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MAGAZINE OF THE BRITISH ARMY

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OUR CONTRIBUTORS THIS MONTH...



GEORGE DURRANT, EX-INT CORPS

Deployed to Burma to prevent intel leaks, this former NCO saw action against the Japanese from 1944 to 1945. Find out about him, and other Far East vets, on page 48.



SGT SHANNON GEE, AGC (SPS)

ATTACHED to The King's Royal Hussars where she's the face of all things fitness, this PTI shares her favourite sandbag reps with us on page 24. After all, the warm weather is no excuse to shy away from the weights...



LT SAM GRIFFITHS, RE

AFTER facing an uphill battle through Sandhurst at a weight of 20 stone, this sapper took action to fight the flab. Read about his impressive transformation to marathon man on page 22.

An audience that understands...

ONE of the biggest privileges of this job is the time our team get to spend with Second World War veterans, documenting their experience for people who could be asked to do a similar thing at any moment.

I've always been amazed by these old soldiers' willingness to share so much – particularly given that doing so with their own family may have been problematic in the past.

Of course, in *Soldier* they know they have the ears of people who understand more about military life than most.

Please take time to read our remarkable VJ Day interviews on page 48 – possibly the last batch we can publish. And well done to the team for securing these memories so that we may all benefit.

On page 52 (ex-Pte) Vic Stone recalls that “after I returned to the UK, one thing that struck me was the casual attitude from people we'd been fighting for”.

Being misunderstood by the outside world is something described to us regularly by soldiers past and present – another reason why recording these wartime experiences in permanent form is still so vital, even in a digital age.

Sarah Goldthorpe • **Editor**



‘Please take time to read our remarkable VJ Day interviews’



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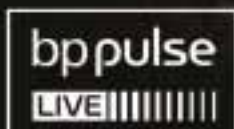
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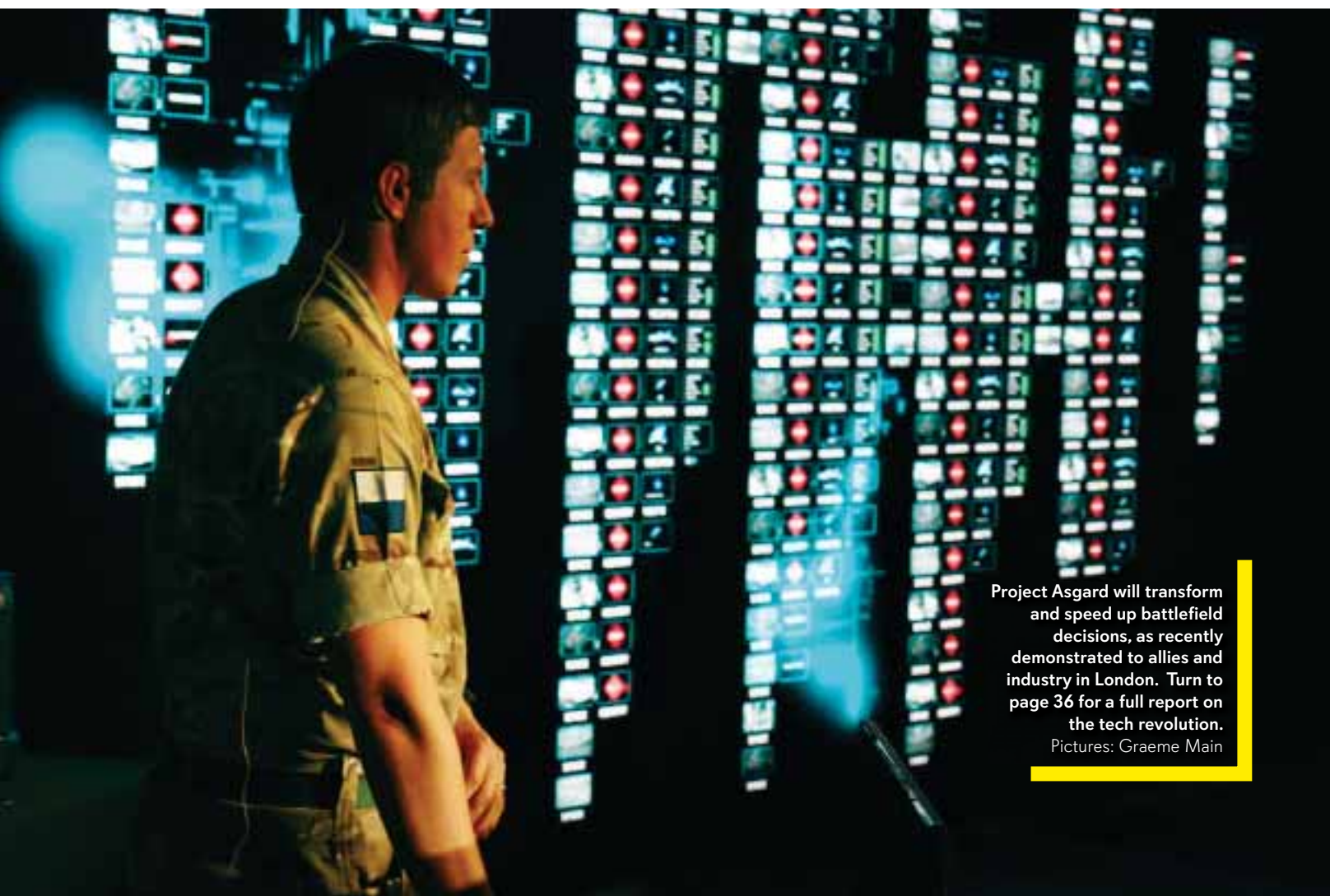
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Project Asgard will transform and speed up battlefield decisions, as recently demonstrated to allies and industry in London. Turn to page 36 for a full report on the tech revolution.
Pictures: Graeme Main



1 POLAND

Reach for the sky

VARIOUS counter-UAS kit as well as techniques, tactics and procedures were tested by British and US formations during Project Vanaheim.

The UK side in Bemowo Piskie was led by Task Force Rapstone, the army's project to accelerate delivery of new technology to troops.

Significant support was provided by personnel from the Land Ground-Based Air Defence programme, which is modernising the army's air defences.

Troops from 1st Battalion, The Royal Yorkshire Regiment served as the primary exercising force, supported by the Experimentation and Trials Group and the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory, who led on data analysis.

They worked closely with the US Army's 5 Corps and a Stryker company from the 2nd Cavalry Regiment, following initial trials in Germany in June.

"We tested a range of capabilities," Maj Christopher Bolton (AGC (ETS)), Task Force Rapstone's Counter-UAS project lead, explained to *Soldier*.

"These included both hard and soft kill systems such as radio frequency detection and jamming, radars, smart sights including the Smartshooter Smash X4 (pictured above), acoustic detection, and interceptor drones."

Offensive and defensive operations were staged to assess performance in a fluid and prolonged engagement.

"This enabled us to better understand how capabilities and sustainment hold up under pressure," added the officer.

"This was more than just a test of counter-UAS capability, it was a collaborative effort to develop and refine the tactics and technologies that will help define the future battlespace."



Picture: Nato

A TASTE OF ARMY ACTIVITY ACROSS THE WORLD

GLOBAL SITREP

2 ESTONIA

Shots fired

BRITISH gunners have fired the Archer system live on operations for the first time.

Troops from 5 Battery, 19 Regiment Royal Artillery put the weapon – the interim replacement for AS90 – through its paces as they passed the halfway point of their stint on Op Cabrit with the 1 Mercian Battlegroup.

The milestone followed the gun's first live firing on UK soil, carried out by colleagues from the regiment's 127 Battery, who will take over deterrence duties in Estonia later this year.

Elsewhere in the Baltic state, the British officer who set up Nato's enhanced forward presence there in 2017 and later commanded Op Cabrit was awarded the country's Cross of Merit.

Brig Giles Harris received the honour from Defence Minister Hanno Pevkur, who praised the former Welsh Guardsman's "outstanding contribution" to defence cooperation.

He added: "In 2017 we were happy to be meeting each other for the first time, whereas we are now old friends and in an operationally fit system."



3 FRANCE

Channel champs

SOLDIERS from First Fusiliers overcame a battle with the elements to become the first mixed Infantry team to complete a relay swim of the English Channel.

In the small hours of the morning, Lt Keeley Lloyd-Janes stepped ashore in France – 15 hours and 27 minutes after the team set off from Samphire Hoe.

With choppy seas and strong winds making for tough going, the seven-strong outfit had to dig deep to finish the challenge, which they took on to raise money for their regimental benevolent fund, the Fusiliers Aid Society.

Search for '1rrfchannelrelayswim' on [justgiving.com](https://www.justgiving.com) to boost their total.



4 GERMANY

'Better together'

NATO'S river crossing experts teamed up to take on Europe's busiest commercial waterway in a large-scale test of operational capability.

The German-British Amphibious Engineer Battalion 130 – which includes a squadron of sappers – spanned the River Rhine using their M3 Rigs, platforms that can be joined together into a bridge or used as ferries to transport heavy military equipment.

Exercise Grand Crossing also involved Italian and Dutch counterparts, bringing the total number of troops to 1,200.

Starting in Sennelager, they completed a 130-mile road move to Rees, replicating the logistical demands of vehicle convoys, refuelling and inter-army coordination.

Maj Ryan Ingram (RE), OC of the UK's 23 Amphibious Engineer Squadron, said it was an opportunity for his soldiers to work with different nations, learn from their experience and "effectively be better together".

Picture: Duncan Campbell

5 UK

Clerics take to the crease

MILITARY chaplains from across the UK forces saw off the Vatican Cricket Club in a historic T20 sporting encounter in Aldershot.

Joined by three other army officers, the service clerics took to the field against a combined team of priests, deacons and seminarians from Rome as part of an international tour promoting interfaith dialogue through sport.

Having been beaten by the 'St Peter's XI' during their last visit to the UK, this time the Brits posted a score of 129 with three balls to spare, winning by 8 wickets.

"It was a great game, with a thrilling chase and played in a brilliant spirit," said team captain Rev Matt Coles (RACHD).

Hosting the delegation and deepening ties with the Catholic Church had also been a privilege added the officer.

'The soldiers all got around the piano and we started singing'

Veteran recalls VJ Day in India – page 50



6 NEPAL

Running up that hill

SUPER-FIT soldiers from 36 Engineer Regiment and The Queen's Gurkha Engineers made the journey home to take on the world's highest endurance race.

The annual Tenzing-Hillary Mount Everest Marathon starts some 5,360m above sea level and descends through several passes to Namche Bazar at 3,440m – a route scattered with ice and scree.

The first British Army outfit to participate in the event, the team arrived in-country a week early to acclimatise and train with local elite runners before an 11-day trek to the start line at Everest Base Camp.

All ten soldiers finished the race, with the fastest, Spr Shreedhar Dangi, posting a time of 5hr 24min to secure a top-ten placing.

Exped leader Capt Chandra Pun said he noticed "transformative growth" in each member during the trip.

"We are a more resilient unit, poised to tackle any challenge and united by a spirit forged in the mountains," he concluded.



MEDICS ON A HIGH

Personnel honoured for their courage and humanity

AIRBORNE medics have been awarded the prestigious Firmin Sword of Peace, given to forces units for going above and beyond their duty.

16 Medical Regiment received the award from the Duke of Gloucester, colonel-in-chief of the Royal Army Medical Service, at Colchester's Merville Barracks.

The citation praised the unit's personnel as "the very best of representatives for the United Kingdom", recognising their role in treating victims of the

devastating earthquake in Turkey in 2023 and for supporting the evacuation of British personnel from Sudan, among other tasks.

After the Turkey earthquake, the unit worked with the local health services and non-governmental organisations to establish a medical facility at the heavily-damaged town of Turkoglu, treating 6,300 patients.

During the Sudan evacuation, troops provided the sole surgical facility supporting the international operation.

Of the 2,450 people evacuated by the British military, 350 were treated for conditions ranging from extreme heat injury to gunshot wounds.

SSgt Elaine Bell (RAMS), a biomedical scientist who deployed on both operations, said: "It's a proud moment to receive this award.

"It was a high tempo period with lots of hard work, but it is very rewarding to have the skills to help people when they need it most."

Picture: Sgt Jimmy Wise, RAF; Cpl Aaron Stone, RLC

FREE TRAUMA COURSE

CHARITY Combat Stress is offering *Soldier* readers a free 90-minute online course to help them care for someone with military-related mental health issues.

The learning focuses on trauma and PTSD, and can be taken at an individual's own pace.

It is free of charge until August 22 and there are two versions – one for family members/carers and the other for medics.

Visit learn.combatstress.org.uk/ptsd-training

LOGISTICS UNLOADED

THE AUDIT burden is set to be reduced for army units, thanks to a review of the service's logistic assurance policy.

Changes will come into effect from January 2026 and for more details read [ABN 029/2025](#).

EMO MEMO

ANY army unit involved in electromagnetic ops must contact the Field Army Cyber and Electromagnetic Activity Group for formal authorisation.

The warning has been issued due to the development of the capability across the service. And it includes any use of equipment in the UK to find, detect or electronic attack (including jamming) via the electromagnetic spectrum.

For details read [ABN 030/2025](#)

PAYMENT ERROR

MISTAKES have been made in the issue of Scottish rate of income tax mitigation payments.

It affects 2,978 personnel, around half of whom have been paid too little, and the other half too much.

The issue is being investigated, but soldiers should contact their unit HR if they think they are affected.

More details are available in [ABN 031/2025](#).

THIS SET IS ON FIRE

MUSICIANS of the Household Division did not disappoint at last month's Military Musical Spectacular. Three days of performances on London's Horse Guards Parade featured a cast of more than 250 and colourful displays.



Picture: Sgt Donald Todd, RLC



Pictures: Cpl Nathan Edwards, RAF; LCpl David Allen, AAC

‘CRITICAL TO TEAM AND MISSION’

THE vital contribution of women to fighting power was voiced from the top at the latest Army Servicewomen's Network Conference.

Scores of troops turned out for the event at Bristol City Football Club, including Chief of the General Staff, Gen Sir Roly Walker, Army Sergeant Major WO1 John

Miller (both shown below) and Commander Field Army, Lt Gen Mike Elviss.

Gen Walker stressed that women were essential in the mission to increase lethality.

He said: "When I commissioned, there were parts of the army where the idea of women in ground close combat roles would have been considered unworkable. That mindset is changing slowly, sometimes unevenly, but change it must. And I am clear we are better, stronger and more lethal because of that.

"War does not care about gender or bias, because talent is talent. We cannot afford to ignore half the population if we want to be the best."

Underscoring the importance of recruiting and retaining females, Gen Walker added: "This is not a nice-to-have, it's mission critical."

The head of the service was speaking as delegates thrashed out issues ranging from female health to dealing with unacceptable behaviour.

The event marked the tenth anniversary of the network (*Soldier*, July).

Panel discussions were led by

junior NCOs and private soldiers, and the audience got to hear about ongoing studies of female health and fitness.

There was a Q&A with senior leaders from the army's unacceptable behaviours team plus a seminar focused on the military justice system.

Network co-chair Lt Col Sam Dodge (RLC) said she was delighted with the turnout and the presence of army top brass.

She told *Soldier*: "Our organisation continues to go from strength to strength.

"Having the chief of the general staff and commander Field Army in the room definitely helped, and their presence was very much appreciated.

"It really sent a strong message about the commitment of our senior leaders."





DON'T LOOK DOWN!

A SOLDIER from The Royal Anglian Regiment balances across steel girders on the urban assault course at Copehill Down. Read more about this kind of training – and why troops want more of it – in our next issue.

Picture: Cpl Paul Squires, RLC



GET SOME ANSWERS

STILL confused about what the strategic defence review is all about – and why it matters?

A colourful explainer (pictured above) has been produced by the army, which outlines everything soldiers need to know about its transformation into a smarter, more tech-focused force. Marked official, it can be viewed on Defence Connect or downloaded from SharePoint.

RESERVES WITH ATTITUDE

LESS than half of reservists have high morale, recent stats have revealed.

This year's army reserve continuous attitude survey showed overall levels of satisfaction dipped to 49 per cent – down from 52 per cent in 2024.

Officers were more likely to feel positive, with 56 per cent reporting their morale as high compared with 47 per cent of other ranks. Commissioned personnel also saw a five-point rise in role satisfaction to 79 per cent.

Some 2,660 troops answered the questionnaire, which was sent to 13,648 individuals in total. Results remained broadly the same across many categories, with some notable ups and downs.



Officers reported increased satisfaction with personal development opportunities, adventurous training and overseas exercises, while more than eight in ten said they would recommend reservist life.

Overall, two thirds of personnel thought their employer valued their service – an improvement on last year.

But there was a sharp decline in views on pre-deployment training, with 16 per cent more respondents, mostly other ranks, saying they were dissatisfied with it.

A greater proportion of reservists were also unhappy with facilities in their barracks and the standard of kit compared to back in 2024.

Pictures: Cpl Aaron Stone, RLC



LEARNING CURVES

BRITISH and French paras have been training to deploy to war zones together.

Amid a state visit by President Macron last month, 20 soldiers from the French 11e Brigade Parachutiste paid a visit to the No 1 Parachute Training School at RAF Brize Norton to jump under UK parachutes.

"The equipment and procedures we use are slightly different to the French, but it all comes from the same principles,

and they've adapted quickly," explained instructor Cpl Craig Corrigan (Para).

"Training like this is important, because the more we know about each other the better prepared we are to go on ops together."

After a day of ground training to build familiarity with the kit and procedures (pictured above), the French paras did a parachute jump to earn their 'bonds of friendship' wings.

Cpl Corrigan added: "It's

important to build human relationships – we are all paratroopers, with similar training and mindset, and being able to earn a different nation's parachute wings celebrates that special bond."

The Airborne Combined Joint Expeditionary Force is a partnership between 16 Air Assault Brigade and 11e BP. Both brigades serve as their armies' rapid response forces and have been trained and ready to deploy together in response to global crises since 2013.



GAS GAS GAS

COUNTER-CBRN drills are back for reservists.

Having not been delivered in their basic training since before 2023 due to changes under Future Soldier, the training gap is now being addressed with packages at the point of demand.

The land reserve counter-CBRN basic all ranks course will be delivered by Army Training Regiment Grantham from next month (September).

It lasts for around four days, and will be made available to all reservists who need it to meet joint training requirements, theatre entry standards or specific start dates.

To bid, search the course name on Target or Lums.

Read [ABN 041/2025](#) for more information.



JUNIOR RANKS RULE THE WAVES

THE army's official Force Atlantic crew for 2025 has been launched – with a mixed-sex team from 12th Regiment, Royal Artillery taking the helm for the World's Toughest Row.

Starting from La Gomera in the Canary Islands in December, the challenge sees rowers embark on a 3,000-mile quest across the Atlantic to Antigua.

In a first for the service, last year's entry was an all-female outfit. And there will be another first this time round as the gunners are all junior ranks.

Bdr Katie Devine will act as skipper and Bdr Olie Cutting 2iC, with LBdr Travis Sawyer and Bdr Vicki Wratten-Wood completing the line-up. Gnr Emma Mackenzie is team reserve.

"I have always been interested in rowing, but I want to see how far I can push my mind and

body and thought the World's Toughest Row was the best competition for me," said Bdr Devine, who at 24 will be the youngest skipper in the field.

"My main goal is to inspire junior leadership as this will be the first army team to row across the Atlantic with no officers.

"It's important to show that you don't have to be an expert to

try something new."

LBdr Sawyer added: "This is about putting myself in a position where I will be pushed beyond any scale of comfort and then some, to see what I am capable of especially as there is no getting off once you have had enough."

Follow their preparations via [@forceatlantic](#) on Instagram.

'You don't have to be an expert to try something new'



Picture: Pte Sulav Thapa, RLC

PRISONERS PAY THEIR RESPECTS

VETERANS in HMP Stafford built a replica cenotaph to mark the 80 years since the end of the Second World War.

Constructed in the prison workshop, the statue (pictured) was unveiled at a special commemoration event last month between the anniversaries of VE and VJ Day.



ALL EYES ON COMBAT ID

A UNIT has opened its own facility for troops to hone their combat ID skills.

With service chiefs repeating calls for soldiers to be up to speed on this skill (page 24), the purpose-built suite at the Royal Armoured Corps Training Regiment in Bovington features various UK and Nato platforms, plus those of potential adversaries including Russian vehicles and airframes.

Learning happens via a combination of scale models, tactical table-top methods and interactive displays – including thermal signatures.



Picture: Graeme Main

Developer Cpl Tom Barraclough (RTR) said the ability to ID friendly and enemy kit was vital to mission success and fighting power.

"I wanted to create a hands-on environment where soldiers could build muscle memory through realistic visual cues," the junior NCO added.

"Traditional digital simulations and photos often fail to convey the full 3D awareness required in the field."

The Acorn Suite, as the facility is known, will be updated regularly as equipment develops.

It supports both introductory recognition drills and more advanced training, and is available for any Field Army unit to book.

THE DRONES GO IT ALONE



IN WHAT could be a world first, the 3rd Assault Brigade of the Ukrainian Ground Forces won a battle against Russian troops while employing only drones.

Not one Ukrainian soldier was used during an assault last month on a major Russian trench complex.

A mix of reconnaissance and first-person view (FPV) airborne platforms plus unmanned ground vehicles (UGV) attacked the fortified position in the Kharkiv oblast.

According to the Ukrainian military report, well documented by video and photos (shown), FPV drones struck first, causing chaos in the trench system.

A UGV loaded with the equivalent of 20kg of TNT then destroyed one entrance to the enemy position.

When a second 'suicide' UGV approached, the surviving Russians waved flags of surrender.

Ukrainian troops then moved in to take their opponents prisoner.

The role of drones in Ukraine is constantly setting new precedents and this is the latest demonstration of how the use of the technology in the war with Russia is changing the course of modern warfare.

The British Army's high-tech future explained – page 36

SAVED FROM SCRAP

BOSSES at the Tank Museum in Bovington have thanked visitors who dug deep to restore an iconic armoured vehicle in danger of being scrapped.

The M47 Patton machine was lovingly restored to full running order in just a year, thanks to a £50,000 fundraising drive.

And it proved a huge crowd pleaser when it debuted at the recent Tankfest event.

Fundraising boss Kevin Hygate said the Cold War icon was an important piece of history.

He added: "Engineer Matt Pyle, who headed the restoration, has done a fine job in helping to save the life of what was nearly a range-wreck."



CONFERENCE CALL

FANCY an insight into US-UK defence business and tech innovation?

This year's Association of the US Army Conference takes place in Washington DC from October 13-15 and British personnel can secure their slots now.

A cross between DSEI and Rusi's Land Warfare Conference, the annual event features trade stalls, forums and seminars.

Those working in capability and acquisition roles or across Field Army are especially encouraged to attend, however individuals must seek their own budgetary authority.

Read **ABN 039/2025** for full details.

win... a summer meal at wagamama

CELEBRATE the summer at Wagamama, which now offers an impressive 20 per cent off to Defence Discount Card users. *Soldier* has teamed up with the Asian-inspired eatery to offer four winners an **£80 e-gift card** to enjoy with the family at a local restaurant. To be in with a chance, email **comps@soldiermagazine.co.uk** with your full name, rank, unit and contact details before August 25. Terms and conditions apply (see page 58). Good luck...



PARTY IN THE PARK

THE Kings Troop arrive for the salute in Green Park in honour of Her Majesty the Queen's birthday last month.

Picture: Sgt Donald Todd, RLC



HOUSING GETS PERSONAL

FAMILIES living in military digs can now look up their local housing officers directly.

Names and mobile numbers for all staff can be found on the Pinnacle website, listed by every location across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The move is one of several measures introduced to improve families' experience following complaints of poor service and standards.

Air Commodore Leah Griffin, the Defence Infrastructure Organisation's head of accommodation, explained the housing officers were distinguishable by their purple Pinnacle uniforms and were the initial points of contact for people to raise issues with.

"They are dedicated to helping families throughout the occupancy cycle, from move-in to move-out, and are key to enabling them to settle into their homes," the senior officer added.

Visit pinnacleservicefamilies.co.uk/your-housing-officer to find the staff member overseeing your patch.

Q&A: Introducing... a housing officer

Name: Toby Golden

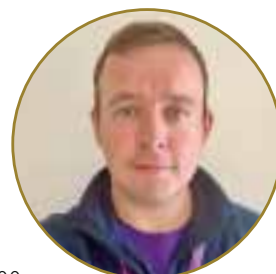
Area: Larkhill, Salisbury Plain

Experience: 14 years in the housing industry, including in estate agency and social housing

Families on your books: 400

Office hours: 0830-1630 Monday to Friday, mostly spent out and about on estates. Outside of daytime hours my team is also available for emergencies or repairs via 0800 031 8628.

Best part of the job: Supporting military families throughout their time in service accommodation. My colleagues and I deeply appreciate the incredible work that our armed forces do, and being able to ease the stress of moving and settling in is a privilege we take seriously. With experience in housing, I understand that things don't always go to plan. That's why we take pride in being a reliable point of contact whom families can turn to for support and reassurance.



MEDAL MUDDLE

CLARIFICATION has been issued on the reimbursement scheme for medal mounting (Soldier, July).

Policy was recently changed to allow troops with six or more decorations to recoup the cost of court-mounting – the process of securing them to stiff backing boards.

Previously, only swing-mounting was funded. However, the wording implied that those whose sixth gong was the Coronation Medal could not claim.

Officials have since confirmed this is not the case and that any individuals awarded a sixth decoration – including the Coronation Medal – are entitled to expenses of £60.

For full details on eligibility and how to claim read [ABN 037/2025](#).



Picture: Sgt Donald Todd, RLC

LIGHTBULB MOMENT?

UNITS could bag themselves tens of thousands of pounds in prize money by becoming more environmentally conscious.

The army's annual Utility Savings Challenge is under way for 2025/26, in which formations are encouraged to reduce energy and water consumption.

Gold, silver and bronze prizes are up for grabs in the form of cash that can be spent on local infrastructure to improve soldiers' quality of life.

Last year's winners were 1st Battalion, Coldstream Guards, whose 'Queen Vic' utilities saving project bagged them £50,000 to spend on upgrading facilities at Victoria Barracks in Windsor.

In the same 12 months, the wider initiative is estimated to have saved the army more than £13m, enough to fund a six-week light role battlegroup exercise in Kenya or a ten-week armoured sub-unit training package in the UK.

Meanwhile, CO2 emissions were cut by nearly 17,000 tonnes – equivalent to driving 63m miles in a diesel car or charging over two billion smartphones.

And since 2022, the campaign

has conserved 86,000 cubic metres of water – the same as 34 Olympic-sized swimming pools.

Director of Basing and Infrastructure – and the service's sustainability champion – Maj Gen Richard Clements, said: "We must continue to encourage specific energy-saving behaviour and responsible resource management to build a culture of sustainability that will have a lasting impact."

Runners-up in the last challenge were Luffenham-based 1st Military Working Dogs Regiment, who won £30,000 for their efforts managing buildings and training their personnel in fault reporting.

And sharing third place, 2nd Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Scotland and 21 Engineer Regiment each received £20,000 to fund improvements to their camps – Glencorse Barracks in Edinburgh and Claro Barracks in Ripon respectively.

For details of how to enter your unit, plus tips on conserving energy and water, visit the Army Basing and Infrastructure page on Defence Connect.

PLAY YOUR PART

Energy saving tips around the block...



Unplug unused TVs, laptops and personal devices



Don't overfill your kettle – boil only what you need



Reduce your shower time to four minutes



Turn down your heating if you can



Close your curtains in the evenings to keep warmth in



Buddy up when doing your laundry to avoid half-loads



Report poor insulation and draughts

Update



TOUGH SUMMER AHEAD?

FOR many the answer is yes, whether through family problems, illness or something else. Whatever your struggles, army chaplains can help. Rev Tim Watts (RACHD, below) from 36 Engineer Regiment and The Queen's Gurkha Engineers offers wisdom...

"However much we might look forward to a break from work, holidays can be stressful. So what can you do?"

It's worth having a plan for filling the time – even if you decide to change things later. It helps manage expectations.

Is there something you would like to do for yourself? Putting the oxygen mask on before helping others keeps us going. It could be something small like a walk – anything that makes you feel like you're coming up for air.

Maybe you're entertaining children and your heart is sinking at the thought of filling the time. A quick internet search will give loads of free or cheap things to do. These can be wonderful, memory-building times.

Finally, plan moments when you can be quiet and still, however short that might be. It may be time to pray or, if that's not your thing just take a moment to pause. There is strength in seizing a moment of stillness.

There could be all sorts of reasons why the summer looks hard and a time to just get through. Please remember you are not alone.

The padres are only a call or message away."





diary dates

1

Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo

THIS year marks the 75th anniversary of the world-famous event, set against the stunning backdrop of Edinburgh Castle. The milestone show is called *The Heroes Who Made Us*, and will run until August 23. Regulars and reservists will feature from across The Royal Regiment of Scotland and Scots Guards, as well as the British Army Band Tidworth, the Band of the Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment and members of the University Officers' Training Corps. For more details visit edintattoo.co.uk



Pictures: Sgt Ben Maher, RLC

5

In it for the long haul

HAVING already battled for honours in the Twenty20 and 50-over formats this season, cricketers from the army and Royal Air Force will see the tempo dip as they square-off in this three-day contest at Larkhill. The fixture was resurrected last season, when opener Cpl Liam Fletcher (REME, pictured) scored 174 as the soldiers won by an innings and 62 runs. Who will star this time round?



Picture: Graeme Main

14

Let battle commence

STARS from the army's victorious Inter-Services squad will be front and centre as the UK Armed Forces women compete at the International Defence Rugby Competition. Staged in England to shadow the Women's Rugby World Cup, the event sees the hosts take on Ireland, Zambia and Tonga in the pool stages, ahead of the knockout rounds. The final will be played at Gloucester's Kingsholm Stadium on September 3. **Visit ukafrfc.co.uk**



Picture: Alligin Photography/Mark Deller



15

Remembering VJ Day

HUNDREDS of forces personnel will descend on the National Memorial Arboretum to mark the 80th anniversary of Japan's surrender to the Allied forces in the Second World War. Victory in Japan Day was met with relief as it brought six years of conflict to a close. This month's national commemorative event will pay tribute to all those who served in the Far East and Pacific during that time, with flypasts from the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight (shown) and the Red Arrows. The ceremony will be broadcast live on BBC One with a national two-minute silence at midday.

At the going down of the sun – page 48

Picture: SAC Pippa Fowles, RAF



The army's former battle tank, Chieftain, will appear

Picture: Shutterstock

16

Armourfest makes tracks

NORFOLK'S Tank Museum will play host to the east's best show of moving military might on the weekend of August 16-17, from 1000 to 1700. The two days will feature battle tanks, armoured vehicles and various arena events including a tank tug-of-war. Visitors will enjoy vehicle rides, re-enactments, stalls, barbecue and a hog roast. On the Saturday evening there will also be live music at a 1940s hangar dance (costume optional). To purchase a ticket (adult £28.50 plus booking fee, under 5s free) visit norfolktankmuseum.co.uk



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stonyhurst.ac.uk/opendays



fuel

FEED THE GAME

Army volleyball ace **SSgt Bertrand Felix (RAPTC)** explains how the right food and drink have helped him perform better



“GOOD nutrition has been a game changer for me, on and off the court. Gone are the days of relying on energy drinks and a flapjack.

The sport demands explosive power, core strength and stability, as well as sharp focus; all of which are fuelled by the food I eat.

I start my day with a high-protein breakfast like eggs, oats, blueberries, banana, strawberries, yogurt and a drizzle of honey to boost energy and kickstart muscle recovery.

Lean meats, wholegrains, sweet potatoes and plenty of leafy vegetables are staples in my meals, ensuring I get the right balance of carbs for energy, protein for muscle repair, and micronutrients for overall health.

I also include healthy fats from nuts and avocados to support joint health and reduce inflammation after intense training.

Don't get me wrong, I've got a sweet tooth, and that stuff still gets past. But I've found a balance. While those treats keep me sane, the real fuel – bananas, oats, and protein-packed meals – ensure I'm in fighting form.

Hydration is also critical. I try to drink at least three-to-five litres of water a day and add electrolytes during long practice sessions to replace what I lose through sweat.

Post-training, a recovery shake with protein and carbs helps speed up muscle repair and reduce soreness.

In short, proper nutrition doesn't just help me thrive on the court, it also enhances my overall resilience, which is essential in both volleyball and army life.”



Picture: Graeme Main; Shutterstock

health



Lt Sam Griffiths, RE

Age: 26

Height: 178cm

Weight: 78kg

Unit: Royal Monmouthshire Royal Engineers (Militia); currently attached to 160th (Welsh) Brigade, Brecon

Years in: 7

Civvy role: Aerospace engineer

FLIGHT OF FOOT

How this officer went from overweight struggler to serial marathon runner... and transformed his health in the process

SAM Griffiths realised his bulk had become a problem as he pushed himself to his limits on a commissioning course at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst.

Weighing in at a hefty 127kg – 20 stone – the officer cadet faced a personal battle to meet the army's exacting standards.

Constantly at the back of his cohort and facing a relentless fight to keep up, he realised that change was needed.

And while a maximum effort paid off to see the reservist become a lieutenant in the Royal Monmouthshire Royal Engineers (Militia), completing the training was only the beginning of a journey from being overweight to competitive athlete.

Now at 78kg, the change in his physical appearance is as stark as it is impressive.

"It was a struggle to get through Sandhurst although I did manage to get there in the end," the 26-year-old officer, who is nicknamed Griff and currently mobilised, revealed.

"But it was later on, in 2022, that I decided to take firm action.

"I felt I wasn't leading from the front; and I wanted to change to do just that.

"Looking in the mirror, I also asked myself if I was happy with the person I was and the answer was 'no' – and so a plan to turn my life around took shape.

"Even doing the simplest things had been a problem – going out for a walk with somebody, for example, was hard as I was so ashamed of myself."

With running as his weapon of choice to burn the fat, the Brecon-based officer started on the streets with a basic task of jogging between one set of lampposts and walking another to recover. But the modest routine paid off as his stamina grew.

"I was getting out every day and started noticing the difference over the next six months or so. And looking at my diet, I made some changes there.

"The issue wasn't really the content of main meals so much as snacking between them – cutting this out helped shift weight."

Meanwhile, both the distance and time Lt Griffiths spent running was on the increase. He also took a month-long break to travel to Nepal, giving up his home comforts to take

on demanding hikes across the Himalayan heights.

"At home I had gone from 20 to 70km per week," the officer, who was a civvy aerospace engineer with Airbus before taking up full-time status in the army, recalled.

"My fitness was improving all the time – having started out with a casual programme of walk-running, I had now achieved a standard where I was comfortable entering the Cardiff half marathon and ran it in 1hr 11min.

"This time was good enough to qualify for the London Marathon, which I put myself forward for and finished in 2hr 50min – it was an achievement but not quite the time I was aiming for as I'd hoped to get through in 2hr 30min."

Despite the disappointment at missing his goal, a 26-mile running odyssey through the capital was testament to how far the once bulky officer had come.

With his new drive, Lt Griffiths went on to be a serial long-distance competitor – taking on the Lisbon Half Marathon and events on home soil while finding that he had more energy and resilience in day-to-day life. He also took to the army arena, representing his corps in different running events.

"Even before getting into competitive sport, simple things like going to the shops became easier because I had more energy and confidence," he added.

"And generally, I could do more with my day and was more productive."

But while his success has meant a huge physical effort, the officer stressed that mental discipline is key for anyone committing themselves to losing weight.

"You need to be strict with yourself – in my case, I have to ensure the habits that I once had do not return," Lt Griffiths said. "For example, I used to regularly buy bags of sweets on the Naafi break and this clearly had to stop.

"But I still have to pay attention to ensure I don't go back to picking up the snacks because – if I do – I could easily end up back in my old ways.

"It apparently takes around three weeks to fully break a habit but if you start going back to them then old patterns can quickly

Photos: Dennis Baber; Robert Gale



BEFORE

re-establish themselves."

The rhythm of life is, however, now different for Lt Griffiths. Highly disciplined in his training regime, regularly attending sporting events and constantly seeking new challenges, his old lifestyle is well and truly behind him.

"My training these days depends on what I am doing – for example, going all out for a marathon involves covering between 110 and 130km a week," he said. "Of these, I do two runs that approach the full distance and seven easier ones."

The officer reflected: "Taking up exercise can transform your life – you don't just benefit from the physical difference when you do something about your weight, your mind alters too."

"I feel completely different now and it is definitely as much of a mental as a physical shift – I'm happier in myself," he added. "My close friends and family can see that too – people notice the change in how you present yourself."

"This shift has given me an entirely new outlook on life – I have an Insta account these days and I'm glad to pass on my experience to others."

Find Lt Griffiths on Instagram at **@Globerunnergriff**

AFTER

"The issue wasn't really the content of meals so much as snacking between them"



!
**BEING
OVERWEIGHT
INCREASES
YOUR RISK OF...**

- Type 2 diabetes
- High blood pressure, which can lead to a heart attack or stroke
- A fat build-up around vital organs, making it harder for the body to fight serious illness

Source: NHS

phys

SANDBAG OF TRICKS

They pop up in gyms, strength and conditioning shelters and PT pods across the service, but how can you branch out with the The55 bag? King's Royal Hussars PTI **Sgt Shannon Gee (AGC (SPS))** gives us her top three three reps with the 25kg weighted wonders

1

PUSH PRESS

"Ensure you're driving through the knees, hips and ankles to press the bag above the head. During the press ensure your head is coming through your arms with the bag directly above."



2

BENT OVER ROW

"Bend down until you feel contraction in your hamstrings. From there keep your head, scapular and back in a neutral (straight) position. Row the bag up towards your belly button, contracting the shoulder blades."



3

FORWARD LUNGE

"When conducting the lunge ensure your front knee doesn't extend past your toes. Keep it above the foot."



LOAD WARNING: Remember The55 bag contains separate inserts, allowing you to adjust weight according to workout and ability. Don't go too heavy, too fast.

**Totally out of breath;
its nearly impossible to talk**

YOU THINK

"I've got nothing left"

INSTEAD SAY...

"I'm going to empty the tank"

**Out of breath;
single words a struggle**

YOU THINK

"I need to slow down"

INSTEAD SAY...

"The faster I do this, the sooner it's over"

**Heavier breathing;
few words at a time**

YOU THINK

"These intervals are killing me"

INSTEAD SAY...

"I'm killing these intervals"

**Heavy breathing; short
sentences with long gaps**

YOU THINK

"My legs are starting to hurt"

INSTEAD SAY...

"I love the feeling of this burn"

**Heavy breathing;
short conversations**

YOU THINK

"Maybe I should slow down"

INSTEAD SAY...

"Whatever I do, I won't slow down"

**Faster breathing;
conversation okay**

YOU THINK

"I don't want to be doing this much longer"

INSTEAD SAY...

"I can push this pace for a long time yet"

**Breathing elevated;
conversation normal**

YOU THINK

"This is a bit uncomfortable"

INSTEAD SAY...

"I could do this all day"



Pictures: Graeme Main

ALL IN THE MIND

How to reframe your negative thoughts when it gets tough

EVOLUTION has conditioned your body to conserve energy – but that little voice in your head telling you to slow down is unhelpful when you're trying to build fitness. Here, exercise rehab instructor Sgt Ross Read (RAPTC) explains how to flip the script.



skills

THE TOP

12

Are you battle ready?
You are now...

WHAT does it mean to be ready for war in 2025? The Lessons Exploitation Centre is here to help. Read on for a summary of its recently published pointers on what every soldier must master in order to identify battlefield threats and – ultimately – survive

1 Know your enemy

This isn't just a task for the Intelligence Corps. Learn how the opposition thinks and fights. Be able to recognise their vehicles and weapons, and learn what their movements and patterns mean. If we can't read their signs we'll be surprised – and killed.

2 Fight by recce strike at every level

Learn to see the enemy before they see you. Find, decide and strike faster than them. Opposition troops will be well camouflaged, try and trick us and mask their emissions. The principle is simple... any sensor, right decider, best effector. Information must flow fast and clearly. We need one shared common operating picture whenever we can. Keep it updated and share info quickly with the right people. Confusion kills.

3 Treat survival as a deliberate operation

We must survive to fight. Hide using camouflage and concealment. Control heat signature and electronic emissions. Use deception and decoys. They are watching us all the time, even in the UK. Disperse by keeping troops/vehicles 100-150m apart and groups small (four to five people max). Stay back from the front line unless necessary and avoid setting patterns. Artillery and mortars may be hit by counter-battery fire within three minutes. Dig and then hunt – the enemy will fire on us with massive and endless firepower, shells, mortars, rockets, drones. We must be ready to burrow deep and build proper overhead cover. Use drone nets, fake positions, and trenches with sharp twists and turns. Carry a shovel. If you can't move, fortify. A trench may save your life.



'Every training exercise must include enemy drones'

4 Expect enemy attack everywhere from the outset

Enemy targeting has already begun. We must defend supply lines, staging areas and every point in between. This must be tested in training now. The whole sustainment system – factory to front line – must work under attack.

5 Counter enemy drones

These systems can find us, jam us, guide artillery or strike directly. We must learn to defeat them. Every training exercise must include enemy drones. Start with simple tools: camouflage, nets, decoys and air sentries. Every soldier must know how to spot a drone and report it. Action must be fast.

6 Master the drone war

In Ukraine now, drones kill more soldiers than any other weapon. We must upskill at this. Every unit needs drone pilots. We must develop our skills with all types of systems, so we waste no time in effectively integrating them.

7 Move on a transparent battlefield

The enemy can see us from the sky, space, ground and on the airwaves. No move is truly hidden. Marching at night may not save you, so use cover. Use the weather and the thermal crossover (dawn/dusk). Use blind spots in their systems. Don't set patterns. Hide your electronic emissions.



8 Fight in the electromagnetic spectrum

Every soldier must understand the battlefield is not just physical, it is also electromagnetic. The enemy can hear us. They can jam us. They can locate and strike us. If you are within 50km of the front line, your GPS may not work. You must be confident with a map and compass and know how your kit works without GPS. Strict radio emissions control – or emcon – is a vital discipline.

9 Survive and operate in a CBRN environment

The enemy has already used tear gas in urban areas and trench fighting. They will do worse. They may strike chemical and nuclear plants. They may use nerve gas agents and even small 'tactical' nuclear weapons. You must be able to don your respirator and CBRN suit fast. Panic will kill you more rapidly than gas.

10 Treat the wounded under fire

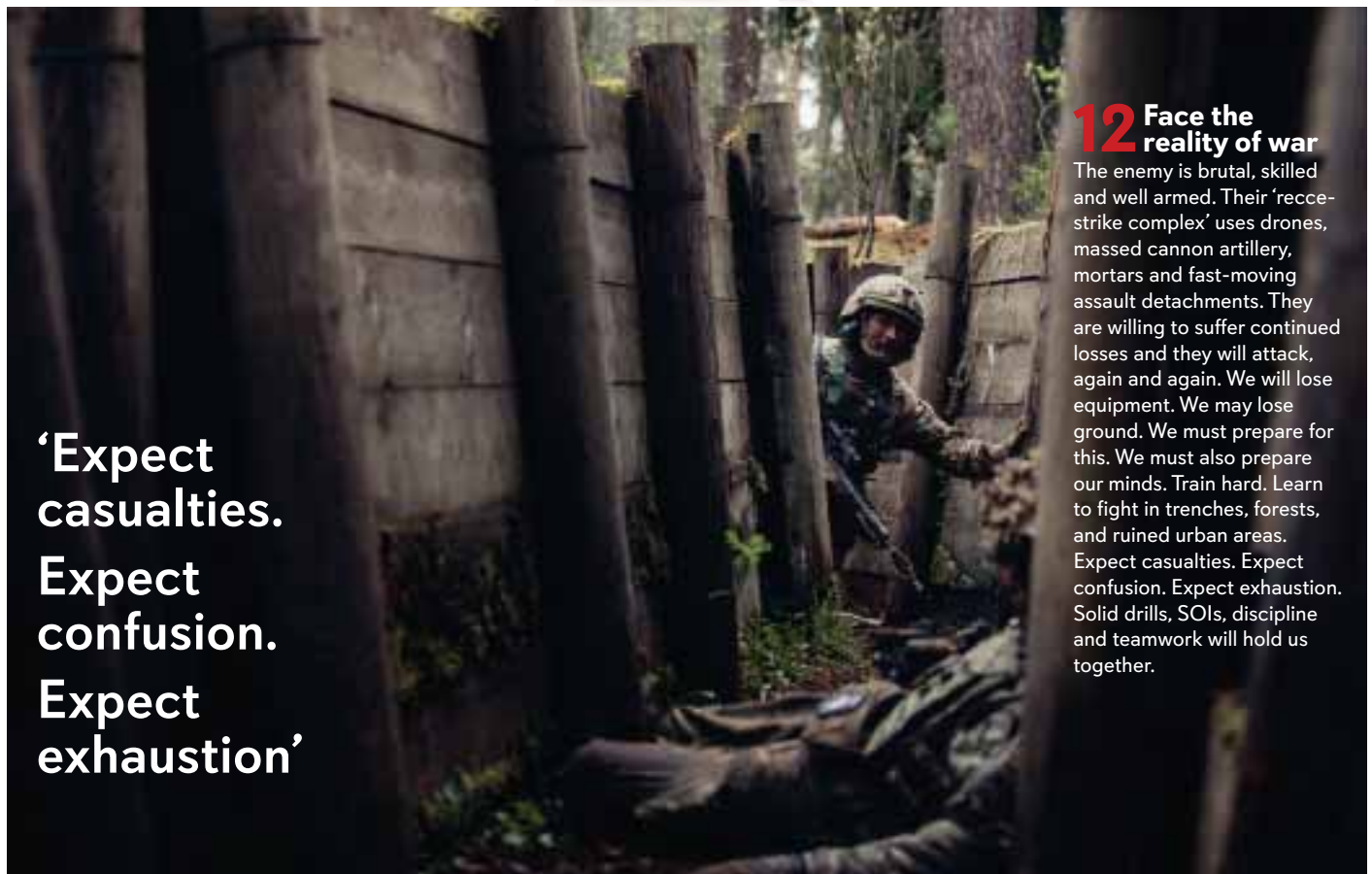
Helicopter rescue is unlikely. You may wait hours or days. Every soldier must have good basic casualty drills. We must increase the ability of CMTs to treat the wounded before they reach hospital. The enemy will target medical units, so medics may need to use deception, dispersal and any transport they can find. Medical facilities will need the same protection as HQs and logistic hubs. Prepare for many wounded – fast and all at once.

11 Conduct mobility and counter-mobility

We must clear routes for our forces and block routes for the enemy. That means crossing rivers, clearing mines, and breaching obstructions. It also means building obstacles, fortifications and laying mines. All soldiers – at every echelon – must be ready to deal with mines. These will be everywhere.



Countering the Threat: The Top Twelve 2025 is classified **OFFICIAL** and can be found on the Army Knowledge Exchange or Defence Gateway



**'Expect casualties.
Expect confusion.
Expect exhaustion'**

12 Face the reality of war

The enemy is brutal, skilled and well armed. Their 'recce-strike complex' uses drones, massed cannon artillery, mortars and fast-moving assault detachments. They are willing to suffer continued losses and they will attack, again and again. We will lose equipment. We may lose ground. We must prepare for this. We must also prepare our minds. Train hard. Learn to fight in trenches, forests, and ruined urban areas. Expect casualties. Expect confusion. Expect exhaustion. Solid drills, SOIs, discipline and teamwork will hold us together.

veterans

DITCH THE STEREOTYPES

Why the civil service could be a good fit for veterans, according to a former army officer who made the move

EX-TROOPS have the skills to land top roles in government and should not be put off by stereotypes, a sapper-turned-civil servant has said.

Adam Jones, who served on ops including Iraq as a Royal Engineers officer before becoming a security boss in London, said those from the more junior ranks had the ability to rise to the top in Whitehall.

And he urged resettlers to seriously consider putting themselves forward – pointing out that disciplines forged in the military such as negotiation and problem solving provided a competitive edge alongside formal qualifications.

The Cabinet Office-based deputy director, who holds the equivalent civvy rank of brigadier, added: “The skill sets of the military and civil service are complimentary.

“The army is all about effect and individuals from that environment can bring a great deal – we need people who can lead teams and make things happen.

“The civil service is keen on diversity too and people joining from the armed forces community bring a diversity of thought – this is really important.”

Jones, who is also a reservist, said soldiers themselves often did not appreciate the extent of their abilities – adding that even younger NCOs shouldered much-desired skills forged in unique environments.

Their experiences often included negotiating with people of different cultures – as soldiers had done in Iraq and Afghanistan – or making life-or-death decisions under contact.

But he stressed that those resettling needed to be able to ditch their military vocabulary and clearly articulate skills to put themselves ahead of the competition.

Jones (pictured below right), who oversees the physical and digital security of the Cabinet Office, also urged troops to offload any civil service stereotypes. Working in a government department was a demanding business, the ex-sapper added.

With fewer jobs on the cards amid recent cutbacks, competition was fierce.

“It’s important that you are able to translate military skills into civilian language,” he continued. “Do not use jargon and set yourself apart because you will be up against a fair few others – we had around 350 applicants for a recent vacancy.

“Don’t come in loaded with preconceptions either – our people don’t come to work in a bowler hat with briefcase,” he added with a smile. “In my role, for example, I’m responsible for working with ministers and permanent secretaries.

“I also sit on a board that advises on security issues all across government departments.”

Jones stressed that soldiers successfully entering the civil service would find a wealth of opportunities.

“The army is good at empowering individuals as well as teaching people to make risk-based decisions – so you’ll find your experience serves you well in this environment,” he concluded.

“You’ll also discover that you are promoted on merit, so you could soon find yourself in the running for more senior roles.”

Find out more about the job opportunities available to veterans by visiting civilservicejobs.service.gov.uk



KITCHENER'S NEEDS YOU

THE military community has been urged to dig deep to restore a much-loved hotel.

Lord Kitcheener's Memorial Holiday Centre in Lowestoft, Suffolk has been providing affordable breaks to service personnel for more than 100 years, but now its trustees need to raise £1m to fund repairs to the grade II listed building.

New sash windows, electrics and solar panels, as well as improved disabled access are among the upgrades required.

The facility is run by former Grenadier Guardsman Duane Ashworth – father of late Victoria Cross winner LCpl James Ashworth (Gren Gds) – and his partner Caroline.

Speaking to *Soldier* in 2022, Mr Ashworth described how the centre had become an important source of mental health support for visitors.

"As well as the hotel, we run breakfast clubs, coffee mornings, regimental dinners and reunions," he explained.

"Civilians will never understand the banter that goes on and how it helps. We also live on site and there's always someone knocking on the door wanting to come in for a brew.

"But we don't mind – if we can draw on our experience to support just one person then that's enough."

Dubbed 'One in a Million' the fundraising campaign is asking veterans and members of the public to donate £1 or as much as possible to help reach the target.

Follow the QR code to support the cause.



STRESS-BUSTING KITS ISSUED

VETERANS and soldiers visiting emergency departments in London are being issued with specialist kit to help support their mental health.

Clinicians at Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust have been signing over special care packs containing kit such as stress balls, eye masks, earplugs and support leaflets to help with conditions including post-traumatic stress.

The move, introduced to coincide with mental health awareness week back in May, was introduced following feedback from a veteran patient. Staff have also been given more training to spot and assist members of the wider armed forces family – including alerts to medical records.



BETTER CONNECTED

VETERANS across the UK are set to receive more housing, health and employment support thanks to a government initiative.

Known as Valour, the £50 million scheme will see regional networks set up to connect service providers, local government and charities in order to better meet the welfare needs of ex-military personnel.

The first centres are expected to be operational next year and will use data to ensure the assistance they provide is tailored to the specific demands of each area.

According to the MoD, veterans will be invited to give input through focus groups, research and feedback.

Defence Secretary John Healey said that while most service leavers do well on civvy street, those who struggle often faced "a postcode patchwork" in accessing help.

"Valour will harness the power of data to shape better service provision and ensure the right type of support is available for veterans," he continued.

"As the delivery arm, field officers will work with local services including government bodies, to share best practice and guidance."

Welcoming the news, director general of The British Royal Legion, Mark Atkinson, said improved coordination was crucial to enabling former troops to lead successful lives.



'I DIDN'T WANT TO BE LOOKED AFTER LIKE A CHILD'

How the ultimate fighting spirit helped this soldier beat cancer and return to the top of his sport »



TAEKWONDO ace Gdsm Thando Dlamini (SG) is enjoying a successful year on the mat, with victories at the Liverpool and Wales Opens along with a bronze medal at his home national championships in Eswatini.

But these achievements are even more remarkable given the fact he missed two years of action while he battled Hodgkin lymphoma and only received his all-clear in the spring.

Here, the humble serviceman talks to *Soldier* about his sporting career, how he battled cancer and his hopes for the future...

Tell us about your background in taekwondo

I started when I was nine or ten, there were some facilities in the village I grew up in and I've stuck with it ever since. My country, Eswatini, is small with a population of 1.1 million, but this is a big sport there. I've been involved with the national team and have competed in the continental championships, as well as the world championships in 2015, 2017 and 2019.

How did you come to join the army?

Since I was a kid, I always wanted to be in the military. I didn't dream of joining the greatest military in the world, the British Army, but as soon as I found out I could, I gave it a go. I am in my sixth year now and have been based at Windsor Castle, involved in ceremonial duties and deployed on exercise to Belize.

Describe your symptoms and how you were diagnosed with cancer

I'd been selected for Army Sport's talented athlete scholarship scheme and was a few months down the line with that when my eyes turned yellow, like jaundice. I was then in hospital for a month as the doctors tried to work out what was wrong. I was diagnosed with jaundice and from there they found the cancer. I was called for a scan in December 2022 and the following month it was confirmed.

How did you react?

I thought of it as something that needed to be fixed, then I could carry on. I am a soldier, and, in my mind, I am prepared for anything. What hurt me the most was not being able to do the things I wanted in terms of fitness and my career.

I'd hoped to push for a place at the 2024 Olympics, but everything was put on hold.

What was your treatment?

My doctors said it would be three or four months and then I'd be back to health. That became five to six months, but I eventually did a full year of chemotherapy. It would be every two weeks, then every month and sometimes it would be short, for 30 minutes to an hour, while others would last eight hours.

How bad were the side effects?

I properly lost weight, couldn't sleep at night and was struggling to walk even a couple of steps. At times you can't really do anything and there was a lot of throwing up and nausea. You also become forgetful, and your veins feel dead from all the chemo.

And then a stem cell transplant followed?

Yes, after a year of chemotherapy I had the transplant. I thought the chemo was bad, but this was worse. I was in hospital for another two weeks and the doctors wanted to get rid of everything to make sure the sickness did not come back. It felt like I was rebuilt and almost born again.

Did it have an impact on you mentally?

Not really. I was okay and thought 'it is what it is'. I'm comfortable by myself and don't get bored. I think my mentality comes from martial arts. From a young age you are taught about discipline and being grateful for everything, which helps develop a strong mind. In my sport I want to fight, that is the mentality I have.

What support did you get from the Scots Guards?

They were checking up on me and as I was living on my own in the block, they made sure I had transport for my hospital appointments. I was also given a point of contact in case there was anything I needed, but I did not want to be looked after like a child. They were there for me, and for them it was a case of 'health first, work later'.

Tell us about your road to recovery

I was always training, even if it was just a few steps at a time and built from there. Initially I couldn't really do anything, but the medical officer came up with a plan to help me. It was a phased return, and I was doing pretty much everything apart from going out on exercise. Fitness wise, I was doing all I could to push myself

and managed to pass the RFT last year, before being medically upgraded to serve again.

What are your aims now?

I was given the all-clear four months ago and now want to leave a legacy. The army has given me everything and I want to give my best in return. My wish is to get back on the talented athlete scholarship scheme so I can do sport full-time before I retire from taekwondo. I will then go back to my unit to continue my military career. I want to be an example to others and try to win everything I can to show what opportunities the army can give – even if you have had to have time away with illness.

You've had a pretty successful return to taekwondo to date...

Everyone has said I've done a great job, but I feel like I have yet to reach where I want to be. It has been like baby steps, and I want to do more. I have been doing taekwondo for a long time and know the position I want to be in. My fitness is coming back and once I get to that level, I will be prouder. I'm not that far off.

What are your aims for the time you have left in the sport?

My dream has always been to compete at the Olympics. I did the qualifiers in 2016, but it was hard; I fought and lost to a very good opponent from Morocco, which was the host nation. I was meant to try again in 2020 but there was Covid, and I was also in basic training. And last time round I had cancer. The goal now is to compete in events around Europe and then maybe go for the 2028 Games. That would mean a huge amount to me; I have been through hell. To come back from cancer, compete at the Olympics and then retire from the sport would mean a lot.

How important has army taekwondo been in your journey?

They are so supportive. When they were running sessions and I couldn't take part I was still made to feel like part of the team. This is something I love, and as I've been doing it for so many years it has been quite easy to regain my fitness. I've done my level two coaching course through the army team and there is a great atmosphere. «

‘I think my mentality comes from martial arts’









THE Red Devils claimed a world first at last month's Armed Forces Parachute Championships in Netheravon. Jumping at 14,000ft, they built a 'Hex' formation, thought to be the first six-way downplane manoeuvre. The Parachute Regiment pros jumped alongside members of the US Army's Golden Knights team, seen in yellow.



SURVIVAL OF THE FASTEST

Could a game-changing network be the answer to winning the unfair fight?

IF SOLDIERS aren't already hearing the word 'Asgard' being bandied about in briefings, they soon will.

It's the name of what is arguably the most important transformation in the army's capability since the introduction of the Mark I tank during the First World War.

The hand of Asgard will soon be felt during every major operation or exercise – by front-line combat units, those in second echelon support roles and even HQs many miles from the action.

Essentially a new data network, the project was first announced late last year. And it has progressed at an unprecedented pace, with contracts awarded in January 2025 and a basic version deployed for evaluation on Exercise Hedgehog in Estonia in May.

Asgard is still being refined by a team of army and defence scientists in partnership with 27 industry partners.

Their goal is to create a world-leading reconnaissance and strike framework made up of cutting-edge software and artificial intelligence capabilities.

It provides improved targeting precision and shorter decision-making cycles. This will

increase lethality in line with the chief of the general staff's vision.

The system will, in time, link together functions such as deep strike weapon systems, surveillance, reconnaissance, intelligence and communications tools and combat support functions, even reaching down to the soldiers' situational awareness equipment, now called the dismounted data system (DDS).

This means that personnel, whether they are fighting in streets or forests, can call upon any munition from any system within the brigade almost instantaneously.

Over time, Asgard will form the army's part of the UK armed forces' digital targeting web, linking all three services together to create, potentially, one fighting entity.

That is due for delivery by 2027, backed by more than £1 billion of funding announced in the Strategic Defence Review.

It all sounds very impressive and incredibly high-tech, but exactly how will Asgard impact troops on the ground?

Soldier spoke to 4th Light Brigade commander, Brig Oliver Dobson, to find out what units got from testing a prototype Asgard system in Estonia. >>



Right, below: **With the latest generation of troops being digital natives, integration of the new data network has been near-seamless**



» A faster tempo

"Asgard allows formations to be much more agile than they once were," says the senior officer.

"In Estonia, data that came in from our long-range surveillance assets was processed so quickly I could change the battle plan very late on.

"With our old system, I simply wouldn't have had the ability to communicate all the changes to a light brigade moving around on foot.

"The DDS, viewed on the Atak chest-mounted device, allowed me to send a new set of orders to the COs very quickly.

"We had chat groups where everyone was able to see the direction I was giving, and could start thinking about the challenges ahead and anticipate what was going to be required.

"We found that generated a much faster tempo in practice, and that produced a decisive edge.

"On Hedgehog my light role brigade fought against a multinational armoured infantry brigade and won, and I don't think we could have done so without Asgard.

"We were outnumbered and in previous years we would've been overwhelmed by their armoured vehicles very quickly."

Safer, better field comms

Brig Dobson continues: "The mesh radios we used made a huge difference as they can leapfrog messages from radio to radio, across vast distances.

"They can carry any IP traffic including video, audio and data across the network and are used in conjunction with the DDS.

"They are low powered so the signature is small, which makes them difficult to detect."

More efficient combat support

During the Estonia package, a large vehicle went off the road and became stuck in a ditch.

The officer explains how, previously, that information would have been sent through the command chain up to the brigade HQ and then down the logistic chain to the vehicle recovery team – a process that can take hours.

"In this instance, the driver took a photo of the stricken platform and put it straight into the vehicle recovery chat group where one of the experienced NCOs saw it and knew that two recovery vehicles would be required," Brig Dobson says.



"He could see the enemy position and our forward line of troops so he could plot a safe route – which he published on the comms system so everyone else could see – and launched the recovery without an extensive planning process.

"Loads of friction stemming from going up and down chains of command, as well as airtime, were reduced and the vehicle was up and running again in a fraction of the time it would have taken previously."

Survivable HQs

The brigadier says: "A piece of kit called Scytale made a big difference here, turning Bowman radio communications into encrypted messages sent over the internet.

"Without the constraints of having to operate within a specific range, we could position our headquarters further away from the battle, whether they were company or brigade facilities. »





‘Loads of friction stemming from going up and down the chains of command – as well as airtime – were reduced’

ASGARD

What it means for Nato

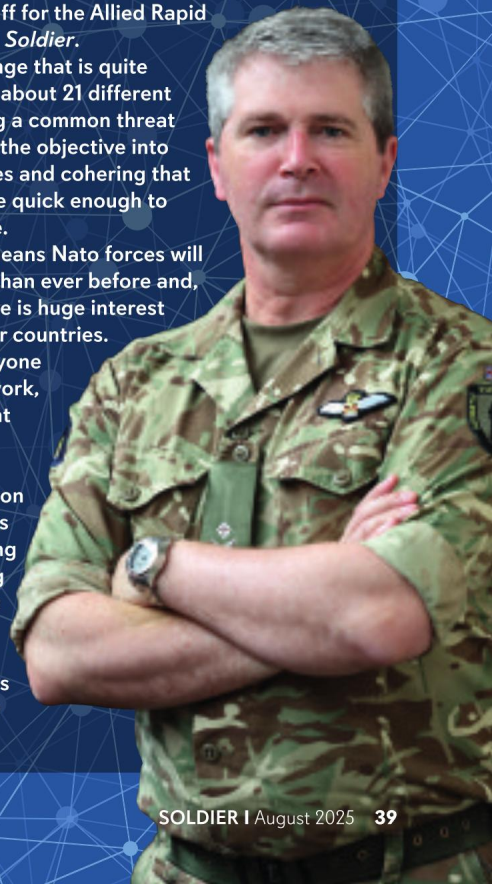
“TO BE receiving data and digital-driven solutions through Asgard to address the scale and complexity of the tasks we face will be momentous for our people,” Maj Gen Mike Keating, Chief of Staff for the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps, told *Soldier*.

“We face a challenge that is quite extraordinary. Think about 21 different armies in Nato facing a common threat and then translating the objective into 21 different languages and cohering that into a single outcome quick enough to deliver an advantage.

“Having Asgard means Nato forces will be more connected than ever before and, not surprisingly, there is huge interest in it from the member countries.

“As we bring everyone into the Asgard network, having many different languages becomes almost irrelevant.

“Creating a common digital environment is effectively diminishing that barrier, lowering the cognitive burden of understanding each other and at a Nato level that makes Asgard an incredibly powerful tool.”



Right: **Troops at the sharp end will benefit from faster decision making processes and the ability to take the battle to the enemy more quickly under Asgard**

» "With greater survivability we were allowed to focus more on decision-making.

"Having the data network to communicate with also meant we could reduce our electromagnetic signature to a very low level when our sensors detected a threat in the area. In Estonia we had a scout battalion looking for our HQ for five days, but they couldn't find us."

Reduced cognitive load

"The personal technology is very intuitive to use," adds the commander.

"In Estonia I checked the server one evening and 150 of my people were up playing around with their dismounted data systems, working out how to do different things.

"The troops had two-and-a-half days' training on it beforehand and they were experts on it because, like most of that generation, they are digital natives.

"Is there a danger of personnel getting cognitive overload with all this tech? No, that's a common misconception.

"What overloads soldiers is all the noise in their ears, 80 per cent of which is probably not relevant to them.

"Now they only have the remaining 20 per cent of rich information they need to know and it's on screen for when it's convenient to absorb.

"If anything, this system reduces their cognitive burden. It gives them relevant information and allows them to be less distracted and focus more on the battle-winning decisions they have to make.

"Also, personnel don't need to learn to be experts in lots of systems, just the DDS, because pretty much everything they need works through that."

More deep strike options

Brig Dobson comments: "I can kill a tank two-to-three kilometres away at the moment with my javelin missile capability. But we had the recently procured Modini Dart jet-powered one-way attack drones, which fly at 250mph and can strike up to 250km away, so soldiers on the front line were able to identify an enemy asset using a recon drone or ground sensor and, without any chatter, pass that information up to divisional HQs immediately for them to target.

"The next stage of this project will see us use a shorter-range effector such as the Helsing HX-2 drone that has onboard AI allowing it to identify and engage targets up to 100km away even when it's denied a signal or data connection.



"It will be operated at brigade level so the kill chain will be shortened because we won't be depending on divisional HQs.

"But when the Asgard network is complete, we won't even be thinking about the ownership of effectors.

"The one I control, the HX-2 for example, might be fired at another commander's targets because their sensors might have picked up an enemy I can't see but I hold the most appropriate weapon. The new decision support software understands all this."

Brig Oliver Dobson

The bigger picture

Thanks to Asgard's combination of linked sensors and weapons and the dismounted data system, soldiers at section level can sense and strike much further out as well as appreciate what's going on in the periphery.

Brig Dobson adds: "They now have an appreciation of the bigger picture and are no longer limited to a drinking-straw view of the battle.

"Great shared situational awareness among everyone is hugely beneficial because it means they can offer up battle-winning solutions you might not know you've got as a commander."





Safer troops

The officer continues: "Knowing where everyone was in real time meant I could more finely balance the risk of any decision because I could judge how long it would take for force elements to reach the positions we wanted them in."

"My situational awareness was enhanced but without the need for constant radio communications back and forth. I could make a decision and act on it almost instantaneously."

More collaborative battle planning

"Battlegroups usually get sight of the combat estimate when it's complete," the brigadier explains. "And then they backbrief to make sure I agree with their deductions."

"But under the new system I could see the cursors of the plans officers from the battlegroups hovering over my screen as I was writing my intent."

"This was a much more collaborative process and we were able to produce better plans more quickly."

"It requires a level of humility in that other people are looking at the estimate from their perspective and you need to consider their advice and guidance."

"Some commanders might feel this will diminish their authority, but they shouldn't because it enhances their ability to deliver the best plan for keeping their soldiers alive and defeating the enemy." «

**'Some
commanders
might feel this
will diminish
their authority
but they
shouldn't'**

‘This is everyone’s business’

Recruitment is up, but not by enough.
Could you be part of the solution?

AROUND 14,000 people need to join up every year for the army to maintain its strength – and while recent figures showed an upward trend in enlistments and applications, the number of troops entering the regular and reserve ranks was still more than 3,000 short of the target in the year to April.

In a signal of intent, service chiefs recently split recruitment and training into two separate commands. But according to one of the senior officers in charge, boosting inflow isn’t just the domain of the top brass – it starts with anyone who puts on the King’s uniform.

Maj Gen Joe Fossey (pictured left), the newly appointed director of army recruiting, called for all personnel to recognise their role in turning things around.

“The service has outsourced

recruiting to Capita but the mindset that follows that is that it’s someone else’s problem to sort out, when actually it’s everyone’s business,” he said.

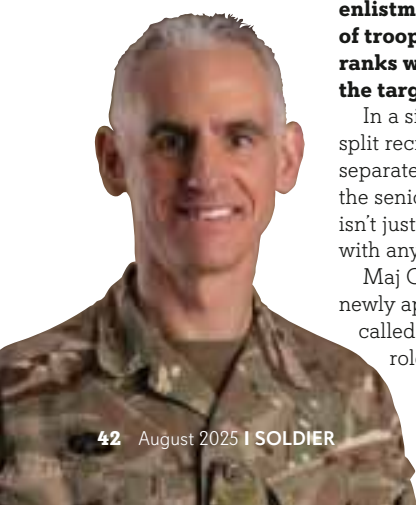
“From the way people conduct themselves when they’re out and about to how they speak to the public or act online, everyone is a recruiter, whether they like it or not.”

Encouraging uniformed influencers to share content was another element being considered, the officer added.

“I’d like us to get some of our brilliant young soldiers telling their stories in the places that matter to young people, which is now usually the virtual sphere,” he went on.

“We have some great role models, who could be saying ‘look at what I’m up to today – it’s pretty cool’.

“It needs people who are inspiring to create the flow into this amazing organisation.” »





RECRUITMENT UPS AND DOWNS

The latest defence stats show a mixed bag when it comes to recruitment...

43,900
Number of UK and Irish applications to join the regular army last year – up 37 per cent on the previous 12 months

8,098
Intake of new regular personnel in the same period – an increase of 12 per cent

42.5%
Rise in applications to the reserves



3,100
Shortfall in intake versus 14,143 target

9,000
Troops that left regular service in the year to April, which although 400 less than in 2024 resulted in a net workforce decrease of one per cent



» Despite criticism of previous advertising, Maj Gen Fossey said an increase in applications suggested the 'You Belong Here' campaign had chimed with gen Z.

But he acknowledged the difficulties of speaking to a cohort that have very different career expectations.

"The workplace wants of the generation that's come through Covid are different," he explained.

"Our very structured approach of people joining as soldiers for a minimum of five years, doing training, then trade training might not suit.

"They also have an expectation that the website, apps and processes are very slick and responsive. They don't tend to wait around long before they're on to the next thing and the recruiting system takes time, while we carry out vetting and medical checks and make sure they can do the job we

need them to do.

"This is a complex ecosystem with human beings who have free will and choice, so if you're going to improve it you've got to make lots of different adjustments – not just one."

Finding ways to nurture candidates through the lengthy enlistment pipeline will therefore be a key focus for the general and his team in the short term, as well as streamlining medical review procedures.

In addition, they will be laying the groundwork for the recently announced move towards a tri-service recruitment organisation in partnership with contractor Serco from 2027, which will end the 15-year contract with Capita.

In the meantime, Maj Gen Fossey said his department were open to ideas from the serving and ex-military community on how business can be done better.

"There is no shortage of opinion in the



PITCHING IN

We asked personnel for their thoughts on the recruitment effort

"To an extent we do all need to be recruiters – we also have to be more upfront because people tend to know when somebody is trying to sell something to them these days. They are, in short, a more clued-up generation."

LCpl Charlie Green, Coldm Gds



"If the service can do anything better it's speed up the joining process – people will lose interest and find themselves other jobs if the wait is too long. We also need to make sure we target those using digital channels because fewer people go to recruitment centres these days."

Pte Sulav Thapa, RLC



"I was recruited by a best friend and then recruited two of my mates – so yes, we definitely all need to play our part. If you find yourself in a position where you can help the army, do it."

LSgt Ashley Ryan, IG



"We should certainly assist in bringing in new people – soldiers have a duty to do their bit when they can."

Pte Jay Anderson, RLC



world of recruitment and people are very free to offer it," he continued.

"In my experience, if you listen, you will find some gold nuggets.

"We are working very hard to improve things, so why wouldn't we use everything at our disposal?"

The recent announcements of a 4.5 per cent pay rise for the forces and extra cash for housing should boost the cause of getting more boots through the army's door.

And June's strategic defence review underlined that the UK military is a growth industry once more. But the same study laid bare the threats likely to face troops in the near future, and the associated urgency of closing the recruitment gap.

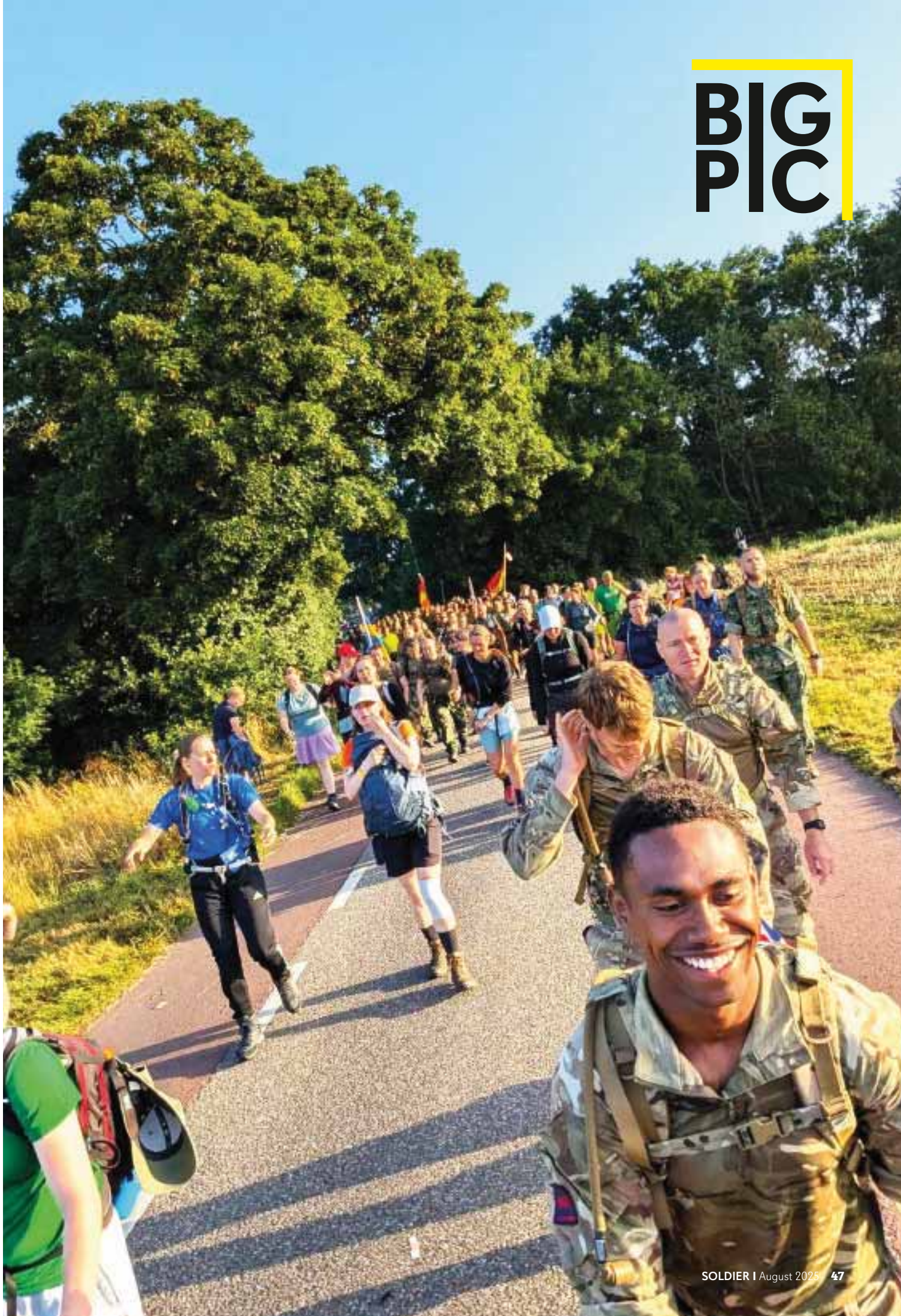
With national security at stake, ensuring a steady supply of motivated and capable soldiers can no longer be seen as someone else's job – it's a mission for all who serve. <<





BRITISH troops joined military marchers from 35 nations at the world's largest walking event in Nijmegen, Netherlands. It saw participants cover 40km per day, with others providing event support. The Band of the Grenadier Guards greeted finishers.







(ex-WO1) Don Poole, Royal Army Ordnance Corps



(ex-Cpl) George Durrant, Intelligence Corps



(ex-Pte) Vic Stone, Royal Army Service Corps

At the going down of the sun...

As the country marks 80 years since VJ Day,
Far East veterans remember their part
in the defeat of the Axis powers

WHEN the smoke of conflict began to clear in Europe in 1945, attention turned to a Japanese enemy that had resolutely refused to give up despite suffering huge losses.

With an unconditional surrender signed by the German high command, British, Commonwealth, American and Chinese troops were still fighting in Burma, now called Myanmar, finally arriving at the capital Rangoon in May.

Meanwhile, the US had been spearheading a campaign across the Pacific in a war of attrition against the Imperial Japanese Forces.

Battling from island to island towards the enemy homeland, the troops faced a foe for whom defeat meant dishonour – and who would fight for every inch of ground.

The battle for the atoll of Tarawa in November 1943 had shown the suicidal zeal of the enemy early in the campaign. A three-day encounter

across a territory of 31 square kilometres left 1,000 US marines dead and another 2,000 wounded.

Of the 3,000 defenders, only 17 were left alive to be taken prisoner. Assaults on Saipan, Iwo Jima and Okinawa in 1945 saw the pattern replicated on a far larger scale.

Now, as a long summer ended and the allies stood in the foothills of the Land of the Rising Sun, commanders faced the prospect of conducting a full-on invasion of the Japanese home islands.

Operation Downfall, as the action was dubbed, would see 767,000 personnel attack.

In response, the Japanese leadership had drawn up a defensive plan called Ketsu Go, Operation Decisive, that would use three million men to inflict mass casualties.

The waiting troops – oblivious to the fact that the dropping of two atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki would bring the war to a sudden conclusion – stood ready for the final assault... >>

» ‘My unit were good lads, all of them. I’m sure it’s similar today’

The son of a London publican, **(ex-WO1) Don Poole** served in India during 1945. He was an ammunition examiner – broadly the equivalent of a modern ammunition technical officer – in the **Royal Army Ordnance Corps**. He married wife Beryl in December 1950 and the couple had a son and daughter. He served in various civvy jobs, including running his own domestic appliance business, until he retired. Aged 101, he lives independently at his home in Hertfordshire.

THE Japanese were an awful enemy – in their code it was death before dishonour; they did not surrender. Had the war not been ended by the atom bombs, an invasion of their home islands would have cost hundreds of thousands of lives. Even after the war there were some of their units operating in India, where I was then based, which would not give up. Fighting went on well into 1946.

What is there to say about me? I was called up to join the army in late 1942 and specialised in ordnance. I went on an extensive course in Hampshire covering everything from small arms to mortar bombs, big calibre shells and mines. It was our job to deal with all types of stuff – to make safe anything that might be lying around.

But this was not my first experience of military life – in 1940 I joined the Home Guard, lying about my age to get in. The unit was local to me – my dad owned a pub, which was called *The Three Brewers*, opposite the tube station in Islington. Our unit went out and helped during the German air raids.

I was promoted to WO1 in India after going through the ranks quite quickly. We did all kinds of jobs, one of which was disposing of Japanese ordnance. Most of it, such as the mortar kit, was manufactured along the same lines as our own and so quite similar. But they did have a 75mm field gun, which was a bit of a beast.

By this stage in the war, however, the Japanese had a shortage of good quality explosives and they had often been badly stored. This meant they deteriorated quickly and could be dangerous. There was one incident at the depot, where some ammunition went up during a fire.

We did mark the end of hostilities in the mess. The soldiers all got around a piano and we started singing. There were bottles of lager, although as I remember it was possibly a candidate for the worst beer in the entire world. We started with nostalgic tunes, *The White Cliffs of Dover* and *We'll Meet Again*. Then, after a few beers, the songs had changed to stuff unsuitable for this magazine.

My brother-in-law had a harder war than me. He was taken prisoner by the Japanese in Singapore. He was a big lad – six foot and 16 stone. He weighed just eight stone when he was repatriated; he was only in his 40s when he died.

The unit I was with was small and they were good lads all of them; I'm sure it's similar today. One difference I suppose is that tours are six months these days; we were away for a few years. My demobilisation finally came in 1947.



‘The truck rolled off the mountain, bodies tumbling out’

When war broke out in 1939, **(ex-Cpl) George Durrant** was living with his parents in Battersea. A talented athlete who ran for the renowned Belgrave Harriers, he enlisted in 1942 at the age of 18 and was sent to Catterick to train as a tank driver. However, poor eyesight meant he was downgraded to supply trucks, which didn't appeal. When a notice came around asking for volunteers for 'a special job abroad' in the **Intelligence Corps**, he jumped at the chance. Now 101, he married his wife Eileen Mary in 1953, had two daughters, and still lives in the house he's owned since 1956 in a leafy side-street in Crawley, Surrey.

WE DEPARTED Liverpool docks in February 1944, heading for Burma via India. My new job was to be part of a special wireless section providing protection against inadvertent leaks that were giving the Japanese vital clues to the whereabouts of Allied troops.

When we crossed into Burma the thing that really hit me was the intense heat and humidity of the jungle. I'd never experienced anything like it before – and haven't since. We had to travel to a base near a place called Pegu in a lorry convoy – a journey that was long and dangerous. Unfortunately, the truck in front of us got too close to the edge of the mountain road and toppled off into the jungle below. It rolled over and over and I saw lots of bodies tumbling out. But when you're in a convoy in a war zone you're not allowed to stop, so we just carried on.

I remember arriving at one village and we were all hoping to drink some lovely fresh water, but the Japanese had poured oil on it. That's what they did, it was war.

We eventually got to Pegu and the troops there – mainly Gurkhas – were not that disciplined on the radio. There were lots of leaks of useful information and the enemy was cashing in. We had to clamp down on our people for their own good.

But that wasn't the only hazard we faced. The snakes were awful. You had to check your shoes every morning because they loved curling up in your boots at night and if they bit you it was often fatal. Scorpions were also common, although less deadly, but I got stung by one once and the pain was incredible, lasting 12 hours.

The Japanese often shot at our camp from the jungle and I was involved in returning fire on several occasions. They were good fighters, but so were we. You were always aware their snipers were around but you learned to live with the risk somehow. You sort of accepted your fate – you couldn't change anything after all. I lost a couple of friends while I was based there and it's something that never leaves you.

When we were told about the atomic bombs being dropped and the Japanese surrender, the overwhelming feeling among us was sheer relief and happiness. Mind you, some Japanese units refused to surrender and were a major hazard for months beyond VJ Day.

Before I was sent home in 1947 to return to my job as an engineer, I was posted to Karachi and put in charge of a depot's postal office. I've never been so popular! And it was a certainly a nice cushy job to finish my time in the army with. >>



» ‘Being killed rarely crossed my mind. It seemed like one big adventure’

A lorry driver living with his widowed mother in West London when he was called up in 1944, **(ex-Pte) Vic Stone** served in Burma from early 1945 until 1947, working as a coxswain on boats supplying front-line troops by river. Despite settling down to marry his wife Sheila in 1953 and having four children, his deployment to the Far East with the **Royal Army Service Corps** gave him a taste for adventure and he later volunteered for the Royal Fleet Auxiliary. Aged 99, he now lives close to one of his daughters in Gillingham, Kent.

I WAS stationed at Kalewa with 856 Motor Boat Company and our job was to take essential supplies of food, water and ammunition to the fighting troops trying to recapture Mandalay.

I crewed with two other soldiers and a few Indian personnel. We each carried a .303 Lee Enfield and each boat had a Bren gun. We'd been trained in all aspects of boat handling back in the UK, but not much could prepare us for the task given to us out there.

Two large barges carrying 100 tons of supplies were lashed each side of our motorboat and we had to tow them more than 200 miles along the Chindwin and Irrawaddy rivers, negotiating strong currents and dangerous shallows.

Navigating the Chindwin was particularly perilous as many parts were uncharted and we sometimes relied on bamboo poles with a weighted base to gauge the depth. Even so, there were many groundings and on one occasion we had to enlist the local villagers to help heave us off a sandbank.

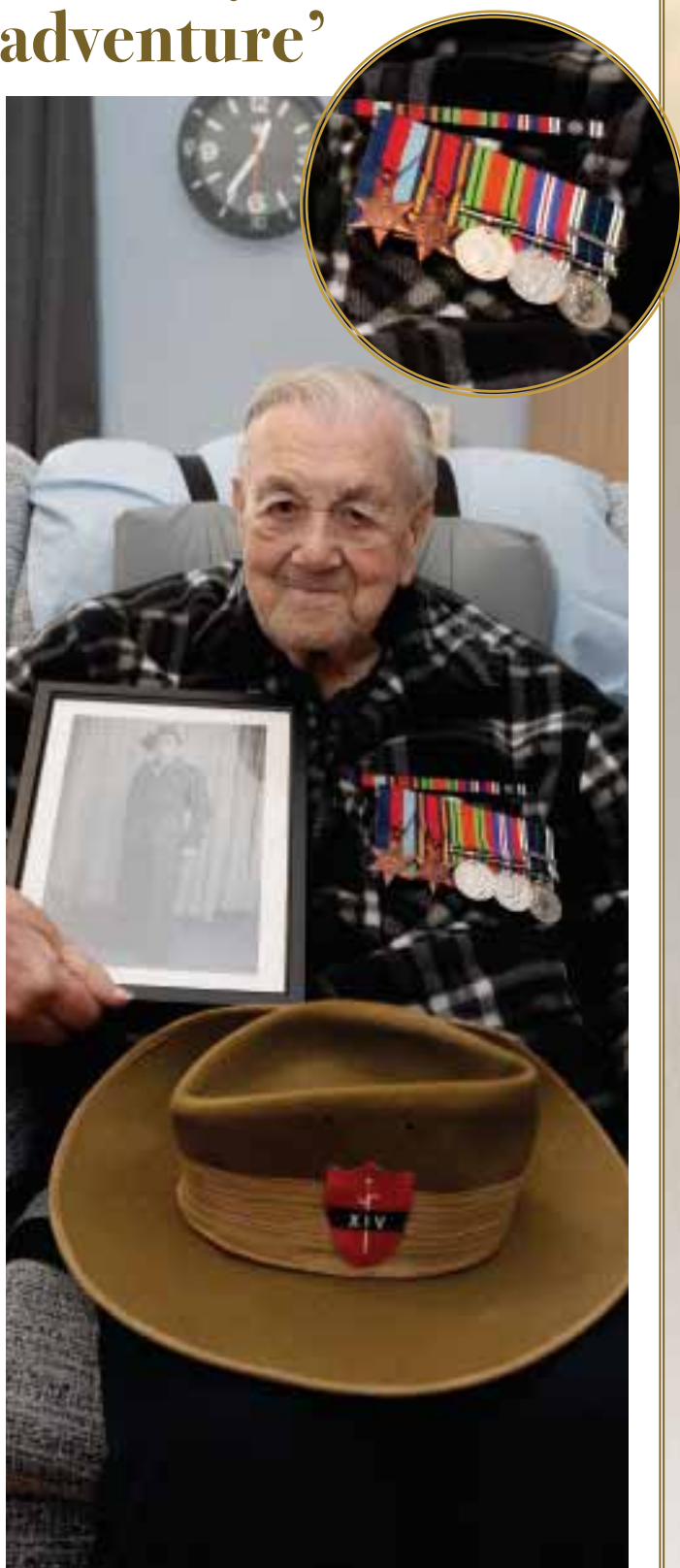
It was a unique operation so we improvised along the way to try and improve our methods. The manoeuvrability of the 'tows', as we called them, was always difficult because of their size and weight. We found some success in mounting outboard engines to each of the barge's outside rear corners enabling us to move the 200-ton beast around a bit more easily against the strong river currents and tides, but each leg was still a huge undertaking.

After we delivered each barge, we towed empty ones back to Kalewa for reloading. Each round trip took about two weeks and was hard going because our motorboats were harbour launches by design and lacked proper cover from the scorching sun or any facilities. There weren't even any toilets on board – as a large group of military nurses found to their dismay when we took them up river to a field hospital.

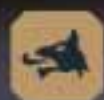
Maybe it was my age, but being killed rarely, if ever, crossed my mind. It seemed like one big adventure to me at the time – even though I knew how vital our role was. We had a visit from the legendary Lt Gen Sir William Slim, who first of all ensured we were kitted out with bush hats rather than berets to protect our heads from the sun. Then he took time to explain the importance of our job in the campaign to recapture Mandalay. I found him a very likeable, down-to-earth man and was proud to be part of his 14th Army.

After I returned to the UK one thing that struck me was the casual attitude from people we'd been fighting for.

When I stepped ashore at Southampton customs and excise officers swooped on us, wanting to know if we had anything in our bags that we shouldn't have. They counted the number of cigarettes I had and told me I was over the limit. Luckily, they let me off the fine. Then, when I returned to work lorry driving, all my colleagues who hadn't been called up had to say to me was, 'how did you enjoy your holiday, then?'. That stuck in the throat. »



LEVEL PEAKS



BEYRON

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Family history

Two reservists tell *Soldier* how the VJ Day anniversary has enabled them to connect more deeply with their relatives

THEY were called the Forgotten Army. With the war on Britain's doorstep at an end, those still fighting or suffering in prisoner-of-war camps in the Far East were out of sight and largely out of mind.

But for their descendants, the sacrifices made in Burma and beyond live on in the family memory. And over the coming months, two creative projects will bring stories of the campaign to light.

TV adventurer and Parachute Regiment officer Maj Levison Wood (below) has wrapped up filming on *The Last Burma Star* – a documentary, set for release in November in which he retraces the footsteps of his grandfather, **Levison Hopkin Wood**, who fought with the 2nd Battalion, The Royal Welch Fusiliers.

Meanwhile, the family of **Peter Kemmis Betty** (right) are publishing their father Peter's memoirs of his three-and-a-half years in Japanese captivity...

So many questions

For Maj Wood, filming provided an opportunity to visit the places he had previously researched – a process the officer says gave him a much deeper respect for what the Second World War generation endured.

"Seeing the terrain firsthand, learning how little recognition many of these men ever received, and understanding the link between that history and the current crisis in Myanmar – it all brought my grandfather's story into much sharper focus," he told *Soldier*.

"It felt personal in a way I hadn't expected. My granddad told me quite a few stories when I was young, things he never shared with my dad, his own son.

"Back then, it just wasn't the norm to talk to your kids about those kinds of experiences. But I think he saw that I was genuinely interested and, because of that, he opened up with me.

"He told me lots of stories about life in the jungle, the leeches, snipers, punji sticks, and booby traps."



Levison Wood (left), whose grandfather (right) served in Burma

A youngster when the war broke out, Hopkin Wood deployed to Burma in the latter stage of the campaign, before serving in Japan until 1947. Maj Wood is grateful that he was able to talk about the chapter with his grandfather, who died when the officer was 19, but still wishes he had asked more.

"You never realise at the time just how valuable those conversations are until it's too late," he continued. "I think it's something a lot of families feel – regret at not having recorded more or pushed a bit further.

"There are so many questions I'd love to ask him now, especially having retraced some of his steps while filming."

An untold story

While those fighting in Burma faced brutal combat and immeasurable challenges, the conflict in the East is also remembered for the suffering endured by Allied prisoners of war held by the Japanese, tens of thousands of whom died through slave labour, malnutrition and disease.

Among those fortunate to come through the ordeal was Peter Kemmis Betty of the 2nd King Edward VII's Own Goorkha Rifles, whose diary from his time in Singapore's Changi Prison is now being published.

Called *Half a Banana* – after his postwar habit of always sharing food – the memoir was edited by his oldest son, ex-cavalry officer Richard. His youngest son, David, is a lieutenant colonel in HQ Field Army.

The regular turned full-time reservist explained that although they had read the journal before their father's death in 2016, as the 80th anniversary of VJ Day approached the family realised they were in possession of a precious piece of history that deserved to be made public.

"It's a bit of an untold story because a lot of focus of the victory over Japan is on the Burma campaign and the horrors of the railroads," said Lt Col Kemmis Betty (Scots). "I think the fall of Singapore was such a big shock that a lot of people didn't want to

'The human spirit can put up with a hell of



**Lt Col David Kemmis Betty
(right) with the memoir
of his father, Peter**



necessarily talk about it, so the experiences of those that had been in Changi get left out.

"My father counted himself extremely lucky, in hindsight, to have ended up staying in there for the duration."

Possibly in an act of self-preservation – either to avoid trouble if his notes were discovered or because events were too painful to commit to paper – the diary omits details of deaths at Changi.

Instead, Peter writes of his duties in the camp garden – the produce from which supplemented the inmates' meagre rations – as well as vital Red Cross parcels and even occasional letters from home. Lt Col Kemmis Betty also explained how the prisoners would maintain morale by playing sports, reading and staging plays or concerts.

"I think they went to great lengths to keep themselves active and not allow themselves to be lazy just doing nothing," he continued.

"That must have required a huge amount of discipline, but that combination of physical and mental activity kept people going."

Lessons of war

Despite the various distractions, life in Changi was tough. By the end, Peter weighed less than nine stone and lost most of his teeth to malnutrition and lack of care.

After 1945 he stayed in the army and went on to serve in India and later Nepal, as well as fighting in Malaya and Borneo.

But behind his impressive military record, which included a Military Cross and Mention in Dispatches, Peter was an emotional man, deeply affected by his experiences in war.

"He had such deep friendships with the people who'd been through the same sort of stuff as him, either in the Second World War or

Malaya and Borneo," said Lt Col Kemmis Betty.

"There was an amazing bond of comradeship between them all, their families and their children.

"Strangely, he had little animosity for the Japanese – and he had an absolute passion for Gurkhas, Nepal and the mountains.

"He was always looking on the bright side of things and loved having fun."

With focus on the European theatre at the time, and even now in moments of remembrance, the officer hopes his father's story will not only remind modern readers of the sacrifices made in the Far East but provide lessons for those serving today.

"We're now refocused on war fighting, and I think people should continue to strive to learn from past conflicts, particularly large campaigns and what that would look like were one to happen again. God forbid," he added.

"There's the business of comradeship and discipline, and using your talent and ingenuity to keep people going.

"The human spirit can actually put up with a hell of a lot more than you think. It's about never giving up hope that you are going to get out and everything will be okay eventually."

Peter was 100 years old when he died and the inevitable passing of the few remaining veterans will remove the last living links to the conflict – likely changing how the nation remembers.

But the threads of inter-generational service remain tightly woven into the fabric of the army.

As time takes its course, family legacies such as these will help to ensure history remains part of collective memory and continue to inform those who follow. «

Q&A PRISONERS OF WAR



Historian Tony Banham has researched the experience of Allied troops in Japanese captivity for various projects, including his book *We Shall*

Suffer There. Soldier asked him about the aftermath of their liberation...

Japan's treatment of its captives was brutal – how were survivors found?

PoWs died of untreated wounds, malnutrition, disease and neglect from the day they were detained, right up to the end of the war – and days or even years after. At liberation, the majority needed some sort of medical attention, and certainly nutrition. For some it was too late. Others were sick enough to need berths on hospital ships, and a number just needed to convalesce in Australia or New Zealand on the way home.

How did the liberating soldiers treat the Japanese?

They weren't at all pleased with what they saw and would have been more than happy to shoot any Japanese guards the PoWs pointed out. But in fact, examples of vengeance were very rare and the ex-prisoners went to some pains to protect the more reasonable and helpful guards.

'Examples of vengeance were very rare'

How long did repatriation last, and how were soldiers received back home?

Most had returned by about November 1945, and those that got back to the UK weren't impressed. Rightly or wrongly, they felt no-one was much interested in their story – and in fact they were forbidden from telling it. And of course, the country had suffered from the deprivations of a long war – it must have been quite deflating.

Were there any any efforts to address psychological issues among PoWs?

The authorities hadn't planned a formal programme. Many ex-captives were lucky in that their fathers were Great War veterans, who quickly recognised the symptoms and could at least understand. Most were unable to talk about their experiences with their wives and children but in later years were able to discuss them with me, someone with whom they had no emotional connection.

a lot more than you think'



HELPING YOU MAKE
BETTER CHOICES

Serving is about teamwork. Your pension is about you. Join us. Job done.

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You'll also have access to our wide range of membership benefits from discounts on new cars to insurances, including our latest range of travel policies.



SCAN ME

IT PAYS TO UNDERSTAND THE VALUE OF YOUR PENSION

Forces Pension Society

68 South Lambeth Road, Vauxhall, London SW8 1RL

T: 020 7820 9988 E: memsec@forpen.co.uk www.forcespensionsociety.org



TALKBACK

mail@soldiermagazine.co.uk WhatsApp +447973 614782

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

Steaming over meals-out claim confusion

THERE is a question that has long perplexed us reservists and has seemingly been ignored by the army remuneration policy team for almost a year.

We've been trying to figure out whether part-time soldiers are entitled to meals-out expenses (MOE) claims.

Interpretation of the policy varies greatly. I know this because I was told I was entitled to claim it in one of my previous reserve units, however my current regiment administration officer says I'm not.

I would be grateful if you could help me determine what the correct entitlement is.

I posted the question on Defence Connect and while the wider community did respond, including a senior Naval Reserve officer, there was no consensus on the matter. – **Name and address supplied**

Lt Col Christopher Prior, SO1 Exploit, Personnel Directorate, Army Headquarters, replies:

I would like to break my response into two parts.

1. Whether reservists are entitled to MOE: In short, yes. In JSP 752, chapter five, section four it states that MOE is an entitlement primarily aimed at single/unaccompanied service persons and members of the volunteer reserve, providing that they meet all other eligibility criteria.

2. Interpretation of the policy varies greatly: This perhaps tells us we can be clearer in the language used within the MOE section of the policy document. The remuneration policy team will conduct a review to see if we might simplify the language and layout to enable clearer decision-



Picture: Cpl Becky Brown, RLC

making on eligibility.

That said, as with all policy, it is important that when deciding on this matter the policy section is read in its entirety and that personnel do not fall foul of picking out certain paragraphs within the section without due consideration to others.

To quote the policy, the aim of MOE is to contribute towards the additional costs of regularly purchasing meals at a commercial retail outlet necessarily incurred by service personnel whose only source of food would normally be from a service messing facility, and are routinely prevented from doing so as a result of their duties at their assignment station.

We must be mindful that there are personnel on many varying types of reserve terms and conditions of service, employed and engaged in various ways across the armed forces, who will be eligible or ineligible for MOE depending on their circumstances.

Reserve rages again

MY LETTER published in April's edition highlighted the ongoing issue of poor maintenance of the reserve estate.

Unfortunately, there has been no improvement since then.

Reserve Forces and Cadets Association North West and the contractor, Vivo, have still not appointed a grounds maintenance firm, a situation that has prevailed since this contract began.

The situation across our properties in this part of the country is nothing short of disgraceful.

The condition of our Army Reserve Centres is unacceptable — overgrown grass, unkempt grounds, and a general appearance of abandonment.

It reflects poorly not only on the two parties I've already mentioned, but on the Defence Infrastructure Organisation.

It's embarrassing when the surrounding areas, maintained by local councils, are tidy and presentable in stark contrast to our military facilities that look derelict and forgotten.

This is not just a matter of appearance — it's a matter of pride, professionalism and our basic standards.

Those in charge should hang their heads in shame for allowing this to continue. I call on them to take immediate action and restore our sites to the standard befitting the UK's armed forces.

Let's sort this out. – **Name and address supplied**

'THE ESTATE IS DISGRACEFUL'

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

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

Army Welfare Service

Contact directly via **rc-aws-iat-0mailbox@mod.gov.uk** or **01904 882051/2053**

ALCOHOL AND SMOKING

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

Drinkline

A free, confidential helpline **0300 123 1110**

NHS support

Various information can be found at nhs.uk/livewell

BULLYING/HARASSMENT/DISCRIMINATION

Army Mediation Service
0306 770 7691 or
mil 96770 7691
army-mediation-0mailbox@mod.gov.uk

Army Speak Out Helpline

0306 770 4656 or **mil 96770 4656**
army-speakout@mod.gov.uk

Defence BHD Helpline

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

DEBT AND MONEY PROBLEMS

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

Forces Pension Society

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

Joining Forces Credit Union

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

Money Helper

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

National Debtline

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

StepChange Debt Charity

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

GAMBLING

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

GRIEF

Cruse Bereavement Support
0808 808 1677
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

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

Bournemouth – September 10

Newmarket – October 8

Belfast – October 15

Cardiff – November 5

Telford – November 19

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
pinnacleservicefamilies.co.uk/contact-us

Forces Help to Buy

For home ownership support visit gov.uk/guidance/forces-help-to-buy

Single Persons Accommodation Centre for the Ex-Services

01748 833797
spaces.org.uk

Veterans Gateway

A first point of contact for veterans seeking support
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**

LONELINESS

Armed Forces and Veterans Breakfast Clubs

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

Samaritans

Someone to talk to, night or day, for free and without judgement
116 123 samaritans.org

The Royal British Legion

Contact the friendly team for information about local groups and support services
0808 802 8080
britishlegion.org.uk

MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

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

Combat Stress 24/7 Helpline

0800 138 1619

Headspace

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

Mind – The Mental Health Charity

0300 123 3393 mind.org

NHS

General mental health support

COMPETITIONS

June 2025 HOAY WINNER

Majority radio alarm and charge pad
Pte L Shrestha, Infantry Battle School, Brecon

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.

Wagamama competition, page 15: prize equates to an £80 e-gift card that will be emailed to the winner. It can be used in conjunction with your Defence Discount or Blue Light Card, is valid for one year from date of issue and is available to use in all Wagamama restaurants across England, Scotland and Wales.

nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters

Op Courage

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

Samaritans

116 123 samaritans.org

The Ripple Pond

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

Togetherall

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

RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN/ABUSE

Aurora New Dawn

Safety for survivors of domestic abuse, sexual violence, stalking
02394 216 816
aurorand.org.uk

ManKind

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

Relate

Relationship support
relate.org.uk

SEXUAL OFFENCES

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

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

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

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

To discuss victim support contact the **Victim Witness Care Unit**, which operates independently from the chain of command, on **07974 074259** or via people-dssc-vwcugroup@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

STAFF NETWORKS

The following groups are open to both regular and reservist personnel, as well as the chain of command and civil servants. Please get in touch using the following details:

LGBTQ+ Network

elizabeth.corbett117@mod.gov.uk

Multicultural Network

priscilla.quansah100@mod.gov.uk

Parents Network

armypers-parents-network@mod.gov.uk

Servicewomen's Network

samantha.dodge733@mod.gov.uk

REUNIONS

Royal Hampshire Territorials and Hampshire Companies, The Wessex Regiment

78th post-war reunion lunch on Saturday, September 20 at The Winchester Royal Hotel. Contact Jim Cooper on 023 9281 6165 or email rhwsxtar@yahoo.com

The Balkans 30 Years On...

Calling all **Fusiliers** who have served in Bosnia and Kosovo with the battalions since 1995 (including in 2023) or those who have undertaken individual deployments or postings in the region. The regiment will hold anniversary events on October 24 in Newcastle and 25 in Manchester. For more details visit the What's On page on fusiliersconnect.com

The Rifles Family Gala.

Silverstone on September 27 from 1800. Champagne reception and dinner, followed by awards, special regimental event and entertainment. Onsite accommodation and camping available. Scruffs bar also available for those not wishing to dine. Tickets £55 on theriflesnetwork.co.uk

PAY

For pay policy queries read JSP 754 *Pay and Reward*

Payments or visit the AF Remuneration Pay Policy team page on Defnet. Further information can also be found on the JPA portal or via your local unit admin office. You can also contact the Army Rem Pol team via their information page on Defence Connect.

An **£8,000 retention payment** is available to troops who joined the army between September 1, 2021 and September 30, 2024 if they sign up for a three-year commitment on top of their initial four years. However, they must apply in a specific three-month window. These dates are shown below – mark them in your diary! Gurkha, FTRS and reserve troops not eligible. Apply on the *Digital Transfers* app and speak to your RCMO for more info.

Attestation date Apply

2021
1/9–31/12 1/4–12/8 2025

2022
1/1–31/3 1/1–31/3 2025
1/4–30/6 1/4–12/8 2025
1/7–30/9 1/7–30/9 2025
1/10–31/12 1/10–31/12 2025

2023
1/1–31/3 1/1–31/3 2026
1/4–30/6 1/4–30/6 2026
1/7–30/9 1/7–30/9 2026
1/10–31/12 1/10–31/12 2026

2024
1/1–31/3 1/1–31/3 2027
1/4–30/6 1/4–30/6 2027
1/7–30/9 1/7–30/9 2027

PENSIONS

Armed Forces Pension Calculator

Provides a projection of benefits from the armed forces pension scheme
mod-pc.co.uk

Forces Pension Society

An independent, not-for-profit organisation that acts as a pension watchdog for the entire military community. Membership includes expert pension guidance, member offers and a magazine.
forcespensionsociety.org

AT



Visit the **Army Adventurous Training Defence Connect**

page via the QR code above for information on upcoming activities on offer – including skiing, climbing, mountain biking, caving, sailing, canoeing, diving and parachuting. You can also use the portal to apply for individual and unit courses, download resources for expedition planning and find out about instructor trawls.

FAMILIES

Army Families Federation briefs

Immigration (virtual) briefs

August 26, 1900–2000
September 30, 1900–2000
October 28, 1900–2000
November 25, 1900–2000
A specially trained adviser will give a short brief followed by a Q&A. All topics covered. Visit the link below for details of how to join the Microsoft Teams meeting.
aff.org.uk/aff-events/

Families Hubs

A wealth of information for all regular and reserve troops and their dependents, including childcare and education, health and wellbeing, welfare, partner employment and non-UK personnel.
discovermybenefits.mod.gov.uk/families

Forces Families Jobs

A career platform for relatives of serving UK personnel, to connect them with employment opportunities in forces friendly organisations – all who have signed the Armed Forces Covenant and are committed to supporting the community. The army is also signed up to the platform and will post its vacancies in targeting military families.

Hive information centres

Support for all members of the service community and their families, with hubs in Aldergrove, Bovington, Brunei, Brunssum, Catterick, Colchester, Colerne, Cyprus, Gibraltar, Grantham, Hereford, Leconfield, Leuchars, Lichfield, Lyneham, Naples, Preston, Sennelager, Shape (Belgium), the South East (including Aldershot and London District), Stafford, St Athan, and Tidworth. For more information follow the ArmyHIVE on Facebook or Insta or visit armyhiveinfo.blogspot.com/

Carers

The Supportability, Additional Needs and Carers Guide is designed to help soldiers, their families and commanders navigate service life. The MoD

Carers Passport has also been introduced along with carers' leave. For more information read JSP 760 *Tri-Service Regulations for Leave and Other Types of Absence*.

Flexible working

An option for service personnel to formally amend their working pattern to aid their work-life balance. It includes **flexible service**, which allows regular troops to temporarily work part-time and/or restrict their separation from the home base subject to operational need, and **alternative working arrangements**, which allow a degree of freedom when attempting to balance work and personal life but do not reduce pay – including remote working, variable start and finish times and compressed working. Further information can be found in JSP 750 *Centrally Determined Terms of Service* and AGAI, vol 2, ch 44 *Army Flexible Service*.

Pregnancy / Maternity and Return to Work Guide

A leaflet to support personnel and the chain of command, including pregnancy loss, maternity, breastfeeding and returning to work. Available via Women's Health Policy and Resources SharePoint page.

In our place

NHS-backed online courses are available for overseas-based service parents to help them better understand child development. The inourplace.co.uk portal includes resources to help develop nurturing relationships. Under an offer with SSAFA, families can use the services free with access code MILITARY at registration.

PHYS

Soldier Conditioning Assessment

As part of the collective effort to multiply fighting power, a revised fitness test is being piloted army-wide until March 2026. The gender free assessment is not a pass or fail test and is designed to measure and improve physical conditioning. It includes a best effort:

- 2km run
- deadlift (following progressive incremental lifts)
- press-ups (in 60 secs)
- pull-ups

Further information is available on the Individual Training Requirement SharePoint page, in the aide

continued >>



STEP UP. STAND OUT.

EXCITING OPPORTUNITIES

OPEN FOR ARMY RESERVISTS. APPLY NOW ON LINKS BELOW.

■ **SERVE - Service for Experienced, Re-joiner and Volunteer Engagements**

<https://www.findforcesjobs.mod.gov.uk>

■ **OCE - Operational Commitments Establishment List (MODNET only)**

<https://modgovuk.sharepoint.com/teams/300422/SitePages/Op-Cts.aspx>

■ **Army Trawls Portal (MODNET only)**

<https://apps.powerapps.com/play/e/244b372b-5d81-ea3d-836d-1407e621eca9/a/a49f8e52-f66b-4b25-914e-485d6e6456a7?Admin=1>



memoire for commanders *A Tool For Progression* and in **ABN 016/2025**.

Defence Perinatal Handbook

A guide to maintaining health and fitness during and after pregnancy. It provides support and guidance for servicewomen through pregnancy and following childbirth – including pre- and postnatal exercise programmes, a postnatal training guide, nutrition info and mental health and pelvic health support.

APPS

The following apps and sites can be found via the Defence Gateway, SharePoint or via shortcuts on some MoD IOS devices...

My Digital Skills

Access learning for both personal and professional development, with personalised recommendations available. Mandated and elective army digital skills foundation courses available through the Digital Skills 4 Defence library, under 'army digital skills learning'. The platform also includes defence mandated digital learning under the Library menu, which covers digital individual training requirements such as protecting personal data, information and knowledge awareness and record management awareness.

Digital Transfers

Used to manage career changes and requests, including transfers to the reserves, from the reserves to the regular army, or to another branch of the armed forces. Access the app through the Career Management Portal on Defence Gateway.

Army Health & Wellbeing Defence Connect page

Pushes health, performance and wellbeing resources out

to personnel who follow the site. The service is especially important for personnel who are not physically at work, do not have a laptop or do not have Modnet access.

MyDEFENCE

A new website bringing into one place content from other digital and IT systems. The portal enables users to undertake self-service admin tasks, find learning and development opportunities and access welfare information. It will be delivered in phases until 2026.

Armed Forces Personnel Portal

Allows troops to conduct JPA self-service tasks without logging into JPA. Currently only available on Modnet but is scheduled to launch on personal devices later this summer. It will replace some of the *MySeries* apps and will converge with *MyDEFENCE* (see above) to provide the G1 self-service elements.

Forces Connect

A free app signposting serving personnel, veterans and family members to local and national organisations offering support across a wide range of topics, from searching for an NHS dentist to housing advice or help starting a business **forcesconnect.co.uk**

NCO ACADEMY

Tea & Toast Talks

Sept 9 at 1000 – Life Skills
Sept 17 at 1000 – Inclusion
Oct 1 at 1000 – TBC
Oct 15 at 1000 – TBC
Oct 29 at 1000 – TBC
Nov 11 at 1000 – TBC
Dec 12 at 1000 – Army Sgt Maj, WO1 John Miller

Development days

September 24 – Catterick
October 23 – Blandford

Visit the NCO Academy group page on Defence Connect

Your chance to
WIN

A Majority Landbeach portable radio



TEN details have been changed in the image below of the UK military's commander-in-chief sharing a joke with the Royal Company of Archers during the annual Ceremony of the Keys at the Palace of Holyroodhouse in Scotland.

Circle all the differences on image **B** and send the panel to HOAY 999, Soldier, Ordnance Barracks, Government Road, Aldershot, Hampshire GU11 2DU, along with contact details, including email address, by August 29.

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

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

The first correct entry drawn after the closing date will win a Majority Landbeach portable radio – your ultimate companion for audio on the move.

All the usual rules (page 58) apply – good luck!



SOLDIERSPORT >>



Army women ace the Inter-Services – page 69

THE BRITISH MOTOR SHOW

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REVIEWS

BOOKS ★ GAMES ★ PODCASTS



BOOKS

The Hiroshima Men

by Iain MacGregor, priced at £25

WHEN the first atomic bomb was dropped on the Japanese city of Hiroshima on the morning of August 6, 1945, it changed the world forever.

The attack – together with a second strike on Nagasaki three days later – achieved the Allied aim of an unconditional Japanese surrender and swift end to the Second World War.

But the raids, which are reckoned to have killed upwards of 200,000 people, also ushered in a new global order and, ultimately, a threat to civilisation itself.

Exactly 80 years on, the world is still underpinned by political doctrines of deterrence created by those first nuclear weapons.

There are varying debates as to the benefits of this uneasy state of play. On one hand, it could be argued that the instruments of armageddon kept an uneasy Cold War peace between the Western Nato powers and the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact. On the other, concerns about these warheads falling into the wrong hands are still used as a pretext for conflict – the 2003 invasion of Iraq and recent American air strikes against Iran are two notable cases in point.

The beginnings of this complex reality are charted by Iain MacGregor in *The Hiroshima Men*, which paints a picture of a world as seen through the eyes of key players at the dawn of the nuclear age.

They include Gen Leslie Groves, the senior officer who oversaw the creation of the bomb in Project Manhattan, Col Paul Tibbets – the US Army Air Force pilot who spearheaded the first use of the weapon – and war correspondent John Hersey, who conducted early interviews with six survivors from the ruined Japanese city, breaking the story of the human cost to the wider world.

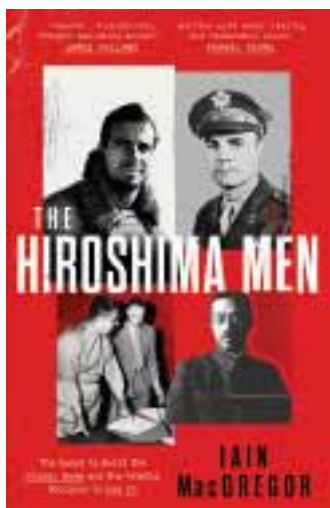
Throughout, the historian draws on a mountain of research while using testimony from the surviving witnesses of the period – including those who lived through the attacks – weaving all together in a compelling narrative.

In combination, these different perspectives provide a rounded picture of the situation that led to the terrible events of August 6. A fear of Axis powers gaining the nuclear edge and developing their own weapons of mass destruction had prompted the allies to pursue a path of research during the war.

The decision to use the bomb followed years of grinding combat with an enemy that suicidally defended every inch of ground.

The final campaigns of the conflict – on the Japanese islands of Iwo Jima and Okinawa – are testament enough to this fact. Very few survivors remained from defending forces that respectively numbered 20,000 and 110,000 soldiers.

Yet it was the civilians who ultimately paid the



FLASHBACK

Read our interview with Hiroshima survivor Keiko Ogura in *Soldier's* online archive at soldiermagazine.co.uk (August 2020 issue)



price of the conflict. *The Hiroshima Men* opens with a harrowing first-hand account from a now elderly survivor of the first attack, then a schoolgirl, who recalls seeing a dying man attempting to force his dislodged eyeballs back into their sockets, and doctors unable to treat horrific burns because of the lack of medical supplies. The sicknesses of radiation, cancer and leukaemia claimed thousands more lives in the years to come as testified by John Hersey's journalism.

MacGregor's achievement is commendable in terms of research, readability and timeliness, coming at a time when there have been recent conflicts involving nuclear-armed nations.

In tandem, those who can actually attest first-hand to the devastating realities of nuclear arms – such as the survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the military personnel who witnessed later tests in the South Pacific – are rapidly being claimed by the years.

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

After some further reading about the war against Japan? Check out these titles, available now...

The Tokyo Sixteen

by Geert Rottiers



HISTORIAN Geert Rottiers tells the story of the Doolittle Raid of 1942 – the daring bombing mission that

showed a frightened American public that the US could strike back at Japan after Pearl Harbour. One for anyone with an interest in aviation – or just against-all-odds tales of heroism.

Jungle Warrior

by Richard Duckett



FOCUSING on an unsung hero from the Far Eastern theatre, this biography tells the story of Lt Col Edgar Peacock,

a former forestry warden in remote Burma who went on to lead highly successful Special Operations Executive missions against the Japanese. A tale of behind-enemy-lines exploits that deserves wider recognition.

Three Weeks in July

by Adam Wishart and James Nally



EXACTLY two decades ago, four British-born Islamic terrorists launched suicide attacks on tube trains and a bus – killing 52 people and injuring hundreds more. The 7/7 bombings were a sobering moment that shook the country to the core – a fact well-reflected in this definitive account. Meticulously researched, the text provides a broad perspective of the atrocities, covering the response,

subsequent military and police counter-terrorism actions and hunt for the culprits behind a copycat attack a fortnight later – during which an innocent man, John Charles de Menezes, was shot dead. Evocatively written and underpinned by revealing interviews with the likes of military personnel, law enforcement commanders, politicians and survivors, *Three Weeks in July* is an outstanding piece of storytelling.

★★★★★
Cliff Caswell, *Soldier*



GAMES

Train Sim World 5: Cargo Line Military

Out now on PC and consoles

BEING *Soldier's* resident railway guru, the arrival of this TSW add-on – combining the dual obsessions of army hardware and locomotives – paved the way for another weekend of all-encompassing anorakness.

For with the KWA Warwell low-loader safely ensconced in the sidings, the sim opened up an opportunity to ferry armoured vehicles resembling FV432s and Mastiffs around the north of England and south-east regions on simulated moves to MoD sites.

And with nothing but the clatter of wagons trundling along an iron road for company while a resigned spouse watched *Saturday Kitchen* in the other room, it lived up to expectations. Players will require both the Great Western and Carlisle routes to make full use of the

downloadable content, but the investment unlocks a plethora of taskings using the Class 66 and 47 locos.

Kit is beautifully rendered throughout and gameplay mechanics are suitably challenging – driving virtual diesels pulling thousands of tonnes of AFVs across networks packed with high-speed passenger services is certainly no mean feat. Braking in good time is another test entirely, needing solid forward planning

On a serious note, however, this DLC does underscore the huge potential of the train as a weapon of war. It demonstrates how a single locomotive affords the opportunity to move huge swathes of armour into position quickly and efficiently – a tremendous asset in a Europe that is already criss-crossed with rail lines.

★★★★★
Cliff Caswell, *Soldier*

PODCASTS

We Have Ways of Making You Talk – Burma '45



AS FLAGS waved in London to mark VE Day in May 1945, the war

raged on in Burma, where soldiers from the UK and the Commonwealth were still battling the Japanese amid some of the most inhospitable conditions of the entire conflict.

The new series of this long-running podcast by Al Murray and James Holland delves into the bloody jungle operations, as well as the politics involved in trying to end the campaign in the Far East.

As always, their combination of encyclopaedic historical knowledge and focus on the

human element makes for compelling – if at times grim – listening and rightly brings the story of Slim's Forgotten Army to the fore.

★★★★★
Capt Mike Ownes, RE

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SOLDIERSPORT



TALENT POOL DELIVERS



Women's individual champion
LCpl Jasmine Holmes (Int Corps)

TRIATHLON

THE strength of the army triathlon set-up was showcased in the Devon countryside as the men's and women's teams claimed the honours in style at the Inter-Services Standard Distance Championships.

While the men missed out on the individual podium spots at Roadford Lake, they packed the remaining top ten and mid-field places to post the fastest collective team time.

Professional triathlete Mne Sam Wordley showed commanding form to secure his fourth individual gold at the head of the race, but Maj Simon Fear (RAMS) spearheaded the soldiers' charge as he clocked a time of 2hr 24min 28sec in punishing heat.

A quick succession of army finishers then followed as 1min 18sec separated Fear in fourth and Maj James Surmon (RE)

in eighth. A similar pattern was repeated as they took places 14 to 17, with just over two minutes splitting the four athletes.

"We had some great preparation beforehand," Fear told *SoldierSport* afterwards. "We were able to recce the technical bike sections as well as the run."

"For me, the focus was on working with the team – trying to encourage others while also working to close the gap."

"I knew my swim would not be strong as I haven't done as much training as I'd like, so I pushed on the bike and looked to close from there."

"It was an uphill start, but I knew I could pick it up on the way back in. It was definitely a fast course."

The officer said the sport continues to flourish within the ranks and that efforts to support personnel in the build-up to the season and at competitions is paying dividends.

"We've had quite a few new

individuals coming through, especially junior soldiers," Fear continued.

"Triathlon in the UK is strong, and our people are picking it up in the civvy world. They then find out about us through things like Defence Connect.

"We held three training days earlier in the year to encourage participation and also had a two-week training camp in Cyprus at the start of the season.

"It was structured training, with pool and sea swimming and a couple of rest days. It was a good chance to get to know those coming in.

"There were a lot of new ideas, which keeps things feeling fresh, and the funding we get from Army Sport helps cover the cost of things like energy gels, protein drinks and kit. There is no feeling of stagnation."

In a repeat of last season's women's race, the army dominated the head of the field – although this time round it was LCpl Jasmine Holmes (Int Corps) finishing ahead of Maj Rosie Wild (RHA) in a time of 2hr 30min 32sec.

Capt Victoria Duncan (RE) was third, with team captain Maj Helene Gleizes (Int Corps) fifth.

"It was a tough course, with a long hilly bike section, but it was honest and a real test," Holmes said. "It is good that the organisers rotate the venues as they suit different athletes.

"It is normally between Rosie and myself at the front, and it was great to get the win.

"For the team competition it is the top four athletes that count. Even if you are clear at the front you must keep pushing for a quick time.

"The army triathlon set-up is

INTER-SERVICES TRIATHLON CHAMPIONSHIPS

MEN

1	ARMY	19hr 45min 21sec
2	RAF	20hr 14min 34sec
3	NAVY	21hr 18min 13sec

WOMEN

1	ARMY	10hr 33min 36sec
2	RAF	12hr 25min 12sec
3	NAVY	12hr 35min 15sec

a great place to be, and we have some brilliant athletes. There are four women who have passed P Company and there is always someone who is doing an insane physical challenge.

"We all push each other on, and it is fantastic to be part of that team."

Holmes was also victorious at this season's British Middle Distance Championships and went on to make her professional debut at the Swansea 70.3 event.

"I want that next challenge to see how I stack up," she explained.

"It is still a swim, bike and run but there might be some more tactics around working with different people out on the road.

"There will be quite a few army athletes involved, and I will get support from them – that is why I chose a UK race for my pro debut.

"I will take it one competition at a time, although I have my eye on other events later in the year.

"But none of this would be possible without the backing of the army coaches and team, as well as the Intelligence Corps Association. Their support has been fantastic."

EXCITING FUTURE FOR GROWTH SPORT

PADEL

IT IS one of the fastest growing sports in the country with participation trebling in the past year, and now it is coming to service circles.

Padel has just received category three recognised status and with funding applications submitted to Army Sport it is hoped the on-court tempo can escalate between now and the end of the year.

Around 90 personnel have already shown an interest in getting involved and should the bid for financial support be successful, learn-to-play sessions will be organised in the coming weeks ahead of a potential army championships in November.

"Padel is getting more and more popular and if we can get alongside that, we can grow with the sport," Capt Harry Owen (REME), OiC Army Padel, told *SoldierSport*.

"It is something new and

modern that breaks the stigma of traditional racket disciplines – it is definitely the 'in' sport of the moment."

Owen hails from a background in tennis and has been playing padel for around 18 months.

After being sidelined by injury he turned his attention to growing the sport in the army and has been delighted by the initial progress.

"I love it," the officer continued. "It is nowhere near as difficult as tennis but has skills in its own right.

"It is an interesting challenge and is almost a mix of tennis and squash.

"It is fast paced and you get through games and matches much quicker.

"We already have a lot of people interested but have probably only reached 50 per cent of the army so far.

"Now it is a case of getting the word out there, gathering more email addresses and pushing out further information.

"I believe there is huge potential in this."

Anyone wanting to get involved in padel should email harry.owen106@mod.gov.uk

'WE CAN GROW WITH THE SPORT'



Army padel player Lt Juan Vilches (RLC) in action

Picture: Graeme Main

TRIATHLON BY NUMBERS

49 Army athletes in action across the various categories

6 Soldiers finishing among the top ten of the men's open race

4 Positions in the top five for the victorious army women's team

1 Other win for the Reds on the day as they claimed the women's masters honours



TRIES MOUNT UP IN SOUTHERN TOUR

RUGBY UNION (MEN)

POINTS were in plentiful supply for the army men's rugby union team on their three-match tour of the southern hemisphere.

The soldiers started their adventure in Wellington, where a brace from Gnr Senitiki Nayalo (RA) helped them to a 45-38 win over the New Zealand Army.

SSgt Matt Dawson (Int Corps), LCpl Solo Radianirova (REME), LCpl Michael McDonald (RE), Cpl Rhys Roberts (RAMS) and Sgt Connor O'Reilly (RA) were also on target for the Reds, who then travelled to Suva to face the Republic of Fiji Military Force.

The highlight of the trip, it was the army's first match on Fijian soil and formed the curtain-raiser to the host nation's clash with Scotland at the HFC Bank Stadium.

And while the tourists ran in five tries, they ultimately fell short against an impressive Fijian outfit, who went on to seal a 51-31 victory.

The action then switched

to Brisbane for the concluding fixture, where the soldiers proved too strong for the Australian Defence Force.

Fly half LCpl Jack Johnson (RE) crossed twice and there were further scores for McDonald, Nayalo and Roberts in a 56-24 triumph.

Skipper Bdr Pete Austin (RA) also touched down.

"I'm delighted to get back on the pitch and have a positive result," head coach Lt Col Tim Osman (RA) said afterwards.

"We showed good resilience. To face a team like that, who wanted to play with pace and offloads, and score eight tries was brilliant.

"The boys absolutely dug in – it was a really pleasing way to finish."

The squad wrapped up proceedings by supporting the British and Irish Lions during their opening test against Australia at Suncorp Stadium.

'THE BOYS ABSOLUTELY DUG IN'



A try scorer at Twickenham in May, Gnr Senitiki Nayalo (RA) starred down under

Picture: Graeme Main



Picture: Graeme Main

SERIOUS INJURY SEES FINAL END EARLY

RUGBY LEAGUE (MEN)

THE Lawson Cup final had to be abandoned after a player from the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers was knocked out following a clash of heads.

The incident happened in the early stages of the second-half and the soldier received immediate treatment from the Army Rugby League's (ARL) medical team until an ambulance arrived. He was then taken to hospital.

Given the seriousness of the

injury and the time taken for on-field treatment, the referee called an early halt to proceedings.

With the Royal Logistic Corps leading 20-6, the REME conceded the tie – meaning the Loggies were crowned champions. An update from the ARL at the time of going to press stated the player is expected to make a full recovery.

Attention now turns to this season's Inter-Services, with the army hosting the Royal Air Force in three matches at the home of Hull Kingston Rovers on September 28.

EQUESTRIANISM

THE Royal Army Medical Service equestrian outfit have been named their corps' team of the year for 2024/25.

The squad has seen experienced riders representing at army-level events but has also made efforts to support newcomers via novice courses.

One of the highlights of the year was a training camp at Somerford Park in Cheshire, where ten members took advantage of world-class facilities under the instruction of team coach, and Finnish event rider, Pauliina Swindells.

Follow them on Instagram via [@ramsequestrianteam](https://www.instagram.com/ramsequestrianteam)



Picture: George Parish

INTER-SERVICES
CRICKET

ARMY 268-2 V 168-9 RAF

LCpl Georgie Cant (Int Corps)
was the army's leading run scorerSAME AGAIN AS
REDS MARCH ONSSgt Amanda Potgieter (REME)
contributed with bat and ball

CRICKET (WOMEN)

THE army women's cricket team added another Inter-Services title to their collection as commanding victories over their rivals in Portsmouth saw them seal the 40-over honours.

Having been pushed all the way by the Royal Air Force in the final of the Twenty20 competition earlier in the campaign, the Reds travelled south expecting another tough test in the longer format.

However, that challenge failed to materialise as the Royal Navy were easily despatched, while the RAF failed to hit the same heights as in their last encounter.

Bowling first against the senior service, the soldiers' cause was boosted by a slick fielding performance that included four run outs. Maj Mel Vaggers (AGC (SPS)) was the pick of the bowlers with figures of 2-16 as the navy finished on 95-9.

The run chase proved a formality as the army reached

their target in the tenth over, with LCpl Georgie Cant (Int Corps) 55 not out.

She continued to fire against the RAF as she smashed 77 from 58 balls before perishing, ending an opening stand of 116 with sister Capt Connie Cant (RA).

The latter was later run out for 51 but SSgt Amanda Potgieter (REME, 73 not out) and Vaggers (49 not out) continued the momentum with a partnership of 106 as they closed on 268-2.

In reply, skipper AS1 Molly Rebanks played a starring role with a knock of 82, but with support failing to materialise the RAF were made to suffer.

Only one other batter made it to double figures as the bowlers shared the wickets, while three further run outs helped the army to a win by 100 runs.

"The RAF had some brilliant batters, but we knew if we put on a big score we'd be asking them to come out and perform - that put all the pressure on them," said Georgie Cant.



Pictures: Graeme Main

MAKING CONTACT

TAEKWONDO

THE army world taekwondo set-up enjoyed a successful week on the mat during its annual training camp and championships.

More than 30 athletes – from beginner to senior level – took part in the programme at Aldershot's Combat Sports Centre, with some travelling from as far as Brunei and Belgium to compete.

Among the winners was Gdsm Thando Dlamini (SG) as he continued his return to action following cancer treatment (see pages 30-33).

"It has been a great turnout, even though we are missing personnel from The Royal Gurkha Rifles," said the sport's OiC Maj Stephen Gibbons (R Signals). "They've all shown that warrior ethos."

"We've had early starts due to the heat and humidity, with three-hour breaks between sessions, and they've had an

indomitable spirit throughout.

"Full contact sparring is why we are here and while there are no gradings this time round, we will use this to select the team for the Inter-Services."

"We are the long-term champions in that competition, and we want that to continue."

Eight newcomers were involved in the camp and Gibbons said efforts to publicise taekwondo and what the sport offers have paid off in terms of attracting fresh talent.

He added: "We have a great social media platform and are constantly advertising what's going on."

"We have an active pathway. We're able to grade people to national governing body standards, we offer level one and two coaching qualifications, as well as lots of competitions."

"It is also pretty easy to do, and it's cheap."

For more details on how to get involved email stephen.gibbons168@mod.gov.uk



More than 30 athletes took to the mat in Aldershot

Picture: Cpl Nathan Edwards, RAF



Capt Laura Clark (REME) claimed double gold

AHEAD OF THE FIELD

ATHLETICS

IT WAS a case of history repeating at the Inter-Services Athletics Championships as the army claimed the men's and women's team titles for an 11th successive season.

The men posted 176 points from 19 events as they finished 34 points clear of the Royal Air Force in second.

It was the same winning margin over the same opponent

in the women's field as the soldiers finished on 183.

Veteran Sgt Osman Muskwe (RAPTC) endured a busy day of action as he competed in six field events – the highlight of which was victory in the shot put with a throw of 15.04 metres. He also claimed silver medals in the discus and triple jump, along with bronze in the pole vault.

In a sign of their dominance, the men claimed the top two spots in five events, while the

women sealed gold and silver in eight.

Capt Hayley Perrin (RAMS) led the way with by winning the 100 metres, long jump and 100-metre hurdles. There were also double golds for Capt Laura Clark (REME) in the 200 and 400 metres, Capt Helen Broadbridge (AGC (ALS)) in the discus and hammer, and Sgt Roanna Vickers (RAMS) in the 1,500 metres and 2,000 metres steeplechase.

RUGBY LEAGUE

THE army men's rugby league team recorded a statement victory ahead of this season's Inter-Services campaign as they overcame Crosfields ARLFC to lift the Tom Sephton Memorial Trophy.

The Reds romped to a 40-14 win in Warrington – a result that followed on from a 24-10 triumph for the development team over the Royal Marines.

The day also included a 27-4 success for The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment against The Royal Yorkshire Regiment.



Picture: John Shirras

RUGBY UNION

A 22-man squad of permanent staff from the Infantry Training Centre Catterick headed down under for their first rugby tour of Australia.

The three-week trip included a slender win over an Australian Army selection side in Brisbane, where they also competed in a local sevens tournament.

The soldiers then made the 12-hour trip south to Singleton, where they were hosted by the Australian School of Infantry. A match with the Singleton Bulls ended in a narrow loss.

"The visit acted as a significant activity to best showcase the Infantry's, and attached arms', approach to sport and how the ITC rewards its staff," said director of rugby Maj Doug Hayton-Williams (RG).



SEVENS TRIUMPH AGAIN



RUGBY UNION

THERE was a familiar winner in this season's LIT Super Sevens Series as the army men retained their title.

The soldiers lifted the silverware after a hard-fought campaign across four rounds – the culmination of which saw them triumph in the final leg at Bury St Edmunds.

Consistency throughout the tournament allowed them to excel in a competitive, elite-level field and in the process underline their status as one of the most formidable squads in the country.

"This title means a lot," said head coach Cpl Joseva Nayacavou (R Signals). "To defend the crown shows the depth of talent and commitment in our set-up.

"Every single player, coach and staff member has contributed to this success.

"We're proud to represent the army on this stage and bring the trophy home once again."

Picture: Cat Goryn/Alligin Photography

Pictures: Graeme Main

HIGH ACHIEVERS

CLIMBING

THE UK Armed Forces climbing season enjoyed a grandstand finale as Europe's top military athletes crossed the channel to test their skills alongside Britain's finest.

Competitors from France, Italy and Kosovo descended on the 270 Climbing Park near Gloucester, where they faced three days of bouldering and

lead climb problems in their bid to become best in class.

It was the third time the army has hosted the European Military Climbing Championships, with the event also incorporating the 2025 Inter-Services showdown.

After bouldering rounds on the opening day, personnel faced two lead climbs 24 hours later before the top 12 male and female performers progressed to a combined final.

The hosts mounted strong bids at the head of both fields, but gold medals ultimately slipped from their grasp.

In the men's showpiece, LCpl Andy Mawhinney (RE) was well placed after a strong outing in the bouldering and went on to score maximum points in the lead climb.

However, Marcelo Bombardi (pictured right) – an Italian international – claimed top spot,

leaving the reservist with silver.

"The bouldering problems were easier than I thought they were going to be, and they suited my style," Mawhinney said.

"I prefer the steeper, powerful stuff rather than the slabs, which require greater balance.

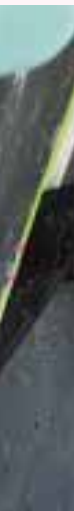
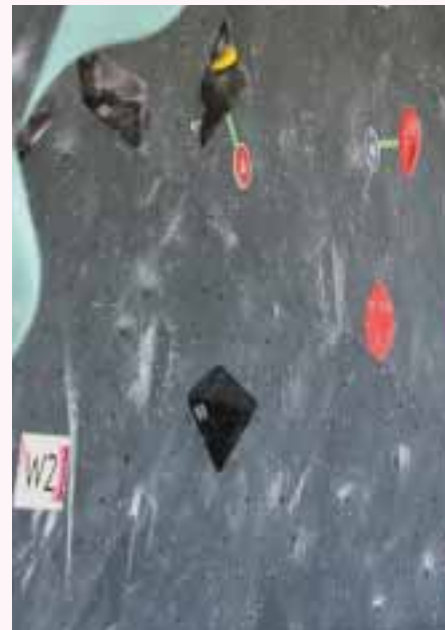
"Once I completed the first one, I was happy from there.

"I was up against a World Cup athlete in Marcelo and to be only 0.4 points behind him after the bouldering was great going.

"However, lead climbing is his speciality, so it was always going to be tough.

"It is good to be involved in an international event, and it is great for our new climbers to see what it is like – it's not every day that you compete against one of the best in the world."

Despite missing out to Bombardi, Mawhinney celebrated success elsewhere.





INTER-SERVICES CLIMBING CHAMPIONSHIPS

MEN

- 1 ROYAL AIR FORCE
- 2 ARMY
- 3 ROYAL NAVY

WOMEN

- 1 ARMY
- 2 ROYAL NAVY
- 3 ROYAL AIR FORCE

competition, where Maj Amy Johnstone (RAMS) topped the leaderboard after a flawless performance in the bouldering.

But with the title in her grasp, she slipped while lunging for the top of the lead climb course, posting a score of 92.1. French rival Margot Combe completed the route to secure gold, leaving Johnstone as runner-up.

Speaking after the bouldering, the officer said: "I enjoyed the problems – there has been some excellent route setting that has required varied styles.

"There is a great crowd here and the atmosphere made a big difference; it is more enjoyable.

"The standard, particularly from the French, is next level. They are elite, and it is cool to be competing against them in a military context.

"It has been three days of physical activity, but I'd say the waiting around has been the most draining part. You hear the crowd cheering people on, but are sat waiting for your turn – that it is hard. Once you are climbing you are in the moment."

Like Mawhinney, Johnstone was named Inter-Services individual champion, and with OCdt Isabelle Pourat (Exeter UOTC) and OCdt Libby Moor (Liverpool UOTC) joining her on the podium, the army women took the women's team crown.

He combined with the Royal Navy's LH Si Noakes to seal the men's European team prize, and was also crowned Inter-Services individual champion.

However, the army missed out on the collective honours as the Royal Air Force sealed the junior and senior titles.

It was also a case of what might have been in the women's

MEDICS TOAST CORPS HAT-TRICK

16 MED REGT

ATHLETES from 16 Medical Regiment stepped away from the demands of the day job to record a stellar month of sporting success.

The unit claimed a hat-trick of corps-level titles across three disciplines, including victory in the first-ever Royal Army Medical Service Boxing Championships.

The football team defeated 1st Military Working Dog Regiment 3-0 in the final of the Harwood Cup – avenging a 1-0 loss to the same opponent last season – and the rugby squad lifted the Harris Cup for a second consecutive season.

Reserve sister unit 144 Squadron played a crucial role in the rugby win, with more than half the players stemming from the formation, while a pre-tournament training camp paid dividends.

WO2 Levi Scarlett, part of the football set-up and squadron sergeant major of 23 Sqn, told *SoldierSport* the competitions formed a welcome distraction for personnel given the current level of activity experienced across the brigade.

"We are generally the first out the door and are super busy supporting four

battlegroups," he added.

"With that tempo it is difficult to get everyone together for sport.

"This was a regimental effort, with buy in from the commanding officer and headquarters, to give people the opportunity.

"It is massive for retention. We are thrashed at the moment with soldiers bouncing from medical covers to exercises and operations; this gives them some respite.

"We had everyone from privates to majors on the football team and you see them in a different light.

"When they get the chance to compete it is great – it is what they join up for."

In a further sign of progress, two football players have since been selected for the army under-23 squad ahead of the new season, while boxers relished the opportunity to test themselves in the ring for the first time.

"We had nine bouts across all ranks," Scarlett continued. "There was a real appetite for it."

'IT IS WHAT THEY JOIN UP FOR'



Picture: Cpl Aaron Stone, RLC

CLIMBING BY NUMBERS



4 Countries competing in Gloucester – the UK, Italy, France and Kosovo

60 Climbers in action over the course of three days

5 Year cycles for the European Military Climbing Championships

Use it or lose it

We asked soldiers how they plan to keep their fitness up over the summer

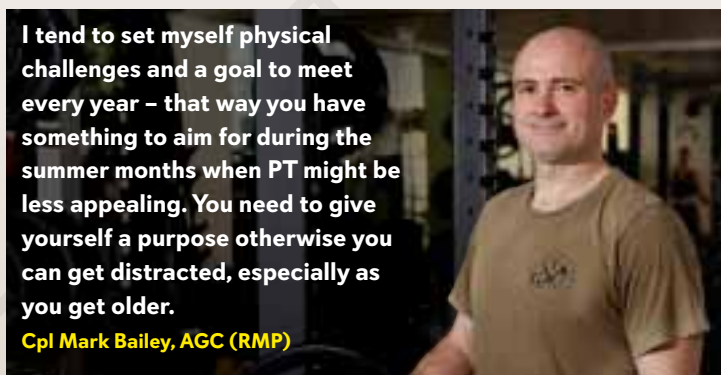
Interviews: Soldier team Pictures: Graeme Main



I'll do some form of run or aerobic training at least every other

day. Then on the other days I'll do gym-based work. It's good to keep structure to your leave, but Saturdays and Sundays are rest days.

LSgt Ben Wright, Coldm Gds



I tend to set myself physical challenges and a goal to meet every year – that way you have something to aim for during the summer months when PT might be less appealing. You need to give yourself a purpose otherwise you can get distracted, especially as you get older.

Cpl Mark Bailey, AGC (RMP)



We all know the fundamentals of fitness so it just takes discipline to continue training consistently through the summer. Personally, I buy a membership of a gym near to home and continue the physical conditioning routines I do at work.

Cpl Rhys Calland, REME (Army Strongman champion)

For me, keeping fit over the summer break is all about establishing a strict routine. You also need to exercise with purpose and enjoy it. I'm recovering from a recent knee surgery. My goal this year is to return to running as soon as I can, so I'll be committing fully to my rehab and PT over leave.

WO1 Matty Howarth, RE



I make sure I exercise hard four times a week, every week. This includes running, swimming and bodyweight exercises. My routine around fitness does not vary too much over leave as it's important to stay fit and healthy.

Cpl Aaron Stone, RLC



I'm the lead PTI for the North West Officer Training Regiment. I need to set an example, so that is all the motivation I need to keep going in the gym through the summer. There are days – certainly in the heat – when it'll be tough but I think about how good I'll feel afterwards, and the benefits of staying fit.

SSgt Toby Townsend, AGC (RMP)



It's good to keep plugging away at phys over the summer. It doesn't have to be seven days a week or as intense as in work. I'll be in the gym and running. On holiday, nothing beats a run along the beach.

Gdsm Kit Lee, Coldm Gds





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**Army
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VJ80

COMMEMORATING THE 80TH
ANNIVERSARY OF VJ DAY

Commemorating the 80th anniversary of VJ Day.

15th August 1945 – VJ (Victory over Japan) Day meant an end to nearly six years of a war that had cost the lives of millions.

VE Day, in May 1945, marked the end of the Second World War in Europe, but many thousands of soldiers from across the Commonwealth were still involved in bitter fighting in the Far East. The surrender of Japan brought a sense of relief that the war was finally over.

15th August is an important date for our charity too, as we mark our own anniversary. We were formed in 1944, one year before VJ Day, to ensure that soldiers returning from the Second World War would be taken care of.

Now, as then, we continue to be inspired by the community that we proudly support, and the fortitude shown by so many in the face of life's challenges.

As long as there is a British Army, the Army Benevolent Fund will be here to provide support in times of hardship or need.



**This VJ Day, support the
Army's national charity.**

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or scan the QR code to learn more.