

# SOLDIER

MAGAZINE OF THE BRITISH ARMY

## STANDING PROUD

Op honours reveal reluctant heroes

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Cover picture: Graeme Main

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“It’s the first time  
I have worked  
with American  
and French  
paratroopers”

Airborne allies – p31







## Some things never change



IN this issue we look to the past and, perhaps fittingly for the first edition of 2021, into the future too.

When it comes to peering into a crystal ball, there can be few areas of Army activity more revealing than esports (page 37).

The mental dexterity and problem-solving skills required to succeed in this discipline are very relevant to where the battlefield of tomorrow is heading. So it's heartening to see that not only is it growing in popularity day by day, but that the Service has recognised its potential too.

However, no amount of technology can degrade the importance of the values and standards displayed by personnel when it really counts.

That's why we didn't hesitate to also use this issue to highlight the deeds of LCpl Hannah Richardson (RAMC) and others recognised in the latest operational honours and awards.

Their citations may have singled them out for individual praise but as Hannah, who features on our cover this month, so eloquently explained, it's being part of a highly motivated, like-minded team that counts... and that applies whether you're sitting in front of a screen or jumping out of a C-130.

**Steve Muncney ● Managing Editor**

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Pictures: Peter Davies

## Pass off rate reflects recruiting high

**T**HE success of the Service's high-profile recruiting campaigns is being impressively witnessed on the parade square at ATR Winchester – with pass off ceremonies doubling in size in recent times.

In December, staff at St John Moore Barracks staged the first five-platoon pass off across the entire Initial Training Group since 2013 and similar sized spectacles are scheduled for the coming months – including plans for a six-platoon event in March.

"In the past we would have parades of 100 people, if that," WO1 Melita Jarvis (AAC, pictured right), RSM at the phase one establishment, told *Soldier*.

"Now it is around 200, which has created a slight problem as everyone has to be two metres apart on the parade square.

"The majority of these soldiers are from the backlog in the system – we have seen that people have really responded to the Belonging campaign.

"Some of them have waited six months to get a job. If you ask a typical 16 or 17-year-old to wait that long they would just turn away, but they are here because they want to join the Army."

With numbers high, the regiment successfully met the challenge of training against a backdrop of coronavirus restrictions – with the virtual realm becoming a welcome ally.

The course was also reduced from 16 weeks to 14, and then down to 12 when WO1 Jarvis arrived in September.

"The only elements we are missing

are the battlefield tours and the adventurous training," the senior NCO, who herself passed off from ATR Winchester 20 years ago, explained.

"Everyone learns differently. The online lessons have been very useful, especially prior to them joining us as they can find out about things like the rank structure and the different personalities in the Army.

"But the practical elements are still there. If you are on the ranges or out in the field on exercise and have to isolate, they are things you cannot do virtually.

"The only negative during Covid-19 has been the fact that recruits have to quarantine if they show symptoms.

"The bonding and teamwork really starts to form at around week six and, if they isolate, they can lose that slightly, which has been hard."

The restrictions have also impacted on the recruits' big day on the completion of training, although online alternatives are again playing a part.

Friends and family would usually be there in person to share in their success, but attendance is now limited to fellow recruits, instructing staff, photographers and the inspecting officer.

"We recently had personnel from countries including Fiji and Belgium passing off whose loved ones were able to watch online," WO1 Jarvis said. "They would have not had that opportunity before.

"I spoke to some of the recruits about this and they love the fact they have 60 or so people watching." ■



“They are here because they want to join the Army”

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# GLOBAL SITREP



## TRAILBLAZER TRACED

THE Women's Royal Army Corps Association has found who is believed to be the oldest surviving female veteran of the British Army – 103-year-old Ena Collymore-Woodstock.

The Caribbean-born centenarian was a radar operator in an anti-aircraft – or “Ack-Ack” – unit of the Auxiliary Territorial Service in the Second World War.

In good health and living with her family between Jamaica and Barbados, she recalled how there were few women in the military at the time and even less who were black.

“We all knew we were doing things for the first time,” she said.

“I wanted to do my part and I felt special. When I got to England, they offered me an office role, but I told them that I hadn’t joined up just to type!”

Born in Spanish Town, Jamaica in 1917, Collymore-Woodstock faced adversity when she was orphaned early in life but went on to break barriers in more ways than one.

After her time in the Army she climbed the ranks of the legal profession, eventually becoming the first woman to hold judicial office in her home country and receiving an OBE for her work with the Girl Guides.

The WRAC association launched its campaign to find the oldest surviving female veteran last February following the death of 108-year-old Anne Robson, who served as a physical training instructor in the ATS.



“There is still a lot of loss in Afghanistan”

Quick-thinking medic receives QCVS – page 47

## 2. FRANCE CONSERVATION QUEST



THE second phase in a major restoration of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission’s largest memorial will soon get under way.

Work at the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme began in 2014 and repairs to the roofs, rainwater pipes and brick work above the main arch have now been completed.

The project resumes in March with additional drainage works, water proofing and restoration of name panels, paving and outer stone work.

“We recognise that Thiepval is at the heart of any battlefield tour, so while the memorial undergoes its essential restoration, we are providing an innovative new way of exploring the site,” said the organisation’s director general, Barry Murphy.

“Through an interactive multimedia exhibition, visitors will be able to learn about the memorial, its history and place in the landscape, as well as the Battle of Somme.”

The work is due for completion in May 2022.



2. FRANCE

4. ESTONIA

3. MALI

### 3. MALI

#### NEW MISSION DAWNS

THE first UK personnel to deploy on the UN's peacekeeping operation in Mali have arrived in theatre as the Army embarks on a new chapter in its support to Africa.

Fronted by A Squadron, The Light Dragoons and B Company, 2nd Battalion, The Royal Anglian Regiment, the 250-strong British contingent will form a long-range reconnaissance task group to boost the efforts of the 15,000 multinational troops who are trying to stabilise a country ravaged by chronic poverty and instability.

Medics, mechanics, UAV pilots and EOD operators are included in a strong supporting cast.

"We conducted high-level training that covered the potential issues we may face on this deployment," Maj Jonny Black, Officer Commanding A Sqn, told *Soldier*.

"While this is a UN peacekeeping role we have to be prepared for the full spectrum of operations.

"For a lot of people, this will be their first deployment. There are a few nerves but also some excitement

— they are looking forward to it."

Ahead of the tour, the battlegroup conducted a mission rehearsal exercise that was split between Salisbury Plain and the Stanford Training Area in Norfolk (pictured) and featured a variety of scenarios, from engaging with locals in a complex social landscape to conducting patrols and having to deal with suspected improvised explosive devices.

Maj Black believes such thorough preparation will be vital in the coming months and he is confident they will excel in the UN environment as well as setting the standard for future personnel to follow.

"It is a high-risk operation, and this is about showing the UK can be a credible part of that," he added.



IN NUMBERS

100

Years since the Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes (NaaFi) was established. The organisation was set up in 1920 to run recreational facilities and sell goods to Service personnel and their families around the world. At its peak during the Second World War, 110,000 employees worked across 10,000 outlets.

## INTELLIGENCE FOR THE ATLAS?

### Brief the team now:



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RESOLUTE troops from the 5 Rifles Battlegroup have been keeping their spirits and skills up during a harsh winter in eastern Europe with a busy programme of activities.

As this issue went to press, 600 soldiers had completed adventurous training disciplines such as mountain biking and skiing amid plunging temperatures.

Meanwhile, their work schedule included exercises to clear a series of Second World War-era bunkers, as well as urban obstacle crossings.





# THE BIG PICTURE

ATR Winchester

## Fixed focus

RECRUITS at ATR Winchester perfect their bayonet drills in the driving rain as training continues at pace at the phase one establishment.

While coronavirus restrictions have seen some lessons move online, practical military skills such as these – which form the bedrock for a successful Army career – cannot be fully replicated in the virtual realm.

Despite the challenges of delivering training in the Covid era, the Hampshire-based facility enjoyed a boom year in 2020 as the Service's recent recruiting campaigns continue to push more aspiring personnel into the Forces' pipeline.

Read a full report on page 7.

Picture: Peter Davies









LEVEL  
PEAKS



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\*Note that British Army personnel can only use non-standard equipment when specifically authorised by the chain of command.





# Ground view

Army Sergeant Major, WO1 Gav Paton, offers his take on Service life...

**S**ITTING down to write this column – with a very unusual Christmas behind us – it is dawning on me that I am now nearing the final chapter of my time in post.

It seems like five minutes since I was starting out, learning how to use social media and penning my first effort for *Soldier*. But it is only after pausing and taking a breath that I realise the amount of ground I've covered – and there is much more I would still like to do in my final eight months.

A piece of work we started at the regimental sergeant majors' convention in September is one such case in point. It looked at how we could use rank to improve life for our troops in three areas – diversity, initial recruitment and training, as well as mental health.

The need for better education was the broad theme running throughout our discussions – so more recently I arranged further seminars to consider each topic in more depth.

Our command and corps sergeant majors – along with

some of the generals responsible for each of the portfolios – joined me for the online follow-up meetings. We also had the company of our counterparts from other countries for a different perspective.

A "living library" of courageous soldier witnesses were central to our discussions – they gave us their personal perspectives on when they had felt the Service had failed them. Hearing what had happened and the impact that it had on their lives was sobering. But it gave us a starting point for improvement.

I'd like to thank everyone involved – the feedback we've generated will help inform the highest levels of the Army as they draw up plans for the future.

I now want to hear the views of soldiers further down the chain of command – in particular the corporals who are some of our most important and influential leaders. Watch this space for more information.

Our people are our most important asset; it is critical that we look after them.



“  
**They are making huge sacrifices**  
”

**UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL**



**Q** Do you have a new year's resolution?

**A** To stop getting punctures on my road bike – I've had four in two months

## Pride in our new breed

I HAVE been on a huge learning curve since taking up this role and I am consistently in awe of the quality of our soldiers.

During a recent visit, I was given a briefing by a lance corporal in the Intelligence Corps – he was a model of complete professionalism, showing great knowledge and confidence despite being just 19 years old.

I've also been out with those helping in the Covid crisis, as well as troops and instructors at training

establishments. All have been away from families, sometimes for weeks on end. They are making huge sacrifices for the country they serve.

Troops in every era rise to the challenge and the current crop are no exception. The Army is now very different from when I joined – I have seen it evolve considerably – but what has not changed is the expectations of personnel.

They continue to serve us proud.

## Talking shop still open for business

■ PLEASE keep getting in touch with any issues you have – I will raise them with our senior officers.

We must ensure we continue to engage with the chain of command. Our generals do care about you and they want to help. And I want leaders at all levels to recognise that their rank is an opportunity to do more for our people.

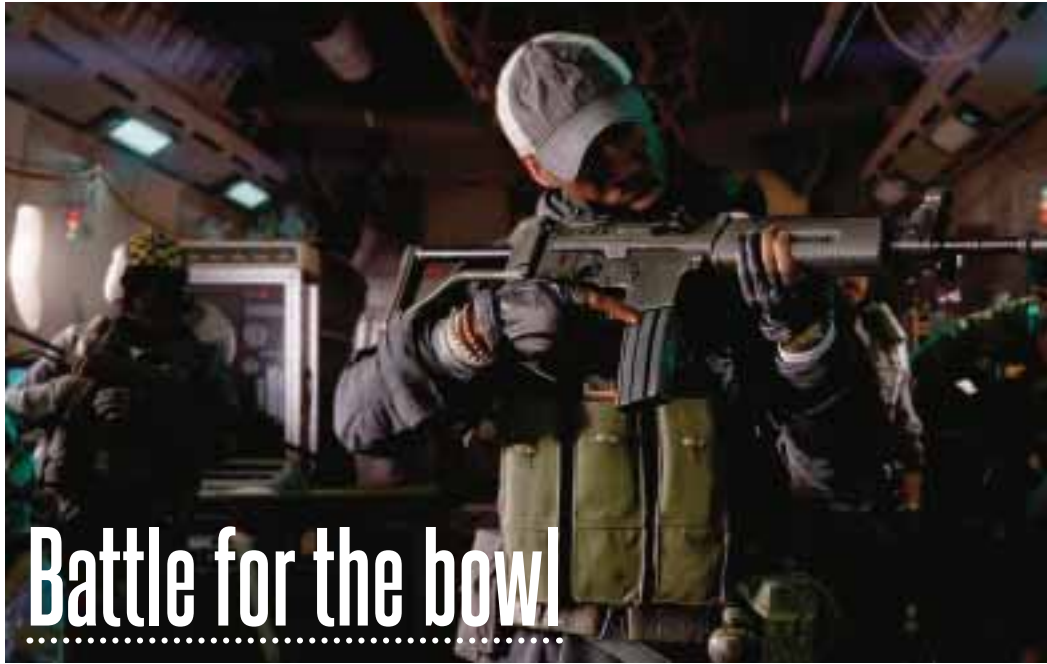
I'm due to finish in the summer, when I hand over to my successor – who I'm sure will be a fantastic sergeant major for the Army.

Let's keep up the momentum.



Picture: Cpl Andy Reid, RLC





## Battle for the bowl

**C**RACK Army video gamers from both sides of the Atlantic locked horns in an esports event to raise thousands of pounds to help job seeking veterans.

Personnel from all three Services faced opposition from five US teams during the hotly contested Call of Duty Endowment Bowl – a first-person cyberspace clash.

They battled for supremacy in Activision's new *Black Ops* title (pictured), with the action streamed live over the internet.

It was the first time the Army, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force had taken part in the event.

Now in its second year, the showdown saw them face a stern test from their more seasoned American counterparts from the outset.

But the Call of Duty Endowment – a charity that helps to place veterans in well-paid, high-quality jobs on both sides of the Atlantic – was the

ultimate victor. More than £750,000 was raised for the cause.

Maj Tim Elliott (Scots) – who heads up Army Esports – said: "I'm absolutely over the moon at the result, particularly when you consider that some of the US teams have been playing for years."

"Competitive gaming is relatively new to our military – the personnel put in some strong performances."

The Army squad – featuring signallers, sappers, tankies and REME soldiers – finished third behind the RAF and eventual champions the US Space Force.

Dan Goldenberg, executive director of the Call of Duty Endowment, said the money raised would place some 2,000 ex-personnel in civvy work.

To date, the organisation has funded job placements for 77,000 veterans in 11 years.

“  
I'm over the  
moon at the  
result  
”

● Cyber squads – page 37



Picture: Cpl Andy Reid, RLC

## SEAMUS ENTERS SERVICE

■ **SOLDIERS** from 1st Battalion, Irish Guards have welcomed a new canine companion in the shape of an imposing regimental mascot.

Turlough Mor – more commonly known as Seamus – recently joined the ranks following a handover ceremony at Wellington Barracks.

The six-month-old Irish Wolfhound is now being introduced to Army life ahead of his first duty on St Patrick's Day in March.

Named after an ancient monarch, the 17th Irish Guards mascot has already spent a month at the Defence Animal Training Centre, Melton Mowbray, along with handler Dmr Adam Walsh (pictured).

Based in Hounslow alongside troops, Turlough Mor replaces predecessor Domhnall, who has gone into retirement



Picture: Cpl Nathan Tanuku, RLC

## PAINTBALLING PAY OFF

■ **LOW-LEVEL** urban training with a twist was carried out by troops from The Royal Scots Dragoon Guards as they perfected skills on home turf at Leuchars Station.

In a break with tradition, the soldiers used non-lethal paint-based marker rounds to test the accuracy of their shooting.

The simunition was fired from the standard SA80 rifle and proved to be more accurate than conventional paintballs. Participants also benefitted from additional protective clothing.

■ **RESERVISTS** from 4th Battalion, The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment tested their urban warfare skills in their final training weekend of 2020.

Around 70 soldiers descended on Salisbury Plain for the serials, which culminated in a dawn attack on Southdown Barn where they completed a series of room clearances and climbed walls to storm the buildings within.

The environment provided the opportunity to develop a number of core capabilities that will enhance The Tigers' ability to operate within complex terrain.



TIGERS SHARPEN THEIR TEETH

Picture: Sgt Nick Johns, RLC



## Reflections in poetry

■ WHILE the basics of soldiering remained the primary focus for recent recruits at ATR Winchester, they were also encouraged to think about their training experience via the medium of poetry.

The brainchild of adjutant Capt Victoria Maymon (AGC (ETS)), the competition challenged junior personnel to pen works based around the theme of "reflection" and attracted a total of 60 submissions – with eight prize winners announced.

"It was a fantastic response," the officer explained. "The recruits write daily journals but, instead of prose, we suggested using poetry."

"In basic training we see people with entry level reading and writing, whereas others are more advanced, but the construction of the poems was great. It was all about taking a moment to reflect and the generation we have in training now is very good at that."



## IN NUMBERS

The NHS number ex-military personnel can call in the South East of England for access to a new high intensity mental health service for veterans



Picture: Steve Dock

## GILES' DESERT DECISIONS

■ A MUCH-RESPECTED officer has been reflecting on her life through a selection of musical tracks after she was invited to be a guest on *Desert Island Discs*.

Col Lucy Giles – president of the Army Officer Selection Board in Westbury – took to the airwaves on the Radio Four programme over the festive period.

The 51-year-old told *Soldier*: "It took about a month to decide on the songs and made me stop and think hard – reflecting on my childhood and adolescence, as well as military life."

Listen back via the BBC Sounds app.

“The figures make for sad and expensive reading”



Picture: Peter Davies

## Gateway to better injury prevention

A NEW ONLINE service designed to improve safety and lower the rate of injuries in the workplace will shortly be launched by the MoD.

The defence unified reporting and lessons system (Durals) will make flagging up incidents easier and allow the Armed Forces to learn lessons more quickly and efficiently, be they due to people's behaviours, equipment, environment or fire.

"With Durals we are addressing and modernising our approach to injury reporting, investigation, exploitation and learning lessons by providing a robust new platform for these critical functions," Adam Neale, Command Environment and Safety Officer at the Army Safety Centre, told *Soldier*.

"Key features include the ability to report from personal electronic devices through Defence Gateway, the issue of push notifications to those who need to know, an inbuilt investigations function and an observations, recommendations and lessons management area."

The initiative will be rolled out at the beginning of March, initially in the form of a trial, before expanding across the Army from April onwards.

Personnel will be able to report incidents and receive feedback on the customer-facing component of the new system, called Defence Alert.

"This is based on the military five-liner – who, what, where, when and

why – but users will negotiate three segments, all of which are intuitive, easy to use and require minimal, if any, training," explained Neale.

"They will allow the upload of incident details and photos and contain responses of investigation findings, observations and recommendations."

With government statistics showing preventable injuries are fuelling a rise in compensation claims against the MoD, the system can't come online soon enough.

There were around 5,200 cases in 2019-20 leading to payouts and legal bills totalling £147 million – that is up 66 per cent on five years ago, and 8.6 per cent on 2018-19.

Noise induced hearing loss accounted for 45 per cent of these, while non-freezing cold injuries were the second most common type with just under 100 recorded.

"The figures make for sad and expensive reading but we are addressing it," said Neale.

The MoD, which released the data, stressed that the safety of all Armed Forces personnel is a top priority and there are "robust measures in place" to ensure that they are protected.

"Compensation claims are also analysed to make sure lessons are learned, and the safety of our people is improved as a result," a spokesman for the department added.



■ A DISINFECTANT spray developed in conjunction with the Army that kills the Covid-19 virus has been made available for sale online.

Virusend is already used by soldiers supporting the NHS and around 50,000 bottles are on their way to those involved in setting up testing sites across the country.

In official trials the substance eliminated 99.99 per cent of germs in under one minute and as a result is now being assessed for use in NHS clinical environments.

To purchase online go to [virusend.co.uk](http://virusend.co.uk) or [lakeland.co.uk](http://lakeland.co.uk)





# FEARLESS FUNDRAISING



## Setting the pace

RESERVIST and serving police officer SSgt Scott Caswell (REME) braced sub-zero temperatures to complete a 24-hour walking challenge at Warwickshire Police Headquarters. Carrying a 50lb Bergen, the 47-year-old clocked 86 laps of the one-mile course. Visit [uk.gofundme.com](http://uk.gofundme.com) and search "Scott's campaign for veterans".

Amount raised:  
**£2,000**  
For: Veterans Contact Point



## Respirator record

THREE ultra-fit soldiers are targeting a world record for the longest run in a general service respirator. Corporals Henry Gibson and Connor Woods, along with WO2 Tommy Whitehead, will wear the kit as they take on the 102-mile Cotswold Way on January 16. As well as smashing the current record by 60 miles, they aim to set a new fastest time for 100 miles. Search "Thomas Whitehead" on [justgiving.com](http://justgiving.com) or follow "100 miles for SSAFA" on Facebook.

Target:  
**£25,000**  
For: SSAFA



Picture: Shutterstock

## Troops boost fight against tusk trade

**S**OLDIERS who deployed to Zambia on a mission to enhance the country's anti-poaching taskforce have been reflecting on a job well done after completing their tour.

Op Corded saw a short-term training team (STTT), predominantly from 2nd Battalion, The Royal Gurkha Rifles, teach tracking, evidence collection drills and other low-level tactics to the local personnel charged with tackling the illegal wildlife trade in the country's national parks.

Sgt Martin Fatchu (RAMC), who delivered lessons on how to counter waterborne diseases in the bush (pictured below right), said the Zambians were keen students and had quickly put their new skills to the test. "They were very receptive to the training and applied themselves really well," he told *Soldier*.

"This was my first deployment with a STTT and I found it very rewarding. It was great to see them go out, do operations and bring back the tusks they had seized from poachers.

"The motivation we have given them is having a big impact.

"From a personal point of view, I was delighted to improve their understanding of waterborne diseases in the field.

"Previously, they were going out and drinking from whatever hole they

could find. I was able to give them an appreciation of the risks they face and show them how they can make things better for themselves on the ground."

However, Sgt Fatchu's main role focused on the environmental health practices at the soldiers' camp on the Kafue National Park.

A recce ahead of the deployment found the local water contained harmful bacteria and faecal contamination, meaning a filtration unit was needed to make it safe for personnel to shower.

However, this offered minimal improvement, so the 38-year-old used military-supplied puritabs to provide further disinfectant.

And with bottled water forming the main drinking source the soldiers faced the prospect of burning the plastic on site as there was no disposal contract in place.

Sgt Fatchu found that water companies would generally accept bottles in good condition and helped form a standard operating procedure where items were segregated into bags and collected for recycling.

"It was important that we left with a good reputation," he explained.

"We didn't want people saying 'they've done a great job with the taskforce, but look at what they've done to the environment'."

“It was great to see them bring back seized tusks”



IN NUMBERS:  
**18,000**

Bottles would have been burnt on camp had it not been for the recycling scheme

**30  
THREE**

Soldiers, mainly from 2 RGR, deployed to Zambia with the short-term training team

Length of the tour, in months





LAST month's clues were ideal for keen historians of the Bosnian War. Warren Christopher, Richard Holbrooke, Carl Bildt and Igor Ivanov all led the Dayton Accords to bring peace to the region.

This month we have teamed up with Streamlight ([streamlight.com](http://streamlight.com)), to offer you the chance of winning a Sidewinder Compact II light, plus helmet mount.

It offers both white and colour LEDs, rotates 185 degrees for easy aiming and has a scratch-resistant lens. It's also waterproof to one metre and is impact resistance tested.

It can clip to a Molle vest, belt, hat brim or pocket.

To have a chance of winning simply tell us what links the clues on the spine of this month's magazine. Answers – including daytime phone number – to [comps@soldiermagazine.co.uk](mailto:comps@soldiermagazine.co.uk) by January 31.

**WIN**  
Sidewinder  
Compact II light  
worth £105

“It's more closely aligned to officer training”

## CENSUS INCLUDES VETS

■ THE next national Census in March will, for the first time, include a question relating to veterans.

The survey will ask participants whether they have ever served.

It is hoped a better understanding of the numbers, locations and age ranges of ex-soldiers will help the government, NHS and Service charities target resources where they are needed most.

## CONNECT APP IMPROVED

■ THE Service's IT chiefs are keen to receive feedback from users on the relaunched Defence Connect app.

Suitable for both iOS and Android devices, the platform should provide a better experience as it features more consistency between the desktop web browser view and the mobile version.

The reconfigured app also has a greater range of content options and enables users to update their profile and access their various apps, knowledge bases and contacts more easily.

If you have any feedback, email [Andrew.Risley497@mod.gov.uk](mailto:Andrew.Risley497@mod.gov.uk)



Picture: Cpl Rob Kane, RLC

## Warrant officer course moves on apace

THE new-look career syllabus for warrant officers has been published, with pilot courses starting this month.

Unlike the Army leadership and development programme (ALDP) for corporals and sergeants, the two component modules – military training and military education – have been integrated into a single three-week package combining e-learning and classroom-based lessons.

Regulars will have 12 months to complete the courses, while Reservists will have 24.

Capt Josh Sleeman (AGC (ETS)), from the professional development team at the Personnel Policy branch, said analysis of the requirements of warrant officers' roles had identified areas for improved preparation.

"The content has been refreshed and more closely aligned to officer training, which will help people when working in staff-based posts," he explained.

"Many subjects will be familiar, such as defence studies, wellbeing, discipline and risk management, but there will be

some topics that are less so, including emotional intelligence, wargaming and essay writing."

The essay assignments will vary in length from 400 to 500 words, while the wargame assessment will take place in a small group, with participants developing a course of action which is then scrutinised and played out. Following this, individuals will be questioned on the activity and its outcomes.

The courses will be led by Educational and Training Services officers and civilian accreditation will be available for those who complete them successfully.

Wider roll out of the programme begins in April and personnel should speak to their regimental career management officers and refer to the ALDP handbook for further information on booking a slot.

Those who have not completed part three of the old command, leadership and management (CLM) syllabus by March 31 will be required to do the full ALDP package.



## Late entry officer process centralised

■ THE process for applying for a late entry commission as a Regular has been changed.

Would-be officers will now attend a centralised senior soldier assessment board (SSAB) instead of cap badges running separate events.

The first SSAB will be held in August at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst and a virtual briefing will take place in the spring to inform

candidates of the format and to aid their preparation.

However, the ultimate decision on whom to offer a commission will still rest with individual cap badges.

The overhaul comes after programme Castle identified that a standardised approach would provide more consistency and better transparency. The route for Reserve commissions is still under review.



# DURING THESE UNCERTAIN TIMES, WE ARE STILL HERE AND READY TO HELP

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NEED TO

WARRIOR

FITNESS / NEXT STEPS / NUTRITION / MENTAL HEALTH

# Ready to *role*

Those in non-ground close  
combat units need to  
prepare for new fitness tests  
coming in 2021

► FROM April new gender-free physical employment standards tailored to cap badge and job role will be introduced for non-ground close combat personnel.

Unlike the annual fitness test, which assesses aerobic endurance and a limited number of physical requirements, the incoming regime will entail soldiers carrying out a wide range of tasks to gauge their fitness for the specific demands of their day-to-day jobs.

In the run-up to the introduction of the standards, personnel can prepare by consulting with their Royal Army Physical Training Corps instructor or PTI and follow the Army physical training system (APTS).

"The APTS provides the overarching

training principles and delivery mechanism for units to maintain role-related fitness standards and, where necessary, enhanced levels of performance for operations or tasks," WO2 Roger Harnden (RAPTC) told *Soldier*.

"It is scientific, evidence-based and uses a holistic approach to physical conditioning which, when applied correctly, can support all unit requirements."

PTIs are able to manage the process via the APTS management tool on Defence Connect. Search "APTS information" for details.

So what are the physical employment standards that those performing these roles have to achieve?





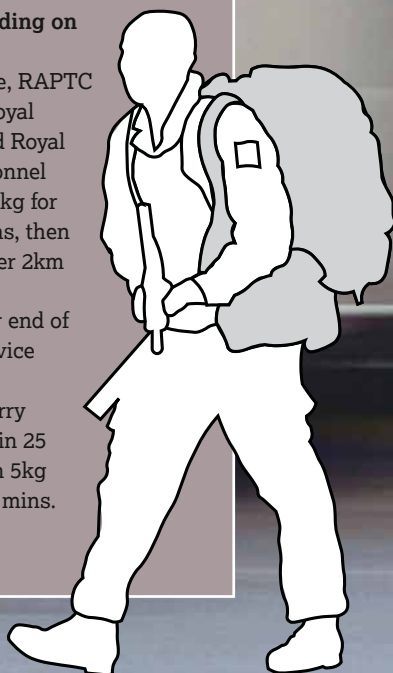
**1**

## Loaded carriage

A two-stage loaded march that varies in length, weight carried and time allowed to finish, depending on your role.

For example, RAPTC and certain Royal Engineers and Royal Artillery personnel have to lug 40kg for 4km in 50 mins, then carry 25kg over 2km in 15 mins.

At the other end of the scale, Service chaplains are required to carry 14kg for 2km in 25 mins and then 5kg over 1km in 8 mins.

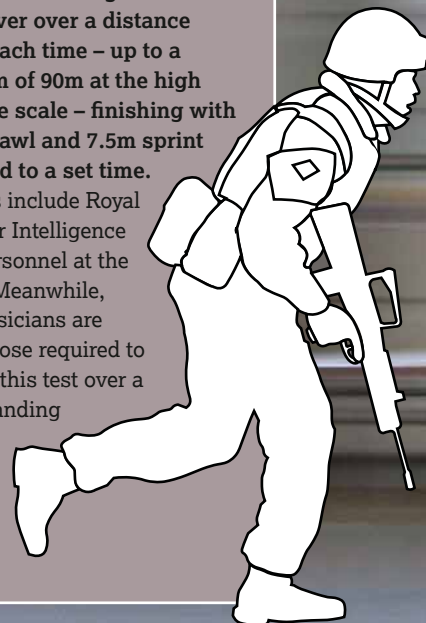


**2**

## Tactical movement

This mimics moving into and out of cover over a distance of 7.5m each time – up to a maximum of 90m at the high end of the scale – finishing with a 7.5m crawl and 7.5m sprint completed to a set time.

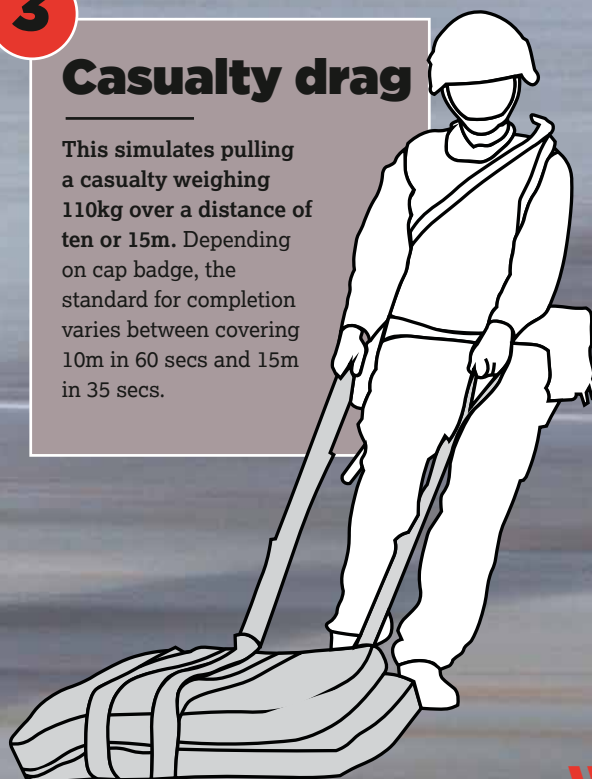
Examples include Royal Signals or Intelligence Corps personnel at the top end. Meanwhile, Army musicians are among those required to complete this test over a less demanding 30m course.



**3**

## Casualty drag

This simulates pulling a casualty weighing 110kg over a distance of ten or 15m. Depending on cap badge, the standard for completion varies between covering 10m in 60 secs and 15m in 35 secs.



**4**

## Stretcher carry

Tested by carrying two 22kg jerry cans over either 120m in 120 secs or 240m in 240 secs, depending on cap badge.





# Fit to fight

## THE ANNUAL PHYSICAL TEST FOR NON-GROUND CLOSE COMBAT PERSONNEL

Listed below are the agreed Regular and Reserve tests and standards that will apply to all cap badge and employment roles



Role Groups	Loaded Carry Stage 1	Loaded Carry Stage 2	Tactical Movement	Casualty Drag	Stretcher Carry	Vertical Lift	Repeated Carry		Incremental Lift-1m	Incremental Lift-Shoulder	Incremental Lift-Overhead			
							RST group	no.shuttles required						
RAPTC	4 km - 50 mins - 40 kg	2 km - 15 mins - 25 kg	90m - 15m (crawl/sprint) - 20s	15m - 35s	240m - 240s	60kg	Medium	32 (16 items)	35 kg	35 kg	25 kg			
RE-1 (25 Gp, 23 Engr Regt, 24 Engr Regt, 3RSME)							Heavy	28 (18 items)	35 kg	35 kg	25 kg			
RA-1(Spec Obs, FST, J Tac, OPA)							Heavy	28 (18 items)	35 kg	25 kg	25 kg			
SASC							Medium	32 (16 items)	30 kg	30 kg	20 kg			
RE-2 (All other)	4 km - 50 mins - 35 kg	2 km - 16 mins - 21 kg	90m - 15m (crawl/sprint) - 20s	15m - 60s			Heavy	28 (18 items)	35 kg	35 kg	25 kg			
AMS-DH							Medium	32 (16 items)	30 kg	25 kg	20 kg			
RA-2 (All other)							Heavy	28 (18 items)	35 kg	25 kg	25 kg			
REME							Heavy	28 (18 items)	35 kg	35 kg	25 kg			
AMS-1 (CMT, Paramedic, MSO, RMO)							Heavy	28 (18 items)	25 kg	25 kg	20 kg			
RMP							Medium	32 (16 items)	25 kg	25 kg	15 kg			
RSignals					Heavy		28 (18 items)	30 kg	30 kg	25 kg				
RLC					Medium		32 (16 items)	30 kg	25 kg	20 kg				
INT CORPS					Medium		32 (16 items)	25 kg	25 kg	15 kg				
AAC-GC					2 km - 25 mins - 35 kg		2 km - 17 mins - 21 kg	90m - 15m (crawl/sprint) - 20s	10m - 60s	Medium	32 (16 items)	35 kg	30 kg	20 kg
AAC-AC										Medium	32 (16 items)	30 kg	30 kg	20 kg
AMS-2 (All other)										Medium	32 (16 items)	25 kg	25 kg	20 kg
AGC-1(AWS, ETS, MAS(A), SPS)										Medium	32 (16 items)	25 kg	25 kg	15 kg
AGC-ALS										Medium	32 (16 items)	25 kg	25 kg	15 kg
MPS										Medium	32 (16 items)	25 kg	25 kg	15 kg
CAMUS	Medium	32 (16 items)	30 kg	25 kg						20 kg				
MPGS	Medium	32 (16 items)	15 kg	15 kg						15 kg				
RACHD	2 km - 25 mins - 14 kg	1 km - 8 mins - 5 kg	90m - 15m (crawl/sprint) - 20s	15m - 60s			Medium	32 (16 items)	15 kg	15 kg	15 kg			
GSC	2 km - 25 mins - 35 kg	2 km - 17 mins - 21 kg	15m - 60s	N/A			N/A	N/A	N/A					

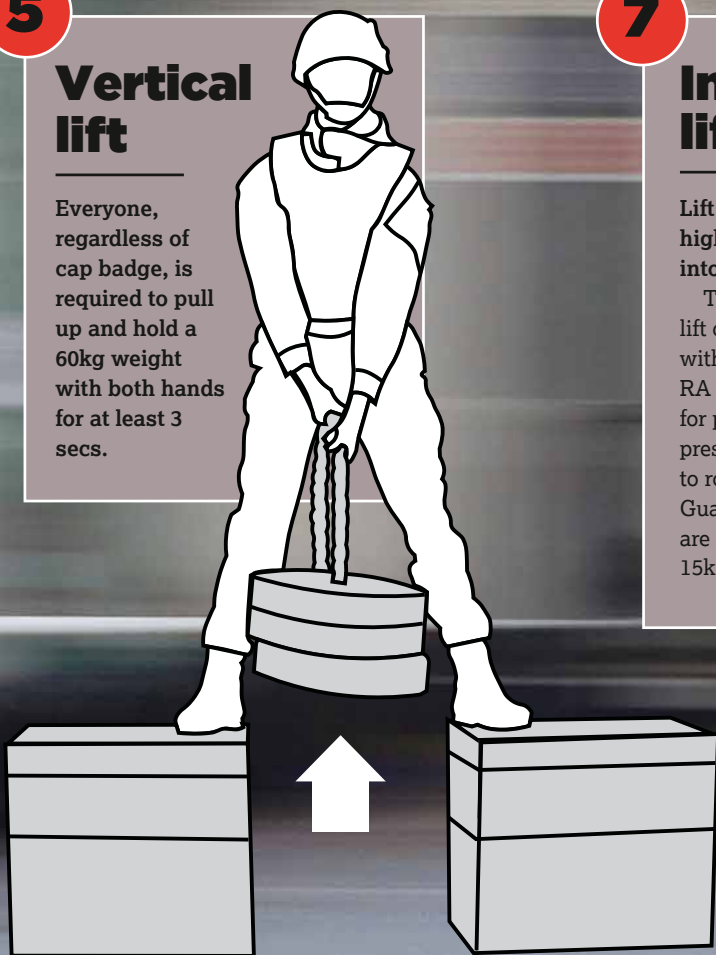
Tests, standards and protocols will be published in MATT 2 prior to implementation in Apr 21



5

## Vertical lift

Everyone, regardless of cap badge, is required to pull up and hold a 60kg weight with both hands for at least 3 secs.

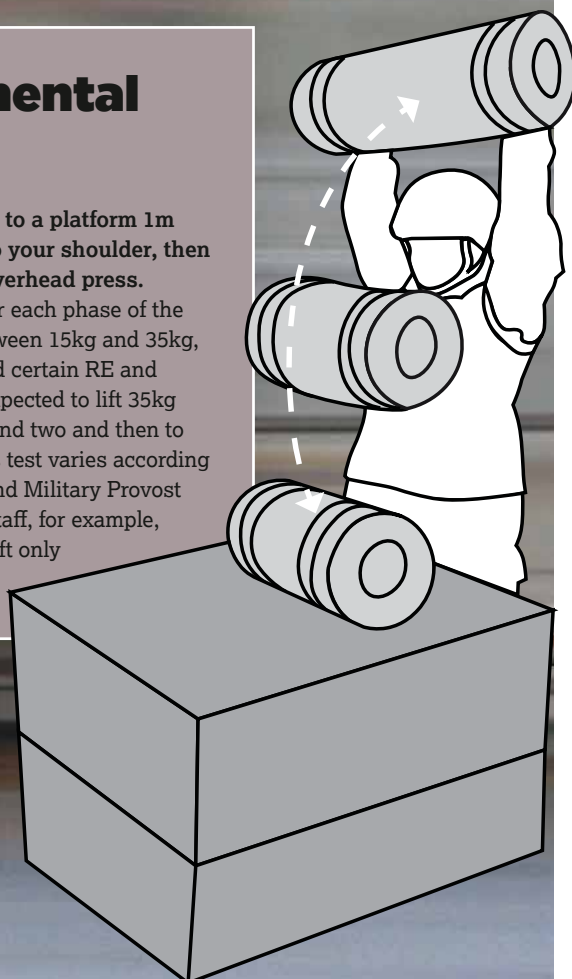


7

## Incremental lift

Lift a weight on to a platform 1m high, then on to your shoulder, then into a classic overhead press.

The weight for each phase of the lift can vary between 15kg and 35kg, with RAPTC and certain RE and RA personnel expected to lift 35kg for phases one and two and then to press 25kg. This test varies according to role though and Military Provost Guard Service staff, for example, are required to lift only 15kg each time.



6

## The repeated carry

This is broken down into two groups – **medium** and **heavy** – with certain cap badges (including RE and REME) required to complete the more demanding tests.

- **Medium** – carry a 15kg power bag over a 30m course then run 30m unloaded
- **Heavy** – carry a 20kg power bag for 30m, followed by a 15m unloaded leg. Then carry two 22kg water cans over 30m, followed by a 15m unloaded phase.

In both groups a maximum of ten mins is allowed to conduct a set amount of shuttles (28 or 32).





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# Command TASK

Aiming for officer selection this year? Here's what to expect...

► WITH the Army steeped in centuries of tradition and perceptions of privilege, becoming an officer can seem off limits to soldiers.

But nothing could be further from the truth – applying from the ranks is easier than you might think.

Col Lucy Giles, President of the Army Officer Selection Board in Westbury, explains more about the process and offers some advice for those setting their sights on command.

## Take the plunge

It may previously have appeared as if there was a mountain of bureaucracy to go through if, as a serving soldier, you wanted to go see if you were officer material. But this is no longer the case – if you are a Regular or Reservist you can apply online with the support of your chain of command, which will be asked to provide a character reference.

## Choose your path

A one-day briefing event held at Westbury comes next. After this you may be identified as benefitting from the potential officers' development course at Worthy Down. If not, then you will be invited to go straight to a main board.

## Prepare perfectly

Both mind and body need to be ready for a demanding three days at the Army Officer Selection Board. You will be assessed against physical standards linked to ground close

combat roles, although achieving these should not be a drama for a serving soldier. Keep your problem-solving skills sharp and stay up-to-date on current affairs before you come – but don't be tempted to prepare to pass specific tasks because you can't be sure they will come up.

## Drop the mask

It might sound like a cliché, but being yourself is perhaps the most important advice that I can give while you are at Westbury. You should also listen carefully to everything you are told and make sure you contribute. The people assessing you are adept at finding out whether you have the right attributes for training as an officer – the real you will come out in the end.

## Apply the learning

If you are successful, a new challenge lies ahead at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst – preparing for this is another story entirely. But it is also important not be discouraged if you are unsuccessful. It simply means this pathway is not for you and the door is open to explore other options. Remember, it is an achievement even to be put forward for the selection process – you should be proud. The experience will stand you in good stead for the future.

### Profile:

Col Lucy Giles

Age: 51

**Commissioned into:** The Royal Corps of Transport in 1992

**Operational experience:** Includes Iraq, Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, Balkans

**Current role:** President, AOSB





Could the low-carb lifestyle solve your weight-loss woes?

A physiologist and nutrition coach discuss

► **JANUARY**; the season of new year's resolutions and the time where more people embark on healthy eating regimes than in any other month.

If you're looking to slim down, you might have considered the ketogenic diet – the low-carb eating plan touted by celebrities and influencers as an effective way to shed pounds quickly.

But is it all it's cracked up to be, or should you stick to more traditional methods to get in shape?

*Soldier* asked Dr Sophie Arana, from the Army Health and Performance Research team, and diet and wellness coach Kev Mason (ex-REME) for their take on the issue.

### ketogenic diet

noun (c)

UK /ki:.teɪ, dʒen. ɪk

a type of eating plan in which someone consumes foods that are high in fat but low in carbohydrates in order to lose weight.

### What is keto?

Followers of ketogenic diets eat lots of high-fat foods such as certain meats, oily fish, nuts and avocado; moderate amounts of protein, including lean meat, fish and dairy; and few carbohydrates, like bread, pasta and rice. Although they may seem relatively new to the scene, such eating plans have actually been around for some 100 years, originally as a treatment for epilepsy and diabetes.

### How does it work?

The lack of carbs for energy puts your body into starvation mode and what's known as ketosis, a state in which it starts to break down fat to provide itself with an alternate source of energy, leading to weight loss. Ketone supplements are also available – these are designed to mimic the effects of the diet, but most do not increase ketone levels enough for the desired effects.



# So, should soldiers try it?



Absolutely, says mechanic-turned diet coach Kev Mason, and this is why...

✓ With a nutritious keto diet, including a good range of animal products, nuts and seeds you will **lose weight**, which is the main objective people are looking for

✓ You will gain **lean body mass**. If you eat enough protein you will not lose muscle, which can be a worry on keto. It's the most important macronutrient, not only for muscle growth but also for gluconeogenesis – the process by which your body produces its own glucose without having to rely on carbs and sugars

✓ If you eat the right foods, like protein, your glucose is better regulated, **you won't get "hangry"** and you will feel fuller and more energised for longer. Carbs get converted to glucose and used to power the muscles but they are very fast burning, so it's like making a bonfire with paper – you have to constantly fuel it otherwise your body slows down. Your energy peaks, then crashes, and you get short-tempered

✓ It's good for **overall health**. By losing weight and eliminating all of the processed foods that are present in modern diets – things like

refined sugars and cooking oils – you lower your risk of so-called lifestyle diseases like diabetes and certain cancers. Lots of my clients report a raft of other benefits too, such as better sleep, enhanced mental clarity and improved hormonal health for women

✓ Soldiers have **the right mindset**. Counting your macronutrients takes a bit of getting used to, but prior planning and preparation is what Service personnel do. You just need to think ahead and make sure you take the right snacks with you when you're out. Every diet takes willpower – if you want to achieve your goal you have to graft

**Name:** Kev Mason

**Age:** 38

**Career:** Served in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers for 13 years, but always struggled with his fitness. After leaving the Army his weight peaked at 129kg before he dropped 40kg by following a ketogenic eating plan. He has since set up his own diet and wellness coaching service – Keto Kev – to help others transform their bodies



But according to Dr Arana, **that's not the whole story...**





Dr Arana believes that while keto can be useful for weight loss, it is restrictive and difficult to sustain long term. And that's not all...

✗ In short, if you're after speed and power, or are wanting to develop muscle, ketones are not the fuel for you. They will keep you going at a steady pace all day and there is some evidence that they improve mental clarity. But **they won't give you those bursts of explosive energy that you need for dynamic, high-intensity military activities.** Only carbohydrates will do this

✗ Eating a low-carb diet may also put you **at more risk of injury and illness**, limit intake of important nutrients such as fibre and B vitamins and place you at higher risk of dehydration. For these reasons, ketogenic diets are **unlikely to support the demands of military employment**

✗ The amount of carbs you'll be able to eat is less than a small serving of pasta or one bagel for the whole day. It will take about five days of this diet for your body to go into a true ketogenic state, and **"cheat days" will set you back to square one**

✗ Military catering in the UK is based on the Eatwell Guide, which promotes a healthy balance of carbohydrate, fat and protein, so it would be **very difficult to safely follow a ketogenic diet in the field** or in your unit

✗ It can be **easy to eat lots of processed meats and saturated fats**, so you need to be very careful that you are not consuming too many poor quality foods

✗ **We aren't yet sure about the long-term impact** of such eating plans on health and performance

✗ Ultimately, for any diet to work it needs to be sustainable over time and compatible with your lifestyle and employment. So, in my opinion **keto is not the key to success for soldiers**

More information on healthy eating can be found on the **Defence Nutrition Advisory Service's** pages on Defence Connect and the Defence Intranet

**Name:** Dr Sophie Arana

**Age:** 31

**Career:** An MoD civil servant for five years, Dr Arana is a senior scientist in the Army Health and Performance Research team, based in Andover. She is also an honorary senior research fellow at University College London's Division of Surgery and Interventional Science

# Life goals

Whatever your fitness, health or career aims are in 2021, this coaching technique could help you achieve them

► LET'S face it, Covid-19 made much of last year a write-off and many of us have had to completely rethink our personal and professional plans.

With the rollout of a vaccine providing a glimmer of hope, maybe you're thinking about working towards a goal you put on hold – or maybe the events of 2020 have led you to re-evaluate what's truly important to you.

Either way, a tool known as value coaching could prove useful, believes Maj Neil Weddell (AGC (ETS)).

The officer is the co-chair of the Humanist, Atheist and Non-religious in Defence (Hand) network, which is training its staff in the technique as a way of helping personnel answer some of life's big questions.

Here, *Soldier* quizzes him on what it's all about.



## What is value coaching?

It creates a space for transforming ourselves and giving our lives purpose. It comes in from the non-religious angle that there isn't necessarily a higher meaning and that we only have this one, short existence, which in itself can be quite a daunting prospect. Value coaching can help us overcome the anxiety such awareness brings, turn it into focus and define our core principles.

## Who can benefit?

It's particularly appropriate for personnel who feel a disconnect between who they are and where their life or career trajectory is going. It can also help those who have undergone a traumatic event – such as war or the pandemic – that makes them re-evaluate life.

## What does it involve?

It's essentially about getting you mentally strong and joined up, beginning with a few basic assumptions. As non-religious people we are reliant on our own values when choosing how to live. Taking responsibility for one's existence, rather than giving in to the push and pull of others is key. It's challenging, but it gives us the freedom to decide what our purpose is. For instance, is yours to be the best at your trade, or leave the world in a better place, or be the best parent you can be?

## It sounds a bit like psychoanalysis...

Funnily enough, it is where coaching and psychotherapy meet – but the focus is very much on mindset and purpose. It is well known that when we are doing anything physically challenging, our brain has this evolutionary self-preservation switch which sends signals to quit when we are only really at 20 per cent physical capacity. Being mentally strong first will always mean you perform better and longer when compared to someone who is physically strong, but lacks conviction.

## Why not just use normal coaching?

Traditional methods often only really focus on one specific goal. But value coaching

analyses a person's whole world view based on four principles – the social, physical, spiritual and psychological dimensions. This is key because people rarely explore these collectively, yet they all influence each other.

## Can you give an example?

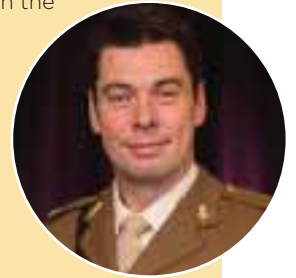
We may, for instance, want the high flying career – a social goal – and so we pursue that pathway, getting coached in how to secure promotion. Unintentionally, working towards that aim could negatively impact our inner personal value of being there for family – our spiritual goal. While we do start to promote, we feel a hollow victory as our late nights at work and stress keep us from enjoying time at home with loved ones. We call this behaviour being "inauthentic" towards our true selves and this induces anxiety in us.

## Do you think people are more anxious in general these days?

For sure. The cause of this is the way the news travels now. We hear so much more about what's going on in the world. Social media doesn't help either, it creates a fear of missing out which fuels our worry. Together with the fact we have limited time on the planet and no particular set purpose or meaning, we can start to feel overwhelmed. I think Covid, especially, has already led many to reevaluate what is important in their life and this is why we are so keen to provide the service to all MoD personnel.

## Helping Hand

As part of his role in the Humanist, Atheist and Non-religious in Defence network, Maj Weddell oversees pastoral support to personnel who don't subscribe to religious beliefs.



"In times of crisis people understandably seek advice from their traditional role models or those who are like minded to them," he explains.

"Faith leaders do an excellent and critical job in that respect for those who are religious, but who is there for the 52 per cent of the UK population – 55,000 within the MoD – who don't have the same outlook?"

"Some of them will want to reach out to someone who authentically shares the same beliefs, and that's where Hand and value coaching comes in.

"We offer personnel the opportunity to talk through those big, existential questions and the service is completely free to those who request it."

If you're curious about value coaching contact Maj Weddell on [neil.weddell@humanism.org.uk](mailto:neil.weddell@humanism.org.uk) or visit [nrpsn.org.uk](http://nrpsn.org.uk)



# Enhance Your Advantage

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**RAFAEL** 



The image shows two soldiers in full combat gear, including helmets, face masks, and tactical vests, running on a dark asphalt runway. They are carrying rifles. In the background, a large military transport aircraft, likely a C-17 Globemaster III, is parked. The aircraft's high-wing configuration and large cargo door are prominent. The sky is overcast with soft, diffused light. The title 'AIRBORNE ALLIES' is overlaid on the right side of the image, with 'AIRBORNE' in a dark green font and 'ALLIES' in a large white font.

# AIRBORNE ALLIES

Words: Georgina Coupe Pictures: Graeme Main, Sgt Tom Evans and Cpl Rob Kane, both RLC

2 Para take to the skies  
with multinational  
partners on  
Wessex Storm »

**T**HE unmistakable sound of rotor blades fills the skies as wave after wave of helicopters appear on the horizon, signalling the largest British-led air assault in more than ten years.

On that occasion it was Operation Moshtarak, when the International Security Assistance Force – in conjunction with Afghan troops – launched an offensive to eliminate the last Taliban stronghold in central Helmand province, in the town of Marjah.

Fast forward a decade and the multinational approach remains firmly on the agenda as four of the Army's most feared gunships – the Apache attack helicopter, with its deadly arsenal of Hellfire missiles and rockets mounted around 30mm chain guns – circle menacingly above the Salisbury Plain Training Area.

They are providing overwatch to the 1,300-strong 2nd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment Battlegroup that is being transported by 17 Chinooks, Pumas and Wildcats ahead of an attack on Imber village.

The intimidating show of force is a powerful demonstration of how British, French and American paratroopers could go into battle side-by-side and marks the beginning of the validation stage of Exercise Wessex Storm.

A six-week set of manoeuvres, it is designed to test and confirm the formation's high-readiness ability to respond to a spectrum of global threats at a moment's notice.

"The beauty of 16 Air Assault Brigade is that we can be used for anything," explains the battlegroup's commanding officer, Lt Col Matt Taylor (Para).

"We can facilitate a full spectrum of operations – whether that's dealing with a counter-insurgency threat, peacekeeping tasks or providing a non-combat evacuation capability. We will do whatever we are asked.


"As well as providing an opportunity to work alongside our international partners and demonstrate the battlegroup's capability to deploy, Exercise Wessex Storm marks three big »





“The beauty of  
16 Air Assault Brigade is that  
we can be used for anything”





» anniversaries as we celebrate our airborne forces' 80th birthday, the 40-year milestone of the Chinook entering military service and a decade since the signing of the Lancaster House Treaties."

The latter, which agreed nuclear, defence and security cooperation between the UK and France, cemented the close partnership between the two nations' airborne brigades, heralding the formation of the Airborne Combined Expeditionary Force.

French paratroopers kicked off the latest exercise with a series of anti-tank ranges using three of their own missile systems – the 84mm rocket, the short-distance urban missile, Eryx, and the Javelin equivalent, Milan – to practise British live fire procedures that culminated in day and night-time company attacks.

"We have a lot in common with the British Army and it's been great to share the way we operate and learn how they work," says 1st Lt Hubert Houdet, of 2e Regiment Etranger de Parachutistes (2e REP).


"We've had the chance to do lots of day, night, urban and field-based serials since we arrived and it's also the first time we've trained with American airborne forces at brigade level.

"Being able to see weapon systems and tactical points of view has given us some different and interesting ideas on how to fight in various battlefields and environments which we will take back to France."

Mounting at Keevil airfield and working in conjunction with Royal Air Force tactical controllers, the American, British and »

# PLAIN TALKING

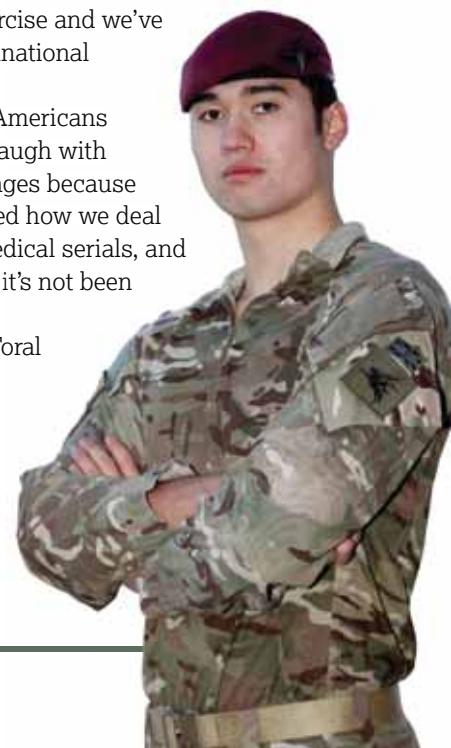
Troops share their thoughts on the multinational mission »



“ Exercise Wessex Storm is our opportunity to prove to the Army and ourselves that we are ready for any tasks we might be needed for.

It is the first time I've worked with American and French paratroopers and although there are some differences, and we use different terminology, there's nothing that can't be cleared up with a short conversation – fundamentally we are the same.”

**LT TOMMY WATSON**  
**2 PARA**



“ It has been a fast-paced exercise and we've been integrated with our multinational partners from the beginning.

I've never worked with the Americans before, but we've had a good laugh with them. There's been a few changes because of Covid restrictions. We altered how we deal with captured persons and medical serials, and also had to eat separately, but it's not been too much of an issue.

Deploying to Kabul on Op Tora! was different to conventional soldiering but it was a great experience because everyone in the Paras wants to deploy.”

**PTE PHIL HORAN**  
**2 PARA**



# IN NUMBERS

105mm artillery shell – **542 fired**

81mm mortar (HE, smoke, illum) – **1,412 fired**

5.56mm – **21,693 live rounds**

5.56mm – **127,800 blank rounds**

.....  
Total rations issued – **14,614**

Chefs cooked **217,000 meals** across the exercise

.....  
Vehicles on ex – **283**



“ This sort of training is great – we don’t do it enough. It allows us to integrate and work together and bridge the gap between the different armies.

We are more connected, and our planning processes have become more streamlined. I hope we’ve demonstrated that we can integrate and be part of a strong Nato alliance if we are required to deter and fight against potential adversaries in the future. ”

**1ST LT ARTHUR ZYCH**  
**173RD AIRBORNE BRIGADE**  
**US ARMY**



“ We share a lot in common with the British Army and we’ve been very warmly welcomed.

The exercise has been great; it’s got every aspect needed to train and it’s been a fantastic thing for our company to do – we’ve had the opportunity to learn how the Brits work and for them to see how we are organised. ”

**1ST LT HUBERT HOUDET**  
**2E REP**



“ I’ve worked with the Polish and Slovenian militaries before, but this is the first time I have trained with the Brits and we’re pretty similar.

It’s good to know how our allies work and all our guys are excited to be here and strengthening our Nato partnerships. ”

**SSGT ELIJAH WELCH**  
**173RD AIRBORNE BRIGADE**  
**US ARMY**





» French military aircraft dominated the airspace above Salisbury Plain for three days and nights.

In that time, they dropped more than 16,000 tonnes of vehicles, equipment and paratroopers as they prepared to take on conventional enemy and militia-style adversaries.

With interoperability at the forefront of the simulated mission, 150 French and 40 American personnel were embedded within the 2 Para Battlegroup.

Here, they carried out air assault operations, rapid air landing manoeuvres and conducted subterranean training – working in the dark confined spaces of an underground tunnel network with the added complication of reduced communications.

“Training in this way offers obvious benefits should we be required to deploy with our twinned formations,” continues Lt Col Taylor.

“We use similar weapon and communication systems, and the development of a shared set of tactics, techniques and procedures shows we are able to achieve much more and can work together seamlessly.”

Supported by signallers, engineers, artillery, medics and logistics specialists from 16 Air Assault Brigade, Colchester-based 2 Para are now bracing themselves to take over the annual rotation of high-readiness responsibility from sister battalion, 3 Para, in the spring.

“2020 was a busy year with our deployment to Afghanistan on Operation Toral,” Lt Col Taylor adds.

“And although it was an excellent tour it was also intense, with disputes over elections, the brokering of a Taliban peace agreement and the added complications of the Covid-19 pandemic.

“But as paratroopers we always love to be involved in operations and are looking forward to taking on the high-readiness responsibility.

“We all want to deploy and use the readiness we have trained for – it keeps us sharp and engaged.” ■

“We all want to deploy and use the readiness we have trained for – it keeps us sharp and engaged”



# CYBER SQUADS

## Online gaming hits the military mainstream

**I**T WAS a surreal end to an already strange evening – spent watching soldiers as they fired illumination rounds to deter insurgents from causing trouble.

Plodding back across the sand to the commandeered hotel buildings in Basra where the Army had created a rural outpost, the mortar crews headed for the cover of their recreational area.

Tearing ring pulls and knocking back soft drinks, most of the personnel flopped exhaustedly onto the chairs around the television and PlayStation.

Even late at night, the summer heat in southern Iraq could top 35 degrees Celsius. Beads of sweat prickled the skin as the air conditioning kicked in.

After a night on ops, recreation came care of a first-person shooter video game. A computer-generated repeat of the day job seemed a bizarre downtime choice in an area where real contacts were common.

But digital combat clearly helped let off steam. »

» “Being out patrolling in places such as Iraq or Afghanistan can be very tough,” Army gaming guru Maj Tim Elliott (Scots) tells *Soldier*.

“And you’re still tense when you return to the cover of your forward operating base.

“Playing on a console or a PC gives you a chance to relax, calm down and generally have downtime fun – and this applies whether at home or on ops.”

With gaming firmly embedded in mainstream culture and continuing to grow in popularity with troops, the Army has been embracing the benefits of digital recreation.

From promoting good mental health to developing core skills, a session twiddling a controller can have a positive impact on many fronts.

As a keen gamer himself – in addition to being a career soldier with operational experience in Bosnia and Iraq – Maj Elliott has been the driving force behind the Service’s growing esports community.

And in the wake of a global gaming phenomenon now worth billions of pounds – which has seen a growth in spectator numbers for virtual competitions – it has been expanding fast over the last year.

Troops can meet online to slug it out with both colleagues and like-minded civvies, details of which can be found by searching “Army esports” on Defence Connect.

An app for soldiers also gives them access to private comms as a companion to the on-screen action.

“We have seen real growth since we started with this,” Maj Elliott points out. “There are already hundreds of troops now playing and we are hoping to expand further.

“I have had occasions where I have been up very early in the morning and seen 50 or 60 people online and gaming in their downtime across the world.

“It is great to have so many individuals interested and taking part.”

Games being played range from actioners such as the *Call of Duty* series to virtual sports titles including the *Fifa* line-up and the offbeat *Rocket League*.

Maj Elliott believes there is an appetite for more variety and points out that new titles are always being added.

Having led the military’s first foray at the Insomnia gaming show last year, he highlights that strong links are also continuing to be forged with civilian colleagues, which will see further playing opportunities.

While stressing that recruitment was not the reason for the presence at the event, he maintains that gamers are constantly honing solid soldiering attributes.

“They have mental determination and problem-solving skills,” he adds. »

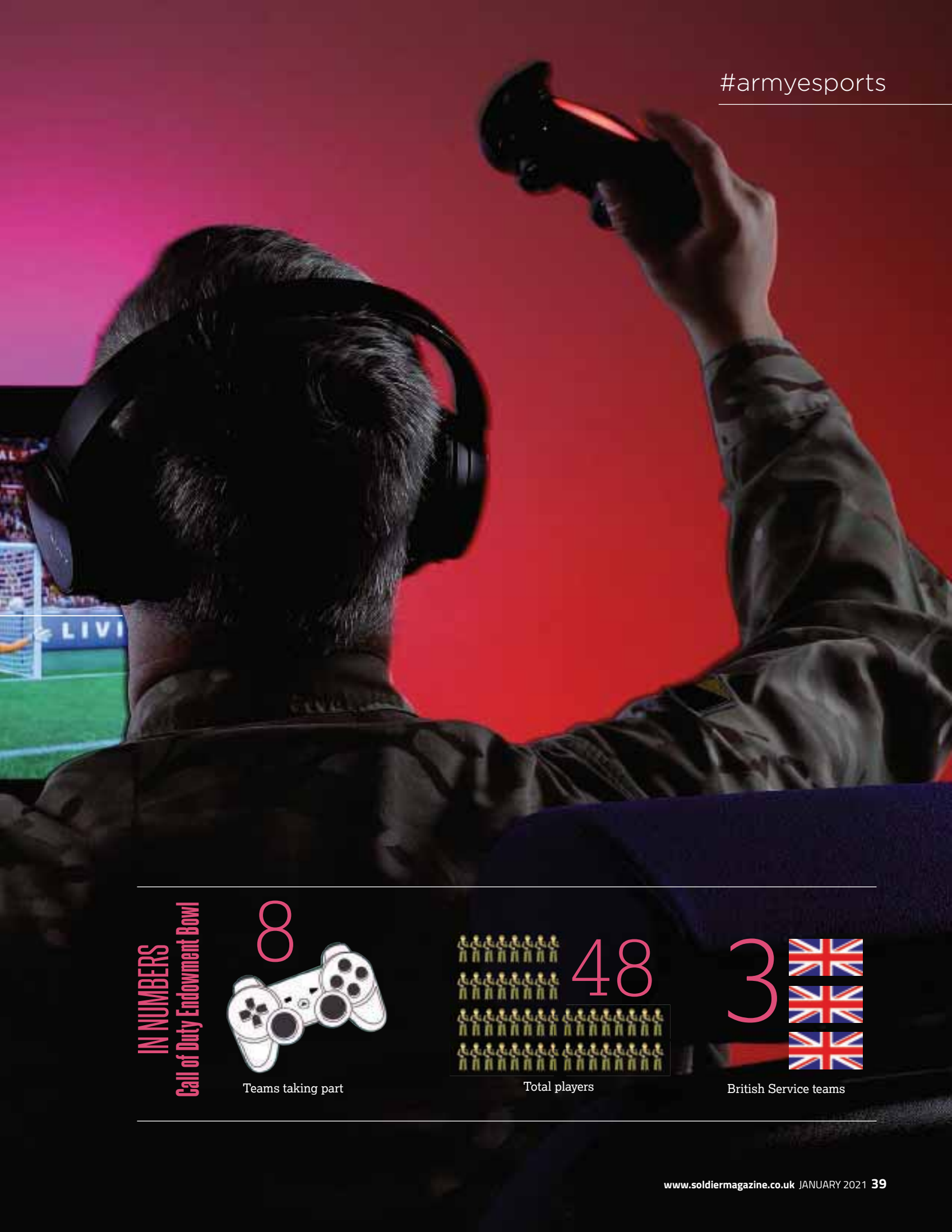
“

It is great to have so many people interested and taking part

”







IN NUMBERS  
Call of Duty Endowment Bowl



Teams taking part



Total players



British Service teams



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» “Cap badge does not matter – these disciplines are needed on the modern battlefield.”

As well as promoting relaxation, providing a downtime social scene and assisting with the wellbeing of players, games are being played competitively by troops.

The inaugural Inter-Corps clash was held in April last year, with sappers and signallers battling it out on the first-person shooter *Counter Strike: Global Offensive*. The Army later threw down the gauntlet to the Royal Air Force.

More recently, all three Services also fielded their video game elite for the Call of Duty Endowment Bowl.

The first time Brits have been invited to the US-run charity event – which raises money to place veterans in employment – they faced a fierce fight with five American military teams.

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment Executive Director, was pleased to see the UK taking part and hopes more regular competition will soon follow.

He believes the online contest could become a similar fixture to the hotly contested Army-Navy rugby union match held at Twickenham every year.

“This is the first time all branches of the US armed forces – as well as British teams – have joined up for a spirited esports event,” the ex-US naval officer adds.

“In the US we have a football game that is similar to your rugby match, and we are seeing the endowment bowl being played in the same friendly competitive spirit.”

This is certainly true, and the scene holds promise for an interesting future.

With esports now part of the fabric of popular culture – and by default with new recruits – a healthy community can only be for the good.

All the positive signs were there when troops used consoles for downtime on the high-intensity ops of a decade ago.

Now games are being deployed to foster core skills, aid mental health and build relationships closer to home. ■



**Maj Tim Elliott**

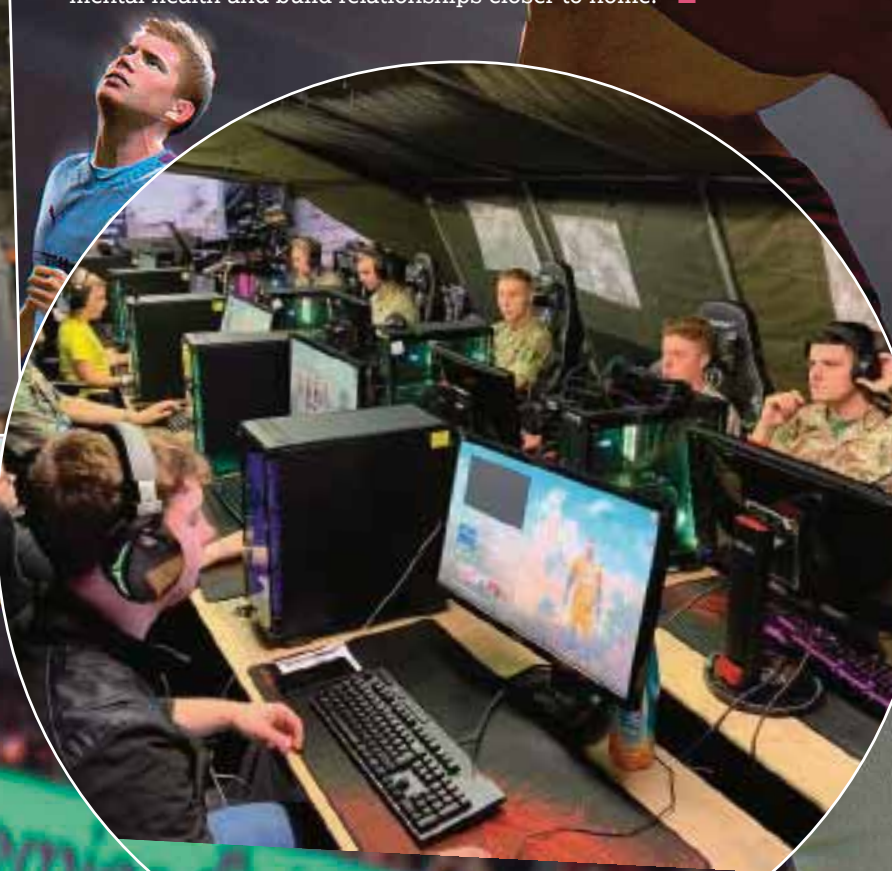
**Age:** 50

**Commissioned into:**  
The Black Watch

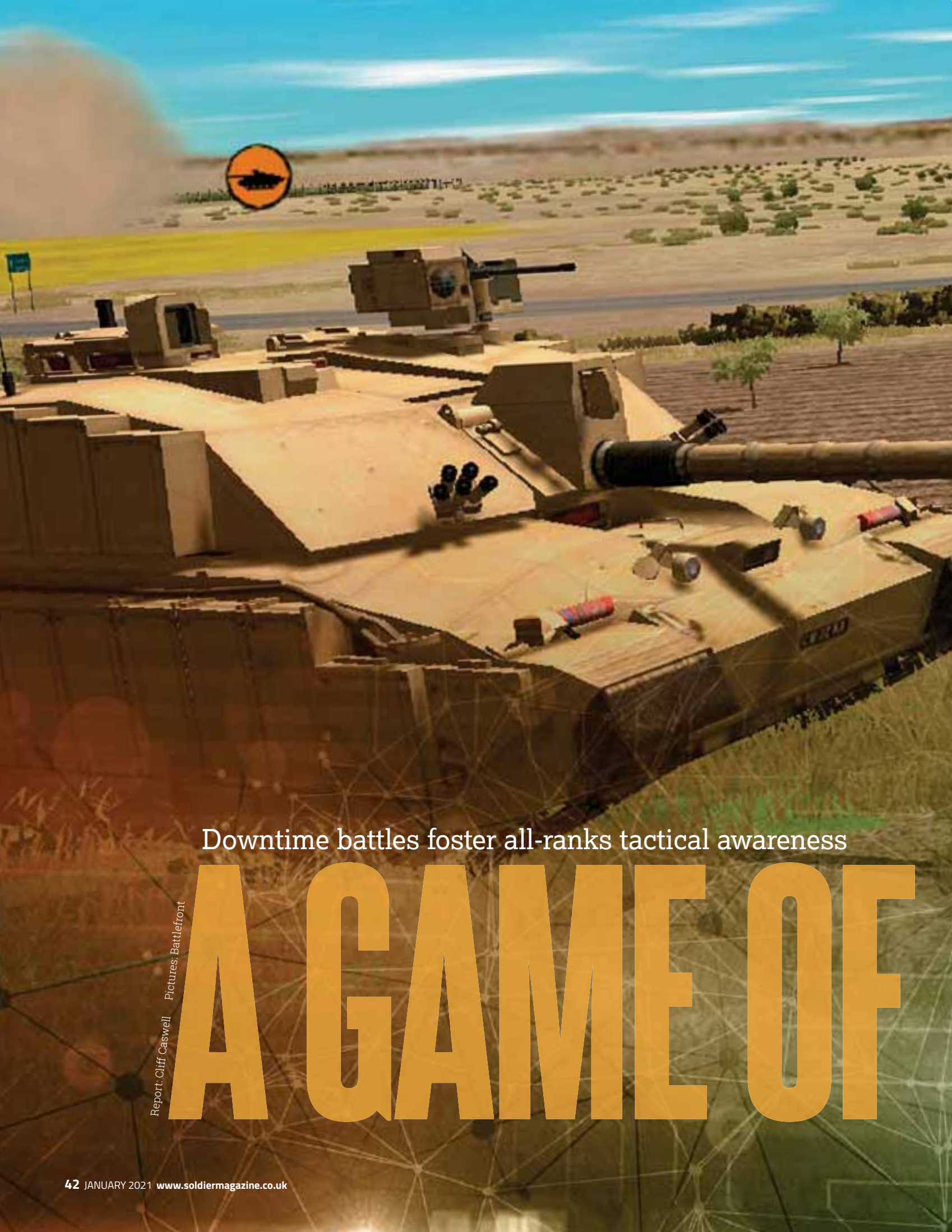
**Years of service:** Regular 1992-2012; Reserves 2016-

**Operational experience:**  
Includes Iraq, Bosnia

**Current favourite game:**  
*Elite Dangerous*





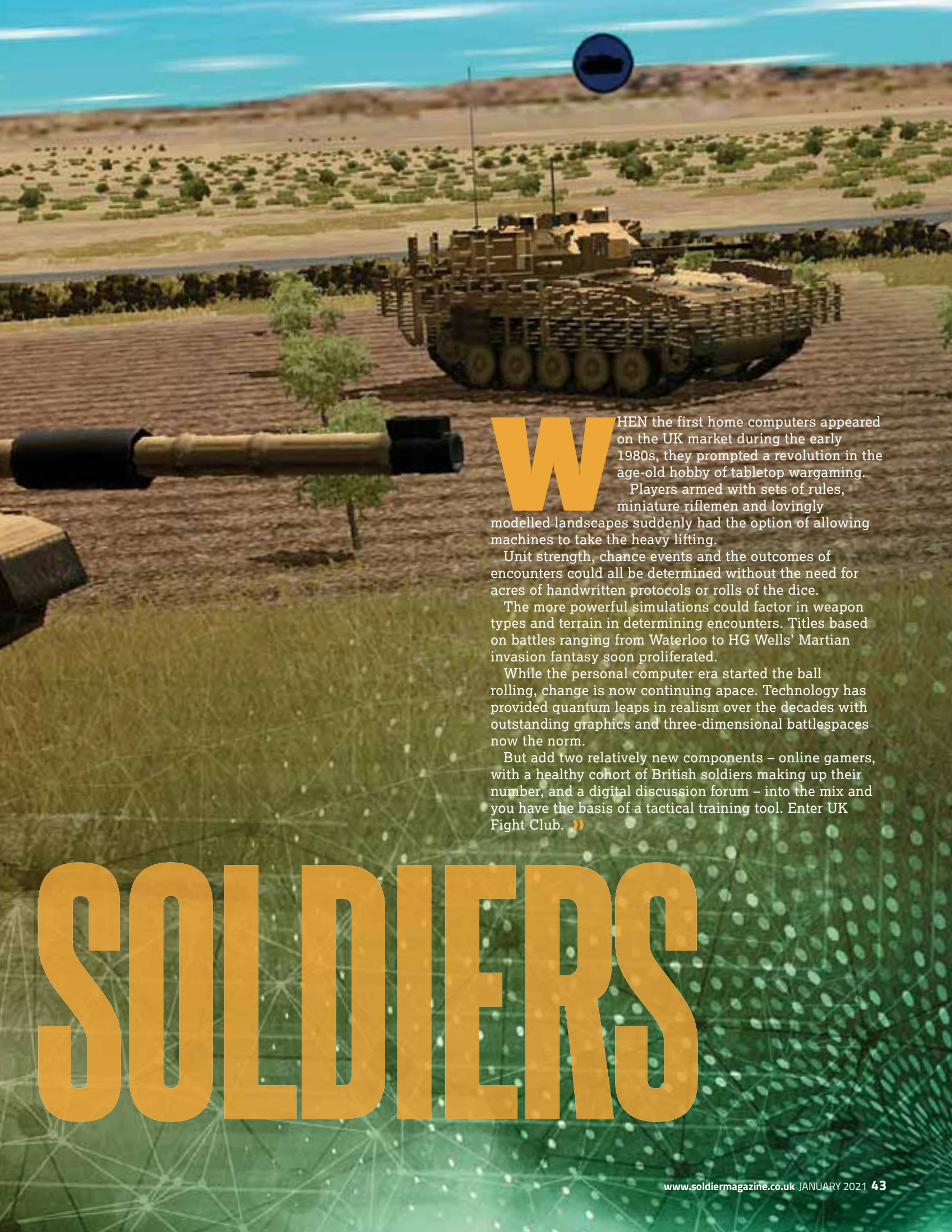


Downtime battles foster all-ranks tactical awareness

# A GAME OF

Report: Cliff Caswell  
Pictures: Battlefront





**W**HEN the first home computers appeared on the UK market during the early 1980s, they prompted a revolution in the age-old hobby of tabletop wargaming. Players armed with sets of rules, miniature riflemen and lovingly modelled landscapes suddenly had the option of allowing machines to take the heavy lifting.

Unit strength, chance events and the outcomes of encounters could all be determined without the need for acres of handwritten protocols or rolls of the dice.

The more powerful simulations could factor in weapon types and terrain in determining encounters. Titles based on battles ranging from Waterloo to HG Wells' Martian invasion fantasy soon proliferated.

While the personal computer era started the ball rolling, change is now continuing apace. Technology has provided quantum leaps in realism over the decades with outstanding graphics and three-dimensional battlespaces now the norm.

But add two relatively new components – online gamers, with a healthy cohort of British soldiers making up their number, and a digital discussion forum – into the mix and you have the basis of a tactical training tool. Enter UK Fight Club. »

# SOLDIERS



» The brainchild of US Army strategist and gaming enthusiast Col Arnel David, the initiative allows troops to play against each other on off-the-shelf strategy titles before informally debriefing on the merits of the various approaches they've taken.

With the project's origins partly in pre-Covid-19 work on the British Army operating model, the club is largely made up of military personnel. But the officer added that it is attracting a wider dynamic – including interested civvies.

"Online communities are making the big difference," Col David, who is serving with Nato's HQ Allied Rapid Reaction Corps in Gloucester, told *Soldier*.

"Using commercially available games, we are bringing together all kinds of people including troops of every rank, MoD staff and mainstream gamers."

Col David said *Combat Mission: Shock Force 2* was among the titles group members used to create serials as the initiative's popularity rocketed during the lull that followed the coronavirus outbreak.

"We had only envisaged having 20-or-so folks involved when we came up with Fight Club," he continued. "But it grew with lockdown and now we have hundreds."

Its administrators are also using social media to engage with audiences, outlining results of scenarios and previews of forthcoming clashes.

While it is not an official MoD training tool, Fight Club has been catching the eye of defence chiefs who have long looked at the potential of the gaming sector.

Back in the mid-2000s – as the first soldiers of the so-called PlayStation generation were enlisting – the engine of then popular first-person shooter *Operation Flashpoint* was initially used to recreate drills employed in Iraq.

Procured as an urgent operational requirement to recreate Op Telic road moves, programmers beefed up the package's realism, reconfigured the armoury with British weapons and made the equipment behave more realistically.

The finished Joint Combat Operations Virtual Environment product was delivered by defence contractor NSC, now part of QinetiQ, and played by troops on PCs to prepare for real-world exercises.

Steve Yates – simulation programme director at the company still providing digital training packages for the MoD – said many soldiers have benefited from such adaptations.

"Investment in console and PC entertainment products dwarfs military budgets," he said. "And why not leverage some of it when there are real benefits?"

"We are seeing the same game underpinnings that are driving hugely popular releases such as *Fortnite*, now being used to provide simulation experiences."

Yates also stressed that technology is an instinctive part of soldiers' lives and the Forces could build on this by using familiar civvy interfaces.

"If you look at console controllers, they are very similar," he continued.

"People understand them in the same way they know



“We are bringing together all kinds of people”



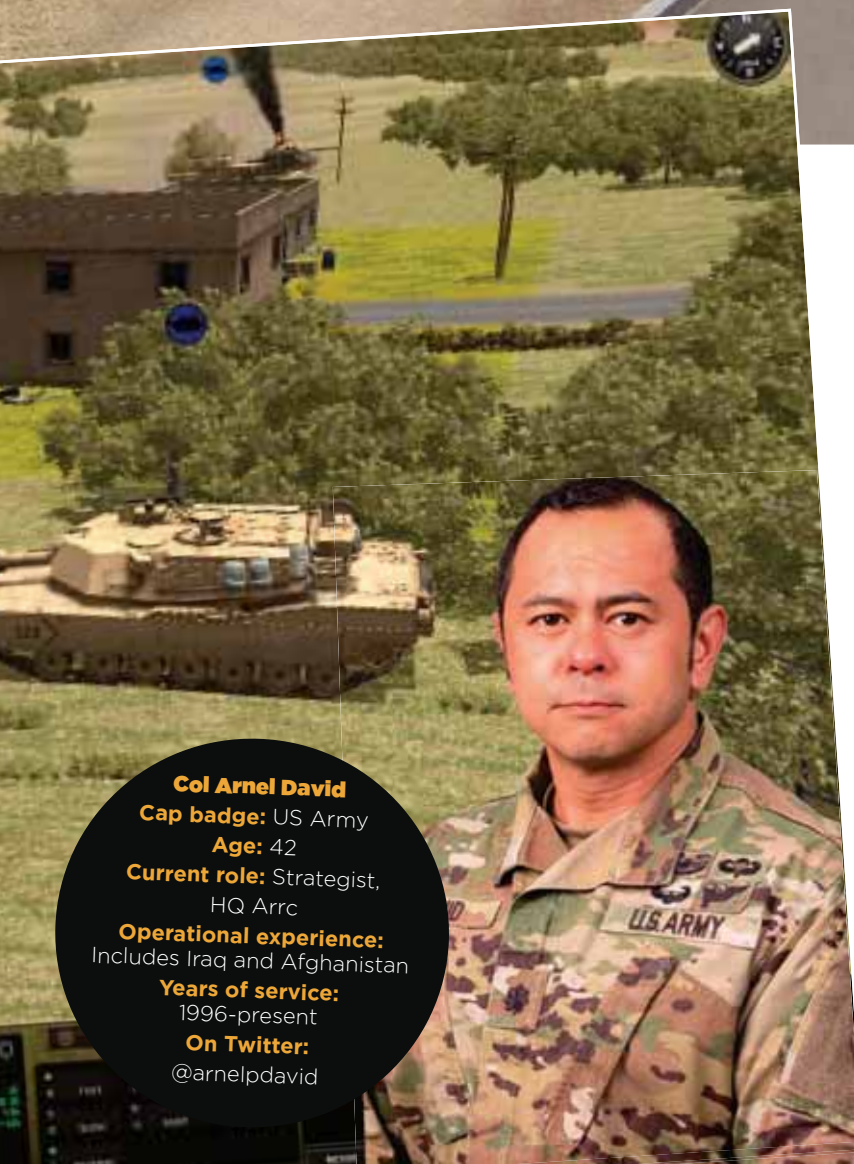


### Exercise control

Recent serials undertaken by UK Fight Club members have included a hypothetical British deployment in the Middle East and a simulated mission rehearsal exercise on Salisbury Plain



● Find out more on Twitter  
[@UKFightClub1](https://twitter.com/UKFightClub1)



### Col Arnel David

**Cap badge:** US Army

**Age:** 42

**Current role:** Strategist,  
HQ Arrc

**Operational experience:**  
Includes Iraq and Afghanistan

**Years of service:**

1996-present

**On Twitter:**

[@arnelpdavid](https://twitter.com/arnelpdavid)

how to read and write.”

Harnessing the power of a generation that understands – and is comfortable with – the online gaming sector is certainly a driving force behind Fight Club.

Col David believes that maintaining the online forum could offer an unprecedented depth of opinion and experience wherever in the world players are based.

“Accessibility helps with the sharing of ideas,” he continued. “Cognitive diversity is an imperative and we will be winning if, in particular, we can get some of the quieter, more junior soldiers to come forward and offer their views.

“We’re dealing with open source stuff here so there is very little in the way of sensitivity, but any discussions where this is an issue take place in the right setting.”

Security is certainly essential but concepts such as Fight Club could bring some interesting new perspectives to military thinking.

With a cohort of soldiers comfortable with gaming and communicating seamlessly online, encouraging them to air their views could be useful – particularly if they are more reserved in the face-to-face world.

In a new era of conflict – in which a varied skill set will be needed to tackle enemy forces on and off the battlefield – capturing good ideas from all ranks is crucial. ■

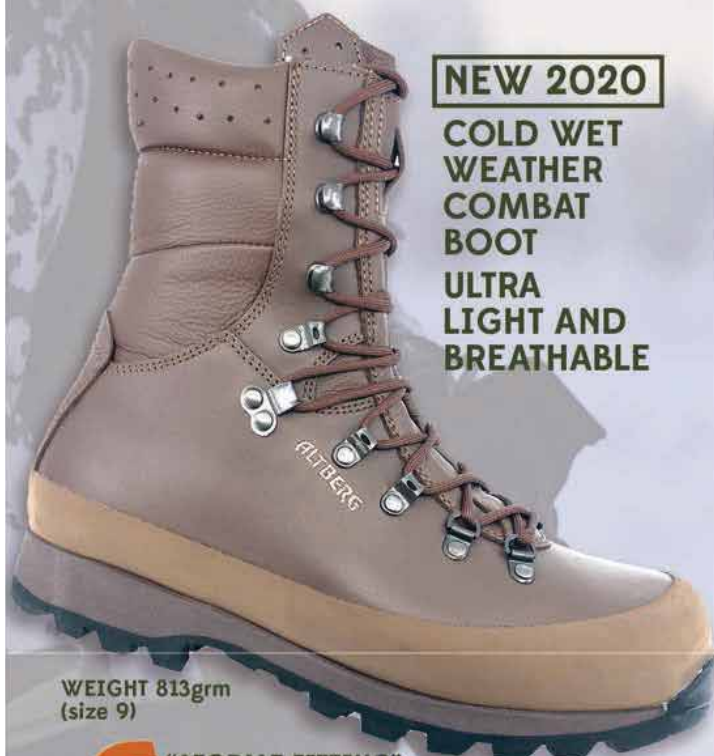


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# ABOVE & BEYOND

Latest operational honours list showcases the selfless commitment of British troops at home and abroad

**O**N FEBRUARY 8, 2020, medic LCpl Hannah Richardson (RAMC) was serving at Kabul International Airport alongside 2nd Battalion, The Yorkshire Regiment, when news of an insider attack on coalition personnel came through.

Realising the system for transferring casualties from the helicopter landing site to the station's Role 2 hospital could be overwhelmed, she quickly enlisted a team of infanteers to help with the triage process.

Throughout the incident she directed the troops – some of whom were more senior than her – in tasks such as bandaging and note taking, while also treating the most critically injured patients.

Her calmness under pressure that day has now earned the 27-year-old a Queen's Commendation for Valuable Service.

“It was just a normal day then we got the call that everyone needed to report to the Role 2.

There had been a green on blue and we were told there could be up to 50 casualties.

Only the day before we had done a mass casualty exercise and realised we didn't have enough manpower for that type of scenario.

That's the first thing I thought of and I knew there was a company of lads sat in the accommodation. So, after checking with the hospital commander, I rang the sergeant major and there was no hesitation – less than a minute later they turned up.

It made a massive

difference knowing that the nurses and doctors could get on with the clinical side of things.

My role saw me balance my time between coordinating the Yorks guys and treating one of the most severely injured casualties.

Unfortunately, he didn't make it in the end. It's very difficult to come to terms with but it's something that happens.

There's a lot of self-reflection afterwards – positive and negative. You ask yourself, 'was I good enough, were my techniques good enough, or was I a contributing factor in why he didn't live?'

That's where the debriefs come in and you realise that regardless of what interventions we did for this guy, he probably wasn't going to make it. ”

**'They trusted me  
and I trusted them'**

Report: Becky Clark Picture: Graeme Main



” We had surgeons who were the best in their field and even they couldn’t save him.

But it’s not the kind of thing you can just forget about. Professionally you have to deal with it, but personally it does play on your mind.

There was so much support from the battalion though – even weeks afterwards, people were still coming in and seeing if I wanted a brew.

When you’re going on Op. Tora you get told it’s not as dangerous as it used to be – and that’s true, it isn’t – but there are absolutely still things going on in Afghanistan. There’s still a lot of loss and I don’t think people realise that.

It wasn’t the first time I’d dealt with casualties there, but it was the first time I’d done so to that extent and in those numbers, so it was definitely a shock to the system.

For me, the main thing was that my instinct was trusted by the company and I trusted their ability, so this award is 100 per cent a team effort.

I was just doing my job, and I know every medic will say that, but it was actually the 2 Yorks guys who really stepped up.

Watching them do what they did and the way they reacted – I was so proud.

They deserve the recognition so much more than me, and if I could hand it over to each and every one of them I genuinely would.”



**‘It seemed the right thing to do’**

**Capt Karl Williams (RLC) was running an errand in a busy shopping centre one day in April 2019 when he heard terrified screams.**

**A man was brandishing a pistol and threatening a crowd of people. The citation for his recently announced Queen’s Commendation for Bravery describes how, without hesitation or regard for his safety, the officer tackled the aggressor to the ground.**

I was in Southampton – I don’t tend to shop there, but I had taken my car to the garage.

As I was heading back to fetch it, walking up the pedestrianised area of the high street, I heard some girls screaming.

It sounded more like hysterical crying, rather than just teenagers messing around.

There had been some kind of incident in a bar and this guy was pointing a pistol at everyone – he was shouting, swearing and threatening to shoot.

He was aged about 45 to 50 and was quite dishevelled. I didn’t think he was a terrorist – he was highly agitated and what he was doing clearly wasn’t normal.

He hadn’t noticed me and I was thinking I had to do something, but I thought if I got into a scuffle with him it might end up terribly.

So, I slowed my pace and tracked him, while doing a bit of an internal risk assessment.

He got to some crossroads about 50 yards away and went round a corner. As he did so, he turned his body away from me and pulled his rucksack up to put his pistol back.

It was just me and him and I had the advantage because he wasn’t watching

me, so I just charged him.

I went in quite hard and fast and grabbed his wrists, pushed him into the wall and at the same time took the back of his legs away and put him to the ground safely.

I’m a logistician at the end of the day, not teeth arms, but we’d covered arrest and restraint years ago during routine training. I locked the back of his arms up and put my knee on his thigh so he couldn’t move.

He actually went quite submissive straight away – I think he was shocked.

I was conscious that I could hurt him, so I spoke to him and he was okay.

I then took the pressure off a bit, while still holding on to him.

At this point a lady had





called the police and said an armed response unit were on their way.

The pistol was by the wall, so I picked it up with my spare hand and knew straight away from the weight and my own experience of firearms that it wasn't real.

I told her to tell the police I'm a soldier, the perpetrator had a replica weapon and there's no need for the specialist unit.

Later I found out there were multiple other incidents that day and me saying that allowed an armed response team to be diverted to a shooting.

Eventually a squad car turned up and I went on my way, not really thinking much more of it.

I never found out what ignited the incident; however, I did hear that he had been sentenced to a prison term.

It's been pretty humbling and overwhelming to get this award as I'm not someone who likes attention.

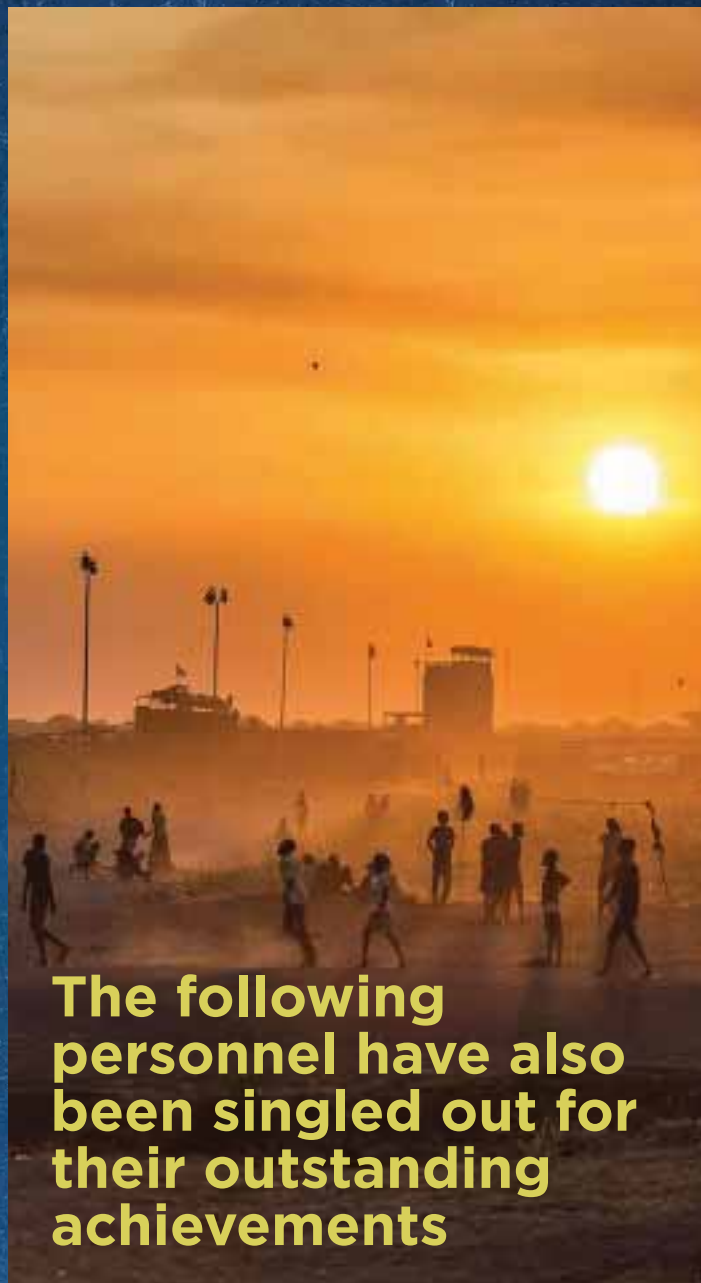
I suppose there was a sense of public duty. This was 2019 and there had been so many incidents where people had been hurt and I thought how I would feel if someone had been injured.

Maybe these sorts of things don't bother soldiers as much as other people – we have training and confidence.

We do enough mental health awareness in the Army now to understand when someone needs help.

Anyone behaving in such a way in a high street full of people is clearly not in a good place.

It just felt like the right thing to do at the time.



## The following personnel have also been singled out for their outstanding achievements

### Officer of the Order of the British Empire

● Col John Baynham, the commander of Op Tanager in Somalia between November 2018 and 2019, has been made an OBE for his contribution to the UK's efforts



to stabilise the country and counter al Shabaab. Despite the high threat from rocket, mortar and IED attacks on British, UN, EU and African Union personnel operating in the region, he "injected momentum" into the mission and won praise from allies for his leadership, according to his citation.

### Commander of the Order of the British Empire

● Col Marcus Mudd has received a CBE for his part in the mission to defeat the remnants of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (Isis). As the chief of staff of the US-led Special Operations Joint Task Force in Kuwait, he oversaw the withdrawal of 1,000 American troops from Northeast Syria. His citation describes him as an "exemplary leader" and an "exceptional representative of the United Kingdom".



### Member of the Order of the British Empire

● LCpl Elham Sedeqi (Para) has been awarded an MBE for his "exceptional" work with the Police Liaison Detachment of the Kabul Security Force. As well as delivering critical information and analysis to the mission, he independently developed a guide on Afghan culture and customs that was distributed to UK personnel in the city and will be used in future pre-deployment training. Due to his language skills, he was the front man in every engagement that his team undertook and, despite the threats to coalition troops, was the first individual into every police station. His citation emphasised his "remarkable bravery, empathy, positive temperament and focus."





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### Queen's Commendation for Valuable Service



● **Lt Col Matthew Smith (RE)** oversaw the conclusion of Op Trenton, the UK's 46-month commitment to the United Nations mission in South Sudan. With a harsh climate, poor infrastructure and units spread hundreds of miles apart, the engineering tasks his troops achieved were all the more remarkable. These included the completion of a route to allow 10,000 displaced persons to return from the UN's protection to the village of Dhorbor; a race against the clock to finish the Role 2 hospital; and the completion of an upgrade to the Kodok culvert crossing. Lt Col Smith's "inspiring leadership, analysis and diplomacy proved central" to these successes, his citation concluded.



● **SSgt Ashley Roylance (Int Corps)** served as a government communications officer in Baghdad and was instrumental in ensuring the security of UK and coalition personnel during the period following the death of the leader of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps' Quds Force in January 2020. Her contribution to intelligence collection and analysis during the crisis was described in her citation as "mission-changing", and her daily briefings demonstrated remarkable strategic understanding. She actively sought out the operations staff with recommendations and did not relent until she was satisfied that threats had been acted on.

● **Cpl Louise Cooper (AGC (SPS))** provided administrative support to Op Shader, acting two ranks up in a staff sergeant's post throughout her tour. Her principal role was providing personnel policy advice to Commander British Forces on more than 1,000 operational troops deployed across four countries. Her citation describes how she was "undaunted by the scale of the task, delivering everything that was asked of her and more, showed insight and maturity beyond her rank and was an exemplary role model to her peers and juniors".

● **Capt Alun Morris (REME)** was "tenacious, relentless and passionate" in his delivery of lifesaving protected mobility vehicles to the British forces in Afghanistan. He oversaw the maintenance of a complicated fleet of more than 100 platforms, mentoring a small team with style and care. His citation describes how his determination to find a cost-effective solution to mitigate the threat to civilian armoured vehicles from magnetic improvised explosive devices will "continue to help save lives in this and other operational theatres".



● **Col Roderick Lee** commanded British land forces in Iraq, Kuwait, Jordan and Cyprus with "energy and commitment". His 2019 tour coincided with an exceptionally demanding period, including nefarious activity by Shia militia groups and increasingly violent protests against the Iraqi government. Col Lee effectively balanced the operational requirement with the significant danger of IEDs, minimising the risk to life and upholding the UK's reputation in the process.



● **Maj Kerry Anne Schultz (RLC)** was the deputy commander and military observation liaison officer on Op Tosca during a politically volatile period in Cyprus. The breakdown of negotiations between Turkish Cypriot and Republic of Cyprus forces had created an unstable environment, but through diplomacy and tact she ensured the tension between the two sides remained low to prevent a recurrence of fighting. Her "grit and determination achieved herculean results that will last well beyond the operation", read her citation.





# INTERNATIONAL RESCUE



A year on from their mission to Wuhan, personnel reflect on the effort to extract UK citizens from pandemic hell



AS MAJ Stephanie Manning-Degobertiere (RA) headed for Heathrow Airport she had an outline of the mission ahead of her.

Part of the Joint Force Headquarters' (JFHQ) operational liaison and reconnaissance capability, she was to travel to Beijing and help embassy staff in the country organise an evacuation of British citizens and other eligible people from Wuhan and the Hubei Province.

The coronavirus outbreak that everyone had been reading about in the news was out of control.

As leader of one of the three four-person teams consisting of representatives from all three Services, her specific task would be to support the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office's (FCDO) British Embassy staff in their liaison with local authorities and clear the way for Brits to catch flights home.

On the face of it, this was nothing out of the ordinary as JFHQ personnel are taught to expect the unexpected.

They deploy in small groups, usually at extremely short notice, often with very little information, in order to quickly get themselves to wherever in the world they are required.

They were part of Op Ruman in 2017, helping coordinate relief efforts after Hurricane Irma struck the Caribbean; they were in Indonesia to support UK government organisations after the earthquake in 2018; and a year later operational liaison and reconnaissance teams (OLRT) were helping out in the aftermath of the Easter bombings in Sri Lanka and Hurricane Dorian in the Caribbean.

But no amount of training could have fully prepared them for the tasking they received a year ago this month – one







“Many individuals had to travel through numerous roadblocks and checkpoints”



that marked the beginning of a period like no other in the organisation's history.

“China looked as if it was in the grip of a dystopian nightmare,” Maj Manning-Degobertiere recalls.

“The streets were almost deserted, many shops were closed down and there were manned roadblocks everywhere.”

To contain the infection rate, Chinese authorities had heavily restricted access and movement in the Hubei region.

Unfortunately, these measures were put in place almost overnight, before the FCDO had the opportunity to adjust travel advice so British nationals in the province had become stuck, with no viable means of leaving the country.

It added up to a huge organisational and logistical nightmare for the military teams and their civilian counterparts.

UK citizens were being tracked down and contacted by the FCDO's call centres, informed of what to do and where to go amid a rapidly evolving situation – no mean feat given the fact Hubei is three quarters of the size of the UK and has roughly the same population.

Meanwhile, the military and FCDO personnel sought permission from the Chinese authorities to move individuals to Wuhan airport and board a flight back to the UK.

“Who could get on the flight had to be negotiated with China's ministry of foreign affairs,” says Maj Manning-Degobertiere.

“Many Brits had to travel through numerous roadblocks and checkpoints manned by the People's Liberation Army – and if a name wasn't on their approved list it would cause huge problems.”

To make matters worse, clearance for the initial evacuation flight was received only hours before it was due to depart.

As a result, they were not able to get the

message to all travellers in sufficient time for them to reach the airport.

“I was in Beijing and in phone comms with my JFHQ colleagues in Wuhan airport, who were checking people in,” says Maj Manning-Degobertiere.

“We had to pull information from the consular staff about who was supposed to be on the flights and check that against who had actually got there and could fly, which was a daunting task at times.

“I remember embassy staff phoning the ministry at 0300 to confirm who was due to fly – a test of their diplomatic skills in itself; I was hugely impressed at the lengths they all went to, keeping the manifest open and adding names for as long as they could before boarding began.

“In one particular case there was a child under five years old cleared to fly, but his mother, married to a UK national and a dual national, didn't have permission because China doesn't recognise dual nationality.

“My colleagues in Wuhan were distraught at having to tell this poor woman she could not travel.

“They had to send her away but I knew it wasn't right so we raised it with the wider team in Beijing and they used their contacts”

## IN NUMBERS UK Joint Force Headquarters

# 52

Tri-Service military personnel in total, with 22 from the British Army

# FIVE

Weeks of individual pre-deployment training

Countries deployed to in last 12 months, either on operations or in planning consultancy role

# 19

# 3

Evacuations of British nationals overseen by JFHQ staff last year – from China, Peru and Cuba

# 2,600

British nationals repatriated in 2020

Number of operational liaison and reconnaissance teams that can be deployed with full operational communications systems at any one time

# 6





» in China's ministry of foreign affairs to get her onboard."

The air of extreme urgency, if not near-panic, among the passengers caused extra headaches for the UK teams working out of Wuhan airport.

"It's a major international hub, probably the size of Gatwick, and we had five military staff and two civilians down there split between the areas before and after passport control, ironing out multiple issues," explains Maj Manning-Degobertiere.

"We had people turning up with visa irregularities, and some even managed to lose their passports between checking in and boarding their flight.

"Fortunately, the consular staff had planned ahead and were already on hand with emergency passports."

Two airliners containing around 350 individuals were successfully dispatched from China, one on January 30 and the second some ten days later.

Despite the constant stress and exhaustion, Maj Manning-Degobertiere believes it is among the most memorable deployments in her 11-year Army career.

"I'm not sure I have ever experienced anything like it before; the fast paced aspect of an ops room in Afghanistan – I served on Herricks 14 and 20 – and the discipline of being in that environment, stopping and listening when certain people speak and give back briefs, have some parallels. But the content of this was entirely new," she explains.

"The training we receive at JFHQ really helped but ultimately just being in the Army, having confidence in yourself, knowing you have been picked to do this job and can think outside the box, are the tools you require because there is no one-size-fits-all solution.

"What worked in China or Cuba won't in other places – that's what makes this role so exciting." ■



**CUBA:** In March the cruise ship MS Braemar was refused permission to dock in the Bahamas following a Covid outbreak among 30 or so people.

The FCDO negotiated to fly the 680 passengers home from Cuba on four British Airways flights.

Rapid deployment specialists from that organisation joined a four-person tri-Service team from

the JFHQ. WO1 Andrew Patterson (RLC) was picked to travel out.

"I was selected because of my skills in movement and logistics," he tells *Soldier*.

"This was a tricky assignment as we had to move lots of people, some of them ill, from a ship on to foreign soil and then to an airport allowing them to be flown back to the United Kingdom safely.

"I assisted in planning and coordinating these moves with the team, briefing the British ambassador negotiating with the Cubans.

"Understandably, they directed a secure end-to-end transfer system, so to deliver this we placed our personnel at several key locations."

To complicate matters further, people developed symptoms as they were waiting to move to the airport, so the team had to





adapt the plan, adjusting for each individual flight as the move progressed.

“Our priority was always on delivering a safe and secure extraction,” continues WO1 Patterson.

“The situation required everyone to think on their feet, adapting at pace to meet the changing demands, keeping all symptomatic individuals processed and screened away from others, ensuring their safety and that of fellow passengers.

“We engaged with Royal Air Force medics to ensure space was available on the fourth and final plane to prevent the further spread of Covid-19.

“It took some doing and lots of negotiations with the Cuban authorities and British Airways, but our blend of experienced personnel allowed us to adapt to the situation.”



**PERU:** Around 1,200 people were estimated to be spread around the country when it went into strict lockdown.

Lt Col James de St John-Pryce (RHG/D) led a four-person team including two civilian specialists from the FCDO who deployed to Lima in late March.

“This wasn’t like Wuhan or Cuba where there was a bunch of people in a known area being extracted in a short space of time,” he says.

“We had Brits all over the country – some 60 per cent were in Lima, 30 per cent in three or four more tourist hubs like Cusco, and another ten per cent out in very remote locations.

“Passengers had to be shipped to a military airfield near Lima airport, where five flights departed in five days.”

But loading the aircraft proved problematic. At the time Peru was enduring an extremely strict lockdown; people could not leave their homes except for basic supplies, hotels were closed and police were stationed at every major junction.

“The country is relatively poor and the Peruvians were terrified their health system would be overrun by the pandemic,” explains the officer. “We were told the health service had just 120 ICU beds for the whole country of 32 million people.

“So we bussed people into Lima but had to seek permission for every passenger to pass through every roadblock, so you can imagine the amount of paperwork that had to be sorted out.”

Once the first batch of five flights had departed some 300 more Brits were discovered around the country so the team flew back a week later.

“Overall, filling this flight

was even more troublesome than before,” recalls Lt Col de St John-Pryce.

“Some individuals had come out of the jungle after backpacking for three months and were in shock – they literally had no idea about the pandemic.

“Others had lost all their money or their passports; one person even wanted to bring some donkeys he’d adopted back with him.

“Also, by this stage the tourist was seen as the carrier that had brought Covid-19 to Peru, so attitudes had changed and many villages had set up vigilante groups to stop tourists, particularly white Europeans, driving through.

“I leaned on the locals employed by the embassy to track our parties travelling into Lima and communicate with the relevant local authorities as problems cropped up.

“They were the absolute heroes of the day and worked all hours to help us get the job done in probably the most extraordinary circumstances I’ve ever worked in.” ■



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# 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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A sergeant of 1st Battalion, The Royal Anglian Regiment sports the traditional beard and axe of the assault pioneer

Picture: Cpl Obi Igbo, RLC

## 'I'd hate the rules to change'

**A**S I eagerly leafed through the December edition of *Soldier*, I chuckled as I read yet another letter regarding the Army's position on facial hair.

While the beard lobby are vocal, there are some of us who hope the Service stands firm on the matter.

The author suggested that it is a retention and recruitment issue, which begs the question, should we really welcome people who base their career choices solely on whether they can grow face fuzz?

And I'd be interested to see statistics on how many soldiers have signed off because they couldn't grow a beard; in my 21 plus years I have never met anyone who cited this as a reason.

I must also disagree with the letter

writer's assertion that cultural and medical dispensations are divisive.

Growing a beard for religious reasons is completely separate to doing so in order to follow the fashion of the day.

Multiple piercings are common and some women like wearing their hair loose – shall we change the rules for them too? Where does it stop?

And if we allow beards, must the pioneer platoon sergeant shave his off to maintain his individuality?

To say that we should move with the times is to ignore the many people who feel strongly about tradition.

It sets us apart from other employers and this grumpy, clean-shaven warrant officer, for one, would hate to see these particular rules changed. – **Name and address supplied**

“ I chuckled as I read yet another letter ”

## 'POLICY UNFAIR TO DIVORCED PERSONNEL'

● UNDER current policy the over 37 package is applicable to married personnel only.

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

**Col Phil Bassingham-Searle, Army Pay Colonel, Army Headquarters responds:** When it was introduced, the over 37 package was designed to support those wishing to settle their families in their own homes when approaching their retirement after 22 years of service.

**It provides financial assistance with their relocation and accommodation costs, so it is meant for married soldiers only.**

**It is acknowledged that there are groups of personnel in circumstances like yours who are not covered.**

**The Future Accommodation Model and the review of the living strategy are both examining the options and costs of changing eligibility and entitlement to reflect the ways our people are choosing to live.**

**I recognise this does not offer a solution in the short term, but I hope it reassures you that this issue is recognised by our leaders and is under active consideration.**



# BULLET POINTS

Bite-sized data to keep you in the know



## CAREERS

**Baseline UK** is an innovative resettlement service that is tailored for the needs of Service personnel and veterans. The company is offering free membership to those with a military background, who will benefit from a professional network, hints and tips and training. For more details visit [baselineuk.org](http://baselineuk.org)

**Linx Security Training** is offering a 20 per cent reduction on 28 courses for serving and former personnel through the MoD-approved Defence Discount Service. The courses on offer range from technical skills to management with industry-approved qualifications. For more details visit [linxtraining.co.uk](http://linxtraining.co.uk)

**Interested in a career as a personal trainer?** Ultimate Performance is expanding and on the lookout for more ex-Service personnel to join its growing ranks. Visit [upfitness.com/en/careers](http://upfitness.com/en/careers) for more information.

**The Recruit for Spouses coaching programme**, which helps Army partners get back into employment, has received a funding boost to help it reach more husbands and wives. To apply for a six-week course of one-hour sessions email [coaching@recruitforspouses.co.uk](mailto:coaching@recruitforspouses.co.uk)

**Forces Families Jobs** is a new platform designed to help partners into meaningful employment. Visit [forcesfamiliesjobs.co.uk](http://forcesfamiliesjobs.co.uk) to see the site, which is free to advertise on for employers who have signed the Armed Forces Covenant.



## SEARCHLINE

**Hollie Badrock is looking for partners of personnel who served between 1990 and 2011** to take part in a research programme for her master's degree. The interviews will take approximately one hour to complete and will cover life in the military community, the impact of frequent relocations and their experiences during times of conflict. To participate in the project email [hbadrock1@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:hbadrock1@sheffield.ac.uk)

**Retired Royal Air Force Serviceman Andrew Clark** is a collector of British military tokens used in Iraq and Afghanistan and is seeking examples of pre-2007 issues to boost his collection. If you have any items of interest email [amcpapermoneyman@aol.com](mailto:amcpapermoneyman@aol.com)

**The Air Training Corps, now part of the Royal Air Force Air Cadets**, will celebrate its 80th anniversary in 2021. To help mark the occasion, they would like to identify those who were cadets when the formation launched in 1941 and interview them to capture early memories. Email [al.munns@btinternet.com](mailto:al.munns@btinternet.com)

**The Royal Signals Amateur Radio Society** is looking for newcomers to join the fold. Open to all cap badges of the British Army, it currently has 500 members but is looking to boost numbers. In addition to serving and former soldiers, the society also welcomes cadet force and Nato personnel, as well as MoD civilians. Email [p25@sky.com](mailto:p25@sky.com) for details or visit [rsars.org.uk](http://rsars.org.uk)

**Anita Louise Watson is trying to trace her father, James Watson**, who served as a lance corporal in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers during the 1970s. Anyone with information should email [anitawatson164@gmail.com](mailto:anitawatson164@gmail.com)

**Hugh Corby is trying to trace the military medals and citations of his late father, Capt Eric Corby (RA)**, who served as a forward observation officer during the Second World War. Anyone with details should contact 07961 606766.



## DIRECTORY

**ABF The Soldiers' Charity:**  
020 7901 8900;  
[soldierscharity.org](http://soldierscharity.org)

**Armed Forces Buddhist Society:**  
Chaplain 020 7414 3411;  
[afbs-uk.org](http://afbs-uk.org)

**Armed Forces Christian Union:**  
01793 783123;  
[afcu.org.uk](http://afcu.org.uk)

**Armed Forces Muslim Association:**  
Chaplain 020 7414 3252;  
[afma.org.uk](http://afma.org.uk)

**Armed Services Advice Project:**  
0808 800 1007;  
[adviceasap.org.uk](http://adviceasap.org.uk)

**Army Families Federation:**  
01264 382324;  
mil 94391 2324;  
[aff.org.uk](http://aff.org.uk)

**Army LGBT Forum:**  
[armylgbt.org.uk](http://armylgbt.org.uk);  
[chair@armylgbt.org.uk](mailto:chair@armylgbt.org.uk)

**Army Libraries:**  
01252 340094

**Army Ornithological Society:**  
[armybirding.org.uk](http://armybirding.org.uk)

**Army Welfare Service:**  
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[army.mod.uk/welfare-support](http://army.mod.uk/welfare-support)

**Big White Wall**, now **Togetherall:**  
[togetherall.com](http://togetherall.com)

**Blesma, The Limbless Veterans:**  
020 8590 1124;  
[blesma.org](http://blesma.org)

**Blind Veterans UK:**  
(formerly St Dunstan's)  
020 7723 5021;  
[blindveterans.org.uk](http://blindveterans.org.uk)

**Care After Combat:**  
[careaftercombat.org](http://careaftercombat.org)

**Career Transition Partnership:**  
020 7469 6661

**Children's Education Advisory Service:**  
01980 618244;  
[dcyp-ceas-enquiries@mod.uk](mailto:dcyp-ceas-enquiries@mod.uk)

**Combat Stress:**  
24-hour Mental Health Helpline for service personnel and their families  
0800 323 4444;  
[combatstress.org.uk](http://combatstress.org.uk)

**Humanists, Atheists and Non-religious in Defence:**  
[defencehumanists.org.uk](http://defencehumanists.org.uk)

**Erskine:**  
0141 814 4569;  
[erskine.org.uk](http://erskine.org.uk)

**Family Escort Service:**  
020 7463 9249

**Felix Fund – the bomb disposal charity:**  
07713 752901;  
[felixfund.org.uk](http://felixfund.org.uk)

**Forcesline:**  
UK – 0800 731 4880;  
Germany – 0800 1827 395;  
Cyprus – 080 91065;

Falklands – #6111;  
from operational theatres –  
Paradigm Services \*201; from  
anywhere in the world (CSL operator  
will call back) – 0044 1980 630854

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

**Help for Heroes:**  
0845 673 1760 or  
01980 846 459;  
[helpforheroes.org.uk](http://helpforheroes.org.uk)

**Heroes Welcome:**  
[heroeswelcome.co.uk](http://heroeswelcome.co.uk)

**HighGround:**  
[highground-uk.org.uk](http://highground-uk.org.uk)  
07951 495 272

**Joint Service Housing Advice Office:**  
01252 787574

**Medal Office:**  
94561 3600 or  
0141 224 3600

**Mutual Support (multiple sclerosis group):**  
[mutual-support.org.uk](http://mutual-support.org.uk)

**National Gulf Veterans' and Families' Association Office:**  
24-hour helpline 0845 257 4853;  
[ngvfa.org.uk](http://ngvfa.org.uk)

**Poppyscotland:**  
0131 557 2782;  
[poppyscotland.org.uk](http://poppyscotland.org.uk)

**Regular Forces' Employment Association:**  
0121 236 0058;  
[rfea.org.uk](http://rfea.org.uk)

**Remount:** 01451 850 341;  
[remount.net](http://remount.net)

**Royal British Legion:**  
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[britishlegion.org.uk](http://britishlegion.org.uk)

**Royal British Legion Scotland:**  
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[legionscotland.org.uk](http://legionscotland.org.uk)

**RBL Industries Vocational Assessment Centre:**  
01622 795900;  
[rbli.co.uk](http://rbli.co.uk)

**Scottish Veterans' Residences:**  
0131 556 0091;  
[svronline.org](http://svronline.org)

**Single Persons Accommodation Centre for the Ex-Services:**



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

**SSAFA:** 0845 1300 975;  
[ssafa.org.uk](http://ssafa.org.uk)

**Stoll:**  
020 7385 2110;  
[stoll.org.uk](http://stoll.org.uk)

**The Not Forgotten Association:**  
020 7730 2400;  
[nfassociation.org](http://nfassociation.org)

**The Poppy Factory:**  
020 8940 3305;  
[poppyfactory.org](http://poppyfactory.org)

**The Royal Star and Garter Homes:**  
020 8481 7676;  
[starandgarter.org](http://starandgarter.org)

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[info@veteranscharity.org.uk](mailto:info@veteranscharity.org.uk)

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[troopaid.info](http://troopaid.info)

**uk4u Thanks!:**  
01798 812081;  
[uk4u.org](http://uk4u.org)

**Veterans Welfare Service:**  
0808 1914 218 (from the UK);  
0044 1253 866043 (from overseas);  
[gov.uk/government/groups/veterans-welfare-service](http://gov.uk/government/groups/veterans-welfare-service)

**WVRS:** 02920 232 668



## COMPETITIONS

### Christmas giveaway winners:

**Pearl jewellery voucher:** Lisa Telford, Shefford, Bedfordshire;  
**Hairdryer set:** Stephen Dwyer, Newport, Monmouthshire;  
**Scaramanga voucher:** WO1 Jonathan Wheatley, Op Tosca, BFPO 567; **Amazon Kindle:** Austin Boulter, Helston, Cornwall; **Headlamp and charger:** Wendy Sparrow, Andover, Hampshire; **King size bed:** Sgt Adam Kastein, Tidworth, Wiltshire; **Men's watch:** Paolo Capanni, Northwood, Middlesex; **Sleeping bag:** Alex Gray, East Kilbride, South Lanarkshire; **Jacket:** El McCullough, Carrickfergus, Co. Antrim; **Bespoke cushions:** William Smith, Catterick

Garrison, North Yorkshire; **John Lewis hamper:** Victoria Earl, London, SW18



## ROADSHOWS

**These events may be subject to delay or cancellation due to the coronavirus pandemic – check relevant websites**

**The Forces Pension Society** is staging a number of roadshows as well as FAR (financial aspects of resettlement) briefings. See [forcespensionsociety.org/news-events/events](http://forcespensionsociety.org/news-events/events) for the latest dates and details.

**The Army Engagement Team** roadshows – enquires to [rc-aeg-mailbox@mod.gov.uk](mailto:rc-aeg-mailbox@mod.gov.uk)

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# REVIEWS

## TOP GEAR

### GECKOTA SIERRA ZERO ONE PHALANX

A watch that delivers style and comfort

➤ WHEN asked to review this watch I was more than happy – it's a good-looking piece, but Geckota?

I racked my brain and could not recall this brand. However, it is most definitely one I shall remember now.

Based in Gloucestershire, the company has manufactured watches and straps since 2010 with designs often inspired by societal trends and icons from the past.

But the look and features of this latest creation draw on the secretive world of special forces.

The **Geckota Sierra Zero One Phalanx** is an updated version of the popular diver's watch – the **S-01 Diver** – but rebranded with the Nato phonetic alphabet.

The first thing I noticed was the weight, which is slightly more than I am used to – in fact it is nearly three times heavier than my Garmin at 108g.

This adds to the feeling that a lot of time has been spent ensuring the watch is



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robust and willing to tackle any adventure you embark upon.

I found it very easy to wear and the manufacturer has put the crown at the four o'clock position, which adds to the comfort.

Influenced by the requirements of elite soldiers, the Phalanx has opted for a low light signature approach, from the dial through to the hands and flat sapphire crystal glass, while an anti-reflective coating reduces the glare to almost nothing.

The dial has the usual 60 minute/second markers that usefully include numeric indicators every five seconds.

It is topped off by the bezel equipped with a 20-minute timer.

Water resistance remains the same as with the diver variant so it is effective to a depth of 300m or 1,000ft.

The Phalanx is powered by a high quality Swiss automatic movement mechanism, leading the hands to move so smoothly it's almost mesmerising.

Only 100 of these watches have been produced, with just 50 in the satin black finish version that I was fortunate to have tested.

Overall, this is a glorious piece; it looks great, feels satisfyingly weighty yet is extremely comfortable to wear.

I can honestly say this now has pride of place in my collection and, in the era of smart watches, I would be happy to forget about my daily step count and showboat the Geckota Sierra Zero One Phalanx day and night. ■



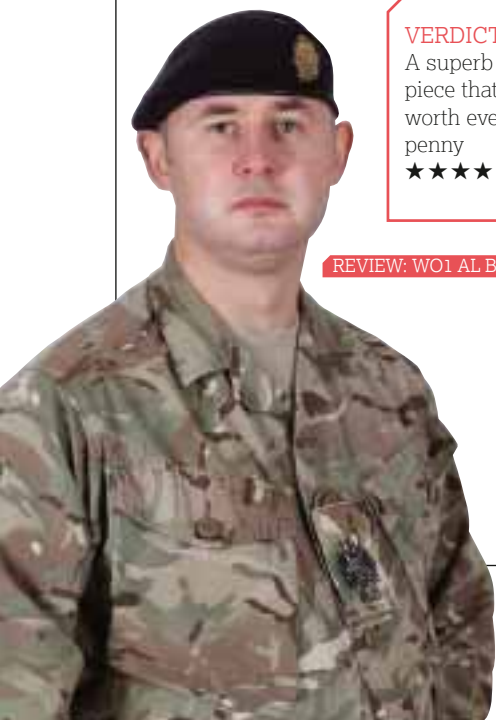
● The Sierra Zero One Phalanx costs £699 and is available from [geckota.com](http://geckota.com)

#### VERDICT:

A superb piece that is worth every penny

★★★★★

REVIEW: WO1 AL BREWER, RLC



## PODCASTS



### PICK OF THE MONTH:

## The Centre for Army Leadership podcast

### Service chiefs and civilian counterparts share insights from the top

▶ WITH the number of official military podcasts rising steadily across streaming platforms, one of the latest offerings comes courtesy of in-house think tank, the Centre for Army Leadership.

Every fortnight the outfit's staff speak to senior officers and high-profile figures from the civilian sphere to pick their brains on the dos and don'ts of command.

Maj Ben Acton (RA) tells *Soldier* more...

#### How did the podcast come about?

We got great feedback from the webinars on our YouTube channel, but there was a real desire from our target audience for a podcast to be able to listen to on the commute or while doing phys. Whether you're on a 40-minute run or driving north on the M6, we hope it gives people the chance to reflect on their own leadership styles and perhaps learn something about themselves.

#### What's the idea behind it?

To encourage diversity of thought. The British Army has done leadership for 300 years and we're good at it, but nobody's perfect and we can still learn from other organisations – from business, finance, sport, academia or the faith community – to see how they approach it and bring in some of their practices.

#### Who have you got lined up for interviews?

Chief of the General Staff, Gen Sir Mark Carleton-Smith, has already done two, and we've also spoken to the Army's most senior female officer, Maj Gen Sharon Nesmith, as well as Baroness Sue Campbell, the director of women's football at the Football Association. This month we have former Saatchi and Saatchi executive Richard Hytner. Others on the cards include Eddie Jones from England Rugby, retired US general Stanley McChrystal and Met Police commissioner Dame Cressida Dick.

#### What do you hope listeners will gain from their insights?

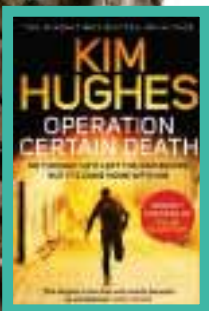
Different perspectives. If we just had general after general, it would become quite narrow. But for example, the majority of people in the Army love sport and are fascinated by how high-performing teams work. There are a lot of parallels to how they do business and leadership at every level in the military. Also, there's the human element – CGS and Maj Gen Nesmith are brilliant leaders, but they have been really honest about how they've learnt and the mistakes they've made. In society at the moment, having senior leaders who are transparent and open is so refreshing and it's what people want to hear.

#### Where can people listen to the podcast?

It's hosted on [armyleadership.podbean.com](http://armyleadership.podbean.com), but it can also be found across the major podcast platforms by searching "Centre for Army Leadership".







● *Operation Certain Death*, by Kim Hughes, is published by Simon and Schuster and priced £7.99

## PICK OF THE MONTH:

# OPERATION CERTAIN DEATH

## Bomb disposal hero turned author makes fictional foray

➤ HAVING detailed his real-life experiences on the front line of bomb disposal in *Painting the Sand*, George Cross holder and recent Service leaver Kim Hughes (ex-RLC) has released a follow-up title – a gripping fictional take on his former role.

*Operation Certain Death* introduces protagonist SSgt Dom Riley, an ammo tech and veteran of Northern Ireland, Iraq and Afghanistan who is recovering from an incident on his last tour in which his colleague was blown up and an interpreter shot in the head.

Back in the UK, he is stood down from duty while he is checked over by an Army psychologist.

Against protocol he blags his way to a callout in Nottingham, where his officer commanding stops him from joining the team on the ground, only to himself be killed a few minutes later in a secondary explosion.

Sent on leave, Riley attends his daughter's school concert with his estranged wife, where a chance remark leads him to think that someone has tampered with his car.

Sure enough, a quick look confirms a bomb has been planted and he realises he was the intended target of the previous incident.

Meanwhile, MI5 are on his case because traces of his DNA were found at the crime scene.

And so unfolds a complicated plot – and numerous sub-plots – as Riley decides not to return to work, but to track down the people threatening his life.

The chase involves the security services, a super-bomb containing Sarin gas and a Russian oligarch – but despite the twists and turns, the storyline is fairly logical and clearly told by someone with an intimate knowledge of the subject matter.

It is fast-paced action that keeps the reader guessing as the tangled web unravels and for a first novel, I thought it was excellent.

I highly recommend this book and am looking forward to reading the next instalment, which the final pages suggest could be in the offing. ■

### VERDICT:

A strong effort for a debut thriller. I hope there is more to come.

★★★★★

REVIEW: ANDY KAY, EX-RS

## BOOKS

### BOOK RELEASES

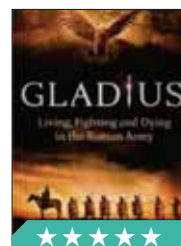


## Berlin: The Story of a City by Barney White-Spunner

THE author of this history of Berlin downplays his military background, but that should not deter serving readers, especially those who have spent time in Germany. White-Spunner shows

an eye for detail in his lively account of the capital's story, emphasising its rough, sharp character, both law-abiding and cynical of authority. Berlin was home to much opposition to the Nazis. Goebbels described it as "a melting pot of everything that is evil – prostitution, drinking houses, cinemas, Marxism, Jews, strippers, negroes dancing, and all the vile offshoots of so-called modern art". Its citizens can be proud, and their city retains the monuments to its past, so well narrated here.

**Dr Rodney Atwood, military historian**



## Gladius

by Guy de la Bedoyere

THIS is not the story of the battles of the Roman legionnaire, although plenty are covered – rather, it examines how the troops were recruited, trained, treated and paid. It is a very detailed and well researched

look at their lives – and sometimes, deaths – and what happened after service. The authorities often found that idle regiments led to trouble, so keeping people busy was a key concern. The similarities to the modern military are amazing. The issues which concerned soldiers back then were pay, promotion and pensions – very much like today. For anyone with an interest in Roman history this book is a must.

**Andy Kay, ex-RS**



## The Reckoning by Prit Buttar

CONTINUING Buttar's outstanding series on the titanic struggle on the Eastern Front in the Second World War, this offering once again bridges historical analysis with riveting prose. In masterly fashion, he sets out not

only the events leading up to the defeat of the Axis in the south, but also the misconceptions surrounding the capabilities of Germany's allies and their Soviet adversaries. Conventional wisdom has not given these groups enough credit regarding their effectiveness and development, but this work goes a long way in addressing this. A comprehensive bibliography and notes section rounds out this impressive book, which comes very highly recommended.

**Maj Chris Buckham, RCAF**



## MOVIES



PICK OF THE MONTH:

### BILL AND TED FACE THE MUSIC

**Rockers return for a new outing – three decades on from their bogus journey**

➤ BACK in the mists of time – when the 1990s were still young – two American rock god wannabes managed to force their cringing lexicon on the world.

With quips such as “most excellent” and sentences peppered with the word “dude”, the language of Bill S Preston esquire and Ted Theodore Logan remained in circulation long after their *Bogus Journey* movie had finished its UK cinema run.

But linguistic crimes aside, the film offered a strangely compelling brand of humour, a soundtrack of then A-list heavy metal acts and a half decent cast. In short, it was well received and is fondly remembered now.

Audiences may well then ask – three decades on – why the hell anyone would risk driving a wrecking ball through the nostalgia by resurrecting the duo.

However, in a bold move **Alex Winter** and **Keanu Reeves** – both now in their mid-50s – have reprised their respective roles as the bodacious buffoons.

And against the nightmare that might have been, they have somehow pulled it off – for *Bill and Ted Face the Music* retains the sense of fun of the old times, while offering plenty to please both existing fans and newcomers.

Those wrinkly enough to remember the last outing recall that career losers Preston and Logan had been told been told by Rufus, a visitor from the future, that they were destined to enjoy musical greatness.

The prophecy, as explained in both *Bogus Journey* and the earlier *Excellent Adventure* film, is that their dire band, Wyld Stallyns, will one day record tracks to unite the universe.

But as the new outing begins, the prediction remains unfulfilled while Bill and Ted are now leathery, washed up rockers with their careers on the rocks.

Reduced to backstreet gigs, they are routinely panned by the critics with each comeback attempt driving them further along the path to total obscurity.

Life changes when they meet another future visitor – this time Rufus’ daughter Kelly – who

delivers a cryptic message that they must imminently perform their seminal song, or the world will end.

The urgent request is accompanied by worrying signs that the space-time continuum is starting to break down.

In the time-honoured rock tradition of plagiarism, Bill and Ted set off on a new quest to steal the vital recording from their future selves.

But matters get more complicated when their wives and daughters become involved – while their future masters lose patience and send a robot to assassinate them.

The plot takes the pair on a horribly complex journey where they are forced to deal with increasingly erratic incarnations of themselves. Meanwhile, their daughters – ably played by **Samara Weaving** and **Brigitte Lundy-Paine** – simultaneously attempt to hunt down iconic musicians to play the world saving tune.

*Bill and Ted Face the Music* is good fun and delivers some laugh-out-loud moments, although seeing the first two movies is a pre-requisite to fully enjoy the new story.

Performances are solid throughout – with Winter and Reeves seamlessly stepping back into their old roles – while **Kristen Schaal** is credible as Kelly.

**William Sadler** – back as the pair’s old friend Death – remains hilarious, having quit as Wyld Stallyns bass player as a consequence of musical differences.

The soundtrack is also decent, with tunes provided by the likes of **Weezer**, **Mastadon** and **Lamb of God** offering a fitting accompaniment to the action.

It was a risk, but Bill and Ted translates well to 2020 and the gamble has paid off.

The world might have moved on since the duo’s first outing, while their language remains winning, but Preston and Logan – it seems – are a timeless double act. ■



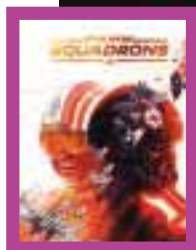
#### VERDICT:

A risky venture that exceeds expectations

★★★★★

REVIEW: CLIFF CASWELL, SOLDIER





## PICK OF THE MONTH:

## STAR WARS SQUADRONS

For Xbox One, PS4 and PC

▶ WITH deep space dogfights an irresistible prospect for fending off the post-Christmas blues, *Soldier* had high hopes for this recently unwrapped *Star Wars* offering.

It was especially appealing as it seemed, on the surface, to promise the new landmark instalment fans have been awaiting since the days of *Battlefront* and *X-Wing*.

But while *Squadrons* has all the stunning visuals, iconic music and general atmosphere expected of the saga, it does not deliver the knockout experience.

The title is certainly fast-paced, action-packed and it is fun to play with all the authenticity of the galaxy far, far away. But there is something of a vacuous feel to this effort – missing a depth of gameplay abundant in other releases.

Having said that, it is not a total misfire. *Squadrons* delivers a worthy solo campaign, with Rebel and Imperial crafts furnished with all the right hardware.

Multiplayer options up the ante further, with opportunities for digital pilots to fly against each other within a vast and exciting backdrop of planets and asteroids.

In this case, deep space dust-ups are usually based around dogfight scenarios, although some objectives extend to conducting attacks on enemy capital ships.

It is all good fun for a while – yet the experience soon feels a little empty once the initial euphoria is gone. *Squadrons* is akin to *Call of Duty* in space – replace an infanterier with a spacecraft and blasters and you have the picture.

In summary, those who are seeking nothing more than casual space combat encounters are likely to be pleased.

They will, additionally, find plenty of opportunities to cosmetically personalise their fighters – while also adding weapon and shield upgrades – as they venture deep into the *Star Wars* universe.

Unfortunately, *Soldier* expected more from this offering given the potential – and compared to titles such as *Elite Dangerous* it seems a tad hollow. ■

## VERDICT:

Dogfights are fun, but don't expect depth  
★★★★★

REVIEW: DAVID McDUGALL, CIVVY

## GAMES RELEASES

**Immortals Fenyx Rising**

For all formats (PS4 reviewed)

AN IMPRESSIVE romp through the world of Greek mythology, this Ubisoft offering is definitely

worth checking out as an antidote to the post-festive boredom. While it has *Assassin's Creed* underpinnings at its core, *Immortals* is an altogether more light-hearted affair. Backed by stunning visuals on a par with Nintendo's classic *Zelda* series, the title seamlessly blends combat, puzzles and open world adventure in a mix that is compelling as well as addictive. Whether exploring the Golden Isles vaults for Zeus's lightning or battling larger than life enemies, *Immortals* has been worth the wait to bring us into 2021 smiling.

WO1 Al Brewer, RLC

**Watch Dogs: Legion**

For PC, Xbox One, PS4 and new generation consoles

SET in a future where AI has culled career prospects, the third outing in this Ubisoft series pits players against

the established order prevailing over a dystopian London. The plot revolves around a group of subversive hackers who find themselves framed for a series of terrorist attacks – and are bidding to clear their names. There is plenty to amuse in the rich, open-world environment but the over-eccentric, stereotypical and two-dimensional playable characters fail to carry the plot. It is fun for a while, but *Watch Dogs* fails to deliver in the way it promises.

David McDougall, civvy

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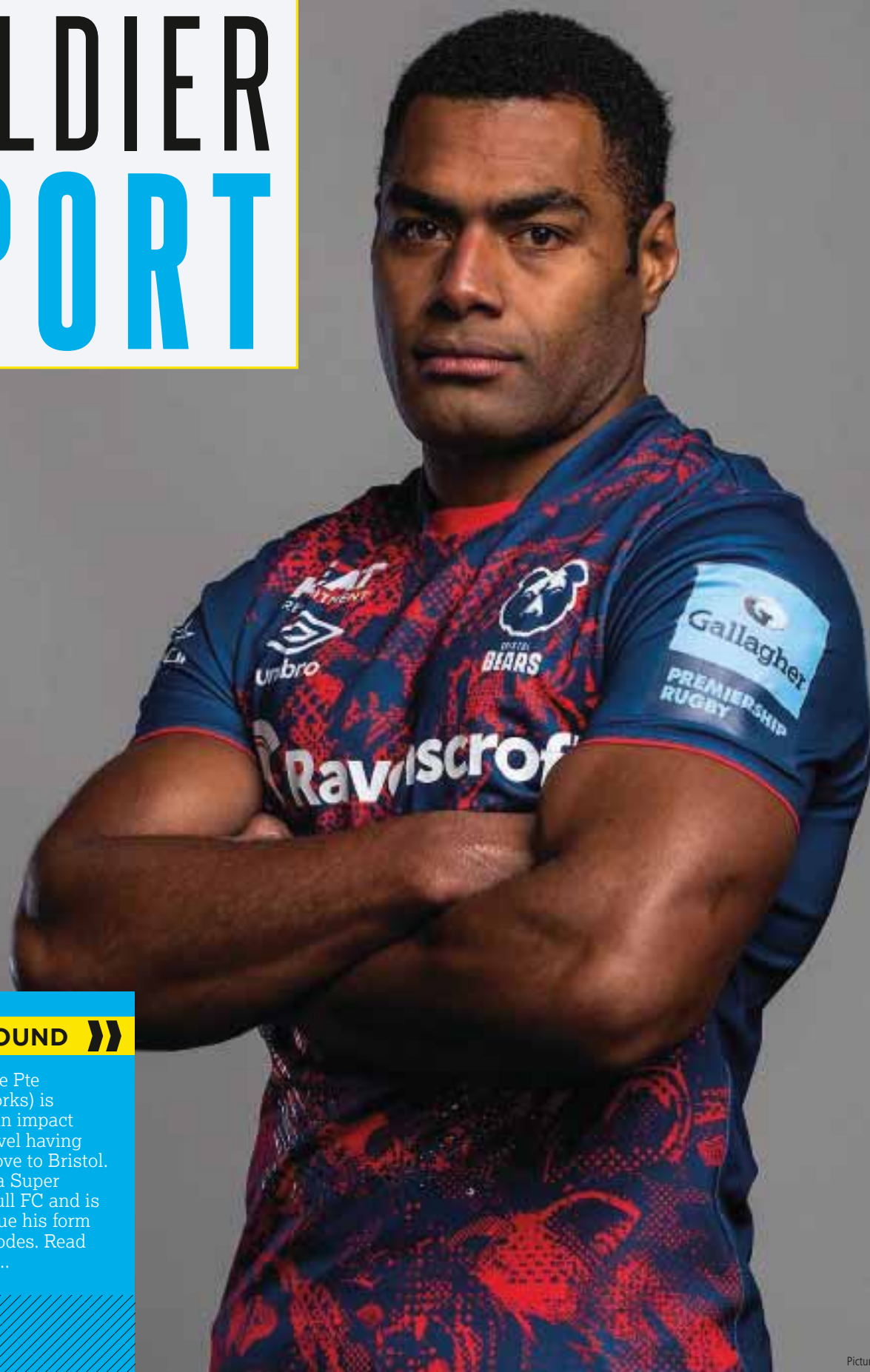
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# SOLDIER SPORT



## BRISTOL BOUND >>

RUGBY union ace Pte Ratu Naulago (Yorks) is hoping to make an impact at Premiership level having completed his move to Bristol. The winger was a Super League star at Hull FC and is looking to continue his form after switching codes. Read more on page 70...

Picture: JMP UK





Pictures: Graeme Main, JMP UK, Ash Allen/SWPix.com

# NAULAGO PREPARED FOR BATTLE WITH THE BEARS

**F**LYING winger Pte Ratu Naulago (Yorks) has set his sights on becoming the latest Army player to excel at the highest level of English rugby union after making his debut for the Bristol Bears.

The 29-year-old agreed to join the Premiership high-fliers in May – but only after completing the Covid-delayed Super League season with former club Hull FC.

A semi-final defeat to Wigan Warriors late last year saw the soldier bow out with an impressive record of 17 tries in 26 appearances and he is now hoping to replicate such stellar form in the West Country.

“So far it is going very well and I’m enjoying it,” Naulago, who made his first appearance in the loss to Clermont Auvergne last month, told *SoldierSport*.

“The environment is really welcoming, and these are exciting times.

“I had a great spell at Hull –

they did a fantastic job in picking me up and getting me to where I am today.

“This move is a real challenge for me, I’m learning new stuff every day and I’m thankful to the staff and coaches who are involved in making sure I’m where I need to be.”

Naulago hails from a rugby union background but his big break came in rugby league, with Hull FC signing him on the back of some impressive performances in a sevens shirt.

He quickly adapted to life in the opposing code – scoring twice on his debut – and is now reacquainting himself with a game he last played when the Army faced the Royal Navy at Twickenham in May 2019.

The speedster was among the scorers that day as the Reds ran out 27-11 victors in front of a host of Premiership scouts.

“There are a few differences between league and union,”



**“I’M  
PUSHING  
MYSELF  
EVERY  
DAY”**

the soldier explained. “But I’m settling in well.

“Bristol play a different brand of rugby to other teams in the Premiership and it is a case of getting used to it all.

“For now, I’m pushing myself every day in training in a bid to establish myself in the first team.

“It is a privilege just to be sharing a dressing room with so many world class players.

“When I started out in rugby my dream was to play at the highest level and I was fortunate enough to get that chance in league with Hull.

“I wasn’t expecting Bristol to get in touch.

“I was thinking I’d be a league player for the rest of my career but, growing up with the sport, this is something I always wanted to achieve.

“I have to say a huge thank you to my unit.

“They’ve allowed me to play rugby full-time for two years and



have also helped on the welfare side – that level of support is really appreciated.”

Naulago has followed in the recent footsteps of fellow wing LCpl Semesa Rokoduguni (Scots DG) and Cpl Lewis Bean (Rifles) in signing for a Premiership club and he said the backing he has received from his Army coaches and teammates has boosted his path to the top.

Rokoduguni, a seasoned campaigner with Bath and a former England international, has been a particular source of inspiration for the player.

“I was based in Warminster for five years,” Naulago explained. “Roko would come over and teach me things after he’d finished training.

“I learnt a lot of skills from him and I’ve stayed in touch – we still message each other.

“It has been disappointing that we haven’t been able to get together as the Army team, but the boys are working hard on their own fitness programmes and we speak to the coaches on a regular basis.

“Hopefully, when the restrictions are lowered, we will have a chance to play again.

“It is always an honour and privilege to represent the Army; that is where I started out and it is a feeling that stays with you wherever you go.” ■



## FITNESS IN NUMBERS

WORKOUTS INCLUDED IN THE EVENT

**5**

DAY WINDOW TO COMPLETE EACH TEST

**7**

DAY SCRUTINY PERIOD THEN FOLLOWS BEFORE A NEW WORKOUT IS SET

**7**

CATEGORIES – MALE, FEMALE, MASTERS AND VETERANS

**4**

DATE, THIS MONTH, WHEN ENTRIES FOR THE TEN-WEEK CONTEST CLOSE

**17**



## VIRTUAL WARRIORS WANTED

**B** RITISH Army Warrior Fitness (BAWF) will become the latest athletic initiative to embrace the virtual realm when it launches a new online competition later this month.

For the past four years the set-up has staged regular team events to test the cardiovascular and endurance capabilities of personnel, but with Covid-19 making such gatherings a non-starter the focus is now switching to the individual level.

From January 18, entrants will be asked to complete a series of five workouts over the course of ten weeks, with their efforts recorded and uploaded onto two apps for verification.

The top performers in each category – male, female, masters (aged 39 to 48) and veterans (aged 48 and above) – will then hopefully face off in a live-streamed final in a bid to be crowned the fittest soldier in the Army.

“We want to make it as inclusive and open as

possible,” SSgt Mat Crook (RAPTC), part of the BAWF’s promotional team, told *SoldierSport*.

“We have looked at historical operations and have built the workouts around the physical requirements that were needed in each of those.

“Coronavirus has opened a new avenue for us to go down. We would love to stage an individual event at the PT school, but this gives us an opportunity to build a bigger audience and greater participation – it is exciting.”

BAWF was launched in 2014 and is designed to improve the effectiveness of serving personnel by promoting military specific physical training that enhances the fitness components needed for operations, while boosting long-term health.

For more information on how to get involved visit the [@British\\_Army\\_Warrior\\_Fitness](#) Instagram page or [competitioncorner.net/events/4403](#) ■



## SPORT SHORTS



### Medals mount indoors

**SERVICE** rowers celebrated a haul of six medals as they squared off against the best in the country at the British Indoor Championships.

A total of 15 soldiers competed in the virtual event, which featured a host of age categories in races across 500 metres and two kilometres.

Sgt Laura Barrigan (RAPTC) topped the standings in her category over the shorter distance, with Maj Andy Kerr (RE) claiming silver and Maj Craig Mumby (REME) and LCpl Stu Elvin (RLC) bronze.

Kerr added a bronze medal in the longer format, a feat matched by WO2 Peter Maddock (Int Corps) who, along with Mumby, claimed victory in the UK Armed Forces standings.



### Jockeys braced for action

**THE** final fixture list for the upcoming military horseracing season has been confirmed.

Sandown Park will play host to the Royal Artillery Gold Cup on Thursday, February 18 and the Grand Military Gold Cup on Friday, March 12.

Details on both events can be found at [thejockeyclub.co.uk/sandown](http://thejockeyclub.co.uk/sandown)

The Wincanton Military Hurdle will be held on Sunday, April 18.



Pictures: Colin Port Images

## THOMAS SET TO GRACE SUPERBIKE STAGE



**"I'M  
EXCITED,  
BUT IT  
IS A BIG  
STEP UP"**

**M**OTORCYCLE ace Sgt Stephen Thomas (AGC (RMP)) is looking to make an impression in the British Superbike Championships following a triumphant return to the grid in 2020.

After missing the 2019 campaign due to a deployment to Kenya, the 28-year-old topped the sportsman standings in last season's Thundersport GB 600cc class and is now plotting a move to the sport's upper tier.

Such stellar form prompted interest from the top and the soldier is currently in talks with potential suitors ahead of the series' opening round in May.

"Considering I hadn't really touched a bike for 18 months, my aim at the start of last season was to simply go out and enjoy my racing," Thomas told *SoldierSport*.

"In the first round at Donington Park I won three out of three races and after that I started thinking 'hang on, there's only three more rounds

– I could win this'.

"So, we began planning the races more tactically, which for a racer is a horrible thing.

"If there is a guy in front, I want to overtake him and win but changing focus takes that edge away.

"However, I'm not going to moan about leading, and then winning, a championship."

Thomas finished the year with eight wins and two third-place finishes from 11 races – a return that has fuelled his move to Superbikes.

He acknowledges that replicating such form at a higher stage is unlikely and is hoping to secure a two-year deal that will initially allow him to find his feet, before progressing further.

"I'm excited, but it is a big step up," he said. "I'll be racing against professional teams with riders who have been on a bike from a young age.

"I'm looking forward to not having any real pressure on me so I can just race – that's why I got into the sport." ■





## KAYAK QUEST LOOMS

A FOUR-strong team of military veterans are hoping to become the first adaptive athletes to complete the 1,400-kilometre Lands' End to John O'Groats kayak challenge.

Known as Kayak 4 Heroes, the group includes former Army Reservist Darren Edwards (pictured above), who was paralysed from the chest down in a serious climbing accident, as well as Jonny Huntington (ex-AGC (ETS)) and Carl Simmons (ex-RAPTC) – who were medically discharged following a brain bleed and spinal injury respectively.

They will embark on their quest in July and hope to raise £100,000 for the Armed Forces Para Snowsports Team and the Association for the Independence of Disabled People.

For more details and to donate visit [kayak4heroes.co.uk](http://kayak4heroes.co.uk)



## Twickenham time out

**THIS** season's Army-Navy match at Twickenham has been cancelled.

Organisers made the decision in light of the continued uncertainty surrounding the staging of sporting events with spectators.

However, all three Services remain committed to playing an Inter-Services competition in 2021 if feasible. Dates and venues for these fixtures will be announced when known.



# MITCHELSON'S MILESTONE MATCH



**"THE  
AIM  
WAS TO  
PLAY  
UNTIL I  
AM NO  
LONGER  
ABLE"**

**A** RMY rugby union star SSgt Sarah Mitchelson (RLC) reached a major milestone at the elite level of the civvy game by making her 200th appearance for Tyrrells Premier 15s outfit Wasps.

The 38-year-old helped the team to a 24-14 victory over the Exeter Chiefs during the personal landmark, a result that was followed by wins over Loughborough Lightning and Sale Sharks.

The forward, who made her debut against Saracens in 2008, told *SoldierSport* she was delighted to mark the occasion with a positive result and said the points could prove vital if Wasps are to achieve a top-four finish at the end of the season.

"It was great to get the win, but it was a relief," Mitchelson added. "Exeter have a strong team and it was not a pretty game – sometimes you just have to grind it out."

"Our target for this year is to reach the Premier 15s final. If we don't make the top four, we will be disappointed."

"We definitely have some work

to do but we are starting to see the potential in ourselves."

Reflecting on the longevity of her Wasps career, the soldier said: "The aim was to always play until I am no longer able to do so but to still be with the same team is something I never thought I'd manage."

"I've been fortunate with postings and even though I'm now based up north I still travel down for training and matches."

"I'm already focusing on my coaching career so it's a case of getting to the end of the season and then we'll see where we are in terms of playing on."

And when asked about her highlights, Mitchelson said helping Wasps establish themselves in the Premier 15s ranks at the top.

"When the competition was first starting there was a worry we might not even be included," she recalled.

"It was an anxious wait; we had not done very well in the two or three seasons beforehand but once we got accepted a new director of rugby came in and we have progressed from there." ■





After seeing my family back home I hope to do some travelling during my post-tour leave – my brother lives in Canada and I'd like to visit him. I miss my relatives but there are enough distractions out here – the job is interesting and each day is different.

**LCpl Imogen Smith, AGC (RMP)**  
Op Toral, Afghanistan



I have dreams of two weeks of chilling out but no doubt I'll be roped into doing chores as my wife has had to do them all for the last six months. We plan on having our very own Christmas in February with any family we can have over and letting our hair down after a very unusual year.

**Capt Ed Swingler, REME**  
Op Tangham, Somalia



I'll spend some quality time with the family. Apart from missing loved ones, the most difficult thing about being away is not having the freedom to just get out and do what you want, when you want.

**Bdr Gino Raffermati, RHA**  
Op Cabrit, Estonia

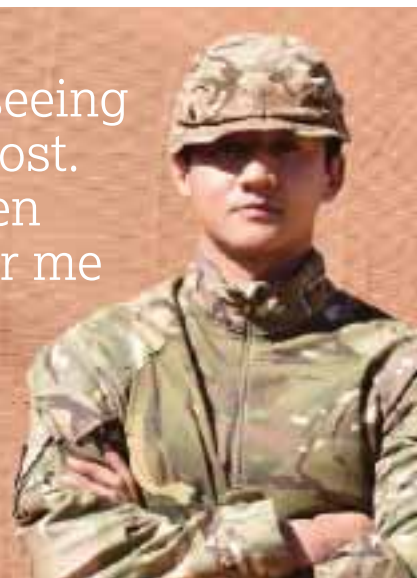


The first thing I will do is see my wife – that's been the most difficult thing about being away. She only arrived in the UK five days before I deployed and this is the first time I've been on ops over the festive season.

**Pte Ransford Ofosu Baake, RLC**  
Op Cabrit, Estonia

I'm looking forward to seeing my sister most. She has been looking after me by sending food while I've been away.

**LCpl Sunil Gurung, RE**  
Op Newcombe, Mali



## Homeward bound

After spending the festive season away on operations, we asked troops what's the first thing they plan to do when they're back...

My deployment doesn't end until August, so I'm looking forward to going to the cricket club to watch my sons play. Ideally, I will be in a deckchair with the Sunday papers and the dog at my feet.

**Lt Col Ed Fraser, Lincs**  
Op Tangham, Somalia







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