit, it's fair to say he had some thoughts...



**CSGT JOE BENSON,  
LANCS**

KEEPING troops guessing is the secret to a successful phys session, says the 1 LANCs boxing coach – and his tactics have shown some startling results. Find out more on **page 23**.



**PTE MICA MOORE,  
RLC**

QUALIFYING for the Winter Olympics is hard enough. Doing so as a self-funded athlete only adds to the challenge. But it was a path that paid off for this bobsleigh ace. Read her story on **page 66**.

# Opportunities like no other

IN its recent recruiting campaigns, the army has turned to the power of sport in a bid to inspire the next generation.

It seems like an obvious move given there are few, if any, other careers that allow employees to combine the challenges of the day job with the ability to pursue their athletic interests.

You name it, the service plays it, and winter sports are among the trump cards. With the slope season under way, personnel have been embracing opportunities that would not ordinarily be available on civvy street.

Hundreds of skiers took to the French Alps for the qualifying stages of the Army Alpine and Nordic Championships (page 70), with organisers stressing how crucial these events are to both recruitment and retention.

Indeed, one recalled speaking to participants who had not even flown, let alone skied, before embarking on the exercise. Is there a better advert for a career in the military?

Further thrills were presented at the Army Ice Sports Championships (page 69), where one novice racer collected some of the “most spectacular” bruises seen in luge yet still finished second in the women’s standings.

Your average office worker isn’t hurtling down an ice track at 75mph on company time.

The army’s bobsleigh fraternity inspired Pte Mica Moore (RLC) to join up as a reservist, and we wish her all the best as she represents Jamaica at this month’s Winter Olympics (page 66).

Away from the cold, the Endurance Army Educators are preparing to face the Marathon des Sables (page 38), while the judo set-up was boosted by an influx of new talent at its latest championships (page 72).

No matter what the sport, soldiers are making the most of the opportunities available. Surely, it’s just a matter of time before a new breed follows suit.

Richard Long • **Sports Editor**

‘Soldiers are making  
the most’



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# SOLDIER

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Picture: Cpl Penny Coldwell-Dabbs, AGC (SPS)

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Picture: Graeme Main



# HUNT FOR THE BEST IS ON

Special award will honour someone between the rank of private and corporal

## NOMINATIONS for the best soldier or junior NCO in the British Army are being sought.

The winner of the first ever Fitzgibbon Award will be announced at a Meritorious Service Medal presentation ceremony on April 17, where he or she will receive an exclusive, custom-made watch by the head of the army – Chief of the General Staff, Gen Sir Roly Walker.

The item will be engraved with the winner’s name and handed over with a special citation.

Army Sergeant Major, WO1 John Miller, who set up the accolade as a way of celebrating the best-of-the-best up to the rank of corporal, will also attend the prestigious event.

Speaking to *Soldier* in his regular column this month (page 14), he said he hoped the Fitzgibbon Award – named after the army’s youngest ever Victoria Cross winner in 1860, 15-year-old Andrew Fitzgibbon – would encourage younger troops to aspire to excellence.

The teenager, who was part of the 67th Regiment of Foot, an antecedent to The Princess of Wales’s

Royal Regiment, received his award for his actions in the Second Opium War in 1860. He braved a barrage of fire to treat wounded men in an assault on the Taku Forts in Tianjin, northwest China.

WO1 Miller said the VC recipient was a fitting namesake for the accolade, adding: “I have wanted to create this award from my first day in the job.

“The fact that it will be presented at the MSM ceremony means the best of our junior and senior soldiers will be celebrated together.”

WO1 Miller said nominations had to be made via the RSM and command sergeant major chain.

Candidates must meet several criteria relating to professional excellence, with the full details having been sent out to formations.

**‘I have wanted to create this award from my first day in the job’**

## PAY ATTENTION

**PERSONNEL** are being reminded there are now only seven increments within the private soldier (OR2) pay band.

Policy changes made in 2024 barred troops from progressing further to prevent longer-serving privates earning more than lance corporals in the same trade, and to incentivise promotion.

Transitional measures were introduced to ensure those already on OR2 levels eight or nine did not experience pay cuts, but wage increases under recent pay awards led to confusion.

Service bosses have published **ABN 03/2026** to clarify matters.

There are thought to be fewer than 1,000 regulars – and around 400 reservists – affected.

Anyone concerned should speak to unit admin staff or visit the FAQ page via this QR code.



## CYBER CENTRE

**ARMY** cyber gurus are getting a state-of-the-art, multi-million pound workplace.

Troops from 13 Signal Regiment (shown) will see various technical and training buildings, plus living spaces, created at their new home at the Duke of Gloucester Barracks, South Cerney.

The venue will house the service’s Cyber, Information and Security Operations Centre, a key hub in the ongoing fight against digital threats.

Work starts in summer 2027.

## WHERE TO FIND SOLDIER



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## 1 FALKLAND ISLANDS

### Gunners go the distance

AIR defence pros covering the South Atlantic showed the real meaning of boots on the ground as they pounded out the miles in a testing endurance march.

Members of 16 Regiment, Royal Artillery tabbed 30 miles through the harsh Falklands terrain towards the capital Port Stanley.

The event aimed to bolster operational effectiveness – reinforcing the unit’s ability to hot-foot it across long distances carrying Bergans and other kit.

Currently serving as the islands’ Resident Sky Sabre Battery, the deployed troops pushed themselves to the limits – with some completing the full route and others joining for ten-mile legs.

Participant Gnr Charlotte May said: “Usually physical challenges are fast and intense – this was slower, which perhaps made it more mentally challenging.”

Elsewhere, infantry ended their stint down south with Exercise Cape Bayonet (page 61).

## 2 ANTIGUA

### Safe harbour in sight

THE finish line was nearing for the Force Atlantic team tackling the World’s Toughest Row as this issue went to press.

The crew of Bombardiers Katie Devine, Vicki Wratten-Wood and Ollie Cutting, plus Gnr Emma McKenzie – all of 12 Regiment, Royal Artillery – had just 74 nautical miles left in their quest to row from the Canary Islands to Antigua.

They were ranked fourth in the mixed class, 12th among the four-person boats and 30th overall. The gunners are the first junior ranks team to form the army’s official entry in the gruelling race, following on from the first all-female crew last year.



A TASTE OF ARMY ACTIVITY ACROSS THE WORLD

# GLOBAL SITREP

## 3 UKRAINE

### Downrange delivery

BRIT boffins are poised to develop new defensive weapons for President Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s forces as his country’s war with Russian approaches the four-year point.

Project Nightfall aims to see UK-designed ballistic missiles supplied to the Eastern European state to hit invading Kremlin troops harder. It is envisaged that chosen defence contractors could deliver the first weapons within 12 months of test firings.

With a 200kg high-explosive warhead, the new, deep-strike projectiles would have a range of more than 500km and be operable in areas of heavy electromagnetic interference.

Defending personnel will also be able to launch volleys of the missiles at Russian targets and withdraw within minutes.

It is reckoned that ten Nightfall systems a month can ultimately be produced. The new weapons will also help inform the thinking on future British kit.

Defence Secretary John Healey said recent attacks on civilians showed that Russian leader Vladimir Putin felt he could “act with impunity” in prosecuting his illegal war. “We won’t stand for this, which is why we are determined to put leading edge weapons in the hands of Ukrainians,” he added.



Picture: SFRS

## 4 SCOTLAND

### After the blast

RESERVISTS and blue light colleagues joined forces to simulate their response to a catastrophic gas explosion.

Some 60 troops from 144 (Parachute) Medical Squadron took part in the exercise at the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service National Training Centre at Cambuslang, near Glasgow.

The multi-casualty scenario saw the rapid deployment of an emergency field hospital.

“As reservists, many of us also work in the NHS and other emergency services,” explained OC Maj Josh March (RAMS).

“Collaborative training brings those skills together and keeps our medics sharp on the basics while ensuring we are ready to provide care in complex environments.”



**5 NORWAY**

**Loggies bend the knee**

THE Scandinavian Alps provided a dramatic backdrop for a month-long package of technical ski instruction and competition for members of the Royal Logistic Corps.

Some 150 personnel converged on Hemsedal, northwest of Oslo, for Exercise Knees Bend, honing their technique across a range of Alpine pursuits – including, downhill and slalom – before battling it out for silverware.

Team honours went to the Defence School of Transport, with LCpl Niall Flannery from 1 Regiment, RLC topping the men’s table and 9 Regiment’s Lt Pheobe Armitage triumphing in the women’s category.

Read more about army winter sports action on page 70.

**‘The distance is one thing, but there is also the sand, heat and kit’**

Marathon des Sables looms – page 38

**6 GIBRALTAR**

**Barbarians on the up**

THERE were promotions and awards aplenty on the rock as the territory’s resident unit continues to punch well above its weight.

Several troops from The Royal Gibraltar Regiment ascended the NCO chain as well as receiving recognition for years in uniform and professionalism throughout.

A presentation ceremony also saw junior leaders acknowledged for completing the demanding class 1 armourers’ course – adding to their unit’s skillset.

The event topped off several recent achievements for the Barbarians, who remain committed on exercises and operations despite their modest size.

Personnel have been on Op Cabrit in Estonia – joining a multinational force defending Nato’s eastern flank – as well as helping to train counterparts in Africa.



Picture: Pte Jenny Jakeman, R Yorks

**7 ENGLAND**

**Northern exposure**

SNOW and subzero temperatures added to the challenges of a navigation exercise in the Cleveland Hills for 15 part-time infanteers.

The troops, from Quebec Company, 4th Battalion, The Royal Yorkshire Regiment donned warm kit and headed out into the wintery landscape to put their skills with map and compass to the test over distances of up to ten miles.

Company 2iC, Capt Ross Garwood (R Yorks), said navigation in all environments was a key skill for personnel, regardless of trade.

“In snowy conditions paths are covered so you have to rely more heavily on relief and features for orientation,” he added.



Picture: Cpl Nathan Tarku, RLC

# EYE LEVEL WITH THE INFANTRY

**A TV documentary that follows the highs and lows of an infantry unit ahead of a deployment to Eastern Europe was due to air on Channel 5 as this issue went to press.**

*Platoon 24/7: Preparing for War* follows troops from Bulford-based D Company, 5th Battalion, The Rifles (shown) over six months.

Speaking to *Soldier* about the show, series director Will Lorimer said he hoped it would appeal to seasoned personnel as well as the general public.

"The aim was to tell the story of the military experience from the eye level of a rifleman," he explained. "The top brass don't feature at all.

"It was about trying to understand what joining up is like – what it means to step up for the first time.

"Everybody in the infantry began as either a rifleman or a second lieutenant.

"I hope serving soldiers will be able to look back and reflect on that experience; the fear and anticipation of not being good at your job.

"What you realise is that everybody is going to make mistakes. But it's the way the people around them respond in terms of support and development which means they stop being mistakes, and become learning points instead."

He added that his team had been surprised by the diversity of troops within the platoon.

The three-part show is due to air at 2100 on February 2, 9 and 16.

It will also be available to watch on the *Simply 5* streaming platform.

Picture: Frank Films Ltd/Will Lorimer

## KICKED OUT

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

📄 **Sgt Tauhakau Viavialevu (1st Battalion, Welsh Guards)**, aged 44, convicted of rape and sexual assault of a female soldier. Sentenced to ten years imprisonment, placed on the sex offenders' register for life and ordered to pay £11,000 in compensation.

📄 **LBdr Aaron Hovius (5th Regiment, Royal Artillery)**, aged 26, pleaded guilty to sexual assault. He was charged following a drunken night out on Op Cabrit,

Poland. Sentenced to 32 weeks' detention in the Military Corrective Training Centre Colchester.

📄 **Cpl Darren Alexander (4th Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Scotland)**, aged 36, was convicted of assault by penetration. A court was told he committed the drunken attack against another soldier. Sentenced to six years' imprisonment.

📄 **Maj Scott Davidson (Grantham Station Support Unit)**, aged 53, was convicted of assault occasioning actual bodily harm for an attack on a subordinate while QM at Dalton Barracks, Abingdon. The soldier lost two front teeth in the attack. Sentenced to six months' imprisonment, suspended for

two years, and 280 hours of unpaid work. Ordered to pay £5,000 in compensation to the victim – the cost of dental treatment.

📄 **Pte Samuel Ping (26 Engineer Regiment)**, aged 22, admitted racially aggravated common assault against a soldier during phase two training. Sentenced to an 18-month service order with 120 hours' unpaid work and rehabilitation activity.

📄 **LCpl Frederick Bradford (21 Multi-Role Medical Regiment)**, aged 33, pleaded guilty to two counts of sexual assault while drunk at a social occasion in 2024. Sentenced to a two-year service community order with 140 hours of unpaid work and placed on the sex offenders' register for five years.



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

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# MY TOP...

Soldier gets to know **WO2 Matt Anderson, SASC** from the Army Trials Unit...

## ...COOKHOUSE

*Trax in Allenby Barracks at Bovington is really good with a large variety of food daily (we don't get that in the warrant officers' and sergeants' mess).*

## ...TRAINING EXERCISE

*Final Storm – the old mortar division final exercise. Nowhere else in defence did you get that amount of mortar qualified personnel, ranges, ammunition and variety of different tactical scenarios in one place at the same time.*

## ...ARMY SLANG

*"Berserker" – used to explain a berserk individual or when someone is not firing on all cylinders, if you get my drift.*

## ...FOREIGN ARMY

*I've had the pleasure to work with a few senior NCOs and officers from the German Army. They always come across as highly professional, capable and efficient (as you would expect). Plus, they like a beer!*

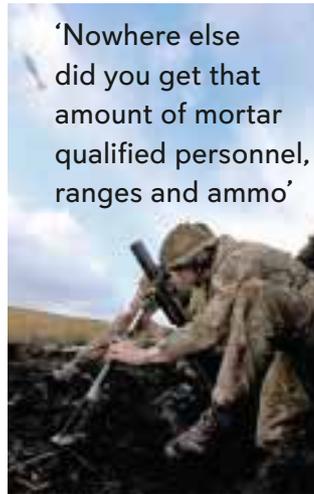
## ...MUSIC

*Anything that's tropical chill house.*



## ...RATION PACK ITEM

*It's been a while since I've been in a position to need to treat myself to the delights of a boil-in-the-bag. I just hope they have improved! I will say no more.*



'Nowhere else did you get that amount of mortar qualified personnel, ranges and ammo'

## ...TRAINING AREA

*For me, being an observer, it's got to be The Plain – big, expansive areas giving me loads of opportunities to prep fire missions.*

## ...ARMY CLICHE FOR THE CHOP

*"Civvies would pay thousands for this". No, no they wouldn't!*

## ...BIT OF KIT

*The Morzen mortar fire direction computer is long out of service but fondly remembered. It's one of the most robust pieces of hardware I've ever used and was apparently based on tech from a 1980s-era pocket calculator. It never failed, and – unlike a lot of stuff nowadays – the battery never seemed to die. I don't expect many people would remember it now, but if you know you know.*

## ...ADVENTUROUS TRAINING

*Without a shadow of a doubt, it has to be parachuting. To truly get outside of your comfort zone, jumping out of a perfectly good aeroplane has no rival. The look on people's faces, when they first realise they haven't been on a plane in flight with the door open before, is priceless.*



## OLD AND BOLD

**MORE old soldiers could be called into service under new legislation being considered by the government.**

Under the proposed rule changes, the maximum age at which members of the strategic reserve could be recalled would be raised from 55 to 65, potentially increasing the pool by tens of thousands.

The conditions under which they mobilise could also be relaxed. Currently, they can be called up when there is "national danger, great emergency or an attack on the UK".

But the suggested changes would see this altered to the broader term of "warlike preparations".

The measures form part of a new armed forces bill.

Concerns around the threat Russia poses have already led some other nations to bolster their reserve forces' potential.



## A BIT FLASH

**AIRBORNE medics are sporting a revamped drop zone flash reflecting their specialist role and a new era for their cap badge.**

Members of 16 Medical Regiment (pictured) have adopted the cherry, grey and green colours of the Royal Army Medical Service, which was formed in late 2024 through the merger of the previously separate healthcare corps.

## CENSUS PLEA

**TROOPS and their families are being urged to tell the Office of National Statistics which topics they think should be included in the next census in 2031.**

Search for '2031 topic consultation' or visit [ons.gov.uk](https://ons.gov.uk)



Picture: Beth Proddger

A member of The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment upskills on a drone. Read more on page 26

# ANYONE FOR A DRONE DEGREE?

**TROOPS will soon be able to gain a degree in drone tech.**

Starting in September, the new three-year course aims to fast-track up to five soldiers and 15 civilians per year into careers at the cutting-edge of military hardware.

It will be taught at Hereford's New Model Institute for Technology and Engineering (NMITE) with the help of £240,000 in army funding. The initiative is part of the wider push to increase fighting power through the integration of AI and autonomous systems.

Speaking at the launch, Col Toby Till – ex-head of the Experimentation and Trials Group who is now in a senior training role – said students would learn how to build, repair and update

unmanned air systems.

“We take all the lessons we see in Ukraine or any other conflict in the world and see that drones are here to stay,” he continued.

“By this time next year we want every brigade to have dipped into NMITE, upskilling themselves and going back into the Field Army to spread those skills.”

LCpl Ryan Praties (R Yorks), who was at the launch event, said: “I would absolutely love to enlist on this degree because it’s an amazing opportunity to master what drones are all about. It’s about nailing multiple systems and being comfortable with rapidly emerging tech and putting it into effective use as a force multiplier.”

For updates on the course: [nmite.ac.uk/form/register-your-interest-in-autosy](https://nmite.ac.uk/form/register-your-interest-in-autosy)



## DON'T LOOK BACK

**A SOLDIER thinks ahead during a casualty evacuation serial on the light cavalry commanders' course, Salisbury plain.**

Picture: Sgt Adam Wakefield, RLC

## 'WE NEED THEM'

**ARMoured vehicles will remain at the heart of the army's fighting system, the chief of the general staff has said.**

Speaking at the International Armoured Vehicle Conference in Farnborough, Gen Sir Roly Walker underlined his commitment to giving troops “survivable, sovereign, world-class platforms”.

Acknowledging the increased role of uncrewed systems – as well as “cheap, throwaway, one-way effectors” – he said the ability to carry troops into, through and beyond battle was still key.

“We will need really high-quality armoured vehicles, because we will be up against an extraordinary number of armoured vehicles en masse, no question, should war come to Europe,” he added.

The army intends to hit initial operating capability of Challenger 3 with delivery of 18 tanks next year. And there are plans afoot to replace the thousands of Land Rover and Pinzgauer light mobility vehicles from the next financial year.





# GROUND VIEW

Army Sergeant Major WO1 John Miller gives his take on service life...

## I HAVE often said in this magazine that people remain the army's most important asset.

Being able to fight by doing the basics well will make all the difference whenever we are called to action.

So I am delighted to announce an accolade for our best junior soldier or NCO who embodies the highest standards.

It's called the Fitzgibbon Award - and it is something I've wanted to introduce from day one in this role.

It has taken a fair bit of organising, but we will now be celebrating the best individual from the rank of private to corporal.

The winner will receive a personalised watch and citation during a Meritorious Service Medal ceremony with senior colleagues. This will be presented by the chief of the general staff.

The recipient will be invited to celebrate at the Regimental Sergeant Major's Convention dinner, too.

My aim with all this is to bring deserved recognition to our junior people.

The MSM is largely aimed at more experienced personnel, often approaching the end of their careers, and the new accolade focuses on the other spectrum of service.

Fittingly, it is named after the army's youngest VC winner Andrew Fitzgibbon, who was decorated in 1860 for actions

'This award is something I've wanted to introduce from day one'

in the Second Opium War. He was a hospital apprentice and an extraordinary soldier of his generation.

The award itself is beautiful. I'd always had a watch in mind; it's exclusive, special and symbolic but also functional - similar in style to other military watches, so it can be worn to work.

The first presentation will take place at this year's MSM ceremony on April 17 and the nomination process, via regimental sergeant majors and the command sergeant major chain, is open.

There are four criteria for nominees to consider - professional excellence, both tactical and technical, reinforcing our standards, implementation of techcraft and decision-making under pressure.

Full details are being distributed to RSMs and military secretariat staff. It is so important we recognise the best of our junior troops - those who do the basics well, innovate and inspire the people around them. They are the engine room of the British Army.

## WO1 Miller's month...

### Visits

- Op Cabrit, Estonia

### Impressed with

- Ingenuity; troops overcoming cold climate issues with drones

### Areas of focus

- Developing leadership excellence

### Coming up next

- Preparing for RSM Convention launch of Fitzgibbon Award



**HARDENED** Himalayan warrior and ex-army stalwart Hari Budha Magar continued his relentless climb into the history books after becoming the first double above-knee amputee to summit the highest peaks on all seven continents.

The former corporal with 1st Battalion, The Royal Gurkha Rifles, took the accolade after hitting the wilds of Antarctica - braving killer temperatures of -25 degrees Celsius and exhausting winds to claim the top of Mount Vinson.

The climber smashed the 4,892m challenge with his experienced team of Abiral Rai, Mingma Sherpa and climb leader Jangbu Sherpa around him.

Magar - who lost his legs aged 31 in 2010 when an IED exploded during an Afghanistan tour - said he was delighted to complete another demanding endeavour.

He added: "The weather on the summit day was outstanding - not a cloud in the sky.



Pictures: Abiral Rai

"As we took our time climbing along the rocky summit ridge, much of which I had to crawl along, I was able to look up and take in incredible views.

"The IED should have killed me, but I was given a second chance and wanted to do something positive - to be an inspiration to others."

Magar's seven-summit challenge included an assault on Everest in his native Nepal back in 2023. He joins an exclusive club of just 500 climbers to have scaled all peaks.



Picture: POPhot Lee Blease, RN

## COLD RESPONSE

**BRITISH military activity is ramping up in Norway as personnel embark on their annual workout in the Arctic Circle.** The Commando Helicopter Force has already carried out load lifting training with its mobile air operations team (shown), with crews going on to conduct survival drills including navigation, skiing, shelter building and foraging for

food. Intense flying sorties of the country's fjords and mountains will follow in the build-up to Ex Cold Response. Featuring troops from 24 Commando Royal Engineers, 29 Commando Regiment Royal Artillery and the Commando Logistic Regiment, it is the largest exercise in Norway this year and will demonstrate Nato's ability to deter threats in the high north.



Pictures: Graeme Main and Sgt Andrew Grayson, RLC

## BOSS'S ANGER OVER AJAX

**THE future of the troubled Ajax armoured vehicle was still hanging in the balance as this issue went to press, with furious MoD bosses hinting it could be canned.**

The platform's initial operating capability status has now been paused – and the senior civil servant in charge of the programme removed from post

– after suspected noise and vibration issues left more than 30 soldiers needing medical treatment late last year.

With a handful of the personnel still being monitored over health issues, Ajax has been pulled from training while further tests on the vehicle are carried out.

But MPs are demanding answers as to why the troop carrier was declared fit-for-purpose amid revelations of ongoing concerns from those at the coalface.

Updating the Commons on investigations into the project, Defence Minister Luke Pollard said it was clear that issues had been raised about Ajax by those on the ground, but these had not been escalated.

The politician (shown below) added: "To say I am angry about the findings of the ministerial review is an understatement – it demonstrates that people were raising issues with this programme but they were not being elevated to an appropriate level.

"In this case, inaccurate information directly contributed to the decision to declare initial operating capability for Ajax – this

is unacceptable.

"Ministers rely on accurate, timely and complete information to make decisions in the national interest, and when that information does not meet this standard, the consequences are not abstract – they can be real, human and serious."

The minister said work to resolve the issues would continue "at pace" with contractor General Dynamics. And there would be a decision on the platform's future shortly, he stressed, adding: "That is being considered as part of the forthcoming Defence Investment Plan."

He said: "For my part, I will scrap rules that serve no purpose, cut through needless bureaucracy and trust our people to get the job done. But let there be no misunderstanding that the safety of our people remains paramount."



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## THE HONOUR IS ALL THEIRS...

**THE** army was well-represented in the King's New Year Honours list last month – with 79 personnel receiving royal recognition in the 2026 line-up.

**KBE** Lt Gen David Eastman **CB** Lt Gen Jeremy Bennett; Maj Gen Sarah Johansen; Maj Gen Gerald Strickland **CBE** Brig David Bickers; Maj Gen Carl Boswell; Brig Mark Comer; Brig Shay Marks **OBE** Lt Col Finlay Bibby; R Yorks; Lt Col Duncan Chamberlain; Col Geraint Davies; Lt Col Johann Jeevarantham, RAMS; Col Andrew Maskell; Lt Col Alistair Morris, ACF; Col Ceri Morton; Lt Col Paula Nicholas, AGC (SPS); Lt Col Garrett O'leary, RA; Lt Col Jeremy Pattinson, RLC; Col James Peycke; Lt Col James Seddon, Gren Gds; Lt Col Harry Simpson, RL **MBE** Maj Martin Bentley, REME; Lt Col Christopher Billups, RA; WO1 Casey Brooks, SASC; Maj Steven Burton, Rifles; Lt Col Mark Connelly, Int Corps; Maj Jack Collicott, REME; WO1 Adam Culliford, REME; Lt Paul Deakin, ACF; WO2 Stella Gale, RAMS; Maj Johnathan Green, RTR; Cpl Shane Green, AGC (RMP); Capt Emma Grimshaw, RAMS; Cpl Dayle Hardaker, AGC (RMP); Maj Thomas Hargreaves, Gren Gds; Capt Stuart Hawkins, RAPTC; Maj William Heather-Hayes, Para; Maj Amanda Hewitt, RAVC; Lt Col David Hobbs, CCF; WO1 Derek Hodgson, RCAM; Cpl Jessica Hoggarth, RLC; LCoH Lewis Homewood, LG; Maj James Hood, RL; CSgt Scott Jamieson, R Irish; Maj Chakra Khatri, QOGLR; Maj Mark Lambert, KRH; Maj Jonathan Leigh, R Signals; Maj Anthony Leighton, AAC; Maj Christopher Mawson, RAMS; Maj Matthew McGarvey-Miles, RLC; Maj Maxim Erskine-Naylor, Scots DG; Col Edwin Oldfield; Capt David Paylor, R Yorks; Col Sarah Raitt; WO1 Steven Sharp, RE; Maj Aaron Thompson, RLC; WO2 Ashley Tipping, Int Corps; Lt Col Darren Ward, REME; SSgt James Weller, RAMS; Lt Col Andrew Williams, AAC; Lt Col Natasha Chatham-Zvelebil, RAMS

**Ordinary Member of the Royal Red Cross, First Class** Lt Col Susan Hines, RAMS; Lt Col Heather Saunders, RAMS

**Ordinary Associate of the Royal Red Cross, Second Class** Capt Rhian Jones, RAMS; Maj Jane Keenan, RAMS **King's Volunteer Reserves Medal** Lt Col Robert Friel, RA; LCpl Angela Morrow, RLC; Maj John Richards, REME; Maj Neeraj Shah, RAMS; WO1 Robert Whelan, RLC **King's Commendation for Valuable Service** Capt Paul Franks, RLC; Maj Mark Gibbs, RAVC; Capt David Hawksworth, RE; Lt Col Rupert Hope-Hawkins, KRH; Maj James Landers, RA; Lt Col Stewart McKenzie, Int Corps; SSgt Martyn Stanley, RE; Lt Col William Tulloch, SG **King's Commendation for Bravery** SSgt Daniel Howel, RLC



## SPEEDY ADMIN

**ACCESS to the JPA system via personal tech has been made easier thanks to a new tool.**

The 'Bring Your Own Device' feature on the Armed Forces Personnel Portal (AFPP) enables troops to check payslips and request leave more quickly from their mobiles, tablets and laptops.

Under the previous *MySeries* apps, these transactions could take several days to clear.

The new system also has a low-data option aimed at those in remote locations or areas with limited bandwidth.

Maj Chris Tate (AGC (SPS)), who helped trial the tool, said it represented a significant upgrade.

"Troops now only have to access one app instead of two or three," he explained.

Use it via the AFPP tile on Defence Gateway.



## CORRIDORS OF POWER

**RESERVISTS got stuck into weekend urban fighting serials at Catterick's Whinny Hill.**

After a hard week in their civvy roles, troops from 5th Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers mastered new drills including room entry and weapon carriage, before the final test of a platoon attack.

## IN MEMORIAM



**Capt Philip Muldowney, RA DIED JANUARY 25, 2026 NORTHUMBERLAND, UK**

**TRIBUTES have been paid to an "unforgettable" character and natural leader after his death during live-fire tactical training.**

Capt Philip Gilbert Muldowney, a fire support team commander with 129 Battery, 4th Regiment, Royal Artillery, died following an incident on Otterburn ranges. He was 25.

Known as Gilbert, the serviceman commissioned in 2020, deploying to Estonia the following year and later serving at the Army Training Foundation College, Winchester and 29 Commando Regiment RA in Plymouth.

An army statement described him as an exceptional officer who always put his troops first.

Commanding Officer Lt Col Henry Waller (RA) said Capt Muldowney's colleagues would remember "his easygoing nature, boundless energy, and infectious sense of humour".

## THE DRUGS DON'T WORK

**A GROUP of soldiers from Catterick-based 32 Engineer Regiment have been given their marching orders after failing a compulsory drugs test.**

Despite press speculation that the troops – understood to number more than 20 – would not be dismissed due to workforce shortfalls, the MoD confirmed their service had been terminated.

A statement said: "We robustly enforce a zero-tolerance policy to drug use by all those who serve and provide an education programme to inform personnel of the dangers and consequences of substance misuse."



# diary dates



Picture: Cpl Jack Welton, RAF

1

## Piste of the action

THE slopes of Meribel again welcome the military's top athletes as they do battle across a host of disciplines at the Inter-Services Snow Sports Championships. The week-long showdown at the French resort will feature a raft of events in Alpine skiing, Telemark and snowboarding with personnel vying for team and individual honours.



4

## Taking one for the team

PERSONNEL across the army will step away from non-essential duties for a day to undertake this year's Op Teamwork event, which for 2026 will focus on the theme 'stronger together'. The occasion will see troops discuss how best to build teams founded on trust, respect and shared purpose. It is part of the service's ongoing drive to improve working culture and root out negative behaviours.

Picture: Cpl Aaron Stone, RLC

Picture: LSgt Vincent Price, SG

# 6

## Cold snap

EXERCISE Winter Camp in Estonia – the annual test of Nato’s deterrence capabilities in extreme cold weather – will draw to a close after two weeks of demanding drills for some 1,250 troops.

British personnel from the Royal Tank Regiment Battlegroup, plus French, US and host nation colleagues faced subzero temperatures during realistic missions based on lessons from Ukraine, including electronic warfare and drone scenarios.

The package, which you can read more about in our next issue, was designed to showcase the alliance’s determination to adapt to the modern battlefield amid challenging climatic conditions.

Picture: LBrdr Brady Gilmartin, RA



Picture: Graeme Main

# 11

## Young guns eye further glory

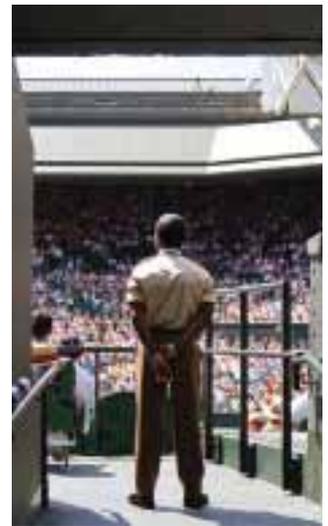
THE first major trophy of the football season will be up for grabs at the Inter-Services Under-23 Championships. The army head into the tournament as defending champions after a 3-1 home win over the Royal Air Force saw them seal the silverware last year. Can they defeat their rivals on the road at Oswestry this time round?

# 13

## Service at SW19

APPLICATIONS close for those wanting to sample the wonders of Wimbledon as part of the military’s raft of service stewards. The tradition dates back to 1946 and sees personnel manning the gangways at the prestigious venue for the duration of the world’s oldest tennis championships.

For more details search ‘volunteer as a steward at Wimbledon’ on Defence Connect. Successful applicants will be notified by February 27.



Pictures: Anjani Kataria

# skills

## CRIME-FIGHTING FLEX



Picture: Graeme Main

### Service and civvy police use drone skills to catch the bad guys

**TECH-SAVVY troops from the Royal Military Police joined forces with civvy cops to trade best practice on using drones for crime investigation.**

The soldiers met with specialists from Cheshire Constabulary to see how their use of unmanned aerial systems had evolved to take villains off the streets.

They had a first-hand look at how the civvies were deploying the kit for taskings such as recce sorties on arrest warrant locations. And troops were given the once-over on thermal imaging kit.

Maj Matt Keenan – OC of 174 Provost

Company, 1st Regiment, RMP – said the relationship had helped both parties.

Joint serials will continue this year.

The sub-unit is also being upskilled by operators who have been on the small UAS commanders' course, with numerous pilots now using the lightweight Parrot platform (shown above).

Maj Keenan said: "There may be sites of war crimes perpetrated by enemies in future conflicts and the service police will need to investigate.

"We may come across mass graves and we can use UAS in evidence gathering – but we must think about how we extract data that meets the standard for a court of law from the drone to a record management system."

The officer said the lessons had been particularly useful given that clearing routes for military traffic is on the tasking list for 174 Coy.

"A diesel vehicle will always generate heat, but we found the signature from a Land Rover engine lasted for hours after it was stopped," he added. "The trace from hot water poured on the ground shows up to 30 minutes – so

even evidence of a soldier urinating will be visible on a thermal camera."



## GOING GREAT GUNS

**FIRE support teams of the newly formed King's Gurkha Artillery (KGA) are ready for action, as the former infantry continue retraining to become expert gunners.**

In a major step forward for the army's newest unit, Captains Rupendra Rai and Prithvi Raj Rai qualified as FST commanders, while Bombardiers Deepak Gurung and Rabin Chamling Rai were certified as seconds-in-command. It follows their completion of an intensive three-month course.

Due to the responsibility placed upon those who coordinate fires on the battlefield, the training is recognised as some of the most challenging in the Royal Artillery, with high levels of technical proficiency and tactical acumen expected.

The package culminated in Exercise Combined Warrior in Brecon, where the students integrated with infantry cadres across a range of complex operational scenarios.



## WARRANT OFFICERS WANTED

**A SHORTAGE of captains means experienced non-commissioned personnel are being hunted to plug gaps.**

The staff warrant officers' scheme is open to WO1s on senior soldier continuity post terms and conditions.

It will see them fill vacant staff officer three (SO3) roles, with WO2s also considered where no suitable candidates are found.

As well as addressing workforce deficits, the initiative is aimed at providing skilled troops with professional development opportunities.

For more information read **ABN 062/2025**.

## THE ARMY 2026 PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION



# 3 HOT SHOTS

Fancy your skills with a camera? The Army Photographic Competition is open for entries. To inspire you, *Soldier's* newest photographer **Beth Prodger** shares the pics that have turned her head since starting the role...

**ENTER NOW!**

For competition and category details read our online article here



**DEADLINE - April 17**



**Potential NCO course, Otterburn by Mark Owens**

*The strong eye contact pulls you into the image. The gaze is direct, unwavering and deeply concentrated, which paired with the shallow depth of field creates an intimate, striking and authentic portrait.*



**Patrol dog on exercise, Wales by Sgt Donald Todd, RLC**

*Powerful storytelling. The low, directional light creates a cinematic feel. The way the light falls on the dog pulls focus. Our eyes then work towards the harsh shadows, which frame the subjects beautifully.*



**Trench clearance, Estonia by Cpl Aaron Stone, RLC**

*The immersive overhead angle of this one makes you feel like an observer. It gives us situational awareness, almost like a drone view. There's a lot of information in one frame, but it never feels cluttered.*

# kit



## HEDGEHOG BRISTLES

Are spines the answer to protecting heavy armour on the front line?

### CRUDE but easily constructed weaponry continues to be a feature on the battlefield in Ukraine.

Cheap drones assembled by troops in the field from parts bins and using 3D printers have changed the face of its war.

Meanwhile, some of the latest defences against them look equally utilitarian.

When unprotected vehicles became sitting ducks for attack drones, both sides quickly adopted protective cages to cover the main body of the tank, but these can present problems when turrets revolve.

So the latest move has been to build so-called 'dandelion' or 'hedgehog' protection – flexible metal rods arranged in patterns to shield the vehicle from kamikaze drones.

The rods are welded together to form a tree-like pattern with several layers, forming a three-dimensional barrier.

The metal bristles detonate the UAS before it strikes the main body of the tank.

However, one drawback is that the amount of extra metal wire required is heavy – perhaps as much as two tonnes – slowing the platform down and leaving it more exposed to attacks in the first place.

Also, fighters are becoming increasingly proficient at flying drones beneath tanks and vehicles to strike them from below, where the armour is weakest, or using them to drop mines in their path.

“(These innovations) are part of the endless development of experimental and wacky inventions by both sides,” David Kirichenko, a Ukraine-Russia weapons expert, explained to *The Telegraph*.

“There is a constant race to identify weaknesses, produce measures and countermeasures and adapt to changing battlefield conditions.”

And regardless of how cheap and homemade the innovations appear, any edge is worth its weight in gold on the front line.



## MOTOR MOMENT...

### ELECTRIC motorbikes are proving a hit with infantry.

Biking nut LCpl Richard Lewis from 1st Battalion, The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment explained how the Sur-Rons his unit now own (pictured) have been used for everything from resupply missions to transport on recce serials.

The serviceman, who is responsible for instructing colleagues on the vehicle, explained: “The bike comes with a solar charger and takes about four hours to refresh, with a maximum run time of around six hours. I think they're really good – they take off fast – and everyone seems to love them.”

With two modes – normal and sport – the Sur-Ron can vary its maximum speed from 30-56mph.

LCpl Lewis added: “They are good things, doing what we would previously use a man or a quad for.

“But when you start putting kit on your back, they get slower. They aren't the same speed as quads, but they are more reliable with less mechanics involved. They're great – anyone can use them – but we just need more now.”

Picture: Beth Proddger



# phys

## BOXING CLEVER

**SOLDIERS looking to make good on their new year resolutions and shed some weight – or improve general fitness – are benefitting from some high-tempo training courtesy of their boxing team.**

Members of 1st Battalion, The Duke of Lancaster’s Regiment – including those with no previous experience of the sport – have been blasting several sessions a day under the watchful eye of coach CSgt Joe Benson.

And it is has gleaned some remarkable results so far.

“It’s about giving people a bit of identity, making them part of the team and creating purpose,” the senior NCO told *Soldier*.

“For me, great phys is all about mindset. I will never tell them when the end of a session is coming and they walk in not knowing what’s ahead of them.

“Then just when they think it’s over, it’s not. They learn to embrace the unknown – and I think that’s more important than any special regime or reps.

“It’s about building stamina and making everything competitive.

“If it’s a sprint you are tackling today, you want to win, and if it’s press-ups, you want to be the last man standing.”

It’s an approach that seems to be working, with CSgt Benson revealing that three kingsmen who recently trained with him for six months came out top on their respective promotion courses in Brecon.

“I also had one lad who was at 110kg just two weeks before Christmas, and has since weighed in at 87kg,” he explains at the gym in Weeton Barracks, near Preston.

“We now have other units coming to us and

asking for training sessions, which is great. We don’t believe in being a clique – everyone can be part of it.”

### **Benson’s sessions...**

**What does a typical day look like training with you?**

First session at 0830, which might be strength and conditioning or a run, followed by a second at 1100, maybe some sparring or learning sessions, then a third at 1400 and final one around 1900.

### **Where do you start with the newbies?**

Ski-erg, rower or bike. I’ll always begin with that and make it competitive – perhaps doing three 3min rounds to record some times. Then every time they do it we’ll try and beat their previous time. When you’re not feeling particularly motivated or are a bit tired, it’s good to do that. Whatever’s on your mind you are going to forget, because you have to concentrate on this.

## COVERING NEW GROUND

**INSPIRED by the military’s bobsleigh contingent, Winter Olympian Pte Mica Moore (RLC) joined the army reserve – completing her basic training early last year. Here, she discusses the physical challenge of joining up at the same time as performing as an elite athlete:**

“It is one of my biggest achievements given how difficult it was,” she said.

“I’m a sprinter, so running the distances required in basic training was always going to

be tricky. I put in as many long runs as I could and managed to grind it out.

“In my career I have never run further than 300 metres, so it was daunting, but I love a challenge and once I set my mind on something I cannot see myself not doing it.

“I’m 5ft 4in and weigh 66kg, so carrying all that weight was also tough.

“For everything else I’ve done I have practised every day knowing what it would be like – the army was totally different.

“I’ve been to the Commonwealth Games and Winter Olympics and my passing-out parade was right up there with those happy moments.”

Read her full Games story on page 66.



Picture: Girts Kehris





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# reserves

## ‘WE WANT TO KNOW’

Troops urged to make their voices heard among senior leaders with survey

**SERVICE chiefs are appealing to soldiers to complete the 2026 reserves continuous attitude survey amid poor take-up in previous years.**

Just 13 per cent of non-commissioned recipients filled in the 2025 questionnaire, compared to 41 per cent of officers.

This year’s poll is now live, with a link emailed to some 13,662 pre-selected personnel – around two thirds of the part-time workforce.

It is the second time running that it has been sent out solely in digital format instead of also hard copy.

But bosses fear junior troops in particular may not regularly access their Modnet or Armyemail accounts, and are therefore encouraging everyone to actively check whether they have received the survey.

Director Army Reserves, Maj Gen Mark Lancaster (above), said it was important to gather feedback from all ranks.

“My personal request is that you give 20 to 30 minutes of your time to go through the



questions and answer them honestly.

“Rest assured that I, and the senior leadership, are listening to what you have to say.

“We want to know what motivates you to serve, what incentivises you to turn up for training, how your family and employer view your commitment and what issues we need to address to make things better.”

Last year’s results showed that overall satisfaction with life in the reserves remained high at 68 per cent, but soldiers also reported more negative views towards facilities and pre-deployment training.

Some of these concerns were being addressed through the ‘Too Good to Leave’ campaign, Maj Gen Lancaster added.

To check if you have been selected to give your thoughts, go to [surveys.mod.uk](https://surveys.mod.uk), click on ‘Army RESCAS 2026’ and enter your regimental number. The survey will be live until April 2 and feedback is anonymous.



Picture: Graeme Main

## CASH RELIEF

**FUNDING towards driving licences and education is on offer to reservists under two different retention initiatives.**

Troops have until March 31 to claim up to £1,000 to help with the cost of driving lessons and fees for theory and practical tests.

The grant, which is open to those who have completed recruit training, and linked to deployability, is aimed at easing financial pressures on part-time personnel, as well as enabling them to carry out military roles that require Category B licences and attend training events more easily.

Further information can be found in **ABN 063/2025** and applications can be made via the QR code below.

Meanwhile, £2,000 is available annually for reservists undertaking further or higher education. Recipients must be studying full time towards a nationally recognised qualification and be able to demonstrate that their chosen course benefits defence.

For full details of eligibility criteria read **ABN 058/2025**.

Both initiatives are part of the army’s ‘Too Good to Leave’ campaign, which aims to improve the experience of reserve personnel and encourage them to remain in service.

For queries on either grant email [armypers-res-ahq-team@mod.gov.uk](mailto:armypers-res-ahq-team@mod.gov.uk)



Picture: Shutterstock



# SOLE OPERATORS

High alert troops brush up on the skills required to step into any battlefield role

**I**F ANYTHING drives home the need for personnel to be able to step into any role, it's the online videos shooting out of Ukraine showing troops scattering for their lives – often unsuccessfully – under drone attack.

The next war could well require soldiers having to fight on as their commanders vanish from around them – perhaps due to section-level dispersal tactics, perhaps injury – or worse.

Should they find themselves isolated from their team, most well-trained infantrymen would still be confident taking care of business.

But in an increasingly high-tech fight, would they be just as confident operating their injured section commander's chest-mounted data system?

That is exactly the kind of predicament on the minds of troops from 1st Battalion, The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment as, like others, they scour the footage coming from Eastern Europe's front lines.

And they have good reason to be thinking through this stuff – the light infantry unit is currently serving as Nato's forward land forces strategic reserve.

This means the infantrymen are on high alert to deploy to the border with Russia in the event of conflict – with many troops now limited to staying within six hours of their Preston camp at all times.

However, after a busy 2025 – including Wessex Storm and extensive training on Exercise Hedgehog in Estonia (*Soldier*, June 2025) – this battalion has been turning its focus to ensuring that each individual understands the kit, as well as the responsibilities, of every soldier and commander around them.

Maj Lance Morris, OC Burma Company, explained more.

"Our latest training is about upskilling every one of our soldiers," the officer said.

"We know they have basic soldiering nailed and are credible, but this is about teaching them new things and having a much more modern approach.

"For example, we want every one of our people to be able to pick a drone up and use it.

"This kind of training isn't about the select few any more – it is about everybody."

When *Soldier* visited Burma Company at their home in Weeton Barracks they were rotating through three different stands to tick off some important new expertise.

## DRONES

First up, were lessons on a range of small UAS – including the D40, Parrot Anafi, Elbit quadcopter and 5-, 8- and 10-inch first-person view systems (FPVs). Troops from the drone platoon helped those around them get to grips with the specifics of each model and how they work.

Senior operator and instructor Cpl Luke Bradbury said the package had been well received by kingsmen.

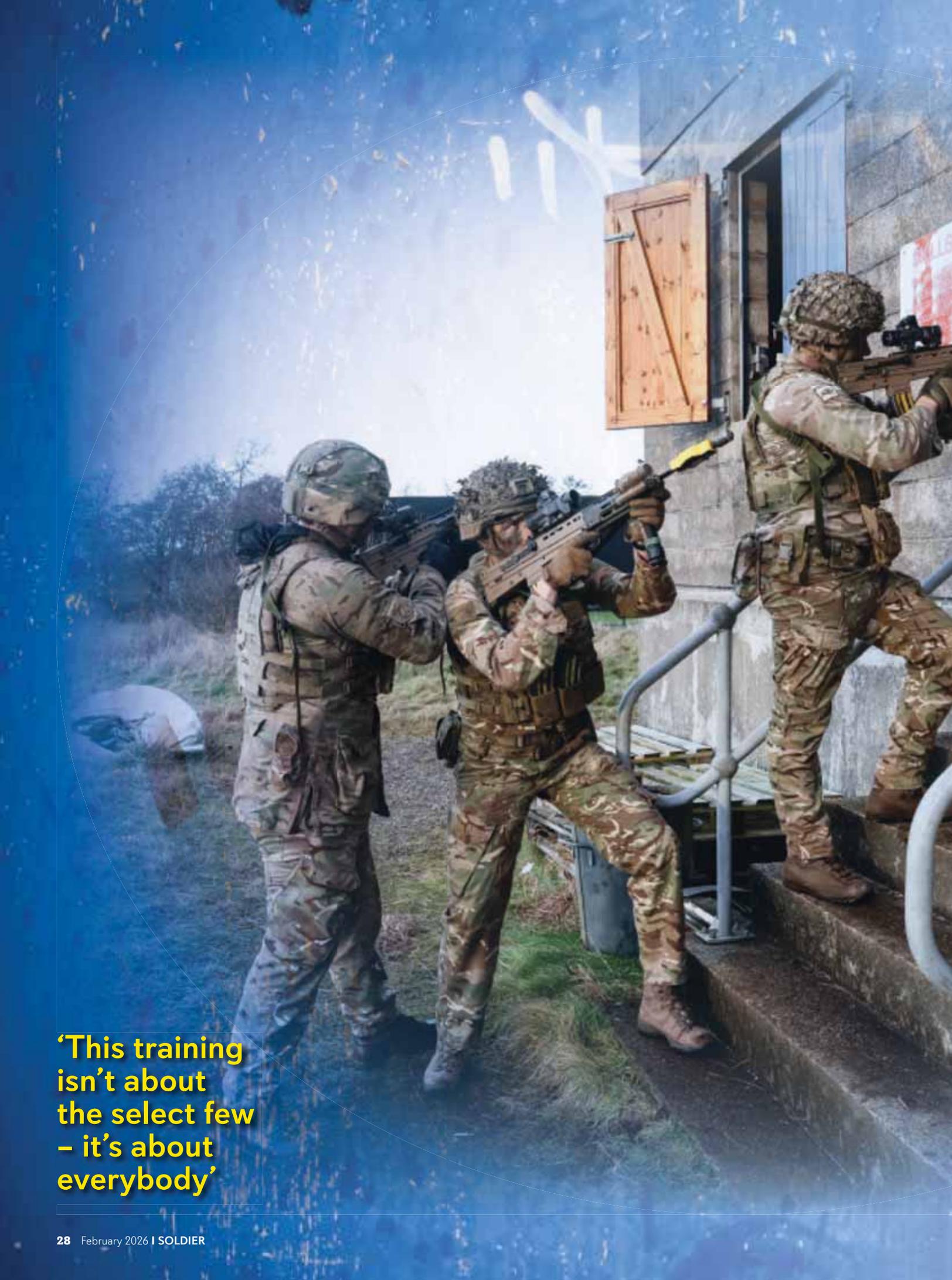
"It's probably been easier for the younger, modern generation to get to grips with this stuff than it has for me," smiled the 28-year-old intelligence NCO. "I don't think it will be long now before everyone does this sort of training in depot.

"Every kingsman has always needed to be weapon trained, and now it's the same with drones."

He said the need to understand UAS in some detail had become apparent to him on junior Brecon recently, where he had been hit by indirect fire after a drone picked up his team's thermal signature.

"These devices really increase situational awareness and the infantry's capability if everyone can operate them," he said. "But the main pitfall of training out here is the

»

A photograph of three soldiers in full combat gear, including helmets and tactical vests, training outdoors. They are positioned near a stone building with a wooden door. One soldier is on a set of stairs, another is in the middle ground aiming a rifle, and a third is in the foreground. The scene is set against a blue sky with some clouds. The image is framed by a large, semi-transparent blue circle.

**‘This training  
isn’t about  
the select few  
– it’s about  
everybody’**



Maj Lance Morris, Lancs

» weather, especially the wind we get. Most drones can be used in any temperature but some platforms like the Parrot struggle in wind.”

The junior NCO added that UAS had presented the perfect upskilling opportunity while he had been out of action with a torn ACL.

He said: “For most drone courses you don’t need to be fully fit – FPV you do because it’s tactical – but for me this was about keeping current.”

Kgn Leo Clarke, also part of the drone platoon, said there was more to the learning than the tactical operation side.

“Once we leave training, people go back to their rooms and some of us will be recharging batteries, reprogramming or looking at manuals,” he added. “People think you get them out the box and they’re ready to go, but it’s not that simple.”



### DDS

The dismounted data system (DDS) system – a relatively new digital targeting set-up (pictured above) that allows troops to locate and destroy enemy positions at speed – was another area of work for the soldiers in the North West.

Part of the cutting-edge Project Asgard (*Soldier*, August 2025), it is one of the pieces of kit that will be central to the army increasing its lethality over the next few years – which made it especially important to roll out across the battalion.

Maj Morris explained: “We started using this last summer on Wessex Storm and in Estonia, but that was just for section commanders. The difference now is that all our soldiers are getting access.

“Too often we find that we upskill commanders – section and platoon – but what happens when they’re not in the fight?”

“Yes, our soldiers could step up. But to get maximum utility from them – and to make them feel invested in – we need them to know how to use this equipment too.”

He added: “For us, the days of ‘go and sit in that tree and look at that arc for a couple of hours and tell us what you see’ have gone. We want everyone to know what everyone else’s job is, and how to use their kit, by getting their hands on the most modern of what we have – even those fresh out of Catterick.”

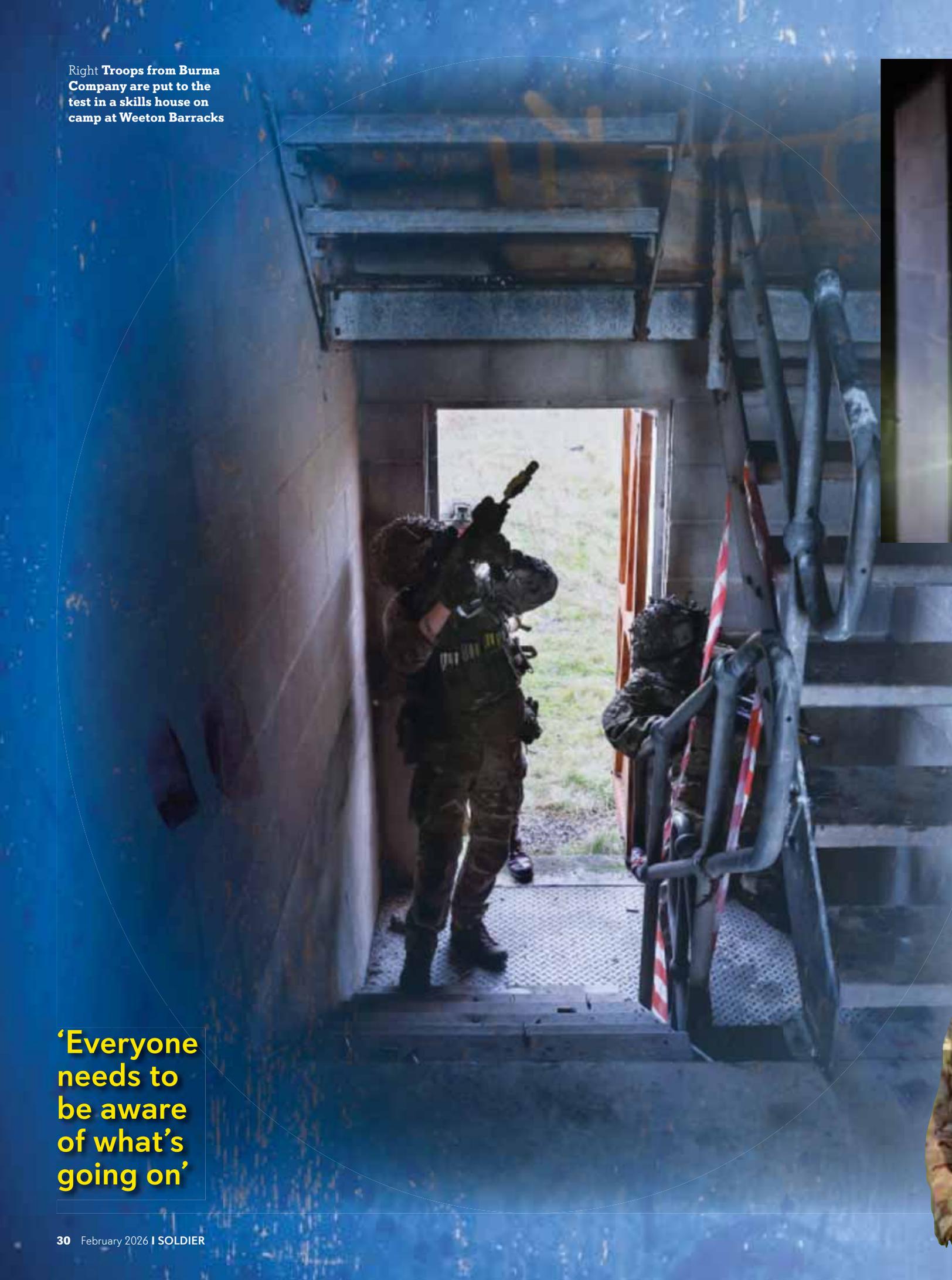
### URBAN DRILLS

The final piece of enhancement training centred on fighting in built-up areas – or Fibua – using an old skills house behind the barracks (shown) to go through various tactics.

At the heart of these drills, of course, is the knowledge that this kind of fighting is a permanent feature of the battles raging though the »

Right Troops from Burma Company are put to the test in a skills house on camp at Weeton Barracks

**‘Everyone needs to be aware of what’s going on’**





## In Numbers

### WAR IN EUROPE

# 1,800

Square miles of territory Russia took from Ukraine in 2025, according to the US-based Institute for the Study of War. Lancs troops are on standby to deploy to the eastern flank of Europe should the conflict escalate

» industrial zones of the Luhansk and Donetsk regions.

"In this kind of scenario everyone needs to be completely aware of what's going on around them," explained Capt Conor Paterson, Burma Coy second-in-command.

"Going through each skill slowly, and ensuring every rank has an understanding of their role, is so important because of the high attrition rate in these environments."

Trying to gain good situational awareness in cramped, dark and confusing surroundings – as well as mastering the tactics to successfully enter and clear a building – is heavy going by anyone's standards. But for Kgn Josh Stockdale it was a welcome refresher.

"We did a lot of urban stuff last year, then had a few months where we haven't touched it, so it's good to brush up on things like break-ins."

"Urban fighting is more stressful because it's all on you. If you're alone in a doorway, it's up to you to get out – you need to make sure your skills are good."

Kgn Reece Cummings agreed.

"It's been very varied and energetic," the 21-year-old serviceman added.

"Urban drills are exciting and you get a buzz off it when you're doing it – probably because you know it's one of the things you could be doing for real."

"If you're in a stack and your first person messes up, it can completely mess up the whole thing. So there is more pressure on the individual. It's such a close space."

Personnel will be putting these lessons into action across the Channel very soon when they descend on the Cenzub urban training facility for some bilateral training with French troops during Exercise Gaulish.

In preparation for the visit, some have been brushing up on French weapons systems such as the HK416 assault rifle in Pirbright and on a visit to the National Firearms Centre in Leeds.

Others, meanwhile, have impressively volunteered to try and crack the local language.

"I did a two-week course at the camp

education centre at the end of November – I didn't do French in school and thought learning another language would be interesting," said Kgn Logan Gray.

"I'm struggling with it a bit, and I know the French will speak better English, but now, if a French soldier doesn't know any English, he could give a brief to us and I could translate. It would help out."

It's the kind of mindset that must be making the lives of commanders far easier as they try to raise the baseline proficiency of every soldier down the chain.

And what also appears to be helping the cause is the fact this unit is following through on a pace of life promised to troops when they first walked through the door.

For Kgn Stockdale, being scattered far and wide as a battalion is part of the appeal of service life.

"We went on Wessex Storm at the start of last year, then Estonia, then a few went to Glasgow staging on, plus a battalion exercise in Brecon, and now France. That will be another country ticked off, working with another army," he said.

"Cenzub's supposed to be quite good and this life is something I always wanted to do. I did four years, left, then rejoined. I missed it."

Kgn Cummings added: "It's exciting to be experiencing different armies and what they might do better or worse – far preferable to being in camp all the time."

"Travel is definitely one of the things that appeals about army life."

With 200 of their soldiers also out in Estonia on persistent engagement activities, as well as the likes of cold-weather and mountain-leader training, there can be no doubt this battalion is ready for action should the call come.

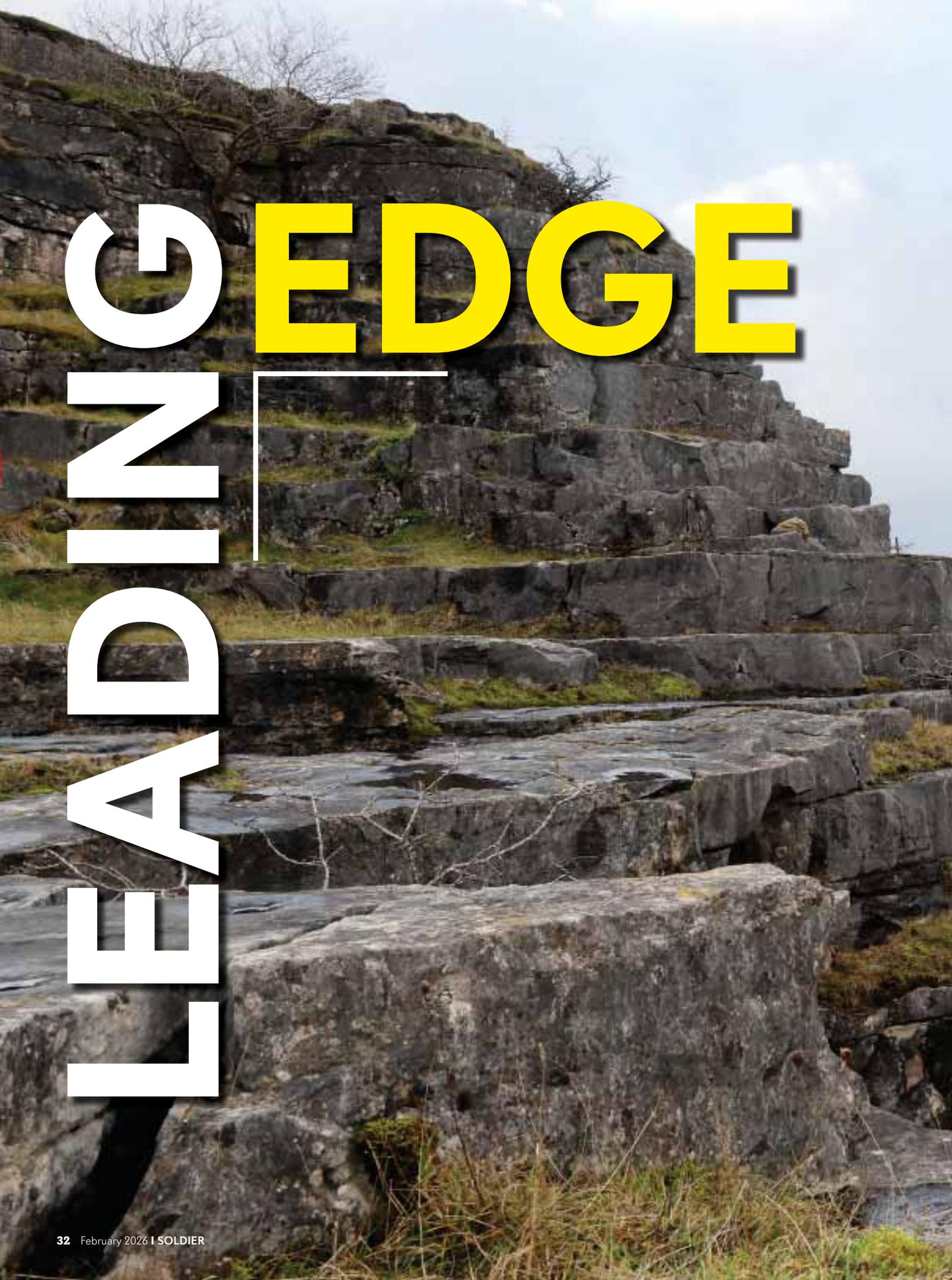
And in the meantime, moving its modernisation mission right down the rank structure is set to pay dividends – both on the proving grounds of France and, of course, on any future battlefield where, as Ukrainian troops know all too well, one adept fighter can inflict a world of pain on any enemy.

"Difficulties be damned" goes The Duke of Lancaster Regiment's motto. Today's British Army might be considerably smaller than many want, but its people are going hell-for-leather to ensure that out on the front line each fighter's effect will be magnified in the extreme – whether that is in the region they suspect, or one they never did. <<



Kgn Reece Cummings, Lancs

Final word – page 74



# LEADING EDGE

## Soldiers hone command skills in wild Wales

Report: Steve Muncey Pictures: Graeme Main

**A**DVENTUROUS training is about to take on a more prominent role in helping develop the service's next generation of talented troops.

The revised army leadership and development programme (ALDP) is moving to a modular based format from this April - with adventurous leadership and resilience training becoming one of its mandatory elements.

The finer details of how the scheme will work in practice have yet to be revealed by Army Individual Training Command but we do know troops will have to complete this element to gauge their teamwork and leadership skills under pressure while outside their comfort zones.

The tuition will build heavily on the adventurous activities delivered during basic training, which usually take place at the Halton or Sennybridge soldier development wings.

Across all three services, it's estimated around 20,000 personnel participate in AT annually - and soon the 2,500 or so troops taking their first step on the NCO ladder every year will join the mix.

That's quite a leap in percentage terms and the service is responding

by recruiting and training more instructing staff and bolstering its facilities around the UK.

Later this year, the army's AT wing at Inverness will be replaced by a new, larger facility at Kinloss which will have the capacity to offer a wide range of land-based endeavours plus offshore sailing - only the second centre in the UK to have this capability.

Currently, there are 13 adventurous training hubs - either army or joint service facilities - located across the UK and Germany, with one based in Dhekelia, Cyprus.

They specialise in single-pursuit foundation courses - which qualify individuals to be competent members of a led group - as well as hosting multi-activity introductory packages. The joint service sites provide most of the specialised training that is required to qualify personnel as instructors.

With demand for courses and facilities set to rise, we visited the army AT centre in Brecon to gauge the views of students and staff on the move to include this type of activity in the leadership development programme and what benefits it might bring junior NCOs. >>



Left A group from The King's Royal Hussars rock climbing in an abandoned quarry near Brecon as part of a multi-activity package

Right **Adventurous training is becoming a formal part of the army's leadership development programme**



## LCpl Emily Skeels, RAMS Leader, Army AT Wing Brecon

Adventurous training becoming part of the ALDP course can only be a good thing. Applying for a role here has certainly been great for my personal and professional development.

I've gained so many leadership skills since I arrived and have really come out of my shell. I feel confident managing people now, including personnel from different ranks, backgrounds and cap badges.

I've been in the army for four years and previously worked as a nurse in the rehab centre at Stanford Hall. I wanted to expand my experiences and coming here has helped me achieve that.

I obtained my quals in six months and am currently spending six months delivering courses for the centre. In the last week I've been helping supervise students on the multi-activity package and open water canoeing.

When I go back to my medical duties I know I'll be much more capable, whether it's dealing with individuals, small teams or larger groups when I will be required to deliver some complex briefs.

That extra bit of self-assurance will be so useful as I try to further my career.

When, hopefully, I become a corporal I'll typically lead a team of around six people and I feel a lot more confident at the prospect of doing that now. My long-term aspiration is to become an instructor at Sandhurst and I really believe my time here has helped me prepare.





**WO2 Kane Mortimer, RAPTC**  
 Chief Instructor, Army AT Wing Brecon

We're sure to be an even busier centre than we are now thanks to the ALDP element coming in. We can house some 36 students at a time currently but are looking to explore some other options with the Infantry Battle School to expand our accommodation in the area.

The plan is also to take on four more instructing staff in the near future, increasing our total number from seven to 11.

Three of them will probably be civilian senior instructors who will be permanent staff here. We also have six adventurous training leaders in post at any one time – service personnel posted here for a year.

They spend the first few months obtaining their quals in relevant disciplines and then move on to delivering courses.

We'll certainly need to keep attracting the right people. It's a constant revolving door and with the ALDP including AT we'll need a steady stream of applications from good candidates. Keeping those roles filled is one of the major challenges of my job.

Working here as an AT leader is actually a great opportunity. Some COs might not realise how good the experience can be for their personnel, even if they do face losing them for 12 months.

We offer places up to the rank of captain but our target audience is junior NCOs. These troops are put in a position where they're conducting risk-to-life activities every day.

They're going out on the ground, managing a group of people they've never met before, delivering briefs and effectively acting as senior NCOs – that's very positive for their units.

Often they come to us as shy, not very confident people with very little exposure to managing risk, but they develop fast as leaders here.

They will get experience of acting as instructors and doing that to a really good standard.

So after 12 months the product the unit is getting back is a more rounded individual, who simply wouldn't have been exposed to this level of responsibility so early in their careers if they'd stayed put.



Below **Troops taking part in the open water canoeing foundation course**



**Cpl Jack Barnes, KRH**  
Student, multi-activity package

It's a good idea to put adventurous training into the ALDP. I do think it can bring junior soldiers on very quickly in terms of building confidence.

I did the summer mountaineering foundation course up in Inverness and was the only NCO there. I could see just how well the private soldiers improved in confidence and started displaying better leadership skills through the week.

I think some AT activities have more value than others when it comes to developing personnel in this respect though – I'm not sure how effective mountain biking would be, for example.

Something arduous would be worth including on the ALDP. You need to be working closely as a team, navigating, having to keep your admin in good order and you should have to deal with cold or uncomfortable conditions to test yourself properly.





**LCpl Jack Pettigrew, RE Student,** open water canoeing foundation course

Adventurous training becoming part of the ALDP syllabus has got to be a good move for the army because so many people shy away from this type of thing, but they might find something they really enjoy and benefit from.

It gets soldiers out of their comfort zones and that's no bad thing. ALDP is mainly about managing people and if you've never done that before you get a taste of that responsibility in a more relaxed setting with adventurous training compared to, say, a full-blown exercise.

I don't know many of the personnel on my course so it's been a good test to see how quickly we can form effective teams and look out for each other.

Also, we are responsible for maintaining and drying our kit so there definitely are lessons for developing good admin habits in the field.

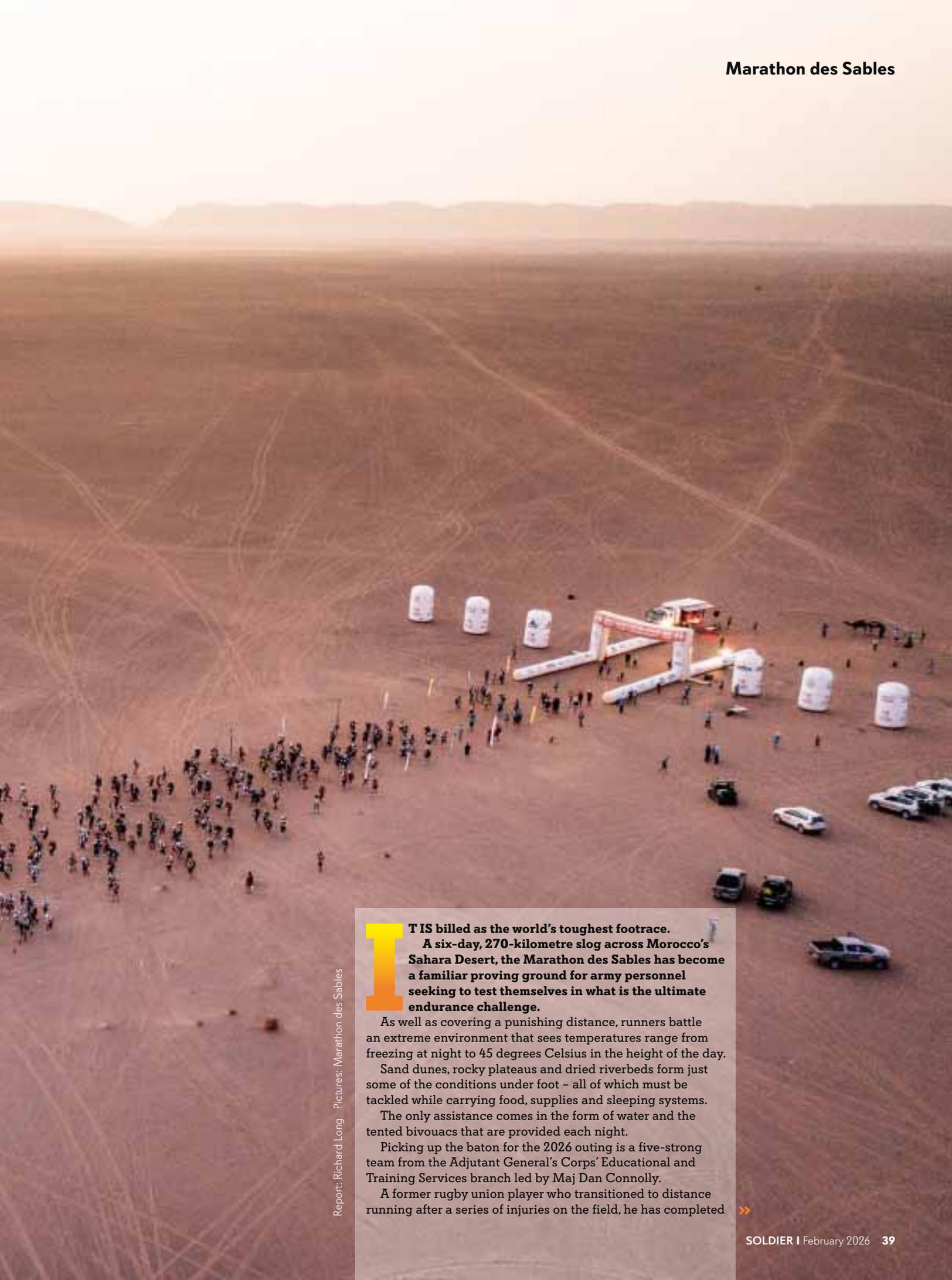
AT is an important part of the army's offer for me. Most of us join up to do something different to the norm and the opportunities that are available across the board in various activities are surprisingly good.

An aerial photograph of a vast, flat desert landscape under a hazy, orange-tinted sky. In the lower portion of the image, a large group of runners is visible, appearing as small dark figures against the light-colored sand. The ground is marked with numerous light-colored tracks and lines, suggesting a well-used path or a specific route. The overall scene conveys a sense of endurance and challenge in a harsh environment.

R U N N I N G

H O T

Troops  
brace for  
the grueling  
Marathon des  
Sables



Report: Richard Long Pictures: Marathon des Sables

**I**T IS billed as the world's toughest footrace. A six-day, 270-kilometre slog across Morocco's Sahara Desert, the Marathon des Sables has become a familiar proving ground for army personnel seeking to test themselves in what is the ultimate endurance challenge.

As well as covering a punishing distance, runners battle an extreme environment that sees temperatures range from freezing at night to 45 degrees Celsius in the height of the day.

Sand dunes, rocky plateaus and dried riverbeds form just some of the conditions under foot - all of which must be tackled while carrying food, supplies and sleeping systems.

The only assistance comes in the form of water and the tented bivouacs that are provided each night.

Picking up the baton for the 2026 outing is a five-strong team from the Adjutant General's Corps' Educational and Training Services branch led by Maj Dan Connolly.

A former rugby union player who transitioned to distance running after a series of injuries on the field, he has completed





» numerous events since – including Ironman UK and the 100-kilometre Race to the Stones – but none compare to what the group will face in the desert come April.

“This is something I’ve wanted to do for a long time, just because of the challenge really,” the officer (pictured right) told *Soldier*.

“I’ve always been keen to push myself and do the most difficult thing I can.

“I knew this race was tough but thought how much better it would be if I wasn’t just doing it by myself.

“We have fantastic personnel in the branch, so I put out a calling notice to form a team. There was a lot of interest, and we have got the five best people for the job.”

Among those to answer that call was Capt Charley Rogerson, who was drawn to the challenge by the power of social media.

“I’m the team member with the least experience, but I’ve always known about the Marathon des Sables,” she explained.

“I had seen emotional videos from the event on Instagram and TikTok and when the notice came through there was a voice in my head saying, ‘this is the race for you’.

“I knew it would involve a lot of days in the heat, but that was about it.

“Dan gave a talk that presented the real truth, and I thought how

amazing it would be to do this challenge with a team of likeminded people.

“If I didn’t bite the bullet and give it a go now, I may never have done it. This has been such a gift – even on the long winter training runs in the snow.”

The notoriety of the Marathon des Sables was a significant pull for Maj Greg Dove.

The team’s training director, he previously served in The Royal Green Jackets and Royal Army Physical Training Corps and has tackled various ultra-distance tests, from triathlons to trail runs.

He said: “It is the unique nature of the event – the terrain, climate, high temperatures, cold nights and the fact you have to be self-sufficient in carrying all your kit.

“At other ultra-marathon events you mostly compete against people from that nation, but this attracts runners from right across the globe.

“Bringing those two elements together makes it so attractive.

“In terms of training, there are differences in our individual abilities. An average week ranges between 20 and 50 miles and includes four to six runs.

“It is polarised endurance training, meaning 80 per cent of those runs will be at a low to moderate intensity with the other 20 per cent at a high intensity.

“That allows us to hit the volume required without getting injured. »





» “We look to make increases of ten per cent each week to build towards a solid endurance base.

“It is important we get used to running on tired legs as that will happen in the desert.

“Running the distance is one thing, but it is also about the sand, heat and the fact we have to carry kit.

“Everything we have planned between now and the start replicates the real race scenarios we’ll face.”

The nature of the event - long distances, austere conditions and a requirement to dig deep - means serving personnel should have a distinct advantage, given the nature of the day job.

It is a theory backed by Capt Rogerson (pictured above).

“I think those skills transfer well,” she continued. “In the army it is all about mental resilience, getting through and just finishing it.

“The service gives you a deep understanding of how important the mind is as a muscle.

“We are set up nicely. Training with weight is something we have done for years, so we have that baseline of fitness.

“When you think about all the transferable skills, it is probably the reason why such a big military contingent has attempted this over the years.

“I’ve seen a lot of YouTube videos and clips, and it seems that everyone is saying if you manage your admin in the heat, you are going to be fine.



“If we can go in knowing we have done all the running and training and that all we have to do is focus on the heat we will be in a good position.”

Maj Connolly believes the relentlessness of the Marathon des Sables will be one of the biggest challenges and that is why the collective approach will be vital.

“We will be running in the Sahara every day for seven days,” the officer continued.

“This is where the team comes in. As an individual you are going to have doubts creeping in, but as we are five people doing it together you do not want to let anyone down.

“That can be an advantage - we want to represent ourselves the best we can.”

That is a sentiment shared by Maj Dove, who said the team - which also includes Capt Jasmine Woodford and Capt Logan Vinters - will not be setting any goals prior to departure.

“We are not bothered by certain times or positions,” he added. “This is just a great event to experience.

“But at the same time, I don’t want to go out there and struggle due to a lack of preparation.

“We have become a lot closer through this and that will only develop further as we get nearer to race day.

“If we arrive fully prepared, physically fit and with our kit in good order that will get us a long way.” »





## In Numbers

### Marathon des Sables



**270**

kilometres in length



**11**

days offline, including  
nine in the desert



**47**

average age of participants



**5.2**

average pace in km/h



**6**

stages - the longest of  
which is 100 kilometres



**60**

nationalities represented



**90**

per cent of entrants  
who finish the route



**40**

years of the event

The Endurance Army Educators are raising money for Walking with the Wounded and the AGC Association. Scan here to donate.





» **Adventure encouraged**

KNOWN as the Endurance Army Educators, the runners will become the second AGC (ETS) outfit to tackle an extreme physical challenge in two years.

The Oarsome Army Educators completed the World's Toughest Row in 2025 - claiming third place in the mixed fours category of a race that sees crews row from the Canary Islands to Antigua.

Such ventures have been encouraged by Branch Colonel, Col Jonny Taffs, who hopes personnel will be inspired to plan similar events moving forward.

He said: "They are building what I hope will become a tradition of having flagship adventures that showcase the spirit of our branch: dynamic, engaged and with a boldness and confidence to give anything a go."

Such backing allowed Maj Connolly to press ahead with plans for the Marathon des Sables.

"We were inspired by the Oarsome Army Educators and this is about us continuing to showcase the personnel in the ETS," he explained.

"They showed what a small group of highly motivated officers can achieve. That encouraged me to put this together.

"We have had a lot of support from our chain of command, and the aim now is to achieve something exceptional like this every year." <<



# A CHILLY

A group of people are swimming in a large body of water, likely a lake or reservoir. The water is calm and greyish-blue. In the background, there is a dense forest of trees with bare branches, suggesting a cold season. The sky is overcast and grey. The overall mood is chilly and serene.

Report: Sarah Goldthorpe Pictures: Beth Proddger

# DIP...



Cold-water swimming group  
eases the mental load for  
soldiers and veterans

Below **Swimmers stay frosty as they tackle Blue Monday at Frensham Ponds**

» **I**T'S Blue Monday – supposedly the unhappiest day of the year – when I join swimmers on the shore of Frensham Great Pond near Aldershot. But there are no glum faces here.

The group of veterans and serving personnel I am standing with are about to plunge themselves into the chilly water.

Just one degree cooler, and this would technically be called as an 'ice swim'.

It is a bad idea; I know it.

My summer-spec wetsuit is way too thin to help me now, and the cold wind has numbed my toes before I've even removed shoes.

If there is a single most depressing day on the calendar, I may just be about to hit rock bottom.

But a flash of pink light appears in the corner of my eye – a man has just stripped down to his neon budgie-smugglers.

The jokes and banter begin, and for a few minutes I completely forget the winter weather around me.

I might just have found the best place to wait out Blue Monday.

Line of Departure, as this swim meet is known, was only set up a few months ago by organiser Matt Underwood.

And once everyone takes their places along the pond's shoreline, we begin pacing with intent towards the water.

The offensive – as per the group's title – has begun. Splash! Oof.

"Since coming here I've seen a huge improvement in my own mental health, so I wanted to expand it and create a community that provides support to others," ex-Royal Engineer Underwood tells me after five minutes of being submerged to our shoulders.

Not much talking happens during the dip itself – most are just trying to regulate their breathing and laugh away the discomfort. Only a few attempt to actually swim.

But once we are out, it becomes clear how camaraderie and friendship can develop from just a few minutes of shared hardship.

Herrick veteran Underwood, who like many here today is a firefighter, explains more: "Other than the car parking, these sessions are free to attend. And there are six dates per month when we meet.

"I don't know what it is about cold-water immersion – I can't really

explain it – but you just feel so invigorated for the day.

"If you're feeling lethargic and don't want to go to the gym, you can come here, get in and out, and by the time you are home and in warm clothes again you feel totally different.

"But it's the connecting with people while you're doing it that makes a difference."

This certainly appears true from what *Soldier* observes during our brief visit to Surrey's wild-swimming oasis.

Veteran Kev Kempton (ex-RGJ) sums up what the icy plunges and pondside chats mean for him.

"When it comes to mental health, I find counsellors are a bit too invasive," the veteran of Bosnia and Northern Ireland,

explains. "But there's no questioning here or being scrutinised by professionals. People naturally start talking after the swims, and things start to come out far more organically.

"You realise that you're not on your own, that there are people with similar difficulties, and you get to hear how they're getting on with life.

"It's refreshing."

As *Soldier* heads back to the office – and crucially, the central heating – the rest of the group remain on the sand, standing chatting in their fleeces.

The laughter is still echoing round the car park as we drive away.

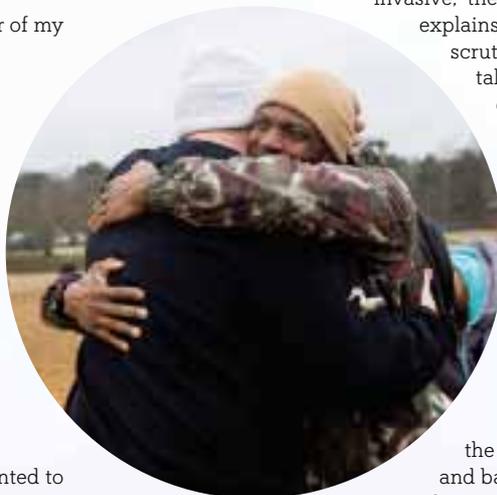
Cold water might be therapeutic, but perhaps the real tonic today has been getting outdoors and bathing in the company of kindred spirits who understand the ups and downs of military life as well as what comes afterwards.

"We provide a safe space for people who have already taken a big step just by attending," Underwood concludes.

"You don't have to have done five tours of Bosnia or Iraq to attend – it's open to all. To us, your service is your service – whether you served a long career or did two weeks then suffered an injury.

"We're here for everyone." <<

**\* Line of Departure currently runs six-to-eight meetings a month. Unlike *Soldier's* specially-arranged visit, the gatherings are anonymous with no photographs posted on social media.**



## 'It gets your blood going'



## POND DIPPING

Members of the Line of Departure swimming group explain what they get from the meets...



### Matt Underwood, ex-RE

Group leader, age 38

"When we're in the water, I try and get people to move past the military bravado of 'I'm going to do one minute per degree' or whatever. If you just go to your ankles and knees, that's fine. For me, the biggest thing I have found with cold water immersion is the improvement to my sleep; I don't sleep well due to nightmares. But coming here doesn't replace counselling or anything like that. People must still seek that out if needed. I try and organise meets on different days throughout the week, and there are just over 30 people involved now."



### Kev Kempton, ex-RGJ

Swimmer, age 54

"It gets your blood going and you feel a bit buzzy afterwards. It's relaxing too, once you stop shivering. Everyone gets something different from these meets, even the closed books like me. It's not just fires I deal with in my role as a firefighter, it's suicides, people under trains and drownings – there's a lot of trauma. I was encouraged to get counselling once but it wasn't for me. I'm very private and when questioned will shut down, which I think is the same for a lot of people. I'd much rather do something like this and have a laugh. Here, you can talk to people on your own terms."



### WO2 James Sergison, RE

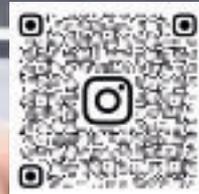
Swimmer, age 36

"I used to do cold-water swimming in Devon on my own, but it's great to have a community that do it together, and I can provide support to anyone who needs it. Matt's done a great job setting it all up. There's still stigma around mental health, but I have seen the swimmers down here open up with each other straight away. I think the shared hardship of the cold water encourages it. As you walk in, the only thing you can really focus on is the present moment. It gives you respite from any challenges you may have going on in your life."

'It gives you respite from any challenges in your life'

### FANCY A SWIM?

Find the group on Instagram at  
@lineofdeparturefrenshamponds





# GRIPPING THE BOOZE

In an era where agility and personal fitness is critical, could it be time to rethink your drinking habits?

**I AM coming round slowly from a spinning slumber, face down in bed and dribbling into a pillow. A milky winter sunlight is streaming through my undrawn hotel room curtains.**

Recollections are swirling – clambering off a C-130 at the airhead in Split and then sitting in a mines awareness brief.

A couple of NCOs met me and we drove through the Croatian town; a hotel-check in and an evening with an endless parade of red wine and beer. We talked about “going up country”.

Bosnia – rats – we’re driving to Bosnia today. Right on cue there is a rapid pounding on the door.

“Cazza?” says a muffled squaddie’s voice. “You’re late – downstairs; five minutes.”

Suddenly bolt upright, the world has caught up.

With a bergan still packed from a late arrival, I stumble and ferret for clothes. There’s the awful feeling of being a spectator as the worst hangover of my life takes hold and there is important business ahead. Crashing down stairs through check-out, I climb into the back of a Land Rover. The next eight hours will feel like the Hundred Years’ War.

Even though this episode was 30 years ago, I still remember it with a glowing

embarrassment given that – as a then very green defence correspondent – a night of overindulgence with off-duty troops disrupted the rhythm of life on an operation, rendered me professionally useless for hours and threatened to wreck a career that had barely even started.

And while times and deployments have changed, it seems the ever-present booze is still the enemy within.

The cold facts speak for themselves.

In the last 12 months, alcohol was a factor in more than half of court martials that resulted in the dismissal of soldiers reported in this magazine.

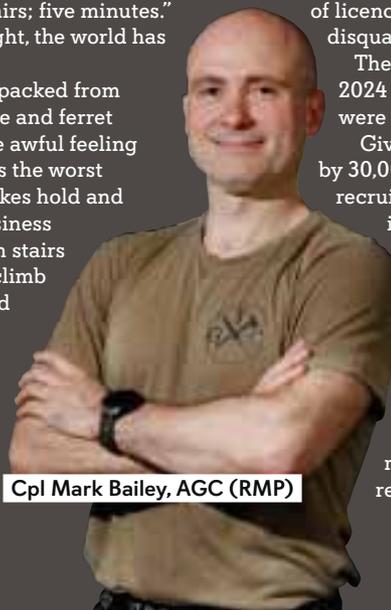
Nights out on the sauce continue to render personnel unfit for duty and there are ongoing concerns at the needless loss of licences through drink-driving disqualifications.

The last set of army figures from 2024 show more than 240 troops were banned from the roads.

Given the regular army has shrunk by 30,000 in the last two decades, that recruitment is still an issue, and there is now a full-on conventional war raging on Europe’s doorstep, self-inflicted attrition is something the service can well do without.

It is therefore unsurprising that commanders are concerned.

“When it comes to fitness, recovery and operational readiness, alcohol is one of >>



Cpl Mark Bailey, AGC (RMP)

# HEALTH HANGOVER

Cpl Mark Bailey says the immediate threats from booze include...

Dehydration

Reduction in joint lubrication

Increase in inflammation

Poorer deep and REM sleep

Less stress tolerance

» the most underestimated performance disruptors facing troops," says Cpl Mark Bailey (AGC (RMP), overleaf), a reservist PTI and sports massage therapist on civvy street.

"Although most soldiers train hard, the problem is that drinking sabotages recovery – and while you don't need to stop in order to stay fit, you do need to stop letting it dictate your performance and manage the balance properly."

Long-time health issues caused by misuse – including liver disease and links to a stack of cancers – aside, Cpl Bailey believes it is the more immediate physical impacts of inflammation and slower tissue repair that will hit troops the hardest.

"You can smash a perfect PT session on a Friday afternoon and undo much of the benefit with heavy drinking that evening," he adds. "Alcohol is the reason why many feel unusually stiff or flat in training and are more injury prone despite doing everything else right."

All this is triggering a few queasy flashbacks to that awful slog into Bosnia. Heading along the infamously rough main supply route, bouncing around with my lungs flushed in diesel fumes, I unceremoniously manage to throw up all over my kit.

The world is surreal, slow and I'm now wet in subzero temperatures as well.

All of the symptoms Cpl Bailey describes combine in a perfect storm. I'm washed out, on my knees and trying to salvage the contents of my bergen. And even though I was out for the count as soon as I hit my

bed, I'm still knackered.

"Alcohol might help you sleep quickly but the quality is poor – notably because it reduces deep sleep, fragments the second half of the night and raises your resting heart rate," the NCO continues.

"The result is simple – you wake up tired with reduced motivation and with a lower mental resilience."

Overall, he advises cutting drinking to social occasions, eating protein rich meals and ensuring plenty of water is taken on board before and after booze.

Resting from phys the following day is also sensible to aid your recovery, the PTI – serving with 116 Provost Company, 1st Regiment RMP – suggests.

"Even when alcohol has cleared the system, hangover effects can reduce performance for up to 72 hours," he adds.

"Fitness is about consistency, readiness and reliability – particularly when early PT, tests and courses are non-negotiable."

With the current high training tempo, plus a demand from the chief of the general staff to double fighting power in the next 11 months and treble it by the end of the decade, leaders have been ensuring troops are aware of their responsibilities.

"Put simply, we must have as many people in the fight as possible if the worst happens," says Maj Lance Morris of 1st

Battalion, The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment.

"As a unit, we are on short notice to join Nato's forward land forces in Eastern Europe and need our soldiers deployable for operations if we are called upon to go," he adds. "We must keep our people in the ranks and cannot afford to have large numbers of them unfit – soldiers need to be ready."

Maj Morris is speaking amid a relentless schedule. After a spell in Cyprus, troops hit Estonia for a Nato exercise. And as this issue went to press Burma Company, under the officer's command, was readying for Anglo-French manoeuvres at the Cenzub complex near Rheims (page 26), prior to an outing in Kenya.

But while acknowledging there have been some occasions when troops have landed themselves in booze fuelled trouble, Maj Morris notes the younger generation joining the ranks seem less inclined to indulge in alcohol. This was borne out on a recent presentation to personnel on addiction issues.

"We had a good discussion following the seminar, given by a mental health nurse," he adds. "While we talked about the dangers for career and professional performance, it seems that the cost of drinking alone is turning some off."

"Whereas an evening out would cost between £20 and £50 in my era, it is more like £200 now – that is quite a chunk of the wages of a junior NCO or soldier."



## IN NUMBERS

'Just one more...'

# 72

Time, in hours, hangover effects can last

# 242

Soldier drink-driving convictions in 2024



Kgn Seedia Badjie (pictured left) is one of those in the company who doesn't drink – and while he is dry for religious reasons, he testifies there is little peer pressure to knock back a glass these days. Some colleagues also avoid alcohol altogether.

"I'm quite a private guy and tend to mix within my own circle of friends – alcohol is forbidden as part of my Muslim faith but people do understand my position, are respectful and I have not had any problems," he adds.

"This said, however, drinking is still popular socially and I'm not sure that some in the army realise the damage they are doing to themselves if they take it to excess," the 22-year-old continues. "You're still serving, even when you are off-duty."

I'm back in the past again, crossing the border into Bosnia, wiping the vomit from my wallet – the contents of which have definitely taken a hammering in terms of local currency from the heavy previous evening. There was a moment of panic when I couldn't find either my passport or Nato press card – which would have taken some explaining to troops challenging us at the numerous vehicle checkpoints, not to mention an editor.

Sprawling out on the floor, the temperature has dropped as the Balkans winter bites. It's now way below freezing and, having nearly lost any means of identifying myself, I'm starting to numb. In my mind I am praying that there is no shooting; the international community is threatening airstrikes against Serbian

troops to stop a war from escalating in neighbouring Kosovo – nobody is sure how the conflict will play out here if that happens. After today's mess, my future alcohol consumption will be curtailed if there is the remotest possibility of any activity with soldiers. It is a pledge that has held firm throughout a now very long reporting life.

Thankfully, the trouble did not flare. I arrived at the British camp and managed some real sleep. But the world is arguably more precarious now than it was in those days after the Cold War, when I was a hungover embedded reporter. Threats are constantly changing and – if the call comes – deployment will be rapid and soldiers of all arms and trades will count.

Every army in history has had its vices. But despite signs the culture may be changing with alcohol in the British Army, it remains a threat.

Ukraine has demonstrated that future wars require faster manoeuvre and speed to the trigger. And alcohol impedes both of these things.

This thought, in itself, is sobering, and Cpl Bailey maintains that personnel must pay heed. "The soldiers who stay fit and still drink tend to do one thing well – they manage alcohol like the training load," he concludes. "My message is to train hard, recover properly and drink with awareness, not simply out of habit." <<

For advice on problem drinking in your unit see panel, right, and ABN 009/2025



## HELP AT HAND

ARMY efforts to help those with drinking dramas are being boosted by a growing number of unit alcohol advisers made up of officers, warrant officers and senior NCOs.

Those taking on the job provide early intervention to troops with issues and are prepared for the role via a day-and-a-half-long course. They then cascade their knowledge to trusted personnel in their outfit.

Shown above, WO1 Ben Hood (AGC (RMP)) coordinates the training as a member of the Unacceptable Behaviours Team and says the packages have been well subscribed since they were first introduced some seven years ago.

He tells *Soldier*: "Excessive drinking is not tolerated anymore – it is generally not acceptable, for example, to go out and have a few pints at lunchtime.

"Having advisers is about early intervention before drinking gets to a medical level."



# Life in the jihadi's playground

Almost 25 years since the war in Afghanistan began, the country's story offers lessons in countering fake narratives, says this one-time Taliban member



## 'My country was plunged into civil war and the Taliban's aims resonated'

**M**AIWAND Banayee had one, all-consuming wish when he was 16 – to join a Taliban battalion in holy war and become a suicide bomber.

It was a religious imperative the Afghan national had learned from the uncompromising mullahs in the madrassas – or religious schools – of a refugee camp on his country's borders with Pakistan.

Spurred on by the hard-line preachers, who claimed all Muslims had an obligation to wage war against non-believers, his dream was to martyr himself and win entry to a promised paradise.

"The Taliban was one of the groups that emerged from these schools – the word 'talib' actually means 'student'," Banayee – who went on to renounce violence and now works as a health professional in the UK – told *Soldier*.

"From the beginning of the 1990s, my country was plunged into civil war and the Taliban's aims resonated with me – I joined them because practically they seemed a force for stability, driving out warlords and restoring peace."

Banayee's reality was, by any stretch, a world apart from the West, where football, music, clubbing and an emerging internet were the staple fodder of young people. Born in 1980 into a large Pashtun family in the capital Kabul – and the son of a secular-minded father who had served as a brigadier in the Afghan Army – he had witnessed constant violence.

As a child, he saw a communist Soviet Union occupy the state, before a later civil war forced him to flee with loved ones to the Shamshato border refugee camp near Peshawar in Pakistan.

All this fighting was taking place >>

Interview: Cliff Caswell Pictures: Maiwand Banayee

Main picture **Banayee (circled) with gunmen in Afghanistan** Right **Present day, working in the NHS** Facing page **Growing up as a boy and young man in Afghanistan**

» well away from the gaze of most outsiders. While Western journalists had sporadically covered Afghanistan during the Soviet incursion of 1979, few were aware of the internal conflict that prevailed after the invaders were ousted a decade later by American-backed factions of Muslim guerrillas collectively known as the mujahideen.

Nor did most understand that the successive Taliban movement had gone on to seize power, was attracting a violent brand of religious zealots opposed to Western values, and that they were harbouring a Saudi dissident called Osama Bin Laden, who was planning the US terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001.

Banayee believes that had the war against Russia in Afghanistan not unfolded in this way, the atrocities of the World Trade Center and Pentagon – in which hijacked jets were used to murder 3,000 people – might never have happened.

Asserting that an impoverished populace were easy prey for Islamists who believed they alone had defeated the Soviets and were now turning on an ambivalent West, Banayee says the era offers a sobering lesson in how fake narratives can have international consequences.

While he had shunned the Taliban well before the September 11 outrages – by then having seen their aggression and denigration of women and minorities – he maintains that Afghanistan's grim mix of endless war, deprivation and lack of basic education formed fertile conditions for violent ideologies.

Civilians were exploited by mullahs who had the wherewithal to conduct terrorist acts across the world.

"In the case of my home nation, one form of extremism heralded another," Banayee – who was named after the 1800 battle of Maiwand in which Afghan tribesmen defeated Victorian-era British forces – continued.

"We had the anti-Soviet war for ten years followed by more violence and a civil war that saw the Taliban take power.

"I remember my refugee camp erupting in a furore when September 11 happened and people saw aircraft hitting the World Trade Center on television – but by then Bin Laden had taken refuge in Afghanistan and was already a celebrity."

Banayee highlighted that the dissident had actually been known to the American authorities long before the attacks. In 1998, under Operation Infinite Reach, the Bill Clinton-led administration had ordered missile



strikes at sites linked to the pariah's al-Qaeda terror group in Khost, near Kabul and Sudanese capital Khartoum after attacks on US embassies in Africa.

"But prior to 9/11, imams in the mosques were describing Bin Laden as an upright man, fathers named children after him and people even imitated the way he dressed," said Banayee. In the capital, Kabul, he recalled seeing foreign fighters swelling the Taliban ranks as anti-Western sentiment grew.

Despite his initial allegiance to the group, however, his resolution began to crumble in the latter part of the 1990s when his personal morals were challenged at the city's Ghazi stadium.

"I went to a football match, and there were executions before the game," he continued.

"First, two thieves were brought out and told to lie on the ground – they each had a hand cut off at the wrist – and then a convicted murderer was brought out, and a talib handed his gun to one of the victim's relatives who shot the man dead.

"I had to close my eyes during all this – it was horrible and I couldn't watch."

Banayee would also find himself on the receiving end of his fellow talibs' brutality.

On one occasion he was threatened for not covering his head, fearing for

his life as the fighters challenged him at gunpoint. Another time, he was told he could be summarily shot for standing up to a group boarding his bus.

"Some men got on and ordered all the passengers to pray – then exactly the same thing happened again when the bus had travelled a short distance down the road," he said.

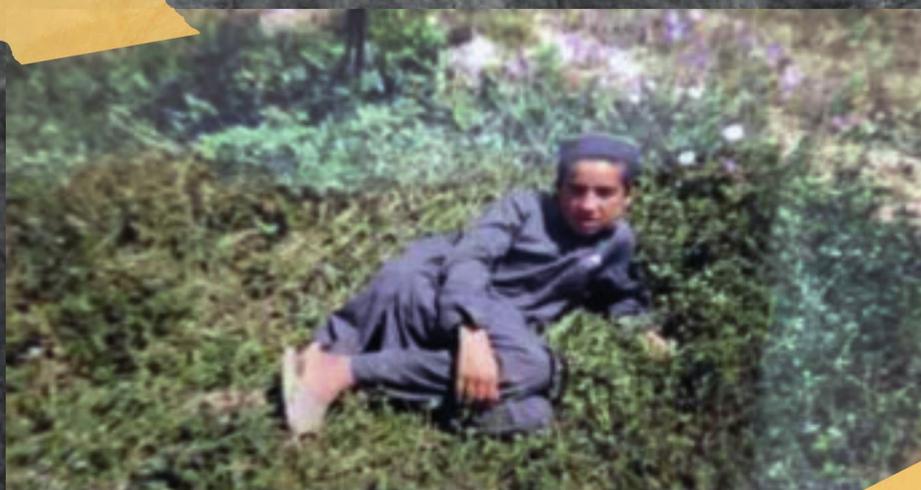
"Even when I explained I was a talib too I was told to be quiet or face a full assault rifle magazine being emptied into my stomach."

These experiences, along with studying secular subjects at an international school and meeting more moderate friends, led him to the path of challenge. Realising that more uncertainty may be coming as a result of the US-led invasion of Afghanistan that followed September 11, his family raised enough cash for him to flee.

He finally settled in Ireland, where he was married for 14 years and became a father. Studying as a physical rehabilitation specialist, he worked for the NHS and as a British Army contractor.

He is now completing his MSc in physiotherapy and has written about his life in a book, *Delusions of Paradise*.

Long after leaving Afghanistan, he heard that talibs he once knew from



**‘I went to a football match, and there were executions before the game’**



refugee camps had gone on to carry out suicide attacks against Nato personnel.

It was an awful revelation to hear, but Banayee continued: “To be honest, I don’t think that any of these individuals were inherently evil.

“It is difficult to explain what it is like to be cut off from the outside world in a place where people are so poor, others injured and helpless; the amputees, the blind – many found solace in a belief that promised paradise.”

As Banayee fled Afghanistan, Nato troops formed into the International Security Assistance Force – encompassing the British Operation Herrick – and remained for exactly two decades as they helped his one-time home to stabilise.

But now with the Taliban back in control after seizing Kabul in the wake of the alliance’s withdrawal, there is a new uncertainty.

“It is a different time – but in terms of radicalisation of any kind, I think that making sure people have access to education will always be the key to preventing it,” he concluded.

“This is how it was for me – and although this has been a long journey, I have learned that when you forgive, you heal. And when you let go, you grow.” <<

# DIRECTORY

Bite-sized data to keep you in the know

## WELFARE

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

### Army HIVE

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

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

### Forcesline

A free and confidential telephone helpline and email service for regulars, reserves, ex-forces and their families.

**0800 731 4880**  
[ssafa.org.uk/get-help](http://ssafa.org.uk/get-help)

### Army Welfare Service

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

### Forces Connect

A free, simple, advert-free and confidential app that signposts soldiers, veterans and families to local and national organisations that can help them with everything from crisis support to business advice or housing. No personal information required.

[forcesconnect.co.uk](http://forcesconnect.co.uk)

### ALCOHOL AND SMOKING

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

### Drinkline

A free, confidential helpline

**0300 123 1110**

### NHS support

Various information can be found at [nhs.uk/livewell](http://nhs.uk/livewell)

### BULLYING/ HARASSMENT/ DISCRIMINATION

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

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

### Defence BHD Helpline

Confidential, freephone and outside the chain of command

**0800 014 2381**

### DEBT AND MONEY PROBLEMS

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

### Forces Pension Society

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

**020 7820 9988**  
[forcespensionsociety.org](http://forcespensionsociety.org)

### Joining Forces Credit Union

Saving and affordable loans for the armed forces community from not-for-profit financial cooperatives

[joiningforcescu.co.uk](http://joiningforcescu.co.uk)

### Money Helper

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

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

### National Debtline

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

**0808 808 4000**  
[nationaldebtline.org](http://nationaldebtline.org)

### StepChange Debt Charity

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

**0800 138 1111**  
[stepchange.org.uk](http://stepchange.org.uk)

### GAMBLING

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

**0808 8020 133**

### GRIEF

**Cruse Bereavement Support**  
**0808 808 1677**  
[cruse.org.uk](http://cruse.org.uk)

**SSAFA** supports people who have been through a similar tragedy, giving you the opportunity to talk through your emotions with an understanding group

[supportgroups@ssafa.org.uk](mailto:supportgroups@ssafa.org.uk)

## RESETTLEMENT

Career Transition Partnership employment fairs help support the transition to civilian life by providing resources, networking opportunities and direct access to forces friendly employers. To book your place at an event visit [modctp.co.uk](http://modctp.co.uk)

**Newcastle – February 5**

**Lincoln – February 25**

**Bristol – March 19**

**Maidstone – April 23**

**Edinburgh – April 29**

## HOUSING

### Single living accommodation

Faults and issues must be reported to the local contractor – Vivo, Mitie or Vinci or your unit quartermaster, depending on location. Check common areas for posters detailing local procedures. Inform your chain of command if you believe repairs are not being properly dealt with.

### Pinnacle Home Services Team

The primary point of contact for families for housing, the allocation of SFA and details of local housing officers

**UK 0800 031 8628**  
**Overseas +44(0) 161 605 3517**  
[pinnacle.servicesfamilies.co.uk/contact-us](http://pinnacle.servicesfamilies.co.uk/contact-us)

### Forces Help to Buy

For home ownership support visit [gov.uk/guidance/forces-help-to-buy](http://gov.uk/guidance/forces-help-to-buy)

**Single Persons Accommodation Centre for the Ex-Services**  
**01748 833797**  
[spaces.org.uk](http://spaces.org.uk)

### Veterans Gateway

A first point of contact for veterans seeking support

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

### INJURY/SICKNESS Personnel Recovery Centres

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

## LONELINESS

### Armed Forces and Veterans Breakfast Clubs

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

[afvbc.world](http://afvbc.world)

### Samaritans

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

**116 123 samaritans.org**

### The Royal British Legion

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

**0808 802 8080**  
[britishlegion.org.uk](http://britishlegion.org.uk)

## MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

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

**Combat Stress 24/7 Helpline**  
**0800 138 1619**

### Headspace

All British Army personnel and civil servants can access this mindfulness app for free with an [@armymail.mod.uk](mailto:@armymail.mod.uk) or Modnet email address. To try it out visit [work.headspace.com/britisharmy/member-enroll](http://work.headspace.com/britisharmy/member-enroll)

**Mind – The Mental Health Charity**  
**0300 123 3393** [mind.org](http://mind.org)

### NHS

General mental health support

[nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters](mailto:nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters)

## COMPETITIONS

### December 2025 winners

**HOAY 1003 (turntable):** Belinda Alley, Warminster  
**easyJet:** Cpl Victoria Kendrick-McGavigan, RAMS  
**Wild Geese:** Maj (Retd) Robert Good, Upavon

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

**Op Courage**

A specialist NHS service for armed forces leavers, reservists, veterans and their families. Search for "Op Courage" on [nhs.uk](http://nhs.uk) to find your local team

**Samaritans**

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

**The Ripple Pond**

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

**Togetherall**

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

**RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN/ABUSE**

**Aurora New Dawn**

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

**ManKind**

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

**Relate**

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

**SEXUAL OFFENCES**

Anyone wishing to report an incident can do so in multiple ways. It does not matter if your allegation is not recent, or if you believe there's no evidence. There is no need for anyone to speak directly to their chain of command.

The **Defence Serious Crime Command**

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

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

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

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

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

**STAFF NETWORKS**

The following groups are open to regulars and reservists and civil servants.

**LGBTQ+ Network**  
[elizabeth.corbett117@mod.gov.uk](mailto:elizabeth.corbett117@mod.gov.uk)

**Multicultural Network**  
[priscilla.quansah100@mod.gov.uk](mailto:priscilla.quansah100@mod.gov.uk)

**Parents Network**  
[armypers-parents-network@mod.gov.uk](mailto:armypers-parents-network@mod.gov.uk)

**Servicewomen's Network**  
[samantha.dodge733@mod.gov.uk](mailto:samantha.dodge733@mod.gov.uk)

**NCO ACADEMY**

**Development Days 2026**  
Feb 19 - Kinloss (39 Engr Regt)  
Mar 25 - Grantham (150 RLC)  
May 13 - Brancote (30 Sigs)  
May 21 - MoD Lyneham  
July 8 - Edinburgh  
Sept 16 - Thorney Isle (16 RA)  
Oct 21 - MoD Lyneham  
Oct 26 - Chepstow (1 Rifles)

Search for the NCO Academy on Defence Connect for more information.

**SEARCH**

**Paul Borres** is trying to trace a member of the **Royal Army Medical Corps** who was based in Soest, Germany in 1971 named Shirley. Email [paul21\\_b@hotmail.com](mailto:paul21_b@hotmail.com)

**UKSF BRIEFING COURSE**

This six-day package is the first step for anyone wanting to attempt selection for UK Special Forces - regular or reservist. For more on 2026 courses search **UKSF** on Modnet or Defence Connect.

Course name	Date
1/26	Feb 1-6
2/26	Mar 8-13
3/26	Apr 12-17
4/26	May 10-15
5/26	Jun 7-12
6/26	Sep 6-11
7/26	Oct 18-23
8/26	Nov 15-20

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TEN details have been changed in this image of a soldier from 3rd Battalion, The Rifles kicking off the army's winter training season during Exercise Northern Axe in Finland.

Circle all the differences on image **B** and send the panel to HOAY 1005, Soldier, Ordnance Barracks, Government Road, Aldershot, Hampshire GU11 2DU, along with contact details, including email address, by February 27.

A photocopy is also acceptable but only one entry per person may be submitted. Alternatively, email a photograph of the image highlighting the differences to [comps@soldiermagazine.co.uk](mailto:comps@soldiermagazine.co.uk)

The first correct entry drawn after the closing date will win this 100-litre Trailer Duffel bag from Highlander Forces. The hardwearing holdall features a reinforced base, large opening and heavy-duty fabric, making it easy to load and unload, while the wheeled chassis takes the strain on longer hauls. With simple internal organisation and grab handles on all sides, it's a practical choice for weekends away, the gym or when transporting kit.

Buy one at [highlanderforces.com](http://highlanderforces.com) where *Soldier* readers can save 15 per cent using discount code SM15 (T&Cs apply).



Picture: Chris Fletcher

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A soldier in full combat gear is firing a mortar in a field. The mortar is in the air, with a large plume of fire and smoke. Other soldiers are visible in the background, some crouching and others standing. The terrain is a mix of grass and low-lying vegetation.

**BIG  
PIC**

Two soldiers in full combat gear are positioned behind a line of barbed wire. They are holding rifles and looking towards the camera. The background is a hazy, overcast sky.

**SOLDIERS** from B Company, 1st Battalion, The Royal Irish Regiment honed their craft amid some of the most unforgiving terrain on the army's training estate. Exercise Cape Bayonet was the final drill of their tenure as the Falkland Islands Roulement Infantry Company, following earlier serials on Ascension and South Georgia. Pictures: Cpl Katrina Knox, RAF

# REVIEWS

★ GAMES ★ MOVIES ★ BOOKS ★



title spawned a parade of sequels and spin-offs in different historical settings. But they have proved a mixed bag with varying quality across platforms, and especially patchy on handheld formats.

But the Switch 2 incarnation of *Shadows* – the latest instalment set in the feudal Japan of the 17th century – marks an outstanding return to form for the franchise.

Pushing the hardware of Nintendo's hybrid console to the limits, the scenery and atmosphere of a beautiful country in turmoil are captured perfectly. And with publisher Ubisoft promising the imminent release of the *Claws of Awaji* downloadable content, this is well worthy of your downtime.

Set amid a conflict prosecuted by an unpleasant overlord, the plot centres on two characters – female peasant shinobi Fujibayashi Naoe and Yasuke, an African samurai inspired by a real-life figure.

As well as their different backgrounds, both individuals require different playing styles – the young woman insurgent has a useful agility and ability to slice up foes before quickly disappearing, while the warrior's military training and acumen of 17th century warfare offers conventional power aplenty.

There was no mention of the Animus while we were still playing as this issue went to press, although its presence was evident with tell-tale digital grids and boot-up sequences amid the action.

But the total focus on the past was welcome as the land of the rising sun – in all its open world glory – was great fun to explore.

Graphically superb, *Shadows*, as with previous games, features main and side quests for players to choose from while the action is unfailingly slick.

Controls are intuitive and have clearly been well-thought out for the Switch 2 – this makes climbing buildings and traversing townscapes a simple act.

But combat is the high point of the package, with dual-thumbstick swordplay an experience that has all the cinematic style of a



## GAMES

### Assassin's Creed: Shadows

Out now for Nintendo Switch 2

THIS reviewer has been on the gaming scene long enough to remember when the first title in this series landed on the mag's desk – little did we then know it would become a classic with an enormous following and endure for two decades.

The outing – launched in 2007

when the British Army still had 100,000 regular soldiers – cast players as a mysterious anti-hero during the Crusades.

Set in the beautifully rendered cities of Acre, Damascus and Jerusalem, the plot was intercut with a strange modern-day backstory, in which a device called the Animus was being used to extract ancestral memories from an unwilling hostage.

Given that the intelligent, open-world gameplay was then unique, it is perhaps unsurprising that the



Bruce Lee flick. It's a pacey affair, requiring skill and precision, particularly against multiple opponents.

Meanwhile, gameplay dynamics on the stealth front have been improved, allowing for opportunities to lie prone in long grass, skulk in the shadows or manipulate lanterns and candles to create the right conditions for fight or flight.

If there is a criticism, it is that the cutscenes can drag a tad. While accepting that this is a balancing act in a game where story is key, cinematics seem over-indulgent to the point of tedium in titles across the board these days.

If *Soldier* wanted to watch a film, we'd have booked an evening at the cinema instead.

That aside, *Shadows* is an



outstanding offering that has been ported brilliantly to the handheld environment.

Assassination never felt so good.



Review: **Cliff Caswell**, *Soldier*

## Enjoyed Assassin's Creed? Try...

### Hitman: World of Assassination

Out now



AN EARLIER Switch 2 offering, coinciding with the console's release last summer, this classic outing puts players in the shoes of Agent 47, a suited-and-booted bald badass tasked with executing

contracts on villains across the world. Stunningly remixed and remastered for the handheld, the action takes place in locations from the USA to the Middle East and Asia, with targets including big-time bio-weapons producers, dodgy dictators and businessmen bent on world domination. Enjoy.



## MOVIES

### Nuremberg

Out now on Sky Cinema

HOLDING world leaders accountable to the law – a theme that's, unfortunately, as relevant today as it was in 1945 when the Allies put what was left of the German high command on trial for war crimes.

In this telling of the Nuremberg proceedings, **Russell Crowe's** portly and pompous Hermann Goering spars with **Rami Malek** as Douglas Kelley, the military psychiatrist tasked with assessing the defendants' mental state – while **Michael Shannon** and **Richard E Grant** head up a strong supporting cast as the US and British prosecutors respectively.

Although far from perfect – there are a few hammy moments and more than a little legal and historical dumbing down – it's a decent watch, and a timely one, with the script loudly hammering home the modern-day parallels.

Attempting to convey the terrifying ordinariness of the accused, Malek's character remarks towards the end: "There are people like the Nazis in every country of the world today."



Review: **Becky Clark**, *Soldier*

### The Tank

Out now on Prime

A RECENT addition to *Prime*, this German language film, originally titled *Der Tiger*, follows the story of a five-man tank crew on a mission to collect a rogue Wehrmacht colonel on the Eastern Front in 1943 – think a cross between *Fury* and *Apocalypse Now*.

Despite its low budget, it does well to capture some of the horrors of war and the soldiers' interpersonal relationships, with good special effects and some tense moments throughout. The troops' use of amphetamines to keep going through exhaustion and fear was an interesting insight.

The capabilities of the *Tiger* as a platform are pushed to somewhat implausible lengths at times and the twist at the end was pretty obvious, but this didn't detract too much from the overall product.

Well worth a gander – and probably best viewed in the original version with subtitles.



Review: **Capt Mike Owens**, RE



## WIN: TURTLE BEACH HEADSETS

A DECENT set of headphones can make all the difference to a gaming experience – especially on titles such as *Assassin's Creed* and *Hitman* that *Soldier* has been reviewing of late.

Whether it's picking up the approaching thud of combat boots or the click of a priming pistol, decent audio can be key to despatching the bad guys. And when it comes to our own cans, Turtle Beach has always been one of the providers of choice in the balance of sound quality and price.

So we're pleased to team up with the firm to

offer three lucky readers a chance to bag one of its Atlas 200 wired headsets. Available in officially licensed PlayStation plus PC specific and multifunction versions, these are worth £59 apiece and have been proving a hit with gamers and critics alike.

**To stand a chance of winning one, tell us the name of the boom a fast jet makes when it breaks the sound barrier. Send your answer to [comps@soldiermagazine.co.uk](mailto:comps@soldiermagazine.co.uk) All the usual rules apply.**



# THE ARMY INDIVIDUAL TRAINING COMMAND (AITC)...

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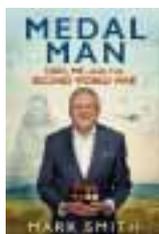
**Clockwise from below:** Mark Smith during filming for *Antiques Roadshow*; on board a Catalina aircraft; his father, RAF wireless operator Les; a Catalina over Ceylon



## BOOK

### Medal Man

by Mark Smith



BEST known as the *Antiques Roadshow*'s military memorabilia expert, Mark Smith grew up listening avidly to family stories of wartime service.

His new book, *Medal Man*, delves into his father's days in the Royal Air Force and the mission over the Indian Ocean in 1945 that claimed the life of his best friend.

Weaving excerpts of his dad's memoir together with his own journey as a collector and history buff – which included a stint as curator of the Royal Artillery Museum – it is a heartfelt and personal tale.

And as the 62-year-old told *Soldier* it all began with a stunning coincidence...

#### How did the book come about?

I gave a talk in Poole in 2022 and was chatting to a local man, who

showed me his collection, including a pair of flying boots. Tucked inside he had found a letter from a lady called Hilda Shirt, the mother of someone who had died on this bloke's aircraft. Her son was Flt Sgt Thomas Henry Shirt – Harry – my dad's best friend, who was killed next to him. The chances of the two of us coming together at that second with those boots was like a lottery win. I told that story on *Antiques Roadshow* and the commissioning editor from Penguin got in touch saying they wanted to publish it.

#### It's a very personal tale; it must have been emotional to write it...

Yeah, my dear old dad genuinely was my best mate. And it was a huge hole in my world when he died back in 2004. But as time goes by you get on with life. There were definitely moments in writing that brought it all back though. I also narrated the audiobook and there were a couple of chapters that were very hard to read.

#### Your dad nurtured your interest in history - what kind of person was he?

He was a headmaster and his passion in life was imparting knowledge. He enthused people and he did the same for me. Listening to him tell stories about the Second World War inspired me so much that it became all-encompassing. But if I'd wanted to talk about football or motorbikes or fishing, he would have done the same.

#### What do you hope readers will take from the book?

Over the years, and all the medals I've collected and stories I've researched, I've been so amazed by these people from the Crimea to Trafalgar or Waterloo, and the First and Second World Wars that they've genuinely become real to me. They weren't just soldiers, they were weavers, coalminers, lorry drivers who stood up and did these incredible things in a wartime situation. And now the only thing that's left of them are these mementoes. People often stop me in the street and thank me for keeping their memories alive or ask me why I do it. Well, now I've written it all down – hopefully they'll be fascinated enough to read it and find out.

#### Any other projects on the go apart from Antiques Roadshow?

I do a one-man theatre show called *For Valour – The Story of the Victoria Cross*. In the first half I explain how it came about and how it's made and in the second I talk about the people who were awarded it. I'm touring this year and have around 30 dates booked across the country.

*Medal Man*, by Mark Smith, is published by Penguin Michael Joseph and priced £20. For more information on the author's upcoming UK tour visit [marksmithmedals.com](http://marksmithmedals.com)

Interview: Becky Clark, *Soldier*

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# SOLDIERSPORT



## MOORE MAKES OLYMPIC GRADE



Pte Mica Moore (RLC) at the Europe Cup in Lillehammer

Pictures: Girts Kehris/IBSF

### BOBSLEIGH

**RESERVIST Pte Mica Moore (RLC) will post another entry on her considerable sporting CV this month as she represents Jamaica at the Winter Olympics.**

The 33-year-old ex-Team GB star saw her qualification confirmed just two-and-a-half weeks before the start of the Games in Milano Cortina, where she will compete in bobsleigh's monobob discipline.

A former sprinter who represented Wales at the 2014 Commonwealth Games, Moore later switched sports and, alongside pilot Mica McNeil, finished eighth at the 2018 Pyeongchang Games - achieving Britain's best result in the two-woman bobsleigh.

After walking away from the set-up in 2022 she returned to action for her new country three years later in a move that celebrated her family's heritage.

The soldier's grandfather came to the United Kingdom as part of the Windrush generation and settled in Wales, with Moore receiving her Jamaican citizenship in late 2024.

"My grandfather passed away when I was young and my mum is a very proud Jamaican - that's what makes this such a lovely moment," she told *SoldierSport* as she reflected on her achievement.

"It has been a long journey, and I have had some difficult years. I will forever be grateful to my parents for backing me - they never let me give up.

"My two best friends from school are my biggest supporters and my partner, LCpl Nick Gleeson (Para), understands the demands of bobsleigh as he is in the sport himself - I can ask his advice on anything.

"It all means so much to me, and when I heard I had qualified for the Olympics, that is where the emotion came from.

"For me it will be a case of producing four consistent runs and then seeing what happens from there.

"I'm known for being a push athlete and Cortina is a good push track - hopefully I can be competitive."

Moore's latest Olympic journey has been far from straightforward.

Formerly a brakewoman with Team GB, she has had to master the skills needed to pilot both the monobob and two-woman sled - with her first experience of driving only coming in the February of 2022.

Her qualifying path also saw her racing at unfamiliar venues, while her 2025/26 campaign has been totally self-funded at an estimated £30,000 to date.

"It has been a tough season," she continued. "I had to go to the North America Cup, where the Jamaican team bases its qualifying, and learn three new tracks, which was a challenge.

"I achieved two third-place finishes at Park City, which was incredible. I could not imagine getting on the podium over girls who have driven that track for so many years.

"I then came fifth at a Europe Cup event at Igls, in Austria, where I was up against World Cup pilots - I was really pleased with that result.

"The monobob is very different. I achieved the best-ever finish by a British two-woman team in 2018 and it was great to share the experience with my pilot.

"But with this, the pressure is all on me, I have to go out and get a good push start, and then do the steering.

"It is an exciting event where

anything can happen.

"Everyone has the same sleds, so it all comes down to who drives and pushes the best over four heats.

"As a brakewoman you don't realise how much goes into getting the sled on the track. You turn up, push, jump in and hope for the best.

"Now I am organising a whole season, paying for kit and equipment and acting as a mechanic - it is a bit of everything."

And this has been achieved with the added pressure of having to raise the money needed to get from one event to the next.

"Being self-funded makes it more difficult," Moore, who joined the army last year as a reservist with 157 Regiment, Royal Logistic Corps, explained.

"I've had to fight for everything and get sponsors on board, and the army has helped as much as it can.

"It is such an expensive sport and £30,000 is the bare minimum you can get away with - the monobob I bought three years ago cost £25,000 alone.

"I've just about made it through the season with the money I have raised, and I now have to do a holding camp before the Games that will probably have to come out of my own pocket.

"There were times in the summer when I was lifting weights in the garage and sending emails to potential sponsors between reps.

"But it has been worth it.

"This emphasises what a lot of athletes have to go through and everyone chasing that Olympic dream gives up so much."

# HARSH CONCLUSION TO GAMES JOURNEY

## BOBSLEIGH

**WITH the Winter Olympics getting under way shortly, the spectacle will be tinged with thoughts of what might have been for Cpl Kewe King (RAMS).**

The brakewoman in Nigeria's two-woman bobsleigh, she had gone from total novice to a World Cup-level athlete in less than two years - all of which was achieved with the aim of going on to test herself at the pinnacle of the sport.

But at the end of last year the country made the decision to focus on qualifying the single-person monobob instead of her sled, a move that marked the end of the 28-year-old's international season.

"It was massively disappointing," King, who serves as a nurse with Joint Hospital Group South East at Frimley Park, told *SoldierSport*.

"I found out about the harshness of sport the hard

way - it can be savage.

"It feels like a premature ending for me. Normally, you do everything you can and when the results come through you either make it or you don't - there is a natural end. I did not have that opportunity."

Despite the setback, King has been able to reflect on her journey to date with pride.

Lining up alongside pilot Simidele Adeagbo, they became the first African two-woman team to compete in a World Cup race and medalled at a North American Cup event at Park City in the USA.

They have also featured in Europe Cup races at the likes of St Moritz and Winterberg, among others.

"We were the first Nigerian two-woman team to medal at a North American Cup race," she continued. "You would have thought we had won it, we were that ecstatic.

"You obviously try your best in every race, and we were so happy to medal there.

"It is a shame I could not go on and make the Olympics, but it has been a brilliant journey.

"Africa is not well represented in winter sports and I feel really proud to put it on the map."

'IT FEELS LIKE A PREMATURE ENDING'



Picture: Vjesturs Lacis

## BOBSLEIGH BY NUMBERS

**3** Rounds in this season's North America Cup to earn qualification

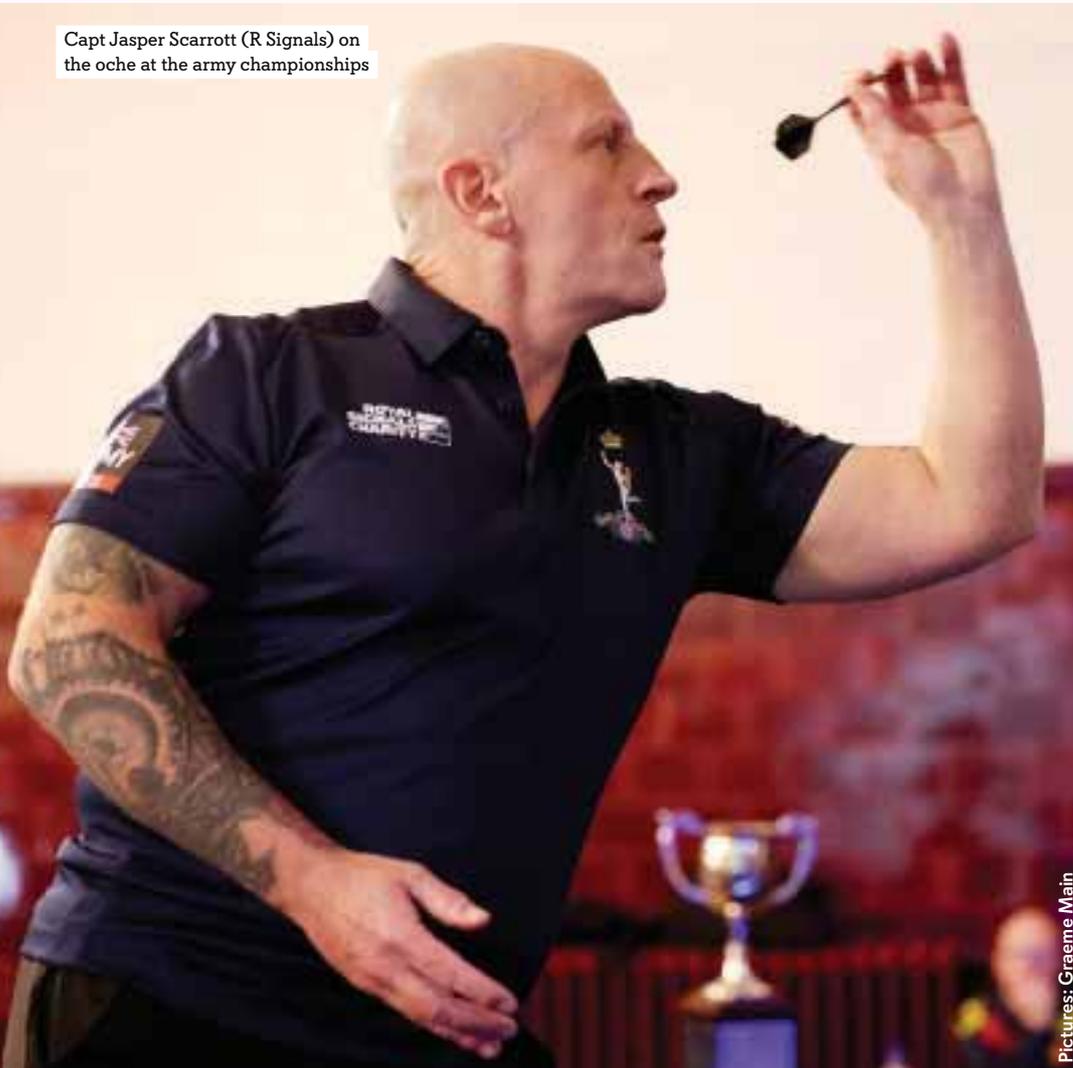
**4** Heats in the Olympic monobob competition - starting on February 15

**2** Number of times the event has featured at the Games - it debuted in 2022

**25** Females that will take to the start line in the battle for gold



Capt Jasper Scarrott (R Signals) on the oche at the army championships



Pictures: Graeme Main

## LESSONS LEARNT AS DUO GO TO SCHOOL

### DARTS

**HAVING enjoyed a breakout year in 2025, the Army Darts Association is continuing to raise its profile as two leading players push for honours in the upper echelons of the sport.**

Army champion Capt Jasper Scarrott (R Signals) and Cpl Darren McMahon (Scots) both tested their aim at the Professional Darts Corporation's (PDC) Qualifying School event in Milton Keynes last month before featuring in the Challenge Tour competition at the same venue a week later.

Unfortunately, the pair missed out in their bid to secure a place on the full PDC circuit, but further high-level tests await as another four tour legs are

scheduled this year.

Scarrott progressed to the final stages at Q-School, where 128 players vied for 12 tour cards. He finished 66th in the overall rankings, losing to former world number four Mervyn King along the way.

"I didn't really have any expectations going in," the officer told *SoldierSport*.

"My hope was just to get through to the second stage, which I did.

"When you face that standard of opposition it makes you play better. My averages went up and were consistently between 80 and 85, sometimes in the 90s.

"Heading into the arena with the likes of John Part, Steve Beaton and Mervyn King I thought 'am I good enough?'. But

once I settled in and played my game, I felt comfortable.

"It is the biggest stage I have faced in darts, but I was not out of my comfort zone."

Scarrott was also pleased with his form at the tour event that followed, where he placed 127th out of 364 competitors.

"I was encouraged and am looking forward to the next one," he added.

"I now know what to expect. I'll try to add a few things to my game and will practise more leading in.

"A lot of these guys are professional darts players, and it is a massive step up. In other competitions you might get a couple of chances at a double, if you miss here you are pretty much screwed."



### DARTS

**CANADIAN star John Part ended Cpl Darren McMahon's (Scots) PDC qualifying journey, claiming a 5-3 victory as the soldier missed out on a place in the final stages of the competition.**

"I did not play my best, and that was mainly due to nerves," the serviceman said.

"I had to win one or two more games but got beaten by a three-time world champion. It was a tense match as both of us needed the victory, but that was the end for me.

"I don't see it as a setback, it is almost beneficial and sets me up for what is to come on the Challenge Tour. It is a big learning curve."

McMahon went on to reach the last 64 in the third of the five events he played on his tour debut.

"I got some tough draws and there were a couple of games I should have won, but missed doubles cost me," he continued.

"I made it to a board final in event three and was beaten by an ex-PDC tour card holder, which shows how high the standard is.

"It is ruthless. You cannot give people at this level chances - they will take them."





# SLIDERS PICK UP THE PACE AS ICE CAMP DELIVERS

## ICE SPORTS

**HIGH-SPEED action was in plentiful supply as the army's luge, skeleton and bobsleigh stars took to the track at Lillehammer for Ex Racing Ice II.**

The event formed the Army Ice Sports Championships and followed on from the programme's novice camp before Christmas, with the leading performers going on to compete at next month's Inter-Services showdown.

With 3rd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment deployed, the men's bobsleigh presented an opportunity for others to shine and personnel from the

Royal Tank Regiment, Royal Engineers and Royal Artillery were among those to impress.

The pairing of Cpl Jonathan Brown (Para) and Capt Tom Rees (RTR) eventually took top spot, with the officer returning to action after two seasons out.

Bdr Sienna Williams and SSgt Georgia Grossi (both RA) claimed the women's honours, which was a standout moment for the latter in what was a challenging week.

"Georgia is a skeleton athlete," explained Capt Lucy Wyatt (RE), chair of Army Ice Sports. "She had a bit of a nightmare in that. She was third after the first run but then missed the sled at the start of the second and had a DNF.

"The brakewoman for the artillery had to withdraw from the competition so Georgia jumped in the back, having never been in a bobsleigh before.

"She could obviously run on the ice and is now an army champion."

Capt Arran Holmes (RE) was once again victorious in the men's skeleton, with Sgt Sofia Griffin (RAMS) sealing the women's crown.

In the luge, there was success for Cpl Steve Webb (RTR) in the men's event, while Wyatt triumphed over Lt Jasmine Dunn (AGC (ETS)) in the women's field.

"Jasmine was a complete novice at the start of the week,"

Wyatt said.

"Her bruises were some of the most spectacular I have seen in luge for a long time.

"She crashed on her second run but stayed in the competition and went on to finish runner-up."

And in a first for the event, the Royal Engineers lifted the corps championship trophy.

Wyatt continued: "This is a chance to bring other people in.

"For example, Arran Holmes has been skeleton champion for four or five years now - he is exceptionally good.

"We get the same people on podiums year after year, so this gives everyone something to race for."



# PIPEDOWN PUSHES QUALIFIERS THROUGH



Pictures: Cpl Penny Coldwell-Dabbs, AGC (SPS)

## SKIING

**THE French Alps formed the backdrop as the military ski season ramped up during Exercise Pipedown.**

One of two qualifying stages for the Army Alpine and Nordic Championships, the event in Les Contamines served up 11 races across the two disciplines in the space of ten days, with 290 skiers taking to the piste.

A total of 31 unit teams competed in the Alpine races, and it was the line-up of Capt Dave Palmer, Sgt Tom Longshaw, Lt Caroline Borton and Tpr Scott Wilson-Poe, from The King's Royal Hussars, who claimed the combined title.

The Nordic events proved a happy hunting ground for 1st Battalion, The Rifles as Lt Ben Spence, LCpl Gerald Webber, LCpl Nathan Carter, Rfn Jherome Camariosa and Rfn Dannan-Jack Jeal secured the men's honours.

Lt Abigail Black, Sgt Becky

Wilson, LCpl Rhiannon Ashton, LCpl Beth Lockett, Pte Aliyah Rachide and Pte Olivia Fane sealed the women's prize for 29 Regiment, Royal Logistic Corps.

The KRH had further cause to celebrate as they were crowned the combined ski champion unit. The top performers were in action at the full army championships as this issue went to press.

Despite numbers being slightly down this year, exercise controller Maj Andy Martin (RLC) was delighted by the success of the event, with the corps-level camps staged in the build-up providing the ideal springboard for skiers.

"That system is working well," he told *SoldierSport*. "There is quality coaching in every corps, and you can see that in the talent here."

"Skiing still has a big appeal in the army."

"While it can be an expensive sport, units are getting much better soldiers when they return."

# LANCS SET SIGHTS ON MAJOR HONOUR

## BOXING

**FIGHTERS** from 1st Battalion, The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment return to the ring this month as they step up their bid for glory in the Army Major Units Boxing Championships.

The Preston-based outfit host 2nd Battalion, The Rifles on February 19 in their first clash of the year, when they will hope to take a step closer to winning the trophy they last lifted in 2024.

Victory two years ago formed part of a hat-trick of titles for the team, who also reigned supreme at the Infantry Box Cup and Army Individual Championships, and coach CSgt Joe Benson told *SoldierSport* his athletes are raring to go.

"As soon as we came back from Christmas leave, we were straight into camp," he added.

"2 Rifles are a strong team, and we are expecting a tough night. We are known as the

**'WE WERE STRAIGHT IN'**



Picture: Beth Prodger

Lions of England and our gym is called the Lion's Den; hopefully we can pack it out and use that support to our advantage."

Kgn Alfie Evans has returned to captain the side and with a record of ten wins from ten bouts will lead from the front. Benson said he is a prime example of the balance between work and sport that exists in the unit.

The coach added: "He left for three months to do his NCO cadre and is straight back in.

"We do our promotion or support company courses and are soldiers first – all our lads want to go on operations. Then we are boxers."

The squad boasts former national amateur champions and plans to enter three fighters in this year's competition. Members have also put their talents to good use by coaching local youth-level boxers in their gym at Weeton Barracks.

Benson said: "Our boxing officer has really pushed this and it gets kids off the streets – they love it."



# HIKERS ON A HIGH AT SPARTAN TEST

## SKIING

**NEW talent came to the fore on the slopes of Serre Chevalier as Ex Spartan Hike completed another successful outing.**

Like Exercise Pipedown, the event formed a qualifying stage for the Army Alpine and Nordic Championships and while some experienced skiers missed out this season, it gave a chance for fresh faces to shine.

"It meant the depth in quality was probably a little bit lacking, but it is great to offer the opportunity to others," said exercise controller Maj Ross Anderson (Scots DG).

"Getting away on experiences such as this is a key component in how we recruit and retain people – they love it.

"Some different teams have come through this year, and the overall combined champions were The Queen's Royal Hussars, which was a bit of a surprise.

"Their improvement from last season allowed them to rise above everyone else.

"We were thinking some of the RLC teams would come through but they are massively busy this year – it shows there are always opportunities to be had."

In terms of individual performances, Anderson praised the efforts of WO2 Dan Orton (REME), who returned after

a number of years away to be crowned men's Alpine individual combined champion.

The exercise saw 146 personnel compete in the Alpine races and a further 145 in the Nordic, and the officer believes they will perform well in the full army championships.

"The Alpine guys will be successful," he said. "With their experience, they should go on to the Inter-Services.

"We also have several women pushing for places, which is great to see. It makes things competitive and hopefully they can help the army women's team defend their title from last year."

## EX SPARTAN HIKE

### MEN'S ALPINE CHAMPION

WO2 DAN ORTON, REME

### WOMEN'S CHAMPION

PTE ISLA JACKSON, PWRR

### TEAM ALPINE CHAMPIONS

QUEEN'S ROYAL HUSSARS

### MEN'S NORDIC CHAMPION

PTE OLIVER WELSH, RLC

### WOMEN'S CHAMPION

SGT DANNI SMITH, REME

### NORDIC OVERALL WINNERS

6 REGIMENT, RLC



## NOVICES HELP THE CAUSE

### JUDO

**A STRONG showing within the novice ranks provided a welcome bonus for those charged with running the latest Army Judo Skills Course and Championships.**

The week-long camp at Aldershot's Army School of Physical Training saw personnel drilled in all elements of the sport before taking to the mat on the final day for matches across

a host of weight categories and experience levels.

The turnout was particularly pleasing for organiser SSgt Russ Parker (RAPTC), who said attracting newcomers is crucial to the sport's development.

"We cater for those who have never stepped on the mat before through to senior players and University Officers' Training Corps athletes on the GB circuit," he told *SoldierSport*.

"We've had a massive influx

at grassroots level, and a lot of those are people looking for cross-platform training.

"For example, we have Brazilian jiu-jitsu guys who are realising that judo can help them get better at their game.

"We have also benefitted from the rise in popularity of combat sports. People are trying different things and want to get into this, which is great to see."

A total of 32 athletes competed in the novice ranks, with the intermediate category also seeing an increase in entries compared to previous years.

"There is definitely talent coming through, and that is important as we move towards the Inter-Services," Parker added.

"We will have another skills course and level two coaching course in April.

"Running that shows novices the natural progression that exists. There will be a variety of grades involved and by talking to people who have done this for four or five years they will realise what opportunities are

out there."

While the grassroots scene is flourishing, the army set-up has seen its number of elite athletes dip in recent seasons.

However, the UOTC path is offering hope for the future. 2Lt Eleanor Syrett (REME), who competes at regional and national level, progressed from that system and was victorious in the women's 70kg ranks.

And OCdt Harvey Creasey-Cottle (Bristol UOTC), winner in the men's open 66kg division, is currently training as a full-time athlete with Team Bath and plans to pursue an army career when his studies are complete.

Parker added: "We are probably a little light at the top end and are lucky to have such talent in the UOTC.

"We also saw Pte Harry Stone (Para) named individual player of the day. He will be one to watch if he can get out on the civvy circuit more."

Follow [@british\\_army\\_judo](#) on Instagram for more details on April's skills course.



Women's champion 2Lt Eleanor Syrett

Pictures: Graeme Main



Picture: Graeme Main

## RACE ACES REQUIRED

### KARTING

**FANCY testing yourself behind the wheel in the UK Armed Forces Karting Championships?**

If so, the army team will be holding trials for potential drivers and pit crew at the Clay Pigeon Raceway in Dorchester on March 10 and 11.

Open to regular and reserves of all experience levels, the event will help form the squad

that will go head-to-head with racers from the other services, as well as corps outfits such as the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, Royal Signals and Royal Engineers, at tracks across the country throughout 2026.

*SoldierSport* caught up with the team at Llandow Circuit in South Wales at the start of last season (pictured), when chairman WO2 Toby Knight (QRH) said the trials were a great opportunity for

anyone who has an interest in motorsport.

“A lot of sports can be quite cliquy, but that is not the case here,” he added.

“We have people who have been racing since they were children, but we will take complete novices if they are quick enough.

“If you like cars and racing come and give it a bash.”

Visit [@army\\_kart\\_team](#) on Instagram for more details.

### MARTIAL ARTS

**BRAZILIAN jiu-jitsu ace Sgt Josh Gibbs (RAPTC) has continued to impress on the international stage.**

The soldier gave a strong showing at the European IBJJF Championships in Portugal last month, where he won bronze medals in the men’s masters blackbelt ultra-heavyweight division and open class.

The wider army team were on the mat as this issue went to press, with world champions Roger Gracie and Ffion Davies leading a seminar in Aldershot.



Picture: Andrew Fosker/Alligin Photography

### RUGBY LEAGUE

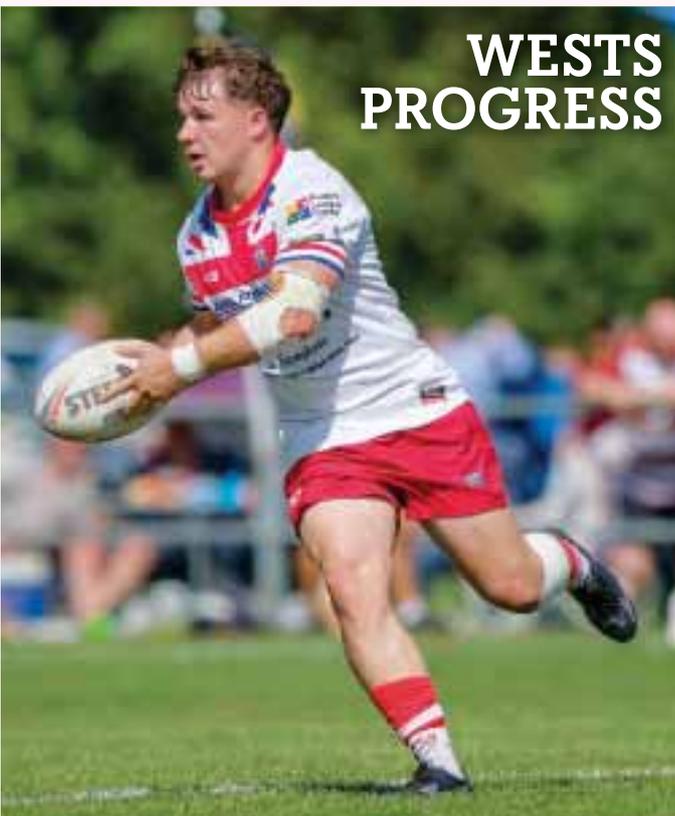
**ARMY star Capt Ella Donnelly (RAMS) has been named in the England rugby league national performance squad as preparations for this year’s World Cup get under way.**

The soldier, who plays for Leeds Rhinos in the Women’s Super League, was part of a 33-strong group that embarked on the first training camp of 2026 last month.

The squad will continue to meet monthly before the resumption of the Challenge Cup and will then reconvene for a match against France in July.



Picture: John Shirras



Picture: John Shirras

## WESTS PROGRESS

### RUGBY LEAGUE

**THERE was first-round disappointment for the army men’s team in the Challenge Cup as they slipped to a home defeat to Wests Warriors.**

The Reds conceded two tries to trail 8-0 at the break before a brace of penalties edged their opponents further ahead early in the second period.

A red card added to the host’s problems and a third score for Wests extended the lead to 18-0.

However, a superb break from LCpl Pita Tamani (Lancs) paved the way for Sig James Amachree (R Signals) to touch down under the posts and a further consolation followed as Spr Todd Johnson (RE) bundled over.

Wests then added a fourth try to run out 24-12 winners.

“We played our best rugby when we went down to 12 men,” said skipper LCpl Michael McDonald (RE, pictured left at last season’s Armed Forces Day clash). “We’re leaving it too late in games.”

# Forward thinkers

We asked The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment (page 24) what parts of modern training were striking a chord

Interviews: Sarah Goldthorpe Pictures: Beth Prodger



The GPS in the dismounted data system is what struck me. It allows commanders to make decisions far quicker and gives time back in the field that would have been spent on maps. I tried it out on exercise in Estonia last year, and the chat function worked well.

**Kgn Amelia McCauley**

We often see and hear about more advanced armies, but now instead of looking on at that kit we actually have some. For me, the dismounted data system and drones are equally exciting – they all combine together to great effect and when you see what's happening in Ukraine, you understand why.

**LCpl Connor Morgan**



Networking and the increasing interconnectivity between different aspects of the battlefield. Kit like the dismounted data system really gives my section the ability to look ahead.

**Cpl Josh Whittaker**



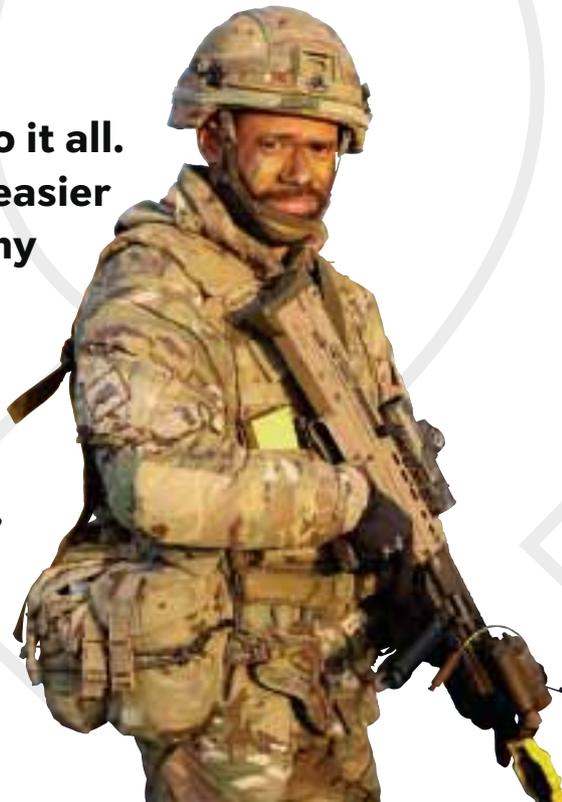
Modern war has already shown what a difference drones make. In the last week I have gone from not knowing a thing about them, to understanding how to fly them and how they're put together. That's a big jump and if I was required to fly one now on operations I would have a good idea of it.

**Kgn Tyler Pilling**



**Drones – they can do it all. They make fighting easier and there are so many models, but in our recent training I've found the Parrot most beneficial; the camera is useful, especially during section attacks.**

**LCpl Api Mulase**



The tech we're using is 100 per cent what stands out. Drones are probably the biggest part of that. It's a 360-degree battle now. You can be the best soldier in the world and some guy can be sat in a shed, operating a drone and slip out of nowhere to hit you. That's why we need to be across this stuff. In Ukraine troops are surrendering and getting drones flown at them anyway. It's sobering stuff.

**Cpl Taylor Hanvey**



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