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MAGAZINE OF THE BRITISH ARMY



DECEMBER 2021

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A life less ordinary



WHY did you join the British Army? Whatever your reasons, I'm willing to bet there's something inside this issue to

remind you, and inspire you with ideas for future endeavours in 2022.

If it was a life of adventure that beckoned, check out our AT feature on page 38 where we get a first-hand look at the stunning opportunities on offer to troops in the Scottish Highlands.

Or if being at sea is more your thing, get inspired by the personnel embarking on the world's toughest rowing race this month on page 44.

Seeing the farthest reaches of the world is a big motivation to many, so don't miss all the action from Exercise Khanjar Oman on page 29.

And in the world of sport, we round up the year's best performances with full coverage of the Army Sports Awards (page 64).

As ever, the organisation continues to deal with its fair share of difficulty as well. Turn to pages 7, 13 and 17 to find out more about the mission to stamp out bad behaviour and reform Army culture for good.

Merry Christmas and here's to soldiers getting back to more of the things they love in 2022.

Sarah Goldthorpe • Editor

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SOLDIER – Magazine of the British Army
Ordnance Barracks, Government Road,
Aldershot, Hampshire GU11 2DU.

SOLDIER is published by the Ministry of Defence
and printed by Walstead (Roche) Ltd.
Print contract managed by CDS.
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Picture: Graeme Main

Humiliating soldier initiations in spotlight amid culture overhaul

INITIATION ceremonies are just one of the behaviours the Army is determined to stamp out in its drive to change the culture of the organisation, a senior officer has told *Soldier*.

Director Personnel Maj Gen Paul Griffiths was speaking following the case of Rfn Kieran Trewin, 26, who was jailed and kicked out of the military after admitting running an event described as "naked ice-breakers", where troops were made to remove their clothes in front of colleagues.

A court martial at Tidworth Garrison heard how they were then quizzed about their sex lives and girlfriends while Trewin slapped their genitals.

The incident, which took place in a kitchen at 1st Battalion, The Rifles' barracks in Chepstow, also saw them box each other naked – other than the gloves they had been given.

At the end of the hearing Trewin was sentenced to 18 months detention at the Military Corrective Training Centre in Colchester and dismissed from the Service.

Speaking after the case, Maj Gen Griffiths said: "There is no excuse for this appalling behaviour. It discredits the individual, their regiment and the Army."

"Initiation ceremonies are unacceptable, and this is exactly the sort of conduct that we are determined to stamp out."

"We expect the highest standards of behaviour, anyone not living up to these standards can expect to have disciplinary or administrative action taken against them."

The two-day trial was told that up to 20 soldiers had been enjoying drinks

outside a block before heading into a kitchen to continue the session.

Once inside, six junior personnel were ordered to stand on a chair and strip. One refused and left the room, while the others stayed.

Outlining the ceremony, the prosecutor described how the music had been turned down and Trewin delivered a brief in which he ordered those present not to take photos.

After the "ice breaker" one soldier was told to consume more drink but after leaving a few drops in the beer bottle he was punched by Trewin.

He denied touching the genitals of two soldiers and punching another but admitted four other charges. However, he was convicted of all offences.

On passing sentence, Judge Advocate Andrew Smith said: "These young soldiers were new, impressionable and, above all, they wanted to show they belonged to the unit."

"There was pressure to go along with the ceremony, and this sort of behaviour is not acceptable."

"There was an abuse of your position of responsibility."

The case follows a run of allegations against British soldiers in recent months for violent and sexual misconduct.

Addressing unacceptable behaviour back in 2019, Chief of the General Staff, Gen Sir Mark Carleton-Smith, said it stood "in contrast to everything the Army represents" – including values of respect, comradeship and self-discipline.

He said such things damaged a reputation "which is exceptionally hard-earned and includes the sacrifice of our friends on the battlefield". ■

'We are going to change the Army'

CGS gets frank at Army People Conference – page 13



PLUS...

'I want you to call it out'



Army sergeant major tackles bad behaviour – page 17

GLOBAL SITREP



1. FALKLAND ISLANDS



Picture: MoD

TOUR-ENDING EXPED

SOLDIERS from the Roulement Infantry Company (RIC) and Royal Logistic Corps joined Naval colleagues on maritime patrols to South Georgia.

HMS Forth sailed to the remote outpost as part of the UK's commitment to monitor protected waters and deter illegal fishing.

On board were members of 11 Explosive Ordnance Disposal and Search Regiment, who as part of the Falkland Islands Ammunition Inspectorate were tasked with removing recently discovered Second World War-era bombs.

They were assisted by troops from Support Company, 1st Battalion, Coldstream Guards, who also took the opportunity to retrace part of Sir Ernest Shackleton's famous 1916 escape route after the loss of his

ship, Endurance.

The exped was one of their last activities as the RIC, having since handed over to comrades from the battalion's 3rd Company.

FALLEN NAMED

THE remains of six Argentine soldiers buried on East Falkland have been identified nearly 40 years on from the conflict that cost them their lives.

Forensic teams from the International Committee of the Red Cross analysed DNA samples from several bodies located in one grave, having previously identified a further 115 individuals.

"Every family deserves to know what happened to their loved one," said project manager Laurent Corbaz. "It's a truly humbling experience to be part of that process and bring their uncertainty to an end."

MALI: IN NUMBERS

13,000

UN personnel are involved in the mission, from 50 nations, including 300 UK troops

1. FALKLAND ISLANDS



2. MALI NEWCOMBE NEWCOMERS



A SECOND wave of troops from The Queen's Dragoon Guards have been carrying out final preparations for a demanding deployment to West Africa.

The soldiers faced a shakedown of skills and drills needed to lead a third long-rang reconnaissance task group in Mali during their mission rehearsal exercise.

Serials at the Stanford Training Area in Norfolk ranged from responding to reports of a mass casualty incident to a lone gunman on the loose.

The Welsh Cavalry is familiar

with the destination – the most recent tour there saw them working with infanteers from 2nd Battalion, The Royal Anglian Regiment.

The latest deployment will see the newcomers combine with 1st Battalion, The Royal Irish Regiment, backed up by a group of specialists including medics and sappers.

Commanding officer Lt Col Hugo Lloyd said: "Each soldier is proud to be involved in this mission and represent the British Army and United Nations."

3. GERMANY

HQ UP AND RUNNING

BRITISH Army officers took part in the first major readiness demo of Nato's new headquarters in Ulm.

Six personnel joined 60 international counterparts from across the alliance at a logistical exercise hosted by the Joint Support and Enabling Command.

The rehearsal of concept drill focused on the movement of units around Europe during a crisis and was the first opportunity for the formation to demonstrate its expertise in reinforcement and sustainment since it was stood up in 2018.

INTELLIGENCE FOR THE ATLAS?

Brief the team now:



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ESTONIA



Picture: Nato

TAPA-based members of the Royal Tank Regiment Battlegroup pictured during the first large-scale training event with the Estonian Defence League in 18 months. Having been put on hold due to Covid, Exercise Northern Frog provided a stern test of defensive and offensive capabilities.

4. LATVIA

CENTRE OF THE ACTION

SOLDIERS from across Nato's enhanced forward presence battlegroups in the Baltics converged on Latvia for a series of military drills and fitness challenges.

Exercise Bold Axe provided a force-on-force test between all of the formations, with UK and French troops working together against their infantry and armoured counterparts in rural and built up settings.

Meanwhile, Exercise Baltic Warrior saw 250 two-person teams from more than a dozen countries running and walking a total of 15km, as well as canoeing for 11km along the Gauja River.

A further package, dubbed Exercise Iron Spear, pitched tank crews from 14 nations against each other in a three-day test of firepower and lethality.



Pictures: Nato



5. KENYA

SPORTING ENGAGEMENT

RUGBY players from Batuk RFC received a welcome boost in their efforts to develop the game at grass-roots level.

Tackle bags, contact shields and post protectors were all donated to the unit by Richmond Rugby Club, and personnel quickly put the kit to good use at the weekly sessions they help organise for young orphans in the Dol Dol township.

"The pitch is not in great condition and the posts are three wooden poles that have been rigged up," said Maj Richie Crane (RLC). "But they are proud of their pitch and are excited to now have their own protectors."



Picture: Djordje Kostic / Shutterstock

England RFU and Rhino Rugby UK have also supported the cause.

Elsewhere, personnel from 39 Engineer Regiment ran a training session at a local rugby club in Nanyuki following completion of Exercise Askari Storm.





SPINE LINE COMPETITION

WIN

A £200 high street voucher



LAST month's spine line clues were inspired by our cover star, Army explorer Polar Preet. (Maj Sandy) Hennis, (Lt Jenni) Stephenson, (Maj Nat) Taylor and (Maj Nics) Wetherill were part of the first all-female team to cross Antarctica back in 2018, and in whose footsteps the Servicewoman will be hoping to follow as she arrives at Hercules Inlet this month (page 14).

This month we are offering one lucky reader a £200 high street voucher – the perfect prize to deploy at the January sales.

It comes courtesy of the Defence Discount Service (defencediscountservice.co.uk), the MoD's official discount service for the Armed Forces and veteran community, to show its support to troops and their families after their incredible work this year.

To be in with a chance of winning the voucher – which can be used at several major retailers including Argos, Sainsbury's, Wilko and Curry's PC World – just tell us what links the clues on the spine of this month's magazine. Answers, including daytime phone number, to comps@soldiermagazine.co.uk by December 31.



Drama at the death

A last-gasp try saw the Army complete a stunning comeback to defeat the Royal Air Force and win rugby union's Under-23 Inter-Services Championships. Read more on **pages 72-73**

“They offer units a way to get after problems”

Pictures: Graeme Main and Lcp Anthony Halliwell-Martin, Rifles



Clawing back training time

Army drive to ditch pointless paperwork and process continues

IF YOU have ever wondered why you spend so little of your working week soldiering, there is good news.

A Field Army initiative to make Service life more efficient – and free up staff time – will become a permanent way of working in future.

The empowerment programme, as it is known, has seen more than 500 change agents trained up over the last three years.

Spread across more than three-quarters of the Field Army, these individuals – who range in rank from lance corporal to major – work with the chain of command to spot where units are wasting time and effort, and help ditch these activities.

Col Vince Connelly, deputy assistant chief of staff for the programme, said the effort had helped make use of resources in constrained times, as well as improving soldiers' lived experience.

“Our change agents are a big

community now, and they offer units a way to get after their problems,” he told *Soldier*.

“They can give them the gift of time, and the means to go after the annoying things that sometimes you feel powerless against. It is not always about the big things.”

Examples of changes made under the programme include simplified processes for bringing new vehicles into service, and replacing paper admin forms with QR codes.

“We have engagement in this scheme from 90 per cent of Field Army units,” Col Connelly continued.

“But the real measure of success will be when this becomes business as usual.

“Covid certainly highlighted that we need to move towards more digital solutions, rather than a clerk having to run from one side of the block to the other to get a signature on a piece of paper.”

View from the CO...



1 Medical Regiment is one unit to have benefitted from the empowerment programme. CO Lt Col Tim Galpin explains how...

“FOR us, it's been about making our working procedures more efficient so we all get more time to do the things we joined the Army for. Time wasn't being treated like a precious commodity. So we made some obvious and simple changes such as **shortening meeting lengths** and **using Defence Connect to relay info** rather than constant verbal briefings. We also instilled a new mindset so everyone felt free to ask ‘does this task need to take this long?’”





Main picture: Shutterstock

Quick as lightning



Gurkha praised for swift actions during terrifying jungle storm

A COMPANY sergeant major who oversaw a night-time jungle rescue after several of his soldiers were struck unconscious by lightning has been awarded with the Queen's Commendation for Bravery.

CSgt (now WO2) Bishwahang Rai (RGR, pictured) was dosing down on exercise in Brunei with 65 of his troops when the dramatic scene unfolded back in August 2020.

"It started to rain, slowly at first, then the thunderstorm began," the Serviceman told *Soldier* after his decoration was announced in the latest operational honours list (right).

"There was lightning in different locations, then suddenly a strike hit a broken tree just 15 metres from us.

"Then it was complete chaos; with people shouting and screaming.

"We put the lights on and found seven guys unconscious."

With another 20 of the group unable to walk from leg injuries, and many suffering hearing loss, the soldier tried to take control of the situation. But with the company's medic located elsewhere on the training package, it was left to him and his 2iC.

"It was a completely uncontrollable situation that night," he continued. "It was pouring down, dark and everyone was a casualty – almost all needed some sort of treatment.

"People were screaming – the electrocution meant that their legs wouldn't work.

"But then I started to compose

myself and went through the orders process and all my training.

"We lined everyone up to decide who was a casualty and who wasn't.

"There was no way we could carry the injured and our kit, so we left almost all our equipment, radios, guns and rifles, and moved to the enemy location about 400 metres away.

"Then we used their comms to call for help and carried the injured 1.5km through thick jungle to a number of waiting ambulances.

"It took all night to extract them."

WO2 Rai had previously undertaken three tours of Afghanistan – one of which saw him Mentioned in Dispatches for helping to extract comrades under enemy fire.

But he says the jungle storm was by far the toughest situation he has faced in the field.

"It was the middle of the night, raining, and completely dark with multiple casualties," he continued.

"And none of us was expecting it.

"On Operation Herrick you always had injury in your mind but in the jungle you don't necessarily expect this kind of thing. It was scary.

"Many of us lost our hearing and had to go through treatment from a specialist who travelled to Brunei from the UK afterwards.

"But what I did was just my job.

"People have commended my courage and leadership – and I was satisfied with the job that I did – but I never expected any sort of award." ■

“
Many of
us lost our
hearing
”

2021 ARMY OPERATIONAL HONOURS

Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire:
Col James Loudoun

Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire:
Lt Col Brian Duff, RE

Queen's Commendation for Valuable Service:

Cpl (now Sgt) Frazer Berry, Int Corps
Sgt (now CSgt) James Chissel, R Irish
Lt Col Darren Dempsey, RLC
A/Maj (now Capt) Jonathon Norfield, RE
Cpl Oluwabunmi Ojo, RLC
Maj Sam Patterson, RLC
Lt Col Andrew Pearce, Rifles
LCpl Max Richardson, Int Corps
Lt Col Jonathan Round, RAMC
Rfn Daniel Rowe, Rifles
Capt Malcolm Scott, RLC
Maj Simon Stott, LD
CSgt Warren Swain, PWRR
Lt Col Martin Windsor, RLC

Queen's Commendation for Bravery:
CSgt (now WO2) Bishwahang Rai, RGR
Cpl Dean Wilson, RLC

WINTER RIVER RESCUE

■ A RESERVIST who plunged neck-deep into cold water to help a child stranded by the fast-rising tide has spoken of his shock at receiving royal recognition.

Cpl Dean Wilson (pictured) waded some 800 metres into a river to assist the 13-year-old who had become cut off by the tide and was clinging to a tree at the Eastern Cleddau Estuary near Llangwm, Pembrokeshire.

Deciding not to move the youngster – who was cold and distressed – he stayed with him for an hour until a lifeboat crew could carry out a rescue.

Now the NCO – who serves with 157 (Welsh) Regiment, Royal Logistic Corps – has been awarded the Queen's Commendation for Bravery.

The 49-year-old told *Soldier*: "I had no idea about any of this, the first I knew was a phone call out of the blue from my CO.

"Obviously, I'm honoured but the news came as a complete surprise."

An ex-Regular who works in security, Cpl Wilson undertook the rescue in November 2019 after he drove past the boy's distraught mum.



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Culture change will require everyone to think about their own actions, chiefs say

Can you look yourself in the mirror?

Top officers call for some serious soul-searching among troops

BEHAVIOUR, beards and bad Wi-Fi were just some of the hot topics up for discussion at this year's **Army People Conference**.

The day-long event, held at Farnborough International Exhibition and Conference Centre, was broadcast to an audience of more than 4,000 on Defence Connect.

As well as giving the Personnel Directorate a chance to update on its progress with various projects aimed at improving the "lived experience" for serving soldiers, it marked the launch of the Army people plan – an initiative to ensure the future Service has the right people with the right skills.

Opening the event, Chief of the General Staff, Gen Sir Mark Carleton-Smith, confronted the issues of bad behaviour and culture change.

No doubt referring to recent press stories about the sexual misconduct of some British troops, he said the Service needed to have an "honest conversation" about the parts of its culture and leadership that it was not proud of.

He also said a shift in mindset was needed to ensure the conformist, respectful and compliant nature of service would not prevent soldiers from being able to challenge and innovate in future.

"We are going to change the Army," he told the audience. "And I need you

to be the agents for change."

Maj Gen Sharon Nesmith, general officer commanding Army Recruiting and Initial Training Command, said that all soldiers had a part to play.

Referring to recent findings on bullying and sexual harassment by the Atherton report (*Protecting Those Who Protect Us*) she said senior officers were taking the issue very seriously.

But she added: "It's all of our responsibilities to change how it feels to be in the Field Army today.

"We all have our part to play."

Deputy Chief of the General Staff, Lt Gen Sir Chris Tickell, added: "It's about all of us thinking about what we're doing 24/7, and making sure we're living by our values and standards and looking ourselves in the mirror on every action."

The conference saw a host of entrepreneurs take to the podium to explain how they innovate, and discussion panels where online viewers could text in questions.

Among them were comments about poor Wi-Fi provision on the defence estate (see story right) and the Army's decision to uphold a ban on beards despite the Royal Air Force changing its policy.



"Hitting headlines for all the wrong reasons..."

Army sergeant major talks culture page 17



More news from the **Army People Conference...**



GET COMPLAINING

■ **SOLDIERS** need to spend more time formally complaining and less tweeting if they want their issues with Army life to be acted on.

That was one of the messages from the Personnel Directorate.

Speaking at the event, staff explained that social media posts did not provide the evidence and data needed for contractors to effect change.

But the proper channels, such as complaints books in canteens, allowed them to know about and act on any issues.

WI-FI WOES OVER?

■ **POOR Wi-Fi access for soldiers** is being tackled, Deputy Chief of the General Staff, Lt Gen Sir Chris Tickell, has reassured troops.

"This is absolutely recognised," he told the conference.

"A business case is being progressed to spend millions of pounds on providing the requisite level across single living accommodation and technical accommodation, where it's not done."

But he said it had not yet been signed off and digital spends had to go through the Cabinet Office.

"It's absolutely on the Army Board agenda," he added.

"I continue to excite people about it in order to ensure it's delivered. We are absolutely on the case."

MAN WITH A PLAN

■ **SOLDIERS** will in future be considered a battlefield capability in their own right, the Army's Director of Personnel has said.

Speaking at the Army People Conference, Maj Gen Paul Griffiths stressed the development would allow future challenges to be met.

"We must make every member of the Army as good as they possibly can be," he said – adding that the department had begun its first ever human capability audit to identify the gaps.

Soldiers can then be better optimised for their role, with through-life education.

Improving diversity and looking at how the Army lives – balancing family needs with those of the military – would improve things further still, he added.





CONSCRIPTS REFLECT

■ FEMALE veterans have been reflecting on their Second World War experiences to mark the 80th anniversary of conscription for women this month.

Some now more than 100 years old, they served at home and abroad as part of Britain's largest military arm – the Auxiliary Territorial Service (shown above).

Daphne Atteridge, a teleplotter for 16th Searchlight Regiment, lost her best friend on a gun-site six months after she joined up.

"I remember Dorothy lying there with just the smallest scar on her forehead where the shrapnel had entered," she recalled.

"It didn't put me off service – it made me more determined. I loved everything about Army life."

Meanwhile, looking back on her deployment to Germany in 1945, Joan Awbery described the terrible smell of bombed out towns, but said returning home was even harder.

"I lost my status and my purpose," she said. "It felt terribly flat coming back to England."

The ex-Servicewomen were telling their stories as part of a new book, *Army Girls*, by historian and broadcaster Tessa Dunlop.

SOLDIERING ON AWARDS RESULTS

■ A FORMER infanteer who has been conquering disability to take on physical challenges for charity was among those saluted at the Soldiering on Awards.

Stephen Vause, who served with 4th Battalion, The Rifles, took the gong in the most inspirational category after raising thousands.

A resident at the Royal Star and Garter Home in Surbiton, he was left in a wheelchair and needing a tablet PC to communicate following an IED strike in Iraq.

He was among a host of ex-personnel celebrated at the awards, which recognise those who have served their country.

They included ex-Fusilier Edward Dean, who was praised for his charity work, and triple amputee cyclist and diver Josh Boggi (ex-RE).

Read more at soldieringon.org



The changes are designed to help commanders celebrate successes and offer support



PROMOTION BOARD

results get to commanders faster

COMMANDERS will now be told about promotion board results on the same day as their soldiers.

The Army Personnel Centre (APC) will inform them of the outcome on Wednesdays at 1530 instead of Thursdays at 0900.

Individuals will continue to be informed on Wednesdays in a window between 0900-1500.

The change reduces the delay between soldiers and commanders finding out and means the latter can engage with their people during the same working day.

It comes after the APC received feedback on its original changes to the system last summer, designed to ensure that troops found out results first.

Commanders, however, expressed

concerns that being informed a whole day after their subordinates meant they were on the back foot when preparing to celebrate achievements or offer support or commiserations.

The feedback was garnered through the adjutants and regimental career management officers' forum, surveys and discussions at the Army People Conference (page 13).

"The latest amendment demonstrates the willingness of the APC to listen to the concerns and recommendations of both the chain of command and personnel," said the organisation's Deputy Military Secretary, Brig Clare Phillips.

"It has resulted in the quick and effective delivery of a policy change that will benefit all parties."

AND SHE'S OFF POLAR PREET HEADS FOR HERCULES INLET

“
I am very
excited
”

■ A PIONEERING explorer was standing at the threshold of a demanding 700-mile solo expedition to the South Pole as this issue of *Soldier* went to press.

In a message on her website (polarpreet.com), Capt Preet Chandi (RAMC) confirmed that she was preparing to board a flight from Chile to the start line at Hercules Inlet.

The 32-year-old added: "It is time to break some more boundaries."



Picture: Graeme Main

"I'm flying to Union Glacier and I'll have my comms kit checked there and then we will wait for a suitable weather window – I am very excited."

Known as Polar Preet, the officer – who featured on last month's front cover – is aiming to become the first woman of colour to finish the trek.

Already a serial ultramarathon competitor, the physiotherapist will face temperatures of -50 degrees Celsius.



Picture: Graeme Main

Sky high

■ THE Sky Sabre missile system is continuing to impress Army air defence specialists as they ramp up their training on the weapon. Gunners from 16 Regiment, Royal Artillery (pictured) have been going through a sign-off process for the kit, which offers a quantum leap on the Rapier system it replaces and is due to achieve full operating capacity in October 2022. Built around a sophisticated radar, electronics hub and launcher vehicle, its missiles can reach speeds of over 2,300mph, while taking out aircraft, drones and laser-guided bombs at ranges of more than 70 miles. Sky Sabre crews can expect regular deployments to the South Atlantic, maintaining a resident battery keeping watch on the Falkland Islands' airspace.

Creative minds boost tech drive

SCIENCE fiction writers are being employed to help the military think outside the box and come up with ground-breaking innovations.

Invoking the spirit of Bletchley Park during the Second World War, the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory Exploration Division is employing a range of creative thinkers that may give troops a technical edge.

"We are looking at the science fiction community, among others, to provide us with some left-field thinking," Linda Knutsen, the division's head, told *Soldier*.

"Our mission is to discover and exploit ideas no one has thought of before – high impact, generation-after-next concepts that will give the UK's defence and security sectors an advantage over their adversaries."

The division was only established in April but is already evaluating a number of radical new systems and game-changing capabilities, says its senior military adviser, Lt Col Gareth Walker (RE, pictured).

"We are working unconstrained and with a wide range of academic and industry partners, crowdsourcing ideas from outside the military and hoovering



up the best ones, then testing them quickly and gathering evidence from outputs and insight," he added.

"In many cases this will lead to more research, but it's part of the process of making sure we put our money where we stand to gain the most benefit."

While many are confidential, current projects include the development of robust laser printing technology so units could make their own parts in the field, and stick-on body patches that immediately warn commanders when personnel reach certain stress levels or are exposed to specific toxins.

Applications the division is keen to explore include robots that could allow a mechanic to fix a vehicle from almost anywhere in the world or undertake work in hazardous environments.



“We have to put our money where we stand to gain the most benefit”

SUICIDAL VETERANS GET MORE SUPPORT

■ AN APP for struggling former personnel has been launched by a suicide prevention charity.

Samaritans Veterans offers access to emotional support plus videos, exercises and podcasts that help users look after themselves and link up with others who have served. There is also advice on volunteering for the charity and providing peer support.

Available on the Apple App Store and Google Play, it was developed following research that found Service leavers wanted to better understand their feelings while hearing from others with similar experiences.

Stats reveal veterans contacting the Samaritans are twice as likely to report suicidal thoughts compared to those from the general population.

Former soldier Tara Robertson – who was seriously injured during a terrorist attack in Northern Ireland – believes the tool will make a difference.

The ex-Royal Logistic Corps driver – who was medically discharged following the bombing at Lisburn in 1996 – added: "The fact that you are able to engage with it on a daily basis and record your feelings will be a huge help."

IN NUMBERS



30,000

Calls to the Samaritans from the military community since 2018

70

Percentage of those from veterans

EX-ENGINEER DIES IN RIVER

■ TRIBUTES have been paid to a former sapper and founder of a veterans' charity who died trying to rescue paddleboarders on a Welsh waterway.

Paul O'Dwyer, who had served with the Royal Monmouthshire Royal Engineers, lost his life at the Cleddau River on October 30 along with three women.

The 42-year-old father-of-three helped set up Sa1ute (sa1ute.co.uk) and was renowned for helping many good causes.

The incident is being investigated and a woman has been arrested on suspicion of gross negligence manslaughter.

FEARLESS FUNDRAISING

Laps of honour

AN AMPUTEE veteran walked 457 laps of a running track to pay tribute to the personnel who died in Afghanistan.

Former Royal Welsh Fusilier Steve Owen, who lost his left leg in 2016 due to injuries sustained on a Herrick tour in 2010, took 42 hours to complete the challenge, dedicating each circuit to one of the fallen. He



pounded out a healthy sum for bereaved Forces children's charity Scotty's Little Soldiers, and veterans' good cause, Woody's Lodge. To donate visit uk.virginmoneygiving.com/steveowen16

Money raised:
£3,000
For Scotty's Little Soldiers
and Woody's Lodge

The long march

A FIVE-STRONG group of Aldershot-based infanteers tabbed up a healthy sum for charity after a demanding day and night on the road.

The troops from 1st Battalion, Irish Guards marched 100km to mark The Royal British Legion's centenary and

remember the sacrifice of comrades from times past. They laid a wreath on their regiment's memorial at Copper House in Windsor before heading to Westminster

and back along the Thames Path, with each soldier carrying 20kg.

Team boss LCpl Joshua Pickman said the charity meant a huge amount – and troops were delighted to raise cash for the military family.

Money raised:
£2,000+
For RBL



The fitness element of the new training programme will include the soldier conditioning review

MATTS GIVEN THE HEAVE-HO

Picture: Graeme Main

Individual training requirement will be in place by next April

MILITARY annual training tests (Matts) are being scrapped in favour of a more practical, straightforward programme.

Named the individual training requirement (ITR), it will also replace the soldier first syllabus and put less emphasis on routine testing and more on equipping troops to perform their roles effectively.

After its rollout in April 2022, all personnel will have to complete two core modules covering fitness and education – while those in the Field Army or deploying on ops will also have to undertake a third component focusing on combat skills.

The fitness element includes the recently introduced soldier conditioning review and role fitness tests, as well as mandated training in subjects such as heat and cold injury.

Meanwhile, the education module covers operational law, behaviours, security and substance misuse.

Fieldcraft, navigation and marksmanship are among the military skills mandated for Field Army troops.

Describing the rationale behind the

change, Maj Dave Beacock (AGC (ETS)) from Headquarters Land Warfare Centre, said the new approach would result in more relevant, interesting training.

"Lessons from operations and collective training showed Matts weren't effective, so we had to fix that," he explained.

"Depending on how they were delivered, people could be quite disengaged. For example, if you're shown a PowerPoint presentation on navigation, and then just do an hour's orienteering, you're unlikely to improve your proficiency.

"But under the combat element of the ITR, troops will do a day of nav in full rig, as well as 2.5km at night.

"It's also about empowering units. We're saying, 'here is the requirement, now you work out how to deliver it based on your operational cycle'."

Trials of the new system are happening between now and February, with materials to support its wider rollout appearing on the Defence Learning Environment next month.

For more information read **ABN 109/2021**.

“People could be quite disengaged”

RUNNING MAN

ARMY veteran and Military Cross holder Brian Wood (ex-PWRR) ran 25 marathons in November in remembrance of troops who died in Afghanistan and Iraq. The former colour sergeant, whose experiences in Iraq were the topic of recent BBC drama *Danny Boy*, was nearing the end of his 635-mile quest as this issue went to press. He started each leg from a different military barracks and aims to raise £20,000 for Walking with the Wounded.





Ground view

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

Contact Paul on Defence Connect

AS I WRITE my column this month the Army is again hitting the headlines for all the wrong reasons – these stories make for very uncomfortable reading.

When a few people end up in the news for unacceptable behaviour, the consequences affect us all.

The Service has a hard-won reputation for high standards and excellence, which we all have a responsibility to uphold.

There is no way of sugar-coating this message, so let me be absolutely crystal clear: bad conduct – whether on or off-duty – has no place in the British Army.

You only have to look at any deployment, whether that is evacuating people from Kabul or assisting the NHS with the pandemic, to see that our organisation relies on working together, with total respect for each other and those we serve.

Not only do we have a moral duty to look after people, it is critical that we are able to recruit and retain the right soldiers.

It is important that we have a workplace in which they are happy and have the opportunity to thrive. If personnel think we

don't care about them or are a bad employer, we have a problem.

For all of these reasons, I am asking you all to step up to the plate and look out for bad behaviour.

And if you see something wrong, I want you to call it out.

Speaking up if we see anything inappropriate is our collective responsibility.

And it is at the very heart of the "challenge culture" I want to see grow in the Army, where personnel are not afraid to act – regardless of rank.

I accept that it might be difficult for some people to make a criticism of others face-to-face.

But if you don't want to take it up with the individual concerned, or feel you can't, there are other ways of making your voice heard.

Going through the chain of command – or the Speak Out helpline on military 96770 4656 – are just two of the channels for putting forward your concerns.

Online, you could also log on to Defence Connect and raise an issue on the Army feedback form.

Calling out bad behaviours is not an option – it's our duty.

● Top officers talk about changing the Army – page 13

“
Bad conduct has no place
”



UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

Q What would be your ideal Christmas?

A Food prepared early on, and a day with the family

Too competitive to criticise?



WE all need to work together to overcome the hurdles and embed a challenge culture within the British Army.

In the longer term, I want to see us getting better at both making and accepting criticism if it is levelled. At times this is not easy, given the

hierarchy we work within.

We must pause our competitive nature, built into us by training, to allow and accept challenge.

If we set the conditions to raise and take points in an appropriate way, then we will change for the better. We can all learn from each other.



Pictures: Freepik and Peter Davies

Christmas calling...

■ I'M HOPING to spend the festive period visiting some of our personnel who are working here on home soil and on overseas operations too. In the past I have done both – deploying on Op Herrick in Afghanistan at short notice a few days before Christmas as well as being on guard duty in the UK. Let us not forget there are also many people on standby and keeping an eye on their phones while the celebrations are going on – all of you have my thanks. You can all be proud of what you have achieved during 2021 – from helping deal with the pandemic to deployments in Afghanistan, it has been an extraordinary year. I wish you all a happy and peaceful festive season.

THE BIG PICTURE

London

Back in their stride

THE King's Troop, Royal Horse Artillery gathered in Green Park last month to carry out a 41-gun salute marking the birthday of The Prince of Wales.

For some of the newer personnel this was a momentous occasion as it was the first time the extensive preparations required for their ceremonial roles had been tested in front of the general public.

The salute marked the end of a 20-month hiatus in such events because of the Covid-19 pandemic. During this period, all duties, such as the coronation salute and Duke of Edinburgh's funeral, had to be conducted behind closed doors.

Picture: Sgt Donald Todd, RLC





IT WAS LIKE

Afghan interpreter reveals family's terrifying scramble to safety during Op Pitting

► WHEN Kabul fell to the Taliban earlier this year, this former interpreter – whose identity *Soldier* is withholding for his safety – found himself face-to-face with the British troops he had spent so much time supporting on Op Herrick.

But now the married 34-year-old father-of-one was staring back at his comrades through the perimeter fence of Kabul Airport. Here, he recalls his family's passage to safety on August 25 during the Op Pitting evacuation... and the soldier he credits with saving his life.

KABUL Airport was so crowded when we arrived. It was like something from hell.

But I'd heard British soldiers were there so we picked up a few belongings, two bottles of water, and went.

There was no help outside; it was very frightening in that crowd. My son was on my shoulders but there wasn't even space to put your feet down.

I worked with the British Army back in 2009 to 2011. At first I was stationed at Camp Bastion, before working alongside The Royal Welsh and later the Gurkhas under Lt Col (now Maj Gen) Gez Strickland.

On that first three-month tour we faced ambushes and IED attacks every day.

But as a child I'd had experience of the Taliban, so it was a good opportunity to serve my country.

My sergeant at the time was named Andy. I don't know where he is now, but he was a great guy. It was a fantastic time working with those soldiers. We were like friends and family – there was no one else. They looked after their interpreters.

I later worked for the French Army, then had jobs in administration, counter terror operations and security management.

Life had been better in Kabul recently but over the last three years there had been lots of bombings, every day.

Nowhere was safe – especially for those who had been involved in operations against the Taliban.

Then my house in Kabul was set on fire by someone. I still don't know who did it, but one of my neighbours was linked to Isis.

My wife and son's hands are still injured from that day.

After that we moved to the green zone, but we weren't safe anywhere and I was using different walking routes every day.

My son was worried for my safety, and would cry every time there were explosions. A six-year-old facing this sort of thing is unacceptable.

My wife and I were thinking how to leave so we applied to be relocated to the UK.

I was told I wasn't eligible but I successfully appealed in early August.

Once the Taliban entered Kabul I went into hiding at my parents' home and only walked out at night.

People around me knew I had been working for the Afghan government so I had to leave.

On our way to the airport on August 25 we had to cross Taliban checkpoints. If they saw evidence of

Reaching out

VETERAN employment organisation JobOppO has started a programme to support newly arrived Afghan interpreters and locally employed civilians evacuated during Op Pitting. Dozens of individuals have benefitted from an employment skills workshop, as well cultural and welfare support.

● To contact the scheme email info@joboppo.co.uk

SOMETHING FROM HELL

who I was there would have been no mercy, so before we left I burnt all my documents in my yard. I just carried copies of them on my phone.

When we got to the airport perimeter I kept calling out to the soldiers that I was an interpreter. I could see they were 2 Para.

They told me to wait. So I stayed there from 0800 until 1730.

At first, they were just calling British passport holders forward. Then a sergeant major on a Hesco barrier saw me and called me up. I was sweating and so dehydrated.

I don't know what he thought of me or why he picked me, but I gave him my passport and phone and told him my wife was further back.

He checked my details, then going inside was like walking through the gates of heaven.

It was a completely different atmosphere inside the airport building – the hospitality and the management. It really was such a warm welcome.

Everyone was hungry, thirsty and no one was really trusting each other – even inside – so we didn't speak. On the plane no one spoke either.

I forgot everything when we landed at Heathrow. I felt that I was in a safe place.

My mother, brothers and sister are still back home in Kabul.

They have moved compounds, and I am not sure what happens next for them, but currently they are safe.

I have restarted life here, but in Kabul I also had a life.

My son is attending a local school in London now, and we are living in one-bedroom bridging accommodation. What we do next isn't clear.

In October I received a notice to say we were being moved to another house that is near Peterborough.

We packed everything, and then just as we arrived our driver got a call from the housing officer to say it was cancelled and we had to go back.

But we are not focusing on problems.

I don't think my son ever wants to go

The interpreter and his family arrived in London in August



The para on the perimeter....

SOLDIER tracked down the CSM from 2nd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment who helped our interpreter and his family – WO2 Adam Croucher (Para, above left). Speaking to us from an overseas exercise, he said he was glad to have helped so many people during Op Pitting, but that recognising individuals may be tricky as "I barely slept for three weeks, so the whole experience was one big blur".

back to Afghanistan.

We are just trying to keep him happy and enjoy his days.

I am also receiving help from JobOppO (see panel) – doing workshops on CVs and applying for jobs.

There's so much difference between Afghanistan and the UK, so I have to practise these things.

I would like to work with the Forces again when I can; the experience of my life was working with the British Army.

I am still trying to find that Parachute Regiment sergeant major who pointed to me at Kabul Airport.

I forgot to get his name but he was the angel who rescued me.

If I ever meet him, I want to thank him.

But I don't think I have the words to express my feelings.

Taking the plunge



6 safety tips for swimming outdoors when the mercury dips

► MAJ Guy Batchelor (Para) will tackle the latest leg of the Oceans Seven open-water swimming challenge next year.

Having already completed taxing tests in the English Channel, Catalina Channel and at Manhattan Island, the Reservist and ex-Regular has set his sights on conquering the 21-mile North Channel from Northern Ireland to Scotland.

Despite temperatures dropping his training continues, and here he shares his tips for taking a dip this winter...

1 Be safe

Open water can be dangerous. Ensure you inform someone where you are and how long you will be swimming for. Check-in with them before you enter the water and once you exit. Never swim alone.

2 Acclimatise

Begin with small duration swims (5-15mins) so your body can adjust, especially as the ambient temperature drops. Enter the water quickly and smoothly and begin swimming as soon as possible. Do not swim in water temperatures below ten degrees Celsius. Stay well hydrated and have drink breaks during your session.

3 Wear the right kit and get instruction

Wear a swimming hat or two to preserve body heat. You can also wear neoprene gloves, booties, a balaclava, or wetsuit – whatever is comfortable. No matter how well you perform in a pool it's worth contacting an open-water/wild-swim coach to get help with technique.

4 No diving

Do not dive or jump in unless you are used to the cold water and know the underwater hazard conditions. Cold water can cause gasping of breath and shock, which can be fatal.

5 Know your limits

Cold water swimming can help combat depression, boost the immune system and improve circulation but respect the environment – it must be done with a steady build-up of your body's exposure. As your fitness and acclimatisation improves you will be able to swim for longer.

6 Warm up slowly

Don't have a hot shower on exiting the water as this can rapidly cool your core, which can be dangerous. Instead, dry quickly, wrap up well, then have a well-deserved hot drink.



Open-water swimming kit list:

- ✓ Trunks / costume / wetsuit
- ✓ Goggles
- ✓ Two silicone hats (always wear bright colours)
- ✓ Neoprene gloves and booties
- ✓ Tow float
- ✓ Changing robe
- ✓ Towel
- ✓ Flip-flops or Crocs
- ✓ Woolly gloves and hat
- ✓ Layers, layers, layers (the best way to get warm after a cold swim)
- ✓ Flask
- ✓ Food

CASTING CALL

How to get a part as a movie extra

► **FILM and TV military adviser Paul Biddiss (ex-Para), who is helping to recruit an army of extras for Ridley Scott's latest flick, explains how soldiers can get into the industry...**

Where do you start?

It's easily done online. You send photos and your measurements to an agency. Some post specific requirements on social media – for example, if they need military horse riders or ex-Infantry.

Does military experience help?

It can during technical scenes featuring arms drill or large battle sequences. If I get former or serving soldiers it can take me minutes to train them up, whereas I might need a few hours with civilians.

Can you do it while still serving?

Yes. I have trained many serving personnel for specific shoots, including on *1917*. But get permission from your chain of command first as you may be asked to come back for further filming.

How long do shoots last?

Anything from ten to 12 hours. But you could be sat around in the extras' area for hours waiting for your scene so be prepared for loads of brews.

What's the pay like?

It varies between productions, but anything from £150 to £300. Additional money is paid for extra abilities like firing

blank weapons on set or strenuous action. I've known some to walk away with £450 for a few hours' work.

What kind of training do you get?

Productions run bootcamps to train you in the specific type of tactics required. Don't get sucked in by advertised theatrical courses promising you work if you pay for their training. It's simply not true, so save your money.

How competitive is it?

Not very because you're picked for your look. On one project the director selected 700 men from thousands of hopefuls based on their appearance and I then

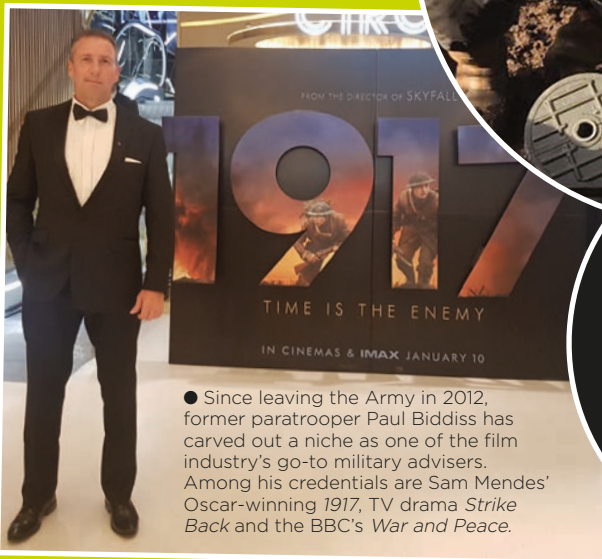
selected the 500 fittest and most robust during the bootcamp stage. The same will happen on my next job, starting in January, where I will choose up to 2,000 men for some major battle scenes.

Do you meet famous actors?

You could find yourself standing shoulder-to-shoulder with them in a battle scene or chatting to them between shots. But there's an etiquette – it's considered unprofessional to just start talking to them. Having said that, that's how I got my break. I was working as an extra on *The Monuments Men* and offered director George Clooney some advice on a scene. Luckily for me he took it on board and that's how it all started.

What do people get wrong about this industry?

Whenever there is something wrong on screen there is a misconception it's all the military expert's fault. The thing to remember is it's an interpretation for entertainment, not a documentary. If reality will not work for the story, a director will simply do it his way.



● Since leaving the Army in 2012, former paratrooper Paul Biddiss has carved out a niche as one of the film industry's go-to military advisers. Among his credentials are Sam Mendes' Oscar-winning *1917*, TV drama *Strike Back* and the BBC's *War and Peace*.



Interested?

To apply to become an extra in Ridley Scott's upcoming period feature visit two10casting.com/apply. Shooting starts in January in London and other locations. You must be physically fit and will be required to grow out your hair and beard.

'This was on my

2021 ends on a high for
Army runners in the mighty
Marathon des Sables

► AFTER four Covid-related postponements, the 35th iteration of the world's toughest footrace finally took place in October.

Among the British personnel competing were Col Lucy Giles, Lt Col Katie Hislop (RE) and WO1 Leon Fairbrother (Coldm Gds, main image)...



Name: WO1 Leon Fairbrother

Age: 43

Cap badge: Coldstream Guards
*Finished the event 25th overall and
was the fifth British male*

What will you remember most from the event?

The sense of solidarity and community in such a diverse group of competitors. That mutual understanding and

respect for each other's achievement was something I've only experienced on operations

Did it live up to expectations?

This was my bucket-list event that I've wanted to do since I was a lance corporal in 2003. I was expecting long days in unbearable heat and minimal comfort in an amazing environment. I got all that and more, as well as meeting some amazing people along the way

How did you train for it?

It was difficult preparing for the heat, which regularly reached the mid 50s in the midday sun. I spent many hours leading up to the event attending hot yoga sessions to assist with acclimatisation, strength and flexibility. This benefitted me a lot. The Covid-19 crisis also prolonged



training by 18 months and staying motivated was hard

Do you think anyone who is fit and has the right mindset could train for something like this?

One hundred per cent. Having the right mentality will get you through most things in life – the MDS is just the same. The Sahara Desert is a challenging environment, but soldiers are used to demanding situations. We adapt well. Everybody suffers, it's just how much you're willing to suffer to achieve your aim

bucket list'



Name: Lt Col Katie Hislop
Age: 45

Cap badge: Royal Engineers
Previously completed the MDS more than 20 years ago as part of the first all-female British team to do so

How did this year differ to the first time you ran in 2000?

Conscious of being older, I trained very differently – far less running and far more strength and conditioning. The delays due to Covid helped me build my endurance base. I kept a diary that first time and noted that temperatures had reached 47 degrees Celsius on the hottest day running through the dunes – this year it barely dipped below 55 throughout, maybe due to climate change. But I altered

my plan as a result – I slowed my pace significantly on day one, put any time-related goals I had set to one side and focused on hydration, nutrition and keeping moving

What kept you going?

The fact I was raising money for Walking With the Wounded and that people had donated generously really boosted me during the hardest stages. Competitors are given a tracking device and there is a webcam at the finish point each day, too, so friends and family can follow you – knowing people were watching spurred me on

What were your thoughts upon crossing the finish line?

Utter relief and delight, particularly given the unusually high number of strong, amazing people who had not made it to the finish line this year. An experienced French ultra-runner very sadly suffered a cardiac arrest and passed away despite immediate medical attention »



Name: Col Lucy Giles

Age: 52

Role: President, Army Officer Selection Board

An MDS first-timer, but has previously completed multiple endurance events including the Trailwalker 100km trek of the South Downs; the Imber and "Race to the Kings" ultramarathons; the Devizes-Westminster canoe race; the cycle route between all of the Ashes Test cricket grounds and several mountain marathons

What was the daily routine ?

It started early with admin. Before setting off we would listen to AC/DC's *Highway to Hell*. Then it was a case of putting one foot in front of the other, hitting checkpoints on time, looking out for people and getting to the stage finish with a smile on my face. I was always the last person in from my tent. Then I would have a hot meal, wash, read emails and get my head down. I averaged ten hours on my feet per day. It took me 68 hours in total and I finished the majority of the stages with my torch

How much equipment did you have to carry with you?

There was essential safety kit, including anti-venom for snake bites,

but the most important items for me, besides food and water obviously, were my carbon fibre poles. A small penknife proved critical for blisters and compressed, dehydrated towelettes were brilliant for washing and hygiene

What was the most challenging aspect?

Temperatures were unseasonably high and that led to heat injuries, which contributed to the spread of a diarrhoea and vomiting bug. I woke up on numerous occasions thinking I was listening to camel noises, and it was actually people violently retching. For me, I had a moment on day one because the first checkpoint took an age to get to as I was walking at 15min/km as opposed to the ten minutes I had planned for. I drank a load of water and salt tablets before setting off to checkpoint two, then promptly threw it all up. I had to override the panic of thinking "am I capable of doing this?" and get a grip



Profile:

Name: Sgt Rajesh Babooram

Age: 43

Service history: 2004-present

Role: Currently catering senior NCO at 3rd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment, but was recently selected to become the personal chef to deputy allied commander Europe at Nato headquarters in Shape, Belgium

Awards: Holds numerous military and civilian culinary competition titles, including a gold medal at Cake International, London

1 Choose your medium

When it comes to intricate work, Renshaw sugar paste icing is great for amateur bakers. It comes pre-rolled or in packets in different colours, ready to use

2 Come up with your grand design

Pinterest is where I go for lots of my ideas, or you can find tutorials on YouTube

3 Make sure the cake is firm

But it doesn't have to be a heavy Christmas cake if that's not your thing. One of my favourites is coffee and walnut. Put it in the fridge for 45mins-1hr, or 15-20mins in the freezer to let it firm up before decorating. If you are doing a traditional fruit cake, roll your marzipan out to about 1cm thickness, position it and let it dry for a bit, then put your sugar paste on top

Iced gems

7 tips for a show-stopping Christmas cake from award-winning Army baker, Sgt Rajesh Babooram, RLC

4 Plan ahead

Take the stress out of Christmas Day by baking your cake in advance. It can stay in the freezer until you are ready to decorate and then it will keep in the fridge for a few days

5 Use fresh ingredients at room temperature

Make sure your eggs and butter are out of the fridge in time for it all to come to room temperature. This will make the batter easier to mix and give your cake a better rise

6 Handle your icing with care

Try not to handle it any more than necessary, otherwise it will go sticky. Your cake also needs to be cool – and away from direct sunlight – so the icing doesn't melt. When you're not working on it, cover it in cling film so it doesn't dry out and crack

7 Practice makes perfect

To be truly successful as a cake decorator you must master both the look and taste. Keep working at it and don't be put off if things don't turn out exactly as planned

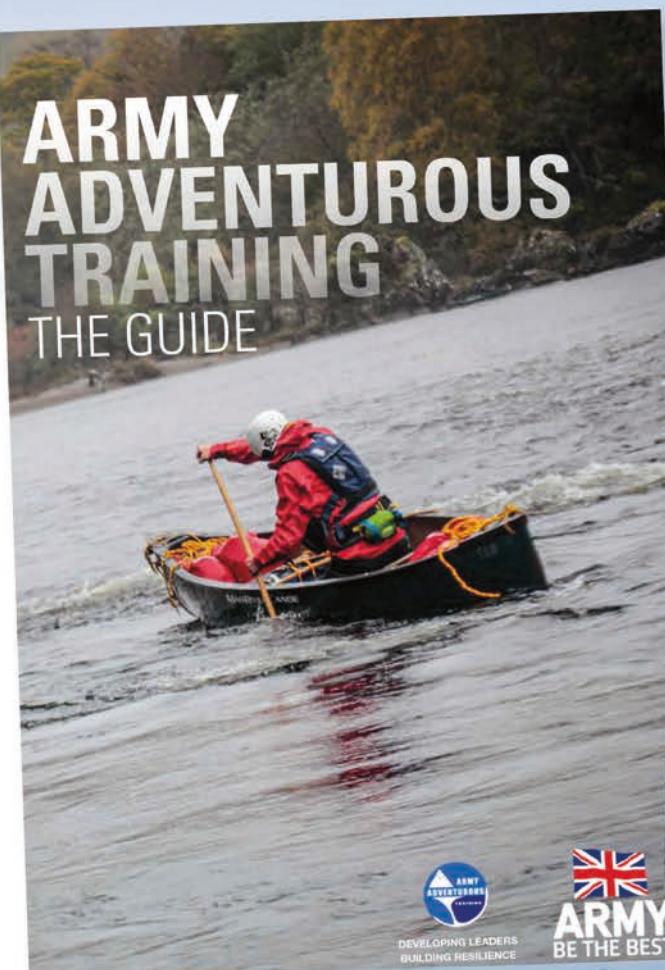
And four more baking boo-boos to avoid...

- **Not greasing the pan enough** – your cake will be tricky to get out and fall apart
- **Not measuring your ingredients properly** – follow the recipe and don't be tempted to wing it
- **Overmixing your batter** – this affects the texture and taste of the cake. Instead of light and fluffy, you'll end up with dense and chewy
- **Checking the oven unnecessarily** – if you open the door halfway through your cake will go flat and it's game over. Also make sure the oven is up to temperature before you put the cake in



In numbers:
SEVEN
length of time, in days, Sgt Babooram typically spends on a competition cake

THE ARMY ADVENTUROUS TRAINING GUIDE IS NOW LIVE!



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FEELING THE HEAT

Oman's demanding
proving ground tests
new generation of troops

IT HAS been an exercise area of choice for generations of British soldiers – where they have honed the skills needed to conduct operations in austere environments far from home.

Perched on the southern tip of the Gulf, the stretching deserts of Oman are impressive and foreboding in equal measure – the extremes of temperature and lunar-like landscape as tough as the troops must become if they are to fight in these conditions.

The world has changed since the first personnel left their boot prints in these parched sands decades ago. But as new threats emerge – and would-be adversaries work to further their global interests – this Middle East proving ground retains its potent edge.

As well as being a key exercise venue, Oman, a longstanding British friend, is now one of the Army's regional hubs – staging posts at strategic locations for coordinating worldwide activity. In future, the base here will allow for greater cooperation with allies while allowing UK soldiers to stay and train for longer.

And the recent arrival of a new generation of troops, backed up by a Royal Navy »

» carrier group led by HMS Queen Elizabeth, showed the partnership's potential.

Exercise Khanjar Oman saw more than 650 British personnel under the command of 4th Infantry Brigade and HQ North East, also known as the Black Rats, operate alongside their host nation counterparts on the Ras Madrasah training area near the town of Duqm.

And as they settled into the month-long stay, they were soon demonstrating their combat credentials.

A battlegroup fronted by 1st Battalion, The Royal Irish Regiment was at the sharp end of the manoeuvres. With a number of its infantry soon heading for Op Newcombe in Mali to join United Nations peacekeeping efforts, the desert experience proved to be invaluable preparation.

The outfit was underpinned by B Squadron of The Royal Scots Dragoon Guards with the Jackal armoured vehicle. Apache attack helicopters drawn from 3 and 4 Regiments, Army Air Corps, plus Wildcats from 1 Regiment, were providing top cover.

At sea, carrier-based F-35 fast jets from HMS Queen Elizabeth packed a further aviation punch. And unmanned aerial vehicles were constantly prowling the battlespace, providing critical reconnaissance while coordinating fires between systems.

With such striking power available, it was unsurprising that Black Rats' boss, Brig Marcus Mudd, was in confident mood as the manoeuvres ramped up. He was delighted with the conventional warfighting discipline shown by his troops as well as their professionalism and flexibility in working with Middle Eastern allies.

"This exercise has been about partnership and learning from each other," he told *Soldier* during the package. "We have a Royal Omani Army reconnaissance regiment as a partner within our battlegroup.

"They have been imparting their expertise on how to survive and fight in the desert, while the British soldiers have been providing them with support on specialist capabilities."

These included the use of assets such as dogs as well as counter-IED protocols, he added.

The brigade commander emphasised that the training was an "incredible opportunity" for both nations.

"Day in, day out we have watched troops learn from each other," he continued.

Joint working was certainly important on this exercise. Soldiers faced an intense skills shakedown, with serials focused on engaging a well-organised mock adversary while dealing with an unfamiliar and inhospitable environment.

The package saw them prepare their campaign from a base location before launching three combined arms missions. It culminated in a live-firing serial – and the personnel involved said it had prepared them well for future deployments.

Cpl Alan Egan (R Irish) admitted the exercise had been a test of soldiering in tough conditions – but he believes troops heading on Op Newcombe will particularly feel the benefit.

"The training area in Oman is unique," he continued. »





Remote working

● AS COLLEAGUES rehearsed a conventional battle in the Omani desert, a troop formed from The Royal Scots Dragoon Guards broke away to face a very different tasking.

The soldiers – with their Jackal armoured vehicles – boarded a catamaran from the host nation's navy for a 12-hour sea crossing north to the strategic Musandam peninsula.

Here they faced a mock fight through an eerie landscape of mountains and rocky outcrops, working with the local defence force to head off an “insurgency” provided by seasoned Omani troops.

The frequent contacts proved a test of mountain warfare skills. And those involved admitted that skirmishing in such strange surroundings had proved a shock to the system.

“The landscape itself is something to behold – the sheer cliff faces here are really amazing,” remarked LCpl Daniel Macleod during a break in the training, which was codenamed Exercise Musandam Fort.

“Earlier we had to help clear a wadi system, providing fire support for the Omani troops – and we are having to deal with an opposing force that really knows the environment.

“It has been tough but we had a unique opportunity in a very different location.”



“The training area in Oman is unique”





Fact file: Oman

Where: South-east Arabian Peninsula

Capital: Muscat

Currency: Rial

Landscape: Interior largely desert; mountains; fertile coastal regions

Daytime temperatures: From 18 degrees Centigrade (winter) to 40 degrees (summer)

» “It will help us as we look forward to future operations – particularly when it comes to navigating and sustaining ourselves in a difficult environment.”

Colleague Rgr Lucan Simons agreed that a great deal had been learnt. He pointed out that the Omani Army’s advice in the desert had been invaluable.

“Their tips and tricks massively helped,” he emphasised. “There are creatures such as snakes and spiders here – but the Omanis know where they are and how you can keep safe.

“It has been great to learn how they operate, while showing them the way we work too.”

Cpl Alice Gask, an aviation communications specialist with 1 Regiment, Army Air Corps, believed the scale of the exercise allowed troops to see the bigger picture of an operation.

The NCO – who works with the Wildcat helicopter – said her role in keeping the wider battlegroup plugged into the aviation assets had enhanced her depth of understanding.

“Hearing troops on the ground, you see how everything fits together,” she added.

“We have also had the chance to go flying and see first-hand some of the capabilities of our aircraft – the camera it has on board, in particular, is unbelievable.”

The opportunities have certainly been rich, and the learning significant, on Khanjar Oman. And with closer cooperation between the UK and the Middle Eastern state on the cards, more regular outings and longer stays are set to benefit other troops in the future.

Working with allies has always been important. But in a world in which threats are constantly evolving and where events impacting the UK can rapidly flare up in far-flung places, ever closer partnerships will be critical as the Army squares up to the challenges ahead. ■





Desert skies

● THE Wildcat helicopters of 1 Regiment, Army Air Corps proved to be a formidable asset across the battlespace – with taskings ranging from the lifting of troops to designating targets.

Personnel worked round the clock to keep the platform flying – and their efforts paid off as it showed its potential in the mock conventional showdown.

WO1 Scott Bolton – the outfit's RSM – said infanteers had been able to observe targets before engaging using the helicopter's cameras, while aircrews had

the ability to flag objectives for the F-35 jets involved in strike missions.

"The Wildcat proved highly versatile – it is a sophisticated Swiss Army knife when it comes to delivering for our troops," the senior soldier added.

"Its camera allowed personnel to see objectives clearly while flying several miles away."

Avionics supervisor LCpl Morne Joubert said the environment had tested ground crews but they had managed to keep teams airborne on a 24-hour basis.



Armed with ideas

Expo highlights troops' vital role in innovation

> Water filtration device



> Methanol power



IT MAY be one of the hottest topics in Army circles right now, but innovation isn't all about multimillion-pound projects, labs or high-level agreements between the MoD and industry.

Around the Service, soldiers at the coalface are constantly coming up with ideas and modifying kit with a view to quicker, easier, cheaper – or just plain better – outputs. And Commander Field Army's Innovation and Experimentation Fund, which gives up to £5,000 to each idea that shows enough potential, has undoubtedly added impetus to the trend.

1st (UK) Division has responded by staging its first ever light forces expo – hosted in Catterick by 1 Close Support Battalion, Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers – to showcase some of these ideas and how they could support their formation on future operations.

"This has been a bottom-up initiative led by 102 Logistic Brigade to enthuse personnel and see what's out there," said Commander Equipment Support, Col Paul Johnson. "The soldiers know what works, what doesn't work, what gaps they've got – and they often have a gem of an idea about how to address it."

Various units presented their innovations, while trusted industry suppliers in the equipment support and resupply arena also displayed their wares.

"We hope that everyone involved, whether they are exhibiting or coming along to have a look around, will gain something from this," added Col Johnson.

"Military and industry are able to talk, ask questions of each other and spark ideas.

"We want this to be the first of an annual gathering because personnel now have ready access to the innovation fund.

"We hope many will come away with a new idea in their heads, develop the concept with the fund and then, if it looks promising, reach into my team at divisional headquarters to push it further."

Some of the most promising kit on display at the show included...

● “Water supplies taken on patrol not only represent 50 per cent of our logistical burden but it’s usually chlorinated and drinking that every day is not pleasant,” Cpl Bryan Munce (Para) told *Soldier*.

“That’s why this piece of kit is so relevant to how the Army wants to operate in future.”

The junior NCO from the Armoured Trials and Development Unit was at Catterick to show a highly mobile water filtration set that’s currently being evaluated.

The size of a large suitcase, it weighs just 60kg and can turn seawater, or a supply from any dirty river or spring, into perfectly safe drinking water at a rate of 25 litres per hour.

It can be powered by solar panels if required, or by conventional generators.



> Augmented reality



● Training is one way to use augmented reality – a technology that allows users to remain in the real world but have images or data projected into their field of view.

However, Capt Max Heron (REME) and colleagues from 5 Force Support Battalion, REME are evaluating its potential in the field after purchasing a set of kit using the innovation fund.

“Our sub-unit focuses on power-pack repair and we’re looking at how to use this equipment to train new soldiers,” explained the officer.

“Currently, we have to remove a

power-pack from our stock to do that so using this method could potentially save the Army thousands of pounds every year.

“In addition, we think it may be utilised by qualified vehicle mechanics doing repair jobs forward.

“When they require some assistance but have no subject matter expert present, this kit’s heads-up display can be used to help them through the repair.

“It has lots of potential but we are only scratching the surface of it at the moment.”

● Out in the field, the lightweight field generator (LFG) is a relatively noisy and thirsty beast.

So personnel from 4th Infantry Brigade are experimenting with a power cell lent to them by a trusted industry supplier that uses a reaction between methanol and distilled water to function.

WO1 Ashley Crampton (REME) tried the kit out when he deployed to Mali with The Light Dragoons earlier this year, with further evaluations planned.

“We are running it alongside the LFG to see what the benefits are,” explained the senior NCO.

“It can’t provide the surge in power the LFG can, but it meets most of our needs – radios, sat boxes, phones or laptops.

“There are no moving parts so no maintenance is required, it’s light at just 27kg, runs virtually silently, and has a very small heat signature.

“It will run for three-and-a-half days without a refill, but in Mali we used it in conjunction with solar panels and it went for eight days.”

By contrast, the LFG uses a litre of diesel an hour.

“This kit fits into the more expeditionary posture the Army will be taking in the future,” he added.

“It runs virtually silently”



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“
For recce it's better
than a quad bike
”

> Electric motorbike

Electric motorbike
undergoing official
trials with the
Australian Army

● Troops from 1st Battalion, The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment are exploring the significant potential of electric motorbikes.

“Normally, we'd have a Land Rover Fitted for Radio vehicle but you are limited as to where you can place that – if you want to go up a mountain, for example,” explained Capt Connor Lister (Lancs).

“You can pull radios out of it, but then it's how far that person can walk with 100 kilos of kit.

“With this, we can establish comms in a wider variety of places without the same burden. And for recce, it's better than a quad bike because it's nearly silent.

“This model can have a three-hour duration depending on how hard it's ridden. We have tried it out in the Peak District but not used it on a proper exercise yet.

“However, we are taking it to Sennybridge in January and on Wessex Storm in February to see what else it can do – maybe looking to explore its potential in a command and control role, and what else it's useful for at section or platoon level.”



> Robot arm



● “We have been evaluating an industry-supplied collaborative robot – so-called because it works closely with people – to see how it could reduce the number of mundane tasks and free personnel to do more productive duties,” Lt Nick Coleing (REME) told *Soldier*.

“Firms such as Amazon use these to pack and move boxes around so it's that level of task I envisage it doing for us.

“It's early days but basic vehicle checks are a long-term possibility, and we are thinking maybe it could help supply 3D printed engine parts in the field.

“An engine component might have an eight-hour print cycle so this could load and unload the printer over a 24-hour period, supplying three parts a day with no personnel required to be present.”

“

A

LOT of people struggled during Covid – they realised life is too short to be stuck indoors,” Col Neil Wilson tells *Soldier* as he reflects on the vital role adventurous training plays within the Army.

As Commander Adventurous Training Group, he reveals that courses staged at centres and wings across the country are being met with huge demand as personnel, and commanding officers, acknowledge the value that comes from being tested in challenging, outdoor pursuits.

“We are between five and ten times oversubscribed,” he continues. “We started gliding again last summer, after the first lockdown, and had four courses of 12 people – we received around 500 applicants.

“Soldiers understand this is good for their mental health and that it is part of ‘the offer’. By not having a go it is almost like refusing part of your pay.

“Our problem is that we lack capacity – even our least popular activity, caving, is twice oversubscribed.

“That is just for our courses. In July and August, we

had an unprecedented level of applications for expeditions. Around 90 per cent of those were UK-based as they could not get abroad at the time, and that appetite has not dropped off.

“Now we are in the winter season we have Alpine and Nordic requests filling our inboxes every day.

“We were oversubscribed before Covid, but that demand has gone up even further now restrictions have eased.”

While activities such as climbing, mountain biking, caving and kayaking offer the perfect tonic to the gloom of the past 18 months, the benefits of adventurous training run much deeper than a post-pandemic pick-me-up.

It is about using these disciplines to develop a soldier’s leadership and resilience skills, while also teaching them about the Army’s values and standards in a practical setting.

All of this can then be transferred from a challenging week in a controlled environment to the pressures of the day job.

“If they can get a qualification to paddle down a river or climb a rockface that is great, but this is about enhancing those leadership and resilience skills and the ability to withstand shock,” Col Wilson continues.

“That can be extreme in a battle situation, but for others who

Courses in high demand as AT remains relevant as ever

APPETITE FOR

are new to the Army it may come from the fact they are away from home for the first time with no Wi-Fi.

“People have comfort, stretch and panic zones – we want them in the stretch zone as this is where we can develop the growth mindset of an individual.

“For example, a group is out on a mountain bike trail, and they stop short of a rocky mud patch. They give it a go but then come a cropper.

“They think about taking a slightly different line and adjusting their position on the bike. They go again and succeed – this helps to develop that growth mindset.

“So when they come across a challenge on exercise or operations, they are then minded to give it a go – we all have more in us than we think.

“It is about the controlled exposure to risk – if there’s no risk, it isn’t adventurous training.”

There is no shortage of peril in the activities *Soldier* witnesses during our visit to the Scottish Highlands.

The stunning backdrop forms the ideal staging post for foundation courses in mountain biking, rock climbing and kayaking – all of which are fully loaded with eager personnel who are determined to test themselves.

WO2 Chris White (RAPTC), the sergeant major at Army Adventurous Training Wing Inverness, says the situation here mirrors that across the group, with many of these pursuits being oversubscribed.

“Scotland is a long way to come but once units get here, they are committed to achieving some really good outputs by the end of the courses,” he adds.

“They need to invest in getting guys away and not worry about the taskings that may come in.

“I think adventurous training is now more relevant

than ever, especially with the drawing back of operations and big exercises – soldiers have to be doing something.”

It is a sentiment that is shared by Col Wilson, who says the Service’s model is the envy of its Nato allies.

“Since Covid restrictions relaxed I’ve been approached by three other armies who are keen to learn more about what we do,” he adds.

“We are the only force in the world to deliver AT in this manner and those Nato countries now want to take a closer look at how we develop our people.

“We see this as being very important and it’s what makes the British soldier a cut above the rest.

“People pay a fortune to do this kind of thing on civvy street and that’s why I see AT as being so integral to the Army offer.

“Defence Connect has been brilliant for us. Our site is bombarded daily and a private soldier, with permission from his or her chain of command, can book himself on a course within ten minutes from their mobile phone.

“We have worked so hard to improve the accessibility of AT and the spread of activities we have, from gliding to caving, means there is something for everyone.”

Read on for a view from the ground in Inverness...»

ADVENTURE



HEADQUARTERS
ARMY ADVENTUROUS TRAINING WING
INVERNESS

COPING ON THE CRAGS

Climbers scale new heights in the Cairngorms

STARING up at Kingussie Crag, personnel from the North West Officer Training Regiment make a final check of their kit before starting their ascent.

Their efforts come in the middle of the week-long rock climbing foundation course and the setting provides a stern test of the skills they have learnt so far.

For some, summoning the courage to reach the halfway point of the climb represents a win, while others forge on to the top before confidently abseiling back down.

WO2 White says that on a typical course around 90 per cent of students will not have climbed before but the benefits that come from the challenges they face are considerable.

"This is massive in terms of coping strategies," he explains. "Some soldiers just take it in their stride, but for others it is pretty out there.

"A lot of people are scared of heights or falling, so by being off the ground you are out of your comfort zone straight away.

"There is also a bit of teamwork involved and it is a huge trust exercise as the climber has to rely on a belayer. So it is a great activity in terms of AT."

Instructor LCpl Dan Brafield (Rifles) watches on intently from the ground, offering words of advice should they be needed.

The 27-year-old Reservist is on a nine-month posting to Inverness and provides a welcome military presence on the wing's teaching team.

"In AT we want to put people in stressful situations," he says. "In terms of climbing, it is quite easy and obvious how

we can do that.

"We give them challenges on the rockface and talk about different coping mechanisms. At the end of the week we relate that back to the day job and how they can deal with similar situations in future.

"It is the same with leadership. I will ask them to highlight the styles of leadership I have shown and ask, 'is that appropriate?'. Again, we look at whether that is something they can take away.

"There is an element of risk, but it is very controlled – they are tied on and if they do fall, it will not be very far.

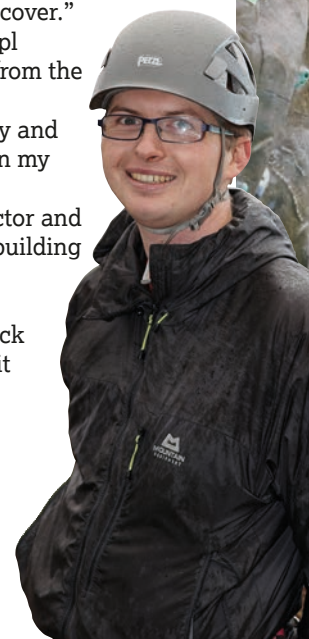
"It also gives an opportunity for people to fail. In the wider Army soldiers perhaps feel as if they cannot make mistakes, but we encourage that – it's about how they recover."

While primarily deployed to help others, LCpl Brafield (pictured right) has also gained a lot from the posting in terms of personal development.

"I feel very fortunate to have this opportunity and it has given me a junior NCO role quite early in my career," he adds.

"I've also managed to gain my kayak instructor and mountain bike trainer qualifications, and I'm building towards my summer mountain leader.

"My battalion has given me the chance to come here and when I'm finished, I can go back and deliver up to four different activities – so it benefits everyone."



Rockface reflections



Name: Jessica Collard
Rank: OCdt
Age: 20
Unit: Liverpool UOTC

What were your motivations for coming on this course?

I've been bouldering a few times and always wanted to do AT, but I've not had the chance over the past couple of years due to Covid. I was keen to do something before my Reserve commission and as soon as this came up, I jumped at it straight away. I would have been happy to do anything but climbing is the best.

How would you describe the experience?

On my first day I was a bit nervous, but I did a big climb by myself the following day. You get a pump from it and there's a feeling of elation when you reach the top, look down and think about how far you've come and the moves you've made. It's also nice to see the other climbers doing well.

Why is it important for the Army to offer AT?

If you're stuck in a job for a long time, you can get tunnel vision. The chance to do things like this is so valuable. »

Name: Edward Rumney
Rank: OCdt
Age: 21
Unit: Manchester and Salford UOTC

Why were you keen to do the climbing course?

We have an indoor climbing wall at our unit, but I do not have the qualifications to use it. If I complete this, and my supervisor course, I will be able to take people on it. I've climbed for a year or so now, but this is the most outdoor experience I've had.

What do you enjoy about the pursuit?

It is the solo effort – I like team sports, but it is nice to do something on your own. It is a real test and if you're not slipping down, you're not going hard enough. It can be terrifying to new people and if it doesn't push you out of your comfort zone, I don't know what will.

Why is it important for the Army to offer AT?

Being a soldier is a hard job and you need some benefits; opportunities like this make it worth it.



HEADQUARTERS
 ARMY ADVENTUROUS TRAINING WING
 INVERNESS

TRAILBLAZERS

Personnel head off road in mountain biking test

THE rolling hillside is perfectly reflected in the tranquil waters of Loch Morlich on a bright autumnal morning as personnel from 4th Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Scotland take to the saddle.

It is the fourth day of their mountain biking foundation course, and they pedal along the shoreline before making their way into the surrounding pine forest, where technical challenges and downhill tests await.

It all seems calm enough, but WO2 White insists it is anything but.

“Mountain biking is the most high-risk activity we have,” he explains. “A lot of the trails they’ll do are wild trails, with long journeys and technical elements.

“Complacency can be an issue; you can switch off or suffer from fatigue, but it is really well managed and there are very few injuries.

“Some days are short, with less distance and more teaching,



Tales from the trails

Name: Brandon Waters

Rank: Hldr

Unit: 4 Scots

How did you end up on the course?

I volunteered to come here – I was well up for it. I did not have much experience of mountain bikes, but I enjoy riding BMX bikes and this has

been great fun.

How has the week progressed?

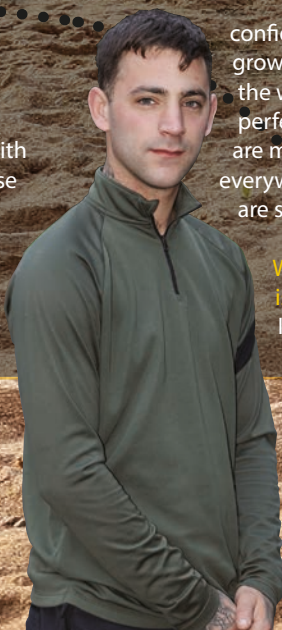
The first day starts with an introductory phase but as the days go on you get more confident – riding trails and going down hills. Your

confidence and skills grow throughout the week. This is the perfect setting, there are mountain bike trails everywhere and the views are stunning.

Why do you think AT is important?

It lets you try new

experiences, and you find yourself doing more than you thought you could. I joined up during Covid and there were no opportunities to do AT during my training. Once this came up, I took it straight away.



and others have more riding and less instruction.

"It is phenomenal up here and we have great access in Scotland. In England and Wales, it is more controlled.

"We are not the only wing delivering mountain biking, but I would say this is the prime centre."

Having completed a mountain bike course earlier in his Service career, Cpl Marc Ferguson says it was an obvious choice when it came to selecting the discipline he and his fellow personnel would undertake when an opportunity for AT arose at their unit.

"I enjoyed it and we decided to come here as it is such a nice part of the country," he adds.

"Mountain biking pushes you out of your comfort zone. It also gives the blokes some downtime, where they can learn from a civvy and experience a different environment.

"Whatever AT you do, a certain skill level is required, and it doesn't matter what rank you are or how long you

have served – you are all in one group.

"You learn the same skills together and it is an opportunity to see the potential in younger personnel.

"We have two new soldiers here with us this week. They have come in and given feedback and coaching to those who have not necessarily picked it up, which has been great to see."

The NCO also believes that AT is a welcome distraction from unit business, where the tempo is as busy as ever.

"The pace of life is full of curve balls and the forecast of events is almost null and void," he adds. "If each battalion allocated one week a month, where the onus is on a young private to book an AT course, it would be a huge advantage.

"For us, one of the biggest problems is the lack of activities in barracks. On the back of this, I've heard a couple of lads say they are going out to buy a bike and give themselves a hobby. Having come here they know what limits they can push."

“
We are the only
force in the world
to deliver AT in
this manner
”

Name: Harri Wade

Rank: Hldr

Unit: 4 Scots

How did you end up on the course?

I was told I was going mountain biking and was excited to come here to do it. I went on AT during my training, but I haven't had the chance to do

this activity before.

How has the week progressed?

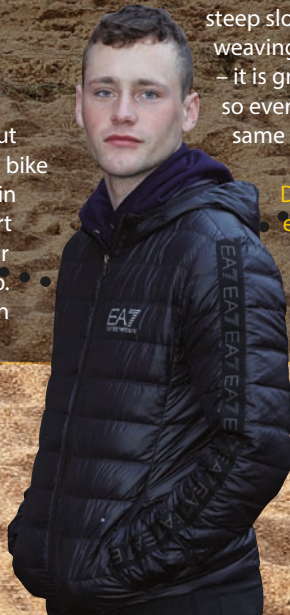
At the start it's about getting used to the bike and how to maintain it, but then you start to do trails and your confidence goes up. You are going down

steep slopes and drops and weaving in and out of trees – it is great fun. It builds up so everyone is doing the same things together.

Do you think this experience will help you in the day job?

I'm new to the battalion, I've only

been here a few weeks, so it has been a great way to bond with some of the guys. It is only going to increase my confidence and team skills. We've been working together on things like navigation and if we get lost it is down to the group to verify where we are so they are great lessons to learn for military life.



FULL FORCE

Rowers target ocean record as Atlantic
adventure looms



“We know what’s coming and we are in a good place”



AT, sleep, row, repeat. It sounds simple enough, but the reality of the task facing the Army’s Force Atlantic crew as they embark on the world’s toughest rowing race will be anything but. Starting this month at La Gomera, in the Canary Islands, the Talisker Whisky Challenge sees entrants battle sleep deprivation, salt sores and physical extremes – as well as a host of weather fronts – in their attempt to reach the Antiguan finish line in the quickest time possible.

The 3,000-mile voyage was successfully navigated by the Service’s first official entry – a team from AFC Harrogate – in 2019 and now it is the turn of the Royal Army Physical Training Corps to shine.

Having helped teach his predecessors the mechanics of rowing as part of their build-up, Capt Scott Pollock’s interest in attempting the feat himself started to grow.

His initial focus was on forming an all-male outfit capable of smashing the race’s four-man crew record, but when he learnt of WO1 Victoria Blackburn’s ambitions to compete he swiftly changed course.

Having agreed to enter a mixed-sex boat the duo appealed to their corps counterparts for recruits. SSgt Phil Welch and Sgt Laura Barrigan answered the call and, fast forward more than 18 months, they are ready for departure.

“You can be fit, strong and mentally robust, but if you don’t work as a unit, it means »



» nothing,” Capt Pollock (pictured right) said as he reflected on the challenge to come.

“It’s possible to get through without any training as you get fitter every day you are in the boat. The most important thing is how the team dynamic holds up.

“There will be dark times, but we’ve had 18 months to research and develop our processes – we know what’s coming and I think we are in a good place to accept and deal with that.”

Despite forming as the first national lockdown took hold in March 2020, Capt Pollock insisted team preparations had not been hampered by Covid, with regular Zoom meetings proving crucial in the early stages.

Their skills as a crew were then tested with two exercises off the coast of Skye before final preparations were carried out at Thorney Island prior to their boat being shipped to the start line.

“The aspiration was to go and find the most challenging conditions we could, but what we got was the complete opposite,” the officer said of their first trip to Skye.

“We would row for four or five hours and then come back in, but on the second time there was no stopping – it was about rowing and sleeping, experiencing the elements, and getting into the routine of being at sea.

“The sooner you get used to that, the



Meet the crew

The RAPTC team share their thoughts on what lies in wait...

Laura Barrigan

Rank: Sgt

Age: 29

Army background: Clarinet player in the Royal Corps of Army Music before transferring three years ago. Deployed to Afghanistan to mentor Afghan PTIs

How did you get involved?

I started rowing in 2016 but had never heard of this until Vicky put a message out looking for crew members. I had a quick look and thought it sounded good. I love a challenge and if someone says I can't do something, I'll do it – I must always have something to aim for.

How difficult has it been so far?

It has been a learning curve. As well as being a rower I'm in charge of the team's

media, which means I've had to learn all about Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. We've also completed courses in areas such as navigation and these are life skills to take forward. I loved going up to Skye though, I put my out-of-office on and work was gone. We could just do our thing and go rowing.

What will be the biggest challenge at sea?

The weather – you cannot go for a 40-day record in storms.

Other than a new record, what does the Force Atlantic crew hope to achieve in this challenge?

The bigger picture is the fact we want to show this is totally possible for anyone – the next crew to attempt the race after us will be all female, and that is amazing.

Victoria Blackburn

Rank: WO1

Age: 39

Army background: Served for 20 years, initially with the Royal Military Police, before transferring ten years ago

How did you get involved?

I had seen documentaries about two female crews and wanted to put forward an all-female team of my own. Then, a few weeks later, I received a Facebook message from Capt Pollock asking if I wanted to join forces with him, and it went from there.

How will your background help in the challenge to come?

I'm physically fit and have competed in indoor rowing events at British and world level. I've seen the Talisker Whisky Challenge and have read all about it – I wanted to challenge myself further and it all came together.

Tell us about the build-up



Talisker in numbers

3,000

miles from the start point in La Gomera, in the Canary Islands, to the finish line in English Harbour, Antigua



10

litres of water that will be drunk per person, per day



1m

calories that will be consumed by the rowers during their voyage



5-7

days before a team member has to enter the water and clean the boat's hull

36

teams taking part, ranging from single rowers to crews of five. Fellow military entrants include the Royal Engineers and Royal Air Force



8.5

length of the Force Atlantic boat, in metres. It has two cabins for rest and recovery

more successful you will be.

"I thought the storms would be my worst fear, and they are still a concern, but now we have faced and dealt with them we are in a really good position."

While successfully navigating the punishing route is their primary goal, the personnel have set themselves the additional target of beating the current mixed-sex record of 42 days.

They will row in pairs in a two-hours-on, two-hours-off round-the-clock rota and if all goes to plan they hope to complete the voyage in 40 days.

"That would be great, but it's something we cannot really control," Capt Pollock continued.

"The key thing is highlighting the fact that this opportunity exists as not a lot of people know about it.

"Hopefully we are raising the profile so more personnel can get on board in future – rowing experience is not vital.

"It is an accessible challenge for all. Yes, there will be some discomfort, but it is achievable." ■

● The Force Atlantic team hope to raise £30,000 for The Royal British Legion by completing the challenge. Visit forceatlantic.com to donate to the cause and search [@forceatlantic](https://twitter.com/forceatlantic) on social media for regular updates on their progress

to the race

The hardest part was getting the campaign off the ground. You can normally get up in the morning and fit the physical training in before work. You'd then finish at 1700, and do another six hours of Force Atlantic stuff. We've practised our routine and did four days of two-hours-on, two-hours-off rowing – we just don't know how we'll feel after another 36 days of that.

What are the biggest tests you'll face at sea?

We know the waves will be scary and getting in the water to clean the hull will be a worry. We will also have to look after our main contact points – such as hands and feet – to try to avoid blistering. We are four strong individuals, but it is important we support each other and not let anyone down.



Phil Welch

Rank: SSgt

Age: 37

Army background: Served for almost 20 years, including nine years in the Royal Engineers before transferring in 2011

How did you get involved?

I've never been one to shy away from a challenge. I have a background in indoor rowing and did a charity challenge in aid of my late brother, Steven Scott, in which I rowed 100 miles in the quickest time possible – I did it in 13hr 50min. In this job I'm always interested in how far I can push myself and then the opportunity of a lifetime came along. I was one of the first to see the

message about forming a crew and said straight away that I'd do it.

Had you heard of the Talisker Whisky Challenge before signing up?

I knew about ocean rowing, but not the challenge itself – I knew it was an opportunity to do something that was far from straight forward. As PT Corps instructors fitness is a given, so the focus has been on training and achieving the qualifications we need in areas such as seamanship, navigation, first aid and sea survival.

What are your thoughts on the potential conditions you will face?

We can only control what we can – if we

get hit by four or five days of bad weather it will impact on what we need to do. We have a target of breaking a world record, but the most important thing is that we all get across safely.

How will you cope with the mental demands of the task ahead?

You have to look at the bigger picture. If I don't perform it is not just me I'm letting down – it is the whole team. I also have three children who have lived this for 18 months, so I have to keep going for them.



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'Uniform grant needs rebooting'

WHILE I was still in training at Royal Military Academy Sandhurst my regiment informed me I would have to buy their number one dress uniform.

It was explained that blues are potentially more important than mess dress because lieutenants are required to wear them for certain duties, formal dinners and other important events.

But I was shocked to discover that the purchase cost is not covered by the uniform grant.

I was particularly annoyed because a friend of mine who was posted to Sandhurst as an instructor received a grant for his number one kit.

I raised this during my training and was told my regiment couldn't force me to buy the number one uniform and that if I was required to dress smartly I could wear brown service dress.

But the adjutant at my regiment said this was not the case and blues were definitely required.

I am now more than a thousand pounds out of pocket and it's obvious the uniform grant does not account for the fact that purchasing this kit is effectively mandatory for personnel at some units.

The scheme should be updated to accommodate this – especially as staff at Sandhurst receive funds for their blues and they are required to wear it on fewer occasions than many young officers.

I also believe the failure of the uniform grant to meet our needs exacerbates the class divide in the Army by pricing out some people from joining certain regiments. – **Name and address supplied**

Lt Col (Retd) Kestrel Simson, Ceremonial Policy and Plans, Home Command, replies: The initial outfit grant allows newly-commissioned officers to purchase regimental uniforms and accoutrements the Army requires them to have but which are uneconomic to provide as issued items.

Regulations state that number two dress is the standard parade wear for all officers and soldiers and is to be worn for daytime parades, while number ten mess dress is for evening duties as directed by the commanding officer.

Because there is a Service requirement to wear these two uniforms, the grant provides those elements of each uniform that cannot be issued and the amount varies for each regiment or corps.

Number one dress is the Army's ceremonial uniform and there is additional funding for those officers who are required to take part in regular formal ceremonial events.

Typically, these are senior officers and personal staff, officers on public duties in London, permanent staff at Sandhurst and defence attaches working abroad, among others.

In some regimental standing orders blues are to be worn for certain occasions, but this is only unit direction. Army policy does not stipulate that this must be worn for these duties and, therefore, it cannot provide funding for them.

This is a matter for you to raise with your commanding officer.

“ I am a thousand pounds out of pocket ”

Talkback

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

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MARRIED BIAS?

● UNDER current policy the over-37 package is for married personnel only.

Why is that the case, and are there any plans for it to be extended to those soldiers like me who own their own homes where they have parental responsibilities, but are either divorced or separated? – **WO2 David Mahoney, REME**

Col Louise Green, Army Pay Colonel, replies: The over-37 provision is an Army-only policy and individuals who are personal status category one (married or in a civil partnership) and two (dependent children for which the soldier is the prime carer) are eligible for it.

Other qualifying criteria includes a requirement to be in Regular service, or a homeowner or householder (renting privately).

Where you have one or more children but are not considered the prime carer (and therefore you are not classed as category two) you are unable to access the provision, unfortunately.

This is because the genesis of it is to permit a soldier to settle his or her family in the final years of their career and serve unaccompanied from their spouse.

Policy is currently being developed as part of the future accommodation model (FAM). One potential element of this is called “maintain own home”, where the current approach to single living accommodation waivers – including the over-37 provision – will likely be replaced with an allowance.

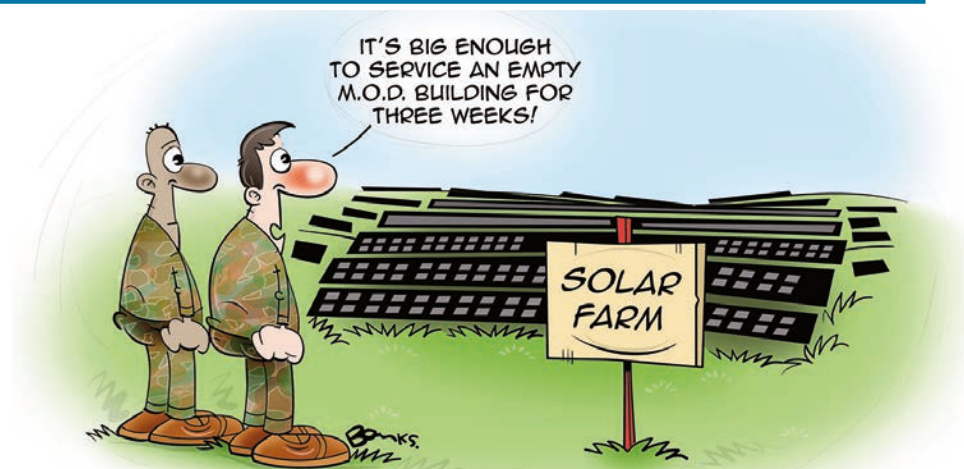
The detail is still being developed and FAM policy is expected to be implemented beyond the pilot sites in 2023.

GOT A GRIPE?

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‘Just how green are we really?’

WHILE the MoD says it is embracing green technology, solar farms and the like, I remain appalled by the sheer waste of energy in defence establishments.

Lights are often left on during the night or all weekend in empty buildings, including classrooms and messes, and hot water taps are even left running at times.

The attitude of far too many personnel is ‘well, it’s not my money’.

As well as saving cash, turning off lights when not in use and not wasting hot water will make a significant contribution to reducing climate change and global warming.

Even turning off computer monitor screens at night would save valuable electricity and funds.

In a similar way, far too many MoD

radiators still do not have working thermostats and so are on full blast right through the winter.

The method used to control heat by many is to open windows and let all the heat out. Even when thermostats are fitted, some individuals seem to have no idea they can turn them down.

The general attitude is just about summed up by what I saw recently – an MoD employee with the word “Eco” plastered across the back of his vehicle, sitting in a car park with his engine running for more than an hour on a mild summer afternoon.

Not wasting resources and energy is at least as important as declaring we are going green if we are to truly battle climate change. – **Name and address supplied**

“I’m appalled by the waste”

CONFUSION OVER EDUCATION PROVIDER’S RULES

● I AM applying to do a postgraduate diploma in global health and infectious diseases, which is a four-year, part-time online course.

It costs £2,750 per year, so my intent is to use three enhanced learning credits (ELC) – the full £2,000 each time – for the first three years and pay the remainder of it myself.

My Army Education Centre says I can do this, although each individual year needs to be listed on the website of the credit scheme provider, ELCAS. But they told me they could not split their course listings to permit more than one credit to be used – I could only use one in total for the entire course.

However, **JSP 822** clearly says that, “ELC funds may be directed at one learning purpose (such as successive years of study towards a qualification)”. It also says that splitting a course is only against the rules if the course is to be completed in one financial year, which this isn’t. So why is ELCAS saying this? – **Sgt Matthew Ellis, RAMC**

Maj Amanda Willcox-Jones, Education Branch, Army Personnel Services Group, replies: If the part-time course you are attending is designed to be done over successive years, you may use one ELC per financial year.

You will need to ask the learning provider to register this part-time version of the course onto ELCAS for you to be able to apply.

Alternatively, if the same course is listed on the ELCAS website as full-time and the provider can supply you with documentary evidence showing that the course can be completed part-time, how many years it will take, and details of the reduced fee associated with it, the education centre staff can reduce the course fee, annotating comments on your claim to show the course is being studied part-time over however many years.

BULLET POINTS

Bite-sized data to keep you in the know



CAREERS

The Recruit for Spouses Career Academy has joined forces with Virgin Red to offer a free mentoring programme to military spouses. Mentors from the company will include employees from areas such as business development and portfolio management. For more information about the initiative visit recruitforspouses.co.uk/spouses/career-academy

Veterans into Logistics CIC is a not-for-profit organisation based in Greater Manchester dedicated to training and supporting ex-military personnel for new careers within the transport and logistics industry. Visit veteransintologistics.org.uk

Forces Families Jobs is a platform designed to help partners into meaningful employment. Visit forcesfamiliesjobs.co.uk

Sibylline, a leading intelligence and geopolitical risk firm, is offering ten scholarship places to recent Service leavers on their extended learning programme. The free online course is designed to take knowledge of intelligence and extend it to the corporate world. It will introduce students to best practice for working in the private sector and will include mentoring from CEO and British Army Reservist, Maj Justin Crump (RWxY). To apply for the course, which starts next month, visit sibylline.co.uk



COMPETITIONS

October Spinalines winner: Pauline Daniels, Lincoln

October HOAY winner: Capt Nigel Orrell, Worthy Down, Winchester



DIARY

December 12: Soldier Stories: Walter Tull. Meet characters, both real and imagined, from the Army's past and hear their amazing tales in the National Army Museum galleries. Visit nam.ac.uk

Until December 31: Foe to Friend. National Army Museum exhibition showing how more than one million

British soldiers have lived and served in Germany over the past 75 years. Immerse yourself in their stories and follow their evolution from conquerors and occupiers to allies and friends.

Until January 9, 2022: Generations: Portraits of Holocaust Survivors. In partnership with the Royal Photographic Society, Jewish News, the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust and Dangoor Education, this exhibition at the Imperial War Museum showcases works from 12 contemporary photographers. The images capture the special connections between Holocaust survivors and the younger generations of their families.

Until further notice: World War 2: War Stories – an exhibition at The Tank Museum telling the story of the Royal Armoured Corps. Visit tankmuseum.org for more information and opening times.



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armybirding.org.uk

Army Welfare Service:
01904 882053;
army.mod.uk/welfare-support

Big White Wall, now Togetherall:
togetherall.com

Blesma, The Limbless Veterans:
020 8590 1124;
blesma.org

Blind Veterans UK:
(formerly St Dunstan's)
020 7723 5021;
blindveterans.org.uk

Care After Combat:
careaftercombat.org

Career Transition Partnership:
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Centre for Veterans Health, King Edward VII Hospital:
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Combat Stress:
0800 323 4444;
combatstress.org.uk

Defence Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination 24/7 Helpline:
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Erskine:
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erskine.org.uk

Family Escort Service:
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Felix Fund – the bomb disposal charity:
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felixfund.org.uk

Forcesline:
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Germany – 0800 1827 395;
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Forces Pension Society:
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forcespensiosociety.org

Help for Heroes:
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helpforheroes.org.uk

Heroes Welcome:
heroeswelcome.co.uk

HighGround:
highground-uk.org.uk
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Humanist, Atheist and Non-religious in Defence Network:
defencehumanists.org.uk

Joint Service Housing Advice Office:
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Medal Office:
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Mutual Support (multiple sclerosis group):
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National Gulf Veterans' and Families' Association Office:
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ngvfa.org.uk

PoppyScotland:
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poppyscotland.org.uk

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rfea.org.uk

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remount.net

Royal British Legion:
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britishlegion.org.uk

Royal British Legion Scotland:
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RBL Industries Vocational Assessment Centre:
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rbli.co.uk

Scottish Veterans' Residences:
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svronline.org

Single Persons Accommodation Centre for the Ex-Services:
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spaces.org.uk

Speak Out – the Army's confidential bullying, harassment and discrimination helpline:
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SSAFA:
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ssafa.org.uk

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The Not Forgotten Association:
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nfassociation.org

The Poppy Factory:
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poppyfactory.org

The Royal Star and Garter Homes:
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starandgarter.org

The Veterans Charity:
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info@veteranscharity.org.uk

Troop Aid:
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uk4u Thanks!:
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Veterans Welfare Service:
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REUNIONS

The Cheshire Yeomanry Association is planning a dinner in Chester on April 23, 2022 to mark the outfit's formation 225 years ago. Email kingsbr@gmail.com for info.



ROADSHOWS

The Forces Pension Society
— an independent, not-for-profit

membership funded organisation that acts as a pension watchdog — is staging a number of roadshows. Log on to forcespensionsociety.org/news-events/events for more information about the events, including dates.

The Army Engagement Team has resumed face-to-face events. For further information email rc-aeg-mailbox@mod.gov.uk
The next roadshows are:

Jan 25 — Slough

Jan 27 — Bedford

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TEN details have been changed in this picture of an Army Air Corps Apache attack helicopter taking part in Exercise Khanjar Oman.

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

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REVIEWS

PICK OF THE MONTH:

Train Sim World 2: Rush Hour

Add-on extends the virtual train set

► THE Army has traditionally sported some capable professionals where railways are concerned – working under the Royal Logistic Corps, they have made a huge difference to previous ops.

The troops – all skilled in disciplines from driving to track repair – have often proved a force multiplier, moving personnel and vehicles around theatre en masse.

Back in the mid-2000s, when there were Regular sub-units dedicated to the trade, commanders used the likes of the now clunky-looking *Microsoft Train Simulator* to teach cab discipline. With today's PCs continuing to grow in processing power, however, the digital experience has moved on

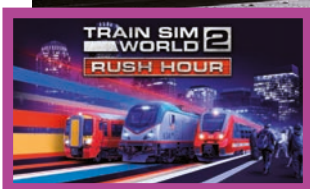


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BOOKS

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MUSIC



to become very real indeed.

Rush Hour – the latest downloadable content addition for *Train Sim World 2* – is a case in point. Effectively upping the ante for virtual drivers already familiar with the base game released last year, the pack plots three new routes while introducing extra rolling stock – all while replicating a hectic operating environment.

Each setting offers a unique experience – the USA sees players working for Amtrak on the Boston-Providence line while Dresden, eastern Germany, is the area of choice for those opting for a tour with Deutsche Bahn. Players preferring to stay closer to home face tasks between London Victoria and Brighton.

Each of the three – which are available individually, as a pack or with a deluxe bundle that includes the base game and other extras – feature a raft of testing scenarios. After a thorough tutorial boxing off the in-cab systems, newcomers will find themselves out on their own riding a busy main line.

They will also discover that developer Dovetail Games has used the new content as an opportunity to introduce several refinements to the core title's underpinnings. These include more populated platforms and a plethora of AI-controlled rolling stock hurtling past at regular intervals, both of them adding to the frenetic atmosphere.

Specialist simulations are not to everyone's taste and have often been derided by hardcore gamers. But they have certainly become big business and last year's port of *Train Sim World 2* to Xbox and PlayStation suggests these titles have more of a mainstream audience than some would believe.

While *Rush Hour* will clearly appeal to enthusiasts, there is plenty here to cater for those more generally interested in simulation. Each train and line provide a new learning experience and a multitude of taskings offer a

decent level of longevity.

The other extra content in the series is also well worth a look, with notable examples including the Southeastern High-Speed package – covering a swathe of Kent – and the heavy freight ops of the Tees Valley Line.

Rush Hour is yet another milestone in an impressive project – a passionate team are consistently delivering the goods in authenticity and realism.

Perhaps a foray into military rail ops would be a worthy consideration in future. ■

VERDICT:

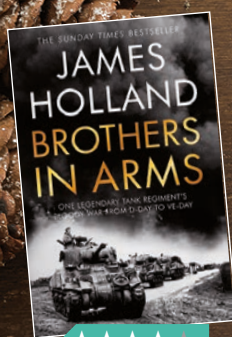
PC simulation at its best

★★★★★

REVIEW: CLIFF CASWELL, *SOLDIER*

Christmas crackers

Short of gift ideas for the hard-to-buy-for soldier in your life? Look no further, with our book review team's round-up of the latest stocking-worthy releases...



Brothers in Arms

by James Holland

HOLLAND'S latest offering sees him following one of the British Army's Territorial armoured cavalry regiments in the final year of the struggle against Nazi Germany. An old hand at such in-depth analysis, he intimately details the Sherwood Rangers' experiences, bringing to life the sometimes thrilling, often deeply moving heroism of ordinary men in an extraordinary situation. From their landing at Gold Beach to becoming the first British formation to cross the Rhine, the narrative engrosses the reader in the sights and smells of a cavalry unit in modern war. Perhaps most importantly, this book recognises those brave officers and soldiers who formed the backbone of this professional Reservist unit, punching with the best of the British Army.

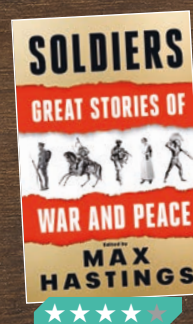
Maj Sven Gronn, R Signals

Anatomy of a Nation

by Dominic Selwood

BILLED as a history of British identity in 50 documents, this stimulating book is a hymn to "sustained creativity" and with chapters on medieval song, William Blake's *Jerusalem* and the account of the *Lady Chatterley's Lover* trial, one can say justly so. Sections on Northern Ireland and the Falklands War are judicious, balanced and well-argued. But elsewhere, Churchill is accused of racism, a questionable position given that few men born before the 1950s could escape charges of prejudice by today's standards. However, the author's research is wide and varied; his writing is clear and lively. The documents provide hooks on which he hangs his themes in this ambitious, episodic story, which mostly works well.

Rodney Atwood, military historian



Soldiers

by Max Hastings

PART of the appeal of Hastings' approach to military history is that he always puts people front and centre. This anthology of "great stories of war and peace" spans millennia, from biblical battles through to modern times – via such legendary leaders as Alexander the Great, Queen Boudicca and the Duke of Wellington, and scores of more obscure figures along the way. It's a great book to dip in and out of and discover interesting nuggets to inspire further reading.

Becky Clark, Soldier

GAMES RELEASES



G-Darius HD

Switch and PS4

NEARLY a quarter of a century after it first appeared, this high-octane arcade shoot 'em up has undergone a spruce up for the modern console market. The side-scrolling blaster puts players in the seat of a fighter with an unusual ability to capture enemy assets and turn them against a legion of foes. As far as shooters go, *G-Darius* is a complex outing, requiring brains and brawn to play well. It also boasts beautiful Japanese artwork matched with an atmospheric dance music soundtrack. Although at £25 there is not a vast amount of longevity for the asking price, this is nonetheless a very solid title.

Cliff Caswell, Soldier



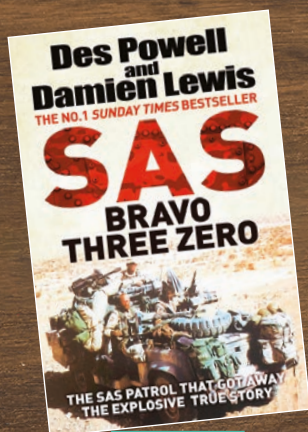
NBA 2K22

All formats

BASKETBALL fans will be in heaven with this latest incarnation of the sport's digital offering. With a full line-up of US players, kit and branding, gamers can contest on-court clashes with the finest in the league to their heart's content as well as embarking on management and career options if they want to venture deeper into the scene. Graphics are outstanding and tunes care of some decent artists add to the overall atmosphere. *Soldier* sampled the Switch version and the game does not disappoint, even in handheld mode. *NBA 2K22* is a must-have for virtual slam-dunkers.

Cliff Caswell, Soldier





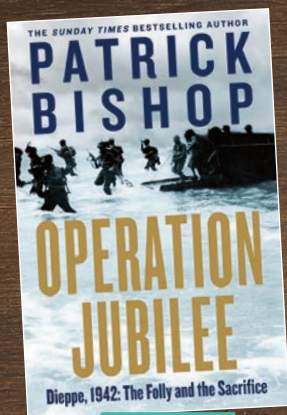
★★★★★

Bravo Three Zero

by Des Powell and Damien Lewis

MOST will be familiar with Andy McNab's account of the Bravo Two Zero mission during the First Gulf War, in which he also mentions Bravo One Zero. Well, there was a third patrol and this is their story. Unlike its counterparts, Bravo Three Zero was vehicle borne and more successful, but still beset by poor intelligence, equipment and weapons. All in all, this is a compelling tale of the SAS getting the mission done under extreme circumstances – a worthy closure to this part of the conflict.

Andy Kay, ex-RS



★★★★★

Operation Jubilee

by Patrick Bishop

THE disastrous raid on Dieppe in August 1942 remains one of the most controversial operations of the Second World War. This latest release leads the charge to mark the 80th anniversary of events next summer. It is a workmanlike essay that exposes the planning and mishandling of what was to be, in hindsight, the perfect example of how not to mount a large-scale combined operation against a well-defended port. The resulting carnage – there is no other word for it – is vividly captured in the latter half of the book. It's certainly a frustrating and sobering read that captures the very essence of this catastrophic failure.

Mike Peters, ex-AAC



★★★★★

Peace, War and Whitehall

by Field Marshal Lord Guthrie

THIS is not so much a memoir as a guide to leadership that many young – and not so young – officers and NCOs would do well to read. Having served for more than 40 years, the author describes what he did at certain levels – company commander, battalion CO, and so on, up to chief of the defence staff. Inevitably, considering the rank and role he reached, there is a certain amount of name dropping, but he also mentions guardsmen, NCOs and officers who helped him on his journey. A very good read that shows the character of the man.

Andy Kay, ex-RS



★★★★★

The Folio Book of War Poetry

I FREELY admit I am no expert on poetry, but I sat down to have a quick look at this Folio Society anthology and was quickly hooked. The poems have been chosen by the former poet laureate Andrew Motion, who explains in his introduction the power of war poetry in expressing the emotions and atmosphere of battle. Presented in chronological order, the selection also includes rhymes and songs from the trenches and from different cultures, showing how language and attitudes have changed over time. Bound in a camouflage style design, this beautiful book is a real collector's item.

Sgt Adam Jackson, Para

Want to join
our reviews team?

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PICK OF THE MONTH:

Heavy Elevator

Scottish singer-songwriter Hamish Hawk serves up one of the year's most refreshing surprises

▶ THEY don't make 'em like that anymore. At least they didn't until a certain **Hamish Hawk** came along.

In *Heavy Elevator*, the Edinburgh-born artist has released an album that sounds so un-2021 **Dua Lipa** might just implode.

But this is a good thing – a very good thing indeed (the music, not Dua Lipa imploding).

Evoking the orchestral, grandiose indie-rock of the more interesting peripheries of 90s Britpop and shoegaze, he manages to bring the sound kicking and crooning into the 21st century.

It's an unlikely and thrilling trick.

Hawk was first noticed at uni by Scottish indie scene legend **King Creosote**, releasing two albums in 2014 and 2018.

But by his own admission, *Heavy Elevator* marks a significant step forward in scope and sound, as its heavy rotation on BBC Radio 6 Music would suggest.

Joined and backed by a full band, he told website *Where the Music Meets* that the album embraces its "rougher edges and imperfections" and is "much more interesting and wide-ranging" as a result.

A song title such as *The Mauritian Badminton Doubles Champion, 1973* could sit quite comfortably next to the words "interesting" and "wide-ranging" in the dictionary.

But the song itself somehow manages to exceed even that high bar. A soaring, epic ode to legacy and living a life less ordinary, it leaves you dizzy, delirious and ecstatic. It's a symphonic serotonin surge not seen since **McAlmont and Butler's** *Yes*.

The track's lyrical reference to *Common People* is another navigational touchstone. It's a struggle not to recall **Jarvis Cocker's** witty storytelling and **Pulp's** anthemic melodies as the album unfolds.

"How do you get off if you've never got on?" from *Bakerloo*, *Unbecoming* is a line that Cocker would have undoubtedly swiped for *Different Class* in a heartbeat.

But the album veers off at some welcome tangents too.

Caterpillar judders and jitters with austere energy, reminiscent of the finest *Silent Alarm*-era **Bloc Party**.



Opener *Vivian Comma* throbs with electronic melancholic minimalism, showcasing the album's most potent weapon – Hamish's entrancing, other-worldly voice.

Asked to describe himself in one word, Hawk says "ridiculous."

Ridiculously good might have been closer.

Take this elevator all the way to the top floor and soak up the view. ■

VERDICT:

A contender for 2021's best of lists, and one to watch in 2022

★★★★★

REVIEW: JAMES MORTON, CIVVY

MUSIC RELEASES



King Size Manger Josh Turner

WITH 11 songs – including some familiar festive covers such as *The First Nowell* and *Silent Night* –

King Size Manger promises to give a modern country feel to any yuletide celebrations this year. Some of the tracks have a proudly patriotic tone to them, which isn't surprising considering the American country and gospel singer's Christian upbringing in Nashville. However, this album – the multi-platinum selling artist's first Christmas offering – breathes life into what could easily have been a flat collection of covers. The variety of different tempos within *Away in a Manger* alone is sure to please any fan of the genre. This is certainly worth a listen – and could potentially remain on the car stereo well into the new year.

Sgt Ben Maher, RLC



The Lockdown Sessions Elton John

ITS title might be enough to send grim flashbacks of 2020 convulsing through us all, but

in years to come this collection of upbeat tunes could be enough to have everyone looking back on Covid-19 through Elton's famous rose-tinted specs. From **Stevie Wonder** to **Miley Cyrus**, **Charlie Puth** to **Nicki Minaj**, each track on the album is wildly different from the other – a celebration of the OAP's passion for new music in all its forms. It's hard to view this as a body of work, but in the most part the offering isn't a bad one from one of the world's most enduring musical stars. One to stick on when you're with a bunch of people who can't agree on musical tastes, perhaps.

Sarah Goldthorpe, *Soldier*

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SOLDIER SPORT



« COMEBACK KINGS

THE Army clinched a dramatic victory in rugby union's Under-23 Inter-Services Championships as a last-gasp try saw them defeat the Royal Air Force and lift the trophy. They trailed 28-17 with nine minutes left, but fought back for a famous win. Read more on pages 72-73...



Picture: Denis Boulanger



Picture: Jackie Crowes



A LEAGUE OF THEIR OWN

SERVICE ACKNOWLEDGES ITS PEAK PERFORMERS AS SPORTS AWARDS MAKE WELCOME RETURN

OLYMPIC boxer Gnr Karriss Artingstall (RA) capped a stellar 2021 by being crowned the Service's sportswoman of the year at the Army Sports Awards.

The featherweight star, who won a bronze medal as part of the all-conquering Team GB squad at the summer's Tokyo Games, emerged as the leading light in arguably the night's strongest category as the ceremony made a glittering return following a Covid-enforced absence in 2020.

Teammate, and Olympic champion, Lauren Price was among the guests of honour, and she watched on as Artingstall pipped triathlon ace Capt Katrina Matthews (RAMC) and SSgt Carrie Roberts (REME) to the coveted prize.

The duo formed strong opposition for the title, with Matthews finishing fourth at this year's 70.3 Ironman World Championships having previously won two full Ironman elite races. She was also part of the European team that triumphed at the Collins Cup.

Roberts' nomination came on the back of a sensational season with St Helens in which she helped the team to a domestic treble as they dominated women's rugby league. The soldier also lined up for England in their summer international against Wales.

Artingstall had to overcome considerable uncertainty outside the ring to realise her Olympic dream after seeing the qualifying tournament cancelled on the eve of her first bout as the Covid pandemic raged.

The Games were then postponed, meaning she would have to wait more than a year

for her next competitive bout. A further setback followed when the qualifiers resumed as the 26-year-old tasted defeat in the quarter finals, leaving her with a winner-takes-all box-off.

Fortunately, the soldier emerged victorious, and she then fought her way to the Games' semi-finals before losing to Japan's Sena Irie.

On collecting her award, Artingstall thanked the Service for aiding her sporting career.

"There are not many jobs where you can be released to train full-time and pursue your dream," she said. "If it wasn't for the Army, I would not be in the position I am now."

Roberts may have missed out on individual honours, but she was able to celebrate collective glory as the Army women's rugby league squad was named team of the year.

They were invited to compete in the inaugural Women's Super League South this season and went all the way to the final, only to suffer an agonising defeat to Cardiff Demons.

However, they put the setback behind them to maintain their dominant form in the Inter-Services and claim another title.

Sailor Cpl Simon Horsfield (Rifles) was presented with the sportsman of the year accolade in recognition of his success in the dinghy discipline.

He is leading the 2000 class in the national series, an event he won in 2019 and 2020, and has been victorious in the past three Sailjuice Winter Series.

In 2020 he was a finalist at the British Yachting Awards as sailor of the year, alongside the likes of Ben Ainslie.

Horsfield is also at the forefront of the Army coaching



**"THIS IS
A HUGE
HONOUR"**

scene, delivering team and instructor training.

"While I'm a competitive sportsman I'm also a coach and if we don't inspire the next generation, we don't have a sport," he said on collecting his award. "I take great pride in the number of fantastic sailors the Army has coming through."

The other nominees were Inter-Services downhill mountain biking champion LCpl John Riddell (RLC), who has also excelled in Alpine skiing, and rugby league star Cpl Peter Holmes (REME), a key component of the Army team that reached the fourth round of the Challenge Cup in 2020.

Elsewhere, Rfn Gary Young (Rifles) received the rising star award following his rapid progress in clay target shooting. In 2021 he was classified in the sport's AAA category, which is reserved for the very best shots in the country.

Playing an integral role in helping the Army Cycling Union continue during lockdown via the online platform Zwift saw Sgt Will Nichols (Int Corps) named official of the year.

"This is a huge honour," the NCO (pictured above) said. "Zwift was a great way to connect with people during lockdown and is very much here to stay."

Maj (Retd) Kevin Kirkham and WO2 Brian Hall (REME) were handed lifetime achievement awards for their services to boxing and karate respectively.

The major unit of the year prize went to 6 Regiment, Royal Logistic Corps, with HQ 7th Infantry Brigade and HQ East taking the minor units and 204 Field Hospital the Reserve equivalents. ■



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COURT STARS REACH NEW LEVEL IN IRISH ENCOUNTER

H EAD coach Lt Col Laura Ellis (REME) believes her side's recent matches with the Republic of Ireland served to highlight the high regard the Army set-up now has in the wider netball community.

The clash saw the development and senior squads tested in two days of action at Worthy Down, with the latter battling their way to a 1-1 series draw.

Despite the best efforts of attacking duo Capt Laura Tognarelli (REME) and Sgt Ellie Nawelle (AGC (SPS), pictured above at the 2020 Inter-Services), the soldiers slipped to a 37-24 defeat in their opening clash – only to bounce back a day later with a 33-24 victory.

The players were due to face Northern Ireland as this issue went to press and Ellis was relishing the opportunity of another international test ahead of this season's Forces contest.

"They are ranked 11th in the world and will be a tough team," she told *SoldierSport*. "But that is

how you get better and it's great that they wanted this fixture.

"It has taken a few years to build to this stage, but we are definitely up there now.

"It's about having robust competition. Most of our players compete at club or regional level, but this is a step up."

The matches came off the back of a successful Inter-Corps competition from which 68 players were invited to the subsequent Army trials.

A total of 45 were then selected to face the Republic of Ireland.

"They were using it as a trial for their squad going forward and it was a chance for me to look at players and get everyone on court," Ellis (pictured right) said.

"It was our first proper netball in nearly two years and there were encouraging signs. The first quarter was a bit scrappy, but it built from there and on the next day our combinations were working a lot better."

Ellis, a former Army team captain, was able to call upon the



**"IT HAS
TAKEN
A FEW
YEARS,
BUT WE
ARE UP
THERE
NOW"**

talents of Superleague player Cpl Dee Bolakoro (RE) and revealed that Gnr Tamara Samuel (RA) was offered a trial with Team Bath on the back of her Inter-Corps performances.

"Having them train regularly at the elite level means they can then bring that experience back to the Army," she added.

"That will be important for the Inter-Services, when there will be pressure on us to maintain our form in that tournament."

In other news, trials for the newly formed Army men's squad were held last month as the sport continues to expand.

More than 50 Servicemen were involved in the mixed-sex inter-unit competition at the start of the season and Ellis believes there is a real appetite for the game in the male ranks.

"We have a lot of talent," she added. "There are already talks about an Inter-Services competition and we hope to have a mixed-sex inter-corps event to help it grow further." ■



NIHELL BOWS OUT

CRUISERWEIGHT star Cpl Chez Nihell (RLC) has announced his retirement from the professional boxing ranks.

The 34-year-old had 69 bouts in a trophy-laden amateur career in which he won every major domestic elite title (pictured above), including the English Amateur Boxing Association Elite Championships.

A former Army team captain, he made his professional debut on the undercard of the James DeGale/Chris Eubank Jr fight at London's O2 Arena in February 2019 and went on to win four bouts that year.

However, the Covid outbreak then halted the growing momentum and following a succession of cancelled shows he reluctantly decided his time in the ring was over.

"I've missed out on two years due to the pandemic," Nihell, who will now concentrate on his role as head coach of the Army development squad, explained.

"In the past six months I've had three back-to-back training camps, only to have three fights cancelled. It wasn't meant to be."



BOXERS EYE PLACE ON NATIONAL STAGE



**"THEY
WILL
HAVE
THREE
TOUGH
BOUNTS"**

THE Army's fighters will be looking to end a shortened year on a high as the latter stages of the English Amateur Boxing Association (ABA) Championships get under way this month.

After returning to the gym in late summer, the showdown has been the prime target for the squad – who will see members of the development and elite teams taking to the ring in pursuit of national glory.

The former were looking to progress from a show with Western Counties as this issue went to press, while the latter have already seen LCpl Carnell Brown (AGC (SPS)), Pte Lily Devlin (RLC, pictured left), LCpl Terri Stewart (REME) and Sig Lucy Kisielewska (R Signals) qualify for the quarter-finals, with Sgt Shamim Khan (RLC) hopefully set to join them.

The soldiers have shown some impressive form in their performances to date, winning 11 out of 15 bouts at the MTK Box Cup before defeating a Scotland team 4-1 at the ITC Catterick show.

"We have some really good kids in the development squad," head coach Sgt James Allen (REME) told *SoldierSport*. "Shamim and Carnell both had wins against Scotland so they will go into this with a lot of confidence."

"Terri and Lucy will compete at 69kg but there are a lot of good fighters at that weight. If they are going to win they'll have to get through three tough bouts."

Once the competition concludes the boxers will have a short break before resuming training ahead of a more regular year in 2022.

The UK Armed Forces Championships return in March, ahead of another ABA test, and Allen is predicting fierce competition from their Forces rivals.

"There will be ten contested bouts so we're already trying to identify the five bankers who can win us the title," he explained. "The Royal Navy have quality in smaller numbers, while the Royal Air Force have bigger numbers but with perhaps less quality."

"We hope to have both the quality and numbers." ■

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SPORT SHORTS



Picture: Alligin Photography

Forces fire at Kingsholm

ATTACKING play was at the fore as the UK Armed Forces locked horns with the Rugby for Heroes Barbarians in their annual remembrance fixture at Gloucester's Kingsholm Stadium.

A host of Army players featured for the military outfit, who romped to an emphatic 62-33 victory over an invitational side that included World Cup winner Mike Tindall and fellow former England internationals Jordan Crane and Delon Armitage.

They were also able to call upon some Service firepower of their own, with soldiers from 1st Battalion, The Yorkshire Regiment and 9 Regiment, Royal Logistic Corps among those supplementing the ranks.



Cup clash called off

THE 2021 Kentish Cup has been postponed following the withdrawal of the Dutch forces from the competition.

The annual tournament, which also features footballers from the UK and French Armed Forces, was also called off during the 2020/21 season due to the Covid pandemic.

It is hoped the contest can be rearranged for the summer of 2022.

RIDERS SET FOR WORLD TEST

AFIVE-strong team of Army riders will test their abilities on the international stage when they compete at the UCI World Masters Cyclocross Championships this month.

Capt Simon Hale, WO2 Matt Waters (both R Anglian), Capt Jon Robinson (Yorks), WO1 Jason Marriott and LCpl Sam Chatwin (both Rifles) will all take to the saddle at the Ipswich-based event, which comes hot on the heels of the team's success at the inaugural Inter-Services.

The soldiers took to the start line in fine form and, with their road and mountain bike compatriots already securing Forces titles, the pressure was on.

Two Royal Air Force riders took an early lead but with Hale and Sgt James Bevan (REME) holding third and fourth places respectively, the Army were in the mix.

Their cause was strengthened by the efforts of Marriott, Chatwin and Waters – who all held strong positions in the top ten.

Bevan went on to finish third and 2Lt Amy Drysdale (REME, pictured) topped the women's standings, claiming a second Inter-Services crown following her victory in the cross-country mountain biking.

Their efforts helped the Army to the collective honours as they held off the challenge of a strong RAF outfit.

"They pushed us hard but solid scoring from the mid-pack riders ensured our strength in depth came to the fore," team manager Hale said. "It was an outstanding win, where every rider gave their all. Climbing up a leg-sapping hill 14 times was just the half of it. We took the fight to our rivals and came out victorious." ■



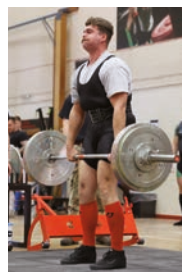
**"WE
TOOK
THE
FIGHT
TO OUR
RIVALS"**



● **TROOPS to Target** athletes Sgt Sam Gowin (RA), OCdt Michael Bamsey (pictured) and Spr Emilia Faulkner (RE) have been named in GB Shooting's world class programme for 2021/22. Pistol shooter Gowin, a bronze medallist at the 2018 Commonwealth Games, has been included in the set-up's podium potential category, while fellow pistol shot Faulkner and rifle ace Bamsey join the national academy programme.

MONTH IN SPORT

December's key fixtures...



WHAT: Army Single Lift Championships
WHEN: December 1

WHERE: Carver Barracks, Wimbish
NEED TO KNOW: The

final powerlifting

event of the year – and second since the sport's resumption – sees athletes tested in the squat, bench press and deadlift – all of which form separate competitions



WHAT: Inter-Services Indoor Archery Championships

WHEN: December 5

WHERE: NAEC Stoneleigh

NEED TO KNOW: The Army's archers returned to action at a summer training camp that led to victory at the Inter-Services Outdoor Championships. Can they claim a Forces' double indoors?



WHAT: Army v British Police

WHEN: December 11

WHERE: Army Rugby Stadium, Aldershot

NEED TO KNOW: The Army women's set-up see their

development and senior sides in action as they pull on the red jersey for the first time in almost two years following the Covid outbreak

HOCKEY IN NUMBERS

SUCCESSIVE TITLES FOR THE ARMY WOMEN PRIOR TO THEIR SHOCK DEFEAT THIS SEASON

23

TROPHIES FOR THE ROYAL NAVY FOLLOWING THEIR TRIUMPHS IN THE MEN'S AND UNDER-25 CONTESTS

2

ARMY TEAMS COMPETING IN THIS YEAR'S ENGLAND HOCKEY CUP – MEN'S AND WOMEN'S SENIORS, AND WOMEN'S OVER-35S

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GOALS SCORED BY THE ROYAL AIR FORCE AS THEY SECURED THE WOMEN'S CROWN IN STYLE

13

HOCKEY



REDS RETURN EMPTY HANDED

IT PROVED to be a frustrating day at the Inter-Services Indoor Hockey Championships as the Army surprisingly finished the campaign without any silverware to their name.

Having dominated for more than two decades, the Reds headed into the women's competition as firm favourites but a 6-5 defeat to the Royal Air Force in their opening game saw their impressive run come crashing to a halt.

A 4-0 win over the Royal Navy restored some pride, but when their RAF rivals thrashed the same opposition 7-1 the trophy was lifted by those in light blue.

The Army men started with a 4-3 triumph over the RAF, only to suffer a 6-3 loss to eventual champions the Navy in the final.

And it was a similar pattern for the under-25s, who followed a 9-4 success against the airmen with a 5-4 defeat against the Senior Service.

Maj (Retd) Bertie Richardson, Secretary of the Army Hockey Association, said it was a disappointing tournament for the soldiers, but insisted they will bounce back during the upcoming outdoor season.

"It's one of those things," he told *SoldierSport*.

"The scores have been very close. In the men's game there were missed opportunities and, had they been converted, it could have been a very different story.

"The men's and women's teams are very competitive and the quality of hockey we have seen from them has been phenomenal – it is something to build on.

"Also, our development squad is really coming along.

"It's now about gearing up for the outdoor season. We have teams competing in the England Hockey Cup and there is a real drive to come back stronger at the Inter-Services in March." ■



RESOLUTE REDS SNATCH VICTORY AT THE DEATH

A LAST-gasp score from Fus Samuel Bolton (R Welsh) saw the Army triumph in an eight-try thriller against the Royal Air Force and secure the Under-23 Inter-Services Championships for 2021.

The second row forward stretched to the line as the full-time whistle loomed to cap a remarkable turnaround from the soldiers, who were trailing by 13 points at the interval and were then 28-17 down with just ten minutes remaining.

Having downed the Royal Navy 27-6 in their opening fixture the Reds headed into the encounter in confident mood, although there was little sign of the drama to come as the early exchanges proved cagey.

Spr JJ Johnson (RE, pictured far right) gave the hosts an early lead with a well-executed penalty from range, before two kicks from SAC Callum Jones saw their opponents edge 6-3 ahead

midway through the first half.

The opening try came moments later as Jones' centre partner Cpl Will Lamont ghosted through the Army's rearguard to score and when Cpl Jordan Oatley crossed on the half-hour mark, following a strong carry from SAC Craig Irwin, the RAF looked to be in control.

But the Army fired an immediate response as their forwards gathered the ball at the lineout and surged for the line. Despite being held up by the opposition defence, their momentum eventually created the platform for a cross-field move that was rounded off by Pte Marley Wolfenden (R Anglian) in the corner.

With the interval in sight the soldiers were looking to hold firm, but the airmen had other ideas and when an Army knock-on gifted an attacking platform, the excellent Irwin was on hand to capitalise from a sustained

INTER-SERVICES
U23 RUGBY UNION

ARMY

31

RAF

28



spell of pressure.

Returning after the break, the champions-elect were desperate for the first score of the half and Johnson delivered in style.

When the fly-half collected a short pass in field he appeared to have few options, but an expertly judged kick and collect saw him sprint clear for a converted try.

Again, the RAF came roaring back and after repeatedly knocking on the door they finally broke through as a flowing move involving Oatley and Lamont saw Jones touch down.

From the stands the Army appeared to be a beaten side, but on the pitch the players had other ideas.

Replacement Hldr Saimone Sevakasiga (Scots) gave them hope when he bundled his way to the line with nine minutes left on the clock, and with Johnson kicking the extras the scene was set for a dramatic finale.

And they duly delivered as the

airmen's heroic defensive efforts were eventually broken when Bolton powered home following a tap penalty in front of the posts.

Johnson again slotted the conversion to complete the final act of a pulsating match that finished 31-28.

"It was a game of two halves," head coach Capt Gareth Slade-Jones (RAPTC) told *SoldierSport*. "The RAF fought well but our boys showed real character to come away with the win.

"We've asked for that all season and at half-time we had to make a plea for them to show it again. We highlighted the areas they needed to improve in, and they came out and delivered.

"In the second-half we showed some resolve. Mentally, we did not fatigue and that's what gave us that extra per cent to go on and get the victory."

Skipper Tpr Levi Roper (QDG, pictured left) added: "It's hard to sum the game up. We showed courage and pride in the jersey, and we had to really dig deep.

"Expectations were high coming into the match, but we came out a little flat at the start.

"However, we have confidence in the team, and we've worked on various scenarios in training where we have been ten, or even 20, points behind.

"We saw the RAF were tiring, and they had some weaknesses in their defence, and we went from there." ■



UNDER-23s IN NUMBERS

COMBINED
POINTS
SCORED BY
THE ARMY
AS THEY
WON BOTH
INTER-
SERVICES
FIXTURES

58

POINTS
SCORED
BY SPR JJ
JOHNSON IN
THE REDS'
VICTORY
OVER THE RAF

16

PLAYERS
FEATURED
THIS
SEASON
- ALL OF
WHO WERE
NEW TO THE
SET-UP

50

SOLDIERS
WHO
SHOWED
AN
INTEREST
IN JOINING
THE SQUAD
WHEN AN
APPEAL
WAS MADE
AT THE
START
OF THE
CAMPAIGN

153



Picture: Campix Photography

RACERS TARGET TOP SPOT

THE Army motorcycle road race team are hoping for better fortunes in 2022 after seeing the Inter-Services title slip from their grasp this season.

The soldiers looked set for victory at the midpoint of their campaign only to see their Royal Air Force rivals seize control, before going on to secure the silverware.

"We were leading both the individual and overall standings until August," team secretary Maj John Miller (RE) told *SoldierSport*. "But the RAF overtook us and were able to hold on to the end.

"It was a disappointment, and we should have won. Injuries and deployments cost us key riders, which didn't help the cause."

The set-up sees riders split between endurance and sprint disciplines, with the former acting as a proving ground for novices looking to gain experience and develop.

They then transition to the

sprint team, which competes for the Forces trophy as part of the Thundersport GB series.

Despite missing out on the collective honours, the squad saw Sgt Richard Spencer-Fleet (REME) claim the individual Inter-Services crown and Miller praised the efforts of WO2 Gavin Watts (R Anglian) and LCpl Tyler Viveiros in their rookie campaigns.

"We are now looking to load the sprint team for next year," the officer continued.

"We have a couple of riders moving over from the endurance side and we also have two brand new rookies coming in.

"We only had three races in 2020 due to Covid-19, so it was great to have a proper season. We were happy to get out again, although we still view the Inter-Services as a missed opportunity.

"If we can keep everyone fit, and not get hit with too many deployments, we can definitely push the RAF in 2022." ■



For me, it would be summiting K2. It is one of the hardest mountains to climb and having that technical challenge, over multiple days, really appeals to me.

OCdt Donald Kennon, MSUOTC



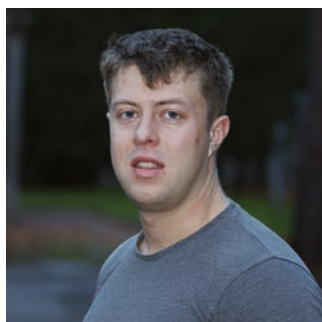
I've always wanted to go to Canada and climb in the Rocky Mountains. Another dream of mine is to climb Everest. I love the freedom that comes with climbing and the sense of accomplishment you get at the end – it's about pushing myself out of my comfort zone.

Pte Kieran Marwood, RLC



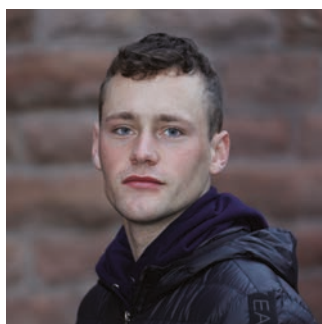
The North Pole. Climbing Mount Everest has almost got to the stage where if you pay enough money, it can be achieved, but this would be a pure, physical challenge.

OCdt Luc Doran, MSUOTC



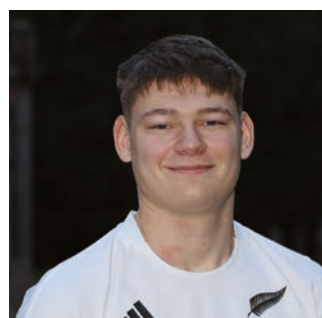
It would be Lands' End to John O'Groats. I'm big into my cycling and have done a few 100-mile road events. It would be a different way to explore the country.

Cfn Rhys Rawson, REME



I'd like to go mountain biking in the Cuillins, on Skye, or at the Five Sisters of Kintail. Cycling across and up and down the mountains would be great.

Hldr Harri Wade, Scots



I would like to have a go at the Ring Road of Iceland. It's a mountain bike challenge and is something totally different, on new terrain and with great views.

Cfn Pacey Mosley, REME

I like hill walking and mountaineering and would love to take a group of lads up the Matterhorn, in the Alps – it is a sheer climb. We are in the Instagram generation, and they could get a few pictures at the top.

Cpl Marc Ferguson, Scots



Ultimate tests

With the Force Atlantic crew setting off on their epic rowing challenge this month (p44), we asked personnel what their dream expedition would be

I would come back to Adventurous Training Wing Inverness to do more mountain biking. Your confidence grows as you ride the trails and downhill sections – it is great fun and I have loved every second of it.

Hldr Brandon Waters, Scots



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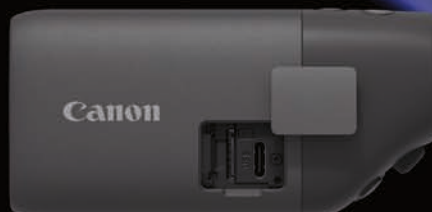


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