

SOLDIER

MAGAZINE OF THE BRITISH ARMY

Point blank

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OUR CONTRIBUTORS THIS MONTH...



CSGT LIAM COMPSON, RCAM

A BASS player in the Household Division's pop band, this talented senior NCO has also been making a mark in the world of country music. Find out more about the multi-instrumentalist's musical mission on **page 60**.



DANI BUTLER

MUAY Thai is only just an official army sport, but its bosses have wasted no time in bringing in top talent to develop fighters. Instructor Butler, also a WBC champion at bantamweight, tells us more on **page 71**.



MAJ STEVE WATTS, RIFLES

ENDLESS supplies of FPV drones to blast the enemy might sound like a commander's dream, but this officer has been trying to make it a reality using 3D printers. Read more about the trial on **page 40**.

Innovating, accelerating...

THE *Soldier* team are often in the privileged position of being among the first to hear about exciting updates in the British Army.

And although we're far from being across everything, if you ever want reassurance about just how much work is going into pushing the service forward right now – both culturally and technically – I invite you to take a look at our inbox.

That said, we do suffer from personnel believing everything they do is 'just their job'. So understanding that great stories rarely fall into your lap – and certainly not from your humble lot – our team also spend a great deal of time calling, emailing, visiting and generally stalking troops across training areas to showcase the most exciting changes.

It's a role we never tire of – and when you get a gem of a story like the one on page 40 about **drones being 3D printed in the field**, it's like hitting gold.

For anyone at the sharp end of combat, this article provides a tantalising glimpse of how quickly one discovery could change everything. And it shows how up for the challenge our soldiers are.

Let's face it, with international affairs being what they are the motivation has never been higher.

As the **army sergeant major** says in his first *Soldier* column on page 16, "focus on what we can control".

There is plenty of that, it turns out. From phys to firearms and FPV drones, we look forward to hunting more of you down soon to inspire the wider service with your innovation.

Sarah Goldthorpe • **Editor**

'The story shows how
up for the challenge
soldiers are'



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Soldiers ponder the future British Army

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**Forces
Mutual**

SOLDIERS FIRST

Picture: Sgt Donald Todd, RLC



THE head of the army says it is “absolutely pointless” transforming the army if it doesn’t have enough of the right people in its ranks.

Speaking at last month’s Rusi Land Warfare Conference, Gen Sir Roly Walker said that despite all the technological advances, his most important focus this year was his personnel.

“We’re rethinking what it means to be a soldier in the 21st century,” the top officer explained.

Emphasising how future wars would be different to anything that had gone before, he continued: “At the heart lies the need for strong ethical and moral values to withstand the pressures of combat.

“And we have a role to project that narrative deeper and wider into society.”

He added that toxic influences of racism, hate, homophobia, and misogyny were the opposite of what was needed in soldiers.

And he had a message for civilians, too.

“To those who aspire to make a difference,

come and join us,” he said. “You can change your life through the army – so why don’t you?”

“It remains a place that creates memories for a lifetime, offering adventure, skills, camaraderie and a place of belonging – whoever you are, wherever you come from and whatever you do.”

Gen Walker explained that youngsters growing up in deprived areas could commonly find themselves on £45,000 just six years into service life, with apprenticeships and good value accommodation under their belts.

He also provided an update on the mission to double fighting power by 2027. “I believe we’re on track...for now,” he said. “The results are encouraging, though I absolutely acknowledge not all soldiers in all formations are experiencing this transformation yet.”

The leader explained how the new Land Training System was preparing troops for war.

“A better trained force will often defeat a bigger and better equipped one – a lesson

Goliath learned from David,” he added.

He continued: “In the last three months alone, 72 fighting sub-units have gone through a new intensive ten-week ‘combat training at echelon’ programme. Over the next 12 months, 400 sub-units, or around 90 per cent of the army, will complete that.

“We’ve trained more than 3,000 drone pilots, with another 6,000 over the next year, as well as providing 200 simulators into unit lines.”

Read the full speech – which also covers the strategic defence review – on [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk)

‘A better trained force will often defeat a bigger and better equipped one’

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1 CYPRUS

Welsh warriors take aim

MEMBERS of 1st Battalion, The Royal Welsh honed their specialist weapons skills as the mercury soared in the Mediterranean during Exercise Kronos Warrior.

Some 120 infantrymen from Delta Company, the regiment's fire support element, took part in a series of light role drills, as well as mortar, Javelin and sniper cadres.

Along with live firing, highlights included inserting by Chinook helicopters, courtesy of Royal Air Force colleagues.

2 KENYA

Feeling bullish

A LENGTHY simulation of recce-strike ops faced troops from 11 Brigade during the formation's first run-out as a fighting force.

Some 1,400 personnel spent 41 days in the field amid the harsh terrain of Laikipia and Samburu during Exercise Bull Storm.

Among the units taking part were 1st Battalion, The Royal Anglian Regiment and 3rd Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Scotland, who were joined by supporting arms and 100 gunners from the Kenyan Defence Force (pictured).

The package replicated a scenario in which the British troops arrived in-country as an advanced element before working with the host nation to defeat a fictional enemy.

It was the first major test of 11 Brigade in its new guise since ceasing security assistance duties and resubordinating into the Field Army.

Bdr Lopeti Cama Tukana (RA), who had been training alongside his Kenyan counterparts, cited the hilly environment, heat and wildlife as the most challenging aspects of the drills.

He added: "It's been interesting to be part of a battlegroup, especially working with the Infantry and the Kenyans as their technology and procedures are slightly different."

Turn to page 40 to read more about developments in drone tech during the exercise.



A TASTE OF ARMY ACTIVITY ACROSS THE WORLD

GLOBAL SITREP

3 UK

Flexible friends

OPERATION Interflex, which has seen some 56,000 Ukrainian troops trained on British soil, is to receive another cash injection this year, it has been announced.

Defence Secretary John Healey said the UK would spend a further £247 million on teaching the eastern European state's military personnel as the government announced more aid to help counter the illegal Russian invasion.

The mission has taken place across the defence estate since 2022, with instructors from 13 partner nations.

Meanwhile, MoD officials have confirmed that Britain is on course to deliver 100,000 drones to Ukraine in a £350 million package. Tens of thousands of artillery rounds are additionally being sent to the battlefield.

Healey said: "We are learning lessons every day from the front line in Ukraine."



4 GERMANY

Bavarian blast

PERSONNEL from Infantry Training Centre Catterick tested their mettle as they hit the Alps for a demanding AT outing.

Exercise Northern Bavaria Adventure saw some 30 troops tackle activities from rock climbing to kayaking amid the spectacular scenery of southern Germany.

Organised by the Gurkha Training Company, the expedition also involved hill walking in neighbouring Austria, as well as klettersteig climbing activities.

The nine-day package pushed the participants well outside of the comfort zone – allowing them to try a host of new pursuits in an unfamiliar environment.



5 OMAN

Cooking up a storm

SIX sweaty weeks in the desert saw soldiers from 1st Battalion, Coldstream Guards hone their skills and drills while getting the chance to work with infantrymen from another force.

The Brits spent time on Exercise Jebel Storm operating alongside the country's Northern Frontier Regiment.

Platoon commander Lt Guy Tillson said the trip had given newer members of the regiment a flavour of how varied life is in the 375-year-old formation.

"Few other cap badges can boast exercising in Oman one week and parading in front of the King for Trooping the Colour the next," he said.



Picture: Gdsm Chris Keatman, Coldm Gds

'It was an incredible opportunity, a once-in-a-lifetime experience'

Wing foil racer takes off in France – page 70

Picture: Nato



6 BRUNEI

It's a jungle out there

MEMBERS of 1st Battalion, The Royal Gurkha Rifles played host to an unusual cohort as they led a group of MPs into the Borneo bush.

The soldiers from C Company welcomed seven politicians from the Armed Forces Parliamentary Scheme, who learnt about jungle warfare training and spoke to troops about their experiences on operations and exercises around the world.

Participant Peter Swallow, the Labour MP for Bracknell, said the visit had provided a useful insight into the strategic importance of Brunei and wider military issues.

"This country faces growing threats, more serious and less predictable than at any time in a generation – the world is changing and defence must too," he added.

7 ESTONIA

Eurovision euphoria

THE Household Division's resident pop band Blue Red Blue received a rapturous reception when they played the host nation's iconic hits at the British embassy in Tallinn.

The outfit delighted audiences by covering the Baltic state's Eurovision entry for this year as well as tunes from times past.

They were playing their part in defence engagement during the gathering in the capital, some 50 miles west of Tapa, where British personnel lead a Nato battlegroup.

Band boss and bass guitarist CSgt Liam Compson (RCAM) said the performance had been well received – with enthusiastic applause for the Eurovision hits.

"Everyone enjoyed themselves – we had a great five days in Estonia," he added.

Read more about CSgt Compson's off-duty musical exploits on page 60.



Picture: Graeme Main

GOING UP

Reservists celebrate retirement age rise

THE normal retirement age for reserve soldiers has been increased from 55 to 60, to match the terms for officers.

Anyone who follows our *Talkback* letters page will know the age disparity in the outgoing policy was a persistent bone of contention for reserve personnel.

Under the new rules, any reservist serving until 60 must be at, or above, the medical retention standard. They must voluntarily agree the offer of additional service and cannot be compelled to re-engage.

Re-engagement will be offered only where the soldier's

commanding officer considers there to be a service need.

The offer applies equally to those serving on an over-age extension, who may be offered additional service to this revised normal retirement age.

"It's not an automatic extra five years for everyone," said Brig Thammy Evans, Director of Army Reserve Personnel.

"Troops need to fit with the service's requirements, just as the situation is now.

"But overall this is great news for our soldiers – they've been asking for this for quite some time.

Maj Gen Mark Lancaster,

Director Reserves, added: "It is not only good news for our reservists but for defence as a whole, helping us retain talent for the training and regeneration we need to increase our fighting power.

"We're fitter and healthier than we were when the serve to 55 policy was introduced.

"We've invested in these soldiers and they often come with great skills in innovation areas like cyber, drone ops and production, artificial intelligence and smart logistic supply.

"Now we have parity."

An army briefing note is due to be issued shortly.



Picture: Shutterstock

A CHATBOT TO CRY ON...

DEFENCE personnel can now share their troubles with an AI-powered confidante.

Available for free via the *Headspace* app, Ebb is an 'empathetic' chatbot that encourages users to reflect on emotions and makes suggestions based on the issues they raise.

It was developed by mental health experts and offers a confidential, encrypted space for troops to vent, while steering them towards meditations or other activities.

When *Soldier* quizzed the tool on sleep problems and money woes, it directed us to an exercise on letting go of nighttime anxieties and a course about handling financial stress.

However, the app should not be used as a substitute for mental health treatment, nor in emergencies.

Anyone with a Modnet or Army email address can sign up via work.headspace.com/britisharmy/member-enroll

Need support? Turn to page 54

£30M

Cash awarded to military causes by the **Veterans' Foundation** since 2016. Set up nine years ago, the organisation has provided grants of up to £200,000 to charities tackling issues such as poor mental health and social isolation.

ARMY HONOURS

KBE Lt Gen Charles Collins

CB Maj Gen Zachary Stenning

CBE Col Nicholas Fitzgerald;
Col Iain Gibb; Col Graham Sefton;
Brig Alexander Smith

OBE Col Patrick Allen; Lt Col Rupert Anderson, RGR; Maj Paul Carney, RE; Lt Col Joanne D'Arcy, RAMS; Col Stephen Davies; Lt Col Stuart Elford, PWRR; Lt Col James Green, Gren Gds; Lt Col Glenis Maloney, R Signals; Lt Col Douglas Nelson, RE; Col Richard Newland; Lt Col Steven Pengilly, Rifles; Lt Col Frank Reeves, Scots

MBE WO2 Mehmet Asir, Para; Maj Timothy Barker, RTR; Lt Col Kevin Bingham, RLC; Maj Stephen Brown, R Signals; SSgt Gordon Bruce, RAPTC; Lt Col Stephen Candlin, REME; Maj William Cook, REME; Maj Christopher Danby, RRF; Maj Neil Donaghy, R Signals; Capt Michael Eynon, REME; Maj Alexander Farrall, Scots; WO1 Tracy Freer, AGC (SPS); Maj Douglas Graham, QRH; Maj William Hodgson, AGC (SPS); Capt Thomas Hulme, GSC; WO1 Adam Johnston, RLC; WO2 Stephen Jones, RA; Lt Col Bharat Kara, RLC; Maj David Love, AGC (RMP); Lt Col James Lyon, RAMS; Maj Jonathan Marsay, RA; WO2 Donald McGregor, RAPTC; Sgt Christopher Morgan, WG; Maj Amelia Morrissey, AGC (ALS); Maj Martin Murphy, RLC; SSgt Emmanuel Oppong, REME; Maj Andrew Poulton, AGC (SPS); Maj James Reaney, Rifles; Maj Marcus Roberts, Scots; Capt Richard Sheehan, Scots DG; WO1 Colin Sinclair, RLC; Lt Col Katherine Badham-Thornhill, REME; Maj Luke Turrell, RA; Maj Tom Watson, RA; Cpl Ceiron Williams, Para; Lt Col Stephen Wilson, QRH; Maj Paul Young, REME

ARRC, Second Class

WO1 Ashley Coull, RAMS

King's Volunteer Reserves Medal

WO2 Mark Ebdon, R Welsh;
Col Alexander Forbes; WO2 James McMillen, RLC; Col Andrew Ryan;
WO1 Nathan Toms, RE

King's Commendation for

Valuable Service Maj Brent Carter, RAMS; Cpl Connor-James Davidson, Scots; Lt Col Matthew Long, RLC; Maj Jonathan Studwell, Int Corps; Maj Paul Wooster, REME

King's Commendation for Bravery

LCpl Charley Draper, RE;
LCpl Rhys Petersen, RE

Picture: Cpl Nanda Atherton, RLC



KING SALUTES HIS SOLDIERS

FORMER Army Sergeant Major Paul Carney was among some 70 soldiers to receive royal recognition in the King's Birthday Honours (see left).

The 45-year-old, right, who now works for housing provider Pinnacle, said he would wear his OBE "with pride".

A lifelong sapper, he served in Iraq, Afghanistan and Kosovo after enlisting as a teenager in 1997.

"His service to the British Army and to his country has been outstanding," the citation said.

Outside of awards for military service, Capt Jay Singh-Sohal (Int Corps), who helped institute a memorial to Sikh troops of the world wars at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire, received the OBE for voluntary work.

The 42-year-old reservist said: "My hope is that young people from diverse socio-economic backgrounds like mine are inspired by those who serve."



EYES ON BRIZE

FURIOUS ministers have ordered an investigation after a break-in at RAF Brize Norton left a Voyager transport jet daubed with red paint.

Defence Secretary John Healey called the incident at the Oxfordshire site "totally unacceptable" and ordered a wider review of UK base security. Two men and a woman were later arrested on suspicion of terrorism offences and a woman with assisting an offender.

Shown above, Brize is a familiar departure point for overseas exercises and ops.

Picture: Cpl Vincent Price, RLC

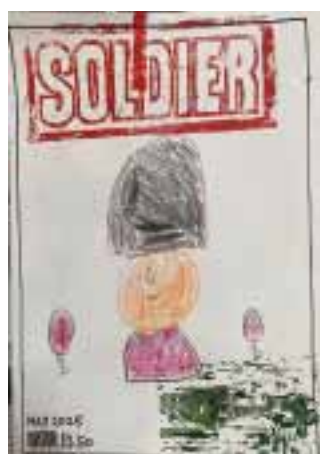
WALKING ON SUNSHINE

THE First Fusiliers got a taste for the high life on a recent parachute foundation course at Netheravon.

Ten troops got stuck into the adventurous training, which replicates the stresses faced on ops.

LCpl Rom Singjali told *Soldier* that although it was nerve-racking at first, "once I was in the air and the chute opened, all the nerves faded away".

He added: "Landing was better than expected – I'd do this again."



MOVE OVER, SOLDIER...

YOUNG visitors to the National Army Museum gave this title's editorial team a run for their money when they had a stab at producing some eye-catching front covers.

The children were undertaking a family workshop at the London landmark – part of a series of events to mark *Soldier*'s 80th anniversary this year.

This includes a special exhibition, ending on July 6, and the release of our entire archive on a new-look website (soldiermagazine.co.uk), which allows issues to be viewed and downloaded for free.

BLOODTHIRSTY FOR NEW DONORS

TROOPS are urged to do their bit to help resupply blood stocks amid concern that reserves could run out fast in a time of crisis.

National Health Service chiefs say there are only three days' worth of O negative – the most commonly used blood in emergencies. And with some rarer blood types also scarce, an urgent call has gone out to personnel across defence to lead the charge to top up supplies.

Commanders are also being asked to show flexibility and give soldiers time off to donate during duty hours.

The rallying call comes from the Defence Medical Services, who have organised donor events at MoD sites over the coming weeks.

The first in the programme, at MoD Main Building in London (shown), was attended by Chief of the General Staff, Gen Sir Roly Walker. It saw 15 litres given by troops – enough to treat 100 adults or 200 children.

Further events are planned at Whittington and Corsham on July 17 and 22.

Campaign organiser Lt Col Alasdair Hempenstall (Scots) – military assistant to DMS Director General Air Marshal Clare Walton – praised the willingness to help.

He told *Soldier*: "It's important we get behind the drive. It's easy to forget that blood is a precious commodity that we should not take for granted – particularly as those of us serving could easily become customers."



Pictures: Cpl Tim Hammond, RAF

Q Who can give blood?

A Anyone aged 17-66 who is fit and healthy and weighs 50-160kg. You must not have had a tattoo or body piercing for four months or received a blood transfusion since 1980.

Q How do I do it?

A Visit blood.co.uk

YOMPERS PUT TO TEST IN SCOTLAND

A RECORD number of serving soldiers took on last month's Cateran Yomp – a 24-hour fundraising hike through the Cairngorms in aid of the Army Benevolent fund.

More than 350 troops joined around 1,000 civvies to trek Scotland's hills and glens nonstop over 24 hours.

Participants could choose from 22-, 36- or 54-mile routes – scooping a coveted gold distinction award if they managed the latter in the set timeframe.

Fourteen teams of soldiers were successful in doing so this

year, including some first-timers from The King's Royal Hussars (see right).

Team leader SSgt Struan Duncan said the event had been really enjoyable despite the changeable weather and a few injury niggles.

"It's definitely one of the most testing things I've done during my 23 years' service," he told *Soldier*.

"It's very physically demanding, with less weight than Cambrian Patrol, but a faster pace and far more elevation."

He added: "We were so well looked after by the ABF – this

event is brilliantly organised.

"At every single checkpoint and water stop, the team gave us everything we needed and plenty of encouragement too.

"I'd definitely recommend the Cateran Yomp."

Inspired by a long-distance military training march, the event attracted walkers from the USA, Georgia, Ukraine and Denmark this year.

Those who took part raised more than £6 million.

Register for the 2026 event at armybenevolentfund.org/cateranyomp



SSGT Struan Duncan (KRH, shown below) and his team scooped gold by completing the challenge in 19hr 5min. Here are two of their memorable moments.

GLEAMING...

"Getting across the finish line as a team – which is exactly what we set out to do – was a real highlight. We thoroughly enjoyed this challenge."



...GOPPING

"At mile 25 we were tabbing along a loch in boggy ground with blue skies overhead when a full-on hailstorm arrived, followed by five hours of rain."





SUPPORT TO STAY ON COURSE

RECRUITS who have previously had a brush with the law need more support to stay on the straight and narrow, research has found.

A study funded by the Forces in Mind Trust said recruits who were already known to police were more likely to cause trouble after enlisting – and earlier intervention might help.

Researchers also suggested that anyone with a history of offending should have their mental health needs better examined when they leave the military.

But the study found fewer service personnel and vets – just 16 per cent – had criminal convictions compared to a quarter of male civvy equivalents.

See fim-trust.org for more.

WEIGHED DOWN BY MEDALS?

...THEN you are in line for a bit of extra cash to help you wear them smartly.

Defence chiefs have agreed that troops with six or more decorations will now be given cash for any extras to be court-mounted – a process which sees military sewing experts secure them to a backing board with specially stiffened ribbons.

Personnel can claim up to a tenner for each award they have.

Soldiers are already given cash – and officers receive uniform tax relief – to have medals displayed using the less rigorous swing-mounting process.

But the latest move, which brings the army into line with the other two services, comes with many formations now demanding

that medals be displayed in the smarter way.

Payments will be backdated to February 6, 2023, to help those with the Coronation Medal.

The move does not apply to troops from the Household Cavalry Regiment and Royal Corps of Army Music who – with frequent ceremonial commitments – already have decorations court-mounted at public expense.

Claims, which do not apply to miniatures, must be made via JPA under administrative costs with the ‘court mounting of medals’ as the type of claim.



Picture: Sgt Rob Kane, RLC



SLOG IN THE SUN

STAMINA was the name of the game for army signallers at their annual **Race the Sun** contest.

This year's multi-event showdown in York saw 220 personnel from the Royal Corps of Signals take part.

Activities included a stretcher race, pictured far left, where eagle-eyed readers may spot the recently appointed army sergeant major, WO1 John Miller.

The energy-sapping day also featured a 20-mile team time trial (shown left), half marathon, orienteering challenge and sprint triathlon.

Phys – page 20

SHARK BYTE

BRITISH Army gamers will soon be showing their teeth on a top-of-the-line PC shaped like a shark.

The computer, worth thousands of pounds, will be owned by the service's Xtra promotion team as a flagship PC for social media broadcasts.

It is being supplied along with half-a-dozen other competition-grade machines. All six will be available for loan to units – the kit comes as part of an Army Esports sponsorship deal with hardware manufacturer Cooler Master and PC builders Wired2Fire.

Maj Griff James (Coldm Gds), who heads up the Xtra outfit, said the metre-high Shark would be a definite talking point.

"As well as its striking appearance, it is packed with the best available parts and represents the cutting edge of a gaming PC," he added.

"It will play anything you can think of – including high-end simulation titles."

The news coincides with an expansion of the Xtra team, with media and tech savvy soldiers being

sought to help promote the military across the digital world.

There will be six more posts available soon, open to both regulars and full-time reservists.

Use of social media channels like Twitch – which is widely used by the esports community – is also being overhauled.

LSgt Ashley Ryan (IG, pictured right), who often introduces new games in his Paddy Plays show on the platform, said some events had yielded healthy audiences but more trials were needed.

"There is a lot of potential here," he added.



FOOT PASSENGERS

THE Coldstream Guards made a return journey from London to Berwick-upon-Tweed in a single day to mark the 375th anniversary of their formation.

The trip north saw them trace the steps of their forebearers, who were raised by Oliver Cromwell in 1650 from the border town.

Some 100 soldiers from Number 3 Company, along with colleagues from the Band of the Coldstream Guards, departed King's Cross shortly after 0600

onboard a special LNER Azuma train wrapped in a poppy design. On arrival, they marched through Berwick with colours flying and bayonets fixed. They attended a service of thanksgiving before returning home on the 1515.

"We're very proud to follow in our forebearers' footsteps, with all the history and traditions that comes too," said Maj Tim Woodbridge, OC Number 3 Company.



Mind the bearskin... the soldiers at King's Cross Station

Picture: Sgt Rob Kane, RLC



GROUND VIEW

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

IT IS only a few weeks since my first appearance in *Soldier* but a lot has happened in that time – not least in world events.

There has been an escalation of the conflict in the Middle East and fighting has been intense in Ukraine.

Closer to home, we have had the publication of the strategic defence review, which I think is good for our army.

For the first time in many years, the armed forces are growing rather than shrinking.

The review enables a new way of fighting; one of ever-increasing lethality over ever-increasing distances. We have fresh equipment coming and it also plans to spend £1.5 billion of new money to enhance our soldiers' accommodation and welfare.

The good news does not stop there. Our recent pay award is also welcome. The 4.5 per cent rise, when combined with our pay

system and increases over recent years, is really positive

But while cash might be available for defence, what we don't have lots of is time.

We know that CGS has mandated that we double our fighting power by 2027 – so that's less than 550 days to achieve it.

This can be done, but it is going to take a concerted effort. I want us to focus on what we can control rather than worrying about the outcomes we cannot.

This means taking ownership of our personal prep and taking every opportunity to train – do PT, get out on the range, work on navigation or medical drills.

And it goes without saying we must all stay on top of our trade or arms-specific skills as well.

In the last few weeks I've visited the NCO Academy at Sandhurst. It has come a long way in a short space of time and I had the privilege of giving a Tea and Toast talk – there have been a fair few of these now. In addition, the Land Warfare Centre pages distil learning from Ukraine plus updates on the Middle East.

Remember, at its heart soldiering is a team game. The more we work, play and think together, the better we will all be.

WO1 Miller's June diary

Visits:

- Race the Sun, York
- NCO Academy, Royal Military Academy Sandhurst
- Space Command, RAF High Wycombe
- Rusi Land Warfare Conference, London

Impressed with...

Leadership, desire to get better

Areas of focus...

Core skills and drills – tactical and technical

Coming up next...

Army Servicewomen's Network Conference; overseas visits

THE FUTURE'S BRIGHT...



Picture: Graeme Main

THE army is to become ten times more lethal, with extra troops, long-range missiles and land drone swarms among the commitments in the strategic defence review.

Outlining how the military will be transformed over the next decade, it describes a new era in which it will move to warfighting readiness via an integrated force.

To help recruitment, the focus will be on drastically shortening the period between applicants expressing interest and joining, and adopting more flexible medical and fitness standards.

As well as an uplift in missile and drone numbers, a boost in armour, AI and software capabilities is outlined, while personnel will step up on European security by adopting a 'Nato first' approach.

And up to one billion pounds will be made available for the set up of a 'digital targeting web' by 2027, which will better connect



Picture: Jon Fletcher

weapon systems and allow for faster battlefield decisions.

Billions more is already being ploughed into cutting edge battlefield equipment such as counter-UAS laser systems, which the MoD is forging ahead with.

The department recently invited industry to submit proposals for a vehicle-mounted laser weapon following successful trials of the Wolfhound-based device, pictured above in Wales (*Soldier*, January).

Got a view? Tell Talkback
mail@soldiermagazine.co.uk



PARADE PERFECTION

THE King's Birthday Parade – also known as Trooping the Colour – wowed thousands of happy onlookers in a sunny Central London last month.

Household Division troops pulled off a masterclass in discipline, detail and teamwork as the Coldstream Guards trooped their colour in the year they celebrate their 375th anniversary. The unit, pictured above, is the army's oldest continuously serving regiment.

More than 1,000 soldiers and 200 horses took part in the day, carrying out complex battlefield drill manoeuvres to a programme of specially composed music.

The spectacle concluded with a flypast over Buckingham Palace (below).



Pictures: Sgt Donald Todd, Sgt Anil Gurung and Cpl Danielle Dawson, all RLC

TUNES AND TRADITION

THE Band of The Royal Regiment of Scotland put on a colourful show at the Linlithgow Marches last month.

The boundary-marking tradition, which is commonplace in Scotland, dates back to the 16th century and is a much-loved community event in the West Lothian town.

Musical support was also provided by the pipes, drums and bugles of the regiment's 2nd Battalion.



Picture: Mark Owens



PICKING BY EXAMPLE

TANKIES exercising at Castlemartin did their bit for the planet after visiting a local beach for a barbecue and finding rubbish dumped there.

Maj Craig Murphy (RTR) said his troops volunteered to litter pick after seeing officers and senior NCOs roll up their sleeves.

The mission took two-and-a-half hours and filled seven one-tonne bags.

"Thankfully, the team at Merrion Camp allowed us to use their cable for dragging bags up the cliff," the officer told *Soldier*.

Picture: Cpl Vincent Price, RLC



HIGH READINESS ALLOWANCE

SERVICE bosses hope a new allowance to compensate for the disruption of being on high readiness will encourage soldiers to stay in service.

A year-long trial with selected units will see those held at 12 to 24 hours' notice to move for seven continuous days automatically get an extra £3.34 per day. Those on up to 12 hours' notice for longer than 48 hours will get £8.11.

Once the qualifying threshold is reached, payments are backdated to day one.

Troops involved in the trial include EOD specialists, regiments on standby for UK resilience duties and elements of the 16 Air Assault Brigade Combat Team.

Recent statistics show the army's overall size dropped by one per cent last year, with around 9,000 leaving – most of those voluntarily.

Evidence gathered by the armed forces pay review body found that time on standby was a source of frustration, with personnel often unable to commit to family events or childcare.

Lt Col Chris Hitchins, CO of 2nd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment, said his soldiers were "immensely proud" of their role at the forefront of airborne ops, but the tasking came at a cost.

"The demands and uncertainty placed on those maintaining high-readiness commitments, routinely for periods of 12 months, significantly restrict personal flexibility and life planning," he said.

"The proposed readiness allowance is a recognition of these sacrifices."

For more info on the trial read [2025DIN01-058](#).



SUN'S OUT, TONGUE'S OUT

HORSES and humans from The Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment hit the beach during some well-deserved downtime from ceremonial duties.

The soldiers took their steeds to Hayling Island in Hampshire to splash in the surf and gallop along the sands.

As well as giving the animals a break from the capital's busy streets, the trip was a chance to expose them to new sights and smells – which helps build trust in their

riders and makes them less likely to startle when faced with something unfamiliar during a parade.

Among those overcoming nerves and taking a dip was Vida, the horse pictured covered in blood after bolting in London last April that has since been undergoing rehab.

Following the seaside outing, the regiment headed back to barracks to prepare for this month's state visit by French President Emmanuel Macron.



'NO JOB LIKE IT'

ARE you the person everyone comes to with their problems? Are you ready for a new challenge?

If the answer to either question is 'yes' then you may want to consider joining the Army Welfare Service.

Its military-civvy team supports troops and their families in their hour of need, and each year the trade takes on eight to 12 transferees from across the service.

WO2 Louise Jarrett (AGC (SPS), below) is one of those to have made the move.

The 44-year-old ex-gunner said it had been "absolutely life-changing" and given her the stability of three-year postings.

Although the role of an army welfare worker is emotionally draining at times, she told *Soldier* it was "hugely rewarding".

"I have learnt so much about communication, relationships and how we interact with the world," the senior welfare worker said.

"We operate in very small teams and there are opportunities to deploy, too.

"You need to be emotionally intelligent and resilient, because you're supporting people when they're struggling. I find domestic violence cases to be the most complex.

"It's so rewarding to watch people rebuild themselves after something like that.

"It doesn't matter if you don't have experience in welfare, the eight-month defence specialist welfare worker course gives you all the tools you need, such as counselling skills.

"My advice to anyone interested would be give it a go. There's no army job like it."

The role offers a career structure from sergeant to WO1 with assignments in major garrisons. For details read [2025DIN01-044](#)



Picture: Graeme Main

phys

Q&A

MY WORKOUT

Army motocross racer and gym enthusiast **CSgt Paul Simons (WG)** on why consistency is king when it comes to seeing results...

When did your phys journey start?

When I joined at 17, I was underweight and needed to put on half a stone so I started training with my brother. I walked into the gym and fell in love with it. I quickly realised how much easier soldiering is when you're fit.

So what's your weekly routine?

Unit phys Monday to Thursday. On Friday and Saturday I do two hours of road cycling and Saturday or Sunday I race motocross. But I also train with weights every night for an hour and a half. There's nothing to do on camp after work – I don't want to sit in my room playing video games, so I go to the gym.

What are your go-to gym tunes?

Stuff like Linkin Park. I put my headphones on and I'll be in the zone. I usually won't talk to anyone. Training is me time.

What about your diet?

I wake up at 0630 and have three scrambled eggs on a piece of toast. Then after morning PT I'll have a protein shake and a banana. At 1030 I have chicken and rice and at lunch I have mince and rice. Then after training in the

evening I eat a steak. And before bed I have a bowl of yoghurt and granola.

Any cheat days?

Every four or five weeks I'll have a pizza or a Nando's. I feel so much better when I eat clean – crap food makes me sluggish. Luckily I'm not that into cakes and stuff.

That sounds tough...

Not really. People in work think I'm weird eating the same all the time but it doesn't bother me. I look at it as fuel, not food. And I prep most of my food on a Sunday so I don't have to think about it.

Do you track your weight and PBs?

No. I don't want to chase a number on a scale – I just go off how I look and feel. Logging PBs gave me anxiety and took the fun out of training so I stopped.

Have you ever taken any time away from phys?

Not really – only when I've been injured. I had to suck it up and watch films all day, which was mentally hard. Even in Afghanistan I would train around our patrols.

What's your favourite form of exercise other than the gym?

Motocross – that's like an all-body workout when you race. And road cycling – it's great fitness and low impact.

And your least favourite?

I don't enjoy running whatsoever. I do it in work obviously, but the army took the joy out of it for me.

Do you drink?

No, and I don't smoke. I once did PT with a hangover and threw up on the run. That really put me off. I enjoy having a laugh – I'm not boring – but I don't enjoy the taste of alcohol.

Any advice for others?

All it is is consistency. People want quick results but after two weeks they lose interest and chin it off. There are 24 hours in a day – if you can't put one aside to train there's something wrong.



Paras battle for team prize

AIRBORNE rivalry dominated the British Army Warrior Fitness team finals as 3rd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment triumphed over their counterparts from 2nd Battalion to be crowned men's champions.

The sides were locked on the same points after four punishing workouts, but 3

Para were handed the title after they finished the final test – dubbed 'quicksand' – in a faster time. Athletes from 33 Engineer Regiment claimed the final podium spot.

The Royal Military Academy Sandhurst dominated the women's field, with the Scots Guards winning the men's masters event.



THE REVIEWS ARE IN...

PT bosses recently rolled out the soldier conditioning assessment (SCA) – a shorter, more straightforward version of the soldier conditioning review. With feedback generally positive, two members of 39 Engineer Regiment told us what they'd made of the new-look tests...



"With the broad jump, medicine ball throw and sprints no longer included, it's shorter so it takes less time to complete, which is a good move – especially if there are 70 of you trying to get through it on a Wednesday morning.

For me, the main thing I'll be working on between now and the next time I do it is the pull-ups. The press-ups, the two-kilometre run and the deadlifts were all very achievable. Overall, I prefer it to the soldier conditioning review."

LCpl Aron Williams, RE



"People understood the SCR was backed by science, but from the soldier's perspective things like the ball throw didn't mean much. I see the benefit of adding the press-ups back in, which used to be part of the old personal fitness assessment, because pushing your body up off the floor is an important functional movement. I noticed I'd gone downhill a bit on those, so that's something I'll carry on working on – although I had no issues meeting the minimum standard."

SSgt Liam Rooney, RE



Name: CSgt Paul Simons

Age: 37

Role: Permanent staff instructor at Bristol University Officers' Training Corps

Years in: 20

Ops: Bosnia in 2007, Afghanistan in 2009 and counter-poaching in Malawi in 2019

Picture: Graeme Main

kit



Picture: Sgt Donald Todd, RLC

CLOTHING UP TO THE JOB?

Have your say on the stuff that you wear

AN ONLINE portal has been set up where troops can give direct feedback on new clothing items.

Redesigned combat trousers, shirts and under-body armour combat shirts (Ubacs) were introduced earlier this year promising wearers better fit and functionality.

Upgrades included stretch panels and elasticated pockets on the trousers and fragmentation-resistant collars plus

removable shoulder pads on the Ubacs.

In what is thought to be a first, personnel can now offer their views straight to the SoldierWorks team, who help develop troops' clothing and kit.

"Up until now, unless they were involved in trials, soldiers were told to pass their thoughts up the chain of command, but as soon as it went above them they had no idea whether it actually reached anyone," said Capt Sam Durrant (R Anglian).

"We are now actively looking for feedback to support ongoing efforts to bring new items into service and to build on material

performance testing.

"There is a short online form on our page on Defence Connect, as well as a space for new suggestions.

"Hopefully, providing this route will allow people to feel heard."

The gathering of evidence was part of continuous work to upgrade the kit issued to troops, added the officer.

Follow the QR code to submit your views



Why off-the-shelf might not cut it...

FROM smocks to boots, soldiers often buy clothing from commercial suppliers, but there are several reasons civvy gear may not be up to spec.

Every issued garment is designed, manufactured and tested to set criteria, which is not necessarily true for bought items.

These are some of the extra boxes army kit has to tick...

✓ **Robustness** The material and colouring must be tough enough to last through operational deployments, including being tear-resistant and not prone to pilling.

✓ **Environmental suitability** Garments must perform in the conditions they were designed for in terms of UV resistance, wicking and evaporation properties, thermal protection and wind and water permeability.

✓ **Camouflage** The wrong pattern or IR performance – with too much or too little reflectivity – can make the wearer stand out from their surroundings.

✓ **Insect-repellent spec** Most issued camouflage items are treated with a hard-wearing repellent, designed to last for 50 washes.

✓ **Material choice** Fabric is specifically selected by thread-count, weight and strength characteristics, while every seam and stitch type is specified for comfort, performance and durability. The latest personal clothing system was comprehensively tested by soldiers and compared to popular commercial brands.

✓ **Sizing** A great number of sizes are made available for users, for example the new Ubacs has 16 individual sizes, plus outsize options, where a civvy retailer typically offers 4-7.

Did you know?

Old clothing isn't just binned. Through a contract managed by the Defence Equipment and Sales Authority, all returned items are categorised and either reissued, resold or the materials recycled, where the army recovers some of the cost.



IS IT A BIRD? IS IT A PLANE?

No, that thing you see is actually a drone...

CHINA'S military has started testing a new drone that resembles a small bird – and its battery powers a set of flapping wings rather than a buzzing set of rotor blades as you might expect.

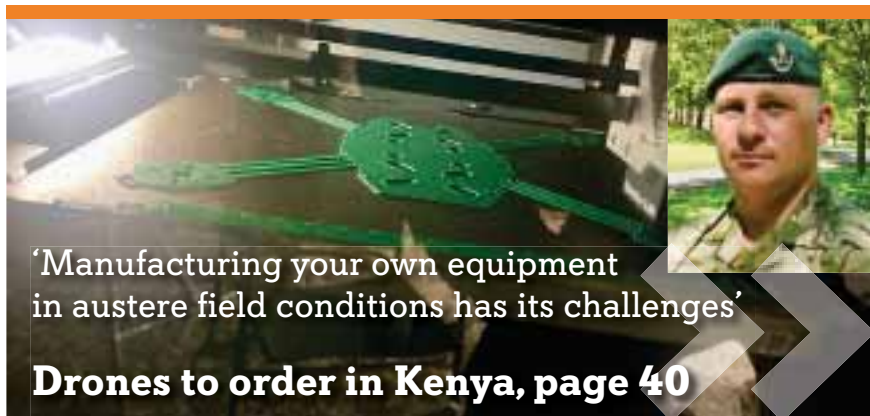
It was revealed during a recent demonstration by the People's Liberation Army's special forces.

The technical specifications of this particular drone are not publicly available, but "ornithopters" have been built before – including by firms in the Netherlands and Germany for civilian roles where versions made to look like birds of prey have been used to scare flocks away from airports and farm crops.

This type of unmanned aerial system is usually limited to short range and low endurance tasks due to its energy intensive propulsion, meaning in a military setting they would only be suitable for nearby missions.

There are reports that China has armed them with micro-warheads for striking certain assets, with their designs providing an effective attack option due to their reduced chances of detection.

Videos of the demonstration reached Ukraine where the *Kyiv Post* acknowledged the winged object's potential, reporting that China claims its 'Little Falcon' ornithopter is the most agile and realistic bird-like drone anywhere in the world.



'Manufacturing your own equipment in austere field conditions has its challenges'

Drones to order in Kenya, page 40

skills

LESSONS FROM THE DEATH ZONE

Record-breaking reservist on what Everest taught her

HONOURABLE Artillery Company soldiers LCpl Charlotte Alder and Sgt Tim Beckett recently became the first mixed gender team from the British military to scale Mount Everest.

In a ten-hour feat of endurance, they climbed to the summit via the southeast ridge, beating incoming bad weather that sadly scuppered the chances of six colleagues.

Speaking to *Soldier* after her return, LCpl Alder said that aside from the physical demands, the expedition had brought home some key soldiering lessons too...

You see so many examples of teamwork and leadership when you're on the mountain. Sgt Beckett was the expd 2iC and led our summit attempt. He is a fantastic leader. Once he has an objective he goes for it. It would have been easy, with the weather window closing to sit back, take stock and think. But if we hadn't summited on that day or were even a couple of hours later we wouldn't have done it at all.

Making difficult decisions and sticking to them is critical. And sometimes leaders have to go against the consensus of the team. When we got back down to camp four from the top I was absolutely fragged, however Tim said we had an hour's rest and then had to move. I just wanted to sleep but it was in my best interests to keep going – you don't want to spend any more time in the death zone than necessary.

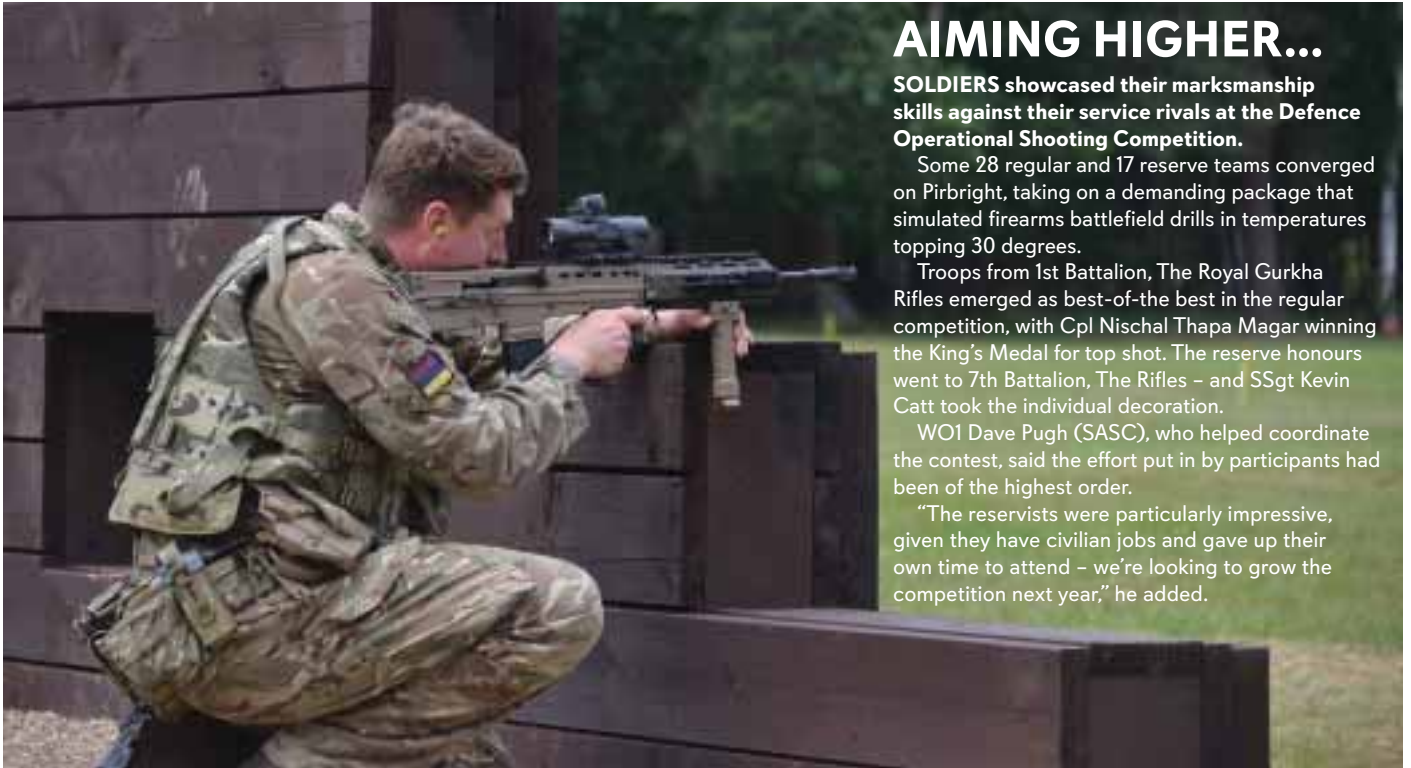
The planning that went into the expd was fantastic. Around 90 people applied when it was first announced three years ago. We did a lot of build-up training in the Alps and then in November we became the first army team to summit Himlung Himal. That taught us so much because we had a lot of altitude sickness. So for Everest we were much more disciplined in terms of our pace and allowed more time, including six weeks of acclimatisation at Base Camp. That meant we had almost no problem with sickness.

Good medical support is key and our two medics were phenomenal. They really looked after the team. We saw a lot of climbers in a bad way, highlighting how important it is to have that expertise to rely on when you are operating at altitude.

It taught me I'm a lot fitter than I thought. It's a lot physically – especially the consecutive days of climbing after you've left Base Camp. I also realised I'm good at not overthinking too much, which is useful in mountaineering because you don't psyche yourself out about the things that could go wrong, you just crack on.

We hope other units can model what this expd achieved. We now have an essential knowledge base we can share. AT teaches you so much about yourself and teamwork that you can bring back to work.





AIMING HIGHER...

SOLDIERS showcased their marksmanship skills against their service rivals at the Defence Operational Shooting Competition.

Some 28 regular and 17 reserve teams converged on Pirbright, taking on a demanding package that simulated firearms battlefield drills in temperatures topping 30 degrees.

Troops from 1st Battalion, The Royal Gurkha Rifles emerged as best-of-the best in the regular competition, with Cpl Nischal Thapa Magar winning the King's Medal for top shot. The reserve honours went to 7th Battalion, The Rifles – and SSgt Kevin Catt took the individual decoration.

WO1 Dave Pugh (SASC), who helped coordinate the contest, said the effort put in by participants had been of the highest order.

"The reservists were particularly impressive, given they have civilian jobs and gave up their own time to attend – we're looking to grow the competition next year," he added.

Picture: LCpl Jay Lawson, RAMS

Q&A

WINNING FORMULA

Why getting stuck in to section comps is a great way to up your skill set

AS ARMY bosses repeat calls for troops to play their part in boosting fighting power, personnel from 39 Engineer Regiment were put through a basic battlecraft package with a highly competitive edge.

Teams of eight were inserted via Merlin helicopter before taking on a series of tasks over two days – including counter-IED drills, casualty evacuation scenarios, vehicle recognition tests and section attacks.

We asked Cpl Marc Capper, commander of the winning outfit from 53 Field Squadron, for the lowdown...

Why is this kind of training useful?

With us being a specialist aviation support unit, there's sometimes a bit of skill fade and this took everyone back to the basics, from which everything else flows. It was based around conventional warfare. We all know what's happening in the world – we need to be ready.

How did you choose the team?

I picked what I thought would be the best section on the day. Everyone has strengths and weaknesses. They were all fit and robust but one guy was more confident on CBRN and another was good at

Soldiers from the winning section – Spr Todd Johnson and Spr Jonathan Chongkit – during Exercise Eagle's Challenge



military knowledge. As a commander you can't take everything on yourself. That's where the 'thinking soldier' comes into it – I told a sapper to deal with a task and they did.

How did you prepare?

We had two weeks of training – that was key. I got out all the instruction manuals and brought myself up to date again. A bit like war, you knew roughly what was coming but not exactly, so we had to practise for everything.

How much difference does the competition element make?

It's massive – soldiers have that winning mentality. They want to push themselves. Section comps bring that out even more and it's infectious. Others will look at us as the team that won and compare themselves.

What was the key takeaway for sappers?

Mental resilience. We had eight tasks to complete and had to tab six or seven kilometres between each, while carrying kit. Soldiers need to be able to keep going. It's a good test for them and section commanders.

What about for you?

How important stuff like this is for morale and camaraderie. As hard as it was, when we stopped we had a laugh. That's the soldier mindset and a reason I love being in the army.

What does it mean to the team to win?

It's nice to have hard work rewarded, to see training pay off, and it breeds confidence for the sappers. Even two weeks later people were still congratulating them. It's good for promotion prospects and makes them want to soldier more.

'A bit like war, you knew roughly what was coming'



diary dates



8

Decade marked

TEN years of the Army Servicewomen's Network will be commemorated as the body hosts its annual conference at Bristol's Ashton Gate stadium. Chief of the General Staff, Gen Sir Roly Walker will deliver a speech to those in attendance, followed by a question-and-answer session on fighting power and diversity. A host of other themes, including mindfulness and mentoring, will be covered on the day.



9

On your marks

TRACK and field titles will be on the line at the Inter-Services Athletics Championships at RAF Cosford. The army secured the men's and women's team crowns last year as they maintained their dominant form of recent seasons and they'll be odds on to seal another double.



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Tour test

THE army men's rugby union team face the challenge of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces at the HFC Bank Stadium in Suva. The match will be a curtain-raiser to the Flying Fijians' test match against Scotland and marks the soldiers' first tour of the country. They will also play games in New Zealand and Australia as part of a three-week trip.

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Notable appearance

POMP and pageantry aplenty are promised when the combined talents of military musicians are brought together at the height of London's summer season. The event, called Heroes, runs from July 15 to 17 and will see the Massed Bands of the Household Division, including the Duchess of Edinburgh's String Orchestra and state trumpeters of the Household Cavalry take centre stage on Horse Guards Parade in a fitting tribute to British troops past and present. For more details visit householddivision.org.uk



Picture: Sgt Donald Todd, RLC

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Ajax makes debut

THE first major training serial involving the Ajax armoured fighting vehicle will take place on Salisbury Plain.

The primary objective of the ten-day Exercise Iron Strike – the first package at this scale on UK soil involving multiple armoured units for some time – is to achieve combat-ready validation for The Queen's Royal Hussars Battlegroup, which will deploy Ajax in its close reconnaissance troop.

Also being signed off for operational duties is the brigade support group for the 20th Armoured Brigade Combat Team, consisting of elements of 3 Armoured Close Support Battalion REME, 1 Regiment RLC and 1 Medical Regiment.

Troops from The Royal Dragoon Guards, 1st Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers and 5th Battalion, The Rifles will also be participating, as well as air defence batteries from the army and Royal Navy.



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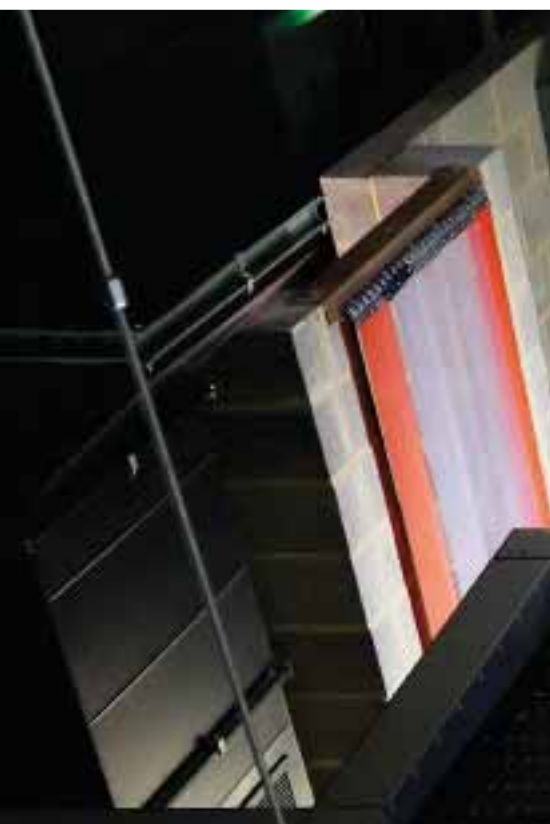
Game on

THE hallowed courts of Wimbledon await the forces' finest players on July 29 and 30 as they battle for glory at the Inter-Services Tennis Championships. The army women head to SW19 as overwhelming favourites after they won all 12 rubbers last time out to claim the title in style. The men's squad will be looking for revenge after missing out by a point to the Royal Air Force.



**‘This is having
a really positive
ripple effect’**

CSgt Gavin Dillon, R Yorks





Close quarters battle



Fighting their corner

New drills and facilities boost close quarters combat training

THE tension is palpable throughout the dark, cavernous space.

Small spotlights are casting faint glows across swathes of concrete and steel while on an elevated gantry two directing staff stand rock still, peering into the gloom below.

The sound of shuffling footsteps grows and a flash accompanied by the ear-splitting crack from a grenade slice through the air followed by the rapid pop of small arms fire.

We are situated in the bowels of one of the army's newest training facilities, located in a corner of Rollestone Camp near Larkhill.

From the outside, the structure could be mistaken for a run-of-the-mill storage depot but the interior is anything but humdrum.

Built in collaboration with industry partner 4GD under the army's collective training transformation programme, it contains a labyrinth of walls, windows and stairwells concealing reams of cutting-edge technology.

Opened earlier this year, it is one of just three garrison urban skills centres (the others are in Catterick and Colchester).



Report: Steve Muncey Pictures: Graeme Main

CQBI course details

Size: 24 students

Entry criteria: Section commanders battle course and B Qual. Infantry only

Week 1: Advanced close quarters marksmanship and assessment

Week 2: Fiwaf, trench

clearing, field firing

Week 3: Room combat and tactical evaluation

Week 4: Lesson teachbacks and confirmation

Qualification: CQBI competency and, if not already held, SA (N) 18





Close quarters battle



‘We don’t do enough pistol shooting’

Cpl Jack Seymour, Rifles

» All of them are equipped with so-called “simwalls”, which allow for an almost infinite number of configurations to be created inside.

They also come with integrated special effects such as smoke, light and sound, as well as state-of-the-art after-action video monitoring systems.

The facilities have been developed as part of a major push to boost fighting skills across the army, including through the Infantry Battle School (IBS).

A week’s worth of training at the Rollestone facility is now a fixture on the school’s close quarters battle instructors (CQBI) course, which itself was revamped as part of the service’s renewed emphasis on close quarters and urban warfare.

“With the army’s focus now on increasing fighting power the decision was taken to open up this course to the whole Infantry after previously being reserved for The Ranger Regiment,” explains CQBI course supervisor CSgt Gavin Dillon (R Yorks).

“All the personnel here will return to their units and cascade advanced skills back to their teams, so it is having a really positive ripple effect.”

Part of the revamp involved IBS staff examining what was being taught and ensuring the best facilities available were being employed.

“Back when this was for The Rangers only, the syllabus focused on room combat and was made up of two weeks of marksmanship and two weeks of tactics,” CSgt Dillon adds.

“We decided to redefine what was commonly understood as the close quarters battle and we now include fighting in woods and forests, trench and subterranean warfare, as well as room combat.

“Many skills are transferrable between these environments so it made sense,” he continues. “The mechanics of Fiwaf, for example, are similar to those of an underground or multi-storey car park, where pillars can be treated in a similar way to trees.”

Having a flexible and technically advanced facility at their disposal has improved the training experience too, says the senior NCO.

“If we put a low ceiling over this area it becomes subterranean; if we put in shop windows it becomes a high street; or if we make the corridors zigzag we have a »

» trench environment. We can even insert lots of doorways to imitate a hotel complex,” CSgt Dillon adds.

“The facilities we were using at Caerwent were quite good but there’s a lot of damage there now and it needs quite a bit of investment,” he continues.

“We also used Cellini Village in Brecon but that was built for a different era – every door and window is open for example.

“Rollestone is not only really flexible, we can also create confusion and stress by quickly introducing smoke and noise.

“We could do that at Caerwent too, but we had to improvise by connecting Bluetooth speakers to smartphones. Here it’s all integrated by design and the effects are so much better.”

The gantries above the training floor allow the directing staff to observe proceedings with an uncluttered bird’s eye view – and that helps them spot even the smallest mistake, which ultimately helps to raise standards.

“The culmination of this week is a tactical evaluation exercise where there is a four-person team made up of three directing staff and one student, with supervisors up above observing as well,” explains the NCO. “That puts a lot of additional pressure on the students, and that’s what we want.

“We also employ the integrated cameras to conduct really detailed after-action reviews that can be displayed and dissected on large screens, so I feel we now are really maximising our training time.”

However, CSgt Dillon, who joined the army in 1998 and has deployed to Northern Ireland and Iraq, says more refinements will undoubtedly be in the pipeline.

“We’re learning about how technology is being employed, reaching back to DSTL among others to keep ourselves informed about what’s been going on in other places around the world,” he says.

“We’ve been keeping an eye on developments in the Middle East.

“Interestingly, Israeli forces do things a bit differently; they tend to advance down a street leading with a light machine gun, and when breaking into buildings they use an underslung grenade launcher to hit the doorway and detonate any booby traps attached to it.

“We don’t have that capability on the course yet and it’s the same with first-person view drones, which we know are being used by other armies on urban ops to help clear buildings for example.

“Overall though, this facility is amazing and everything we do here is designed to be passed on by these personnel to junior soldiers so they can safely turn that corner and kill the enemy without being killed themselves.” <<





Student reports...

Two NCOs relay their views of the CQBI course and the urban skills facility at Rollestone

Cpl Jack Aberdeen, 1 RRF

"I'd heard good things about this course and you definitely learn a lot but it's not a massive leap in terms of physical skills and drills.

The focus is more on how you should be thinking through problems and the decisions you then make as a result.

Rollestone is one of the best facilities I've ever trained at due to its flexibility – you can manipulate it, change the structure and put obstacles in the rooms really easily.

The after-action review screens are brilliant, even if they are a double-edged sword at times.

But that's what we're here for, to learn and it's a really useful piece of kit with a slow-mo function that highlights any errors and helps get lessons across really quickly.

The whole course is superb in fact. Last week I took part in a rapid clearance of a wood block for the first time, entailing techniques such as cadence firing which I've hardly touched in the past.

This week I've learnt about the transition drill for urban fighting – the seamless switch

from the primary weapon to the secondary, our pistol, whilst engaging a target. So if your rifle gets a stoppage, instead of retreating or attempting to clear it, you sling it down and use your pistol to carry on firing.

I've also learnt from having different cap badges here and we have two Dutch army NCOs on the course which has been fascinating. Yesterday they showed us their standard room clearance drill and it was quite different from ours. That's good knowledge to have for multinational exercises in the future.

Ultimately, I'll also go back to my unit and pass on the knowledge and skills I've gained here.

I've enjoyed the course a lot, I'd encourage any NCO or officer to do this if they have the opportunity."



Cpl Jack Seymour, 2 Rifles

"I finished working as an instructor with an intake at ITC Catterick and my chain of command said I could do this course, which has earned itself a great reputation on the grapevine.

There was a lad in my last training team who'd just completed it. We let him own the urban phase of the training and the students enjoyed it. I really noticed the difference too.

I've learnt some new tactics, but training here allows us to concentrate on how to prioritise, identify where the threat is and decide how to deal with it.

One thing it's improved in me is shot accountability. When you use the marker round training system you get more points if you hit the target's A zone – the head or centre of body – and that really focuses your marksmanship.

Another thing I've not practised much before is oblique and lateral firing on the move, across open doorways for example, and we've been incorporating these techniques into our clearance drills.

You definitely get a lot better at pistol shooting too because we don't do enough of

that during normal training in my opinion. You are tested on this in week one and in order to progress on the course you need to score at least 80 per cent.

We don't shoot enough rounds as soldiers in general, in fact, and I've fired more on this course than in the last three or four years.

We don't do enough urban or close quarters training either. This process churns out just 72 people a year, from corporal to captain, so it could easily be expanded and probably should be if we are to increase our fighting power significantly.

Everyone here is like-minded and switched on and it's good to work with your peers.

Hopefully there is enough scope in the future for us to use the knowledge we've gained to eventually teach more advanced urban drills back at our units and help increase the army's lethality."



Cyber defenders

Signallers step up to protect future British ops



IN AN organisation where some unit anniversaries stretch back to the 1600s, marking just five years of existence might seem rather trivial. But this particular half-decade mark deserves celebrating because it belongs to 13 Signal Regiment, which in its short life has become crucial to the future of the British Army.

With the character of warfare evolving fast, digital and cyber capabilities are increasingly being relied upon for operational effectiveness and safety of personnel. And 13 Sig Regt is the service's one and only defensive cyber unit, created to safeguard many of the networks upon which

the army's huge digitisation revolution now hinges.

Every major platform launched in recent years – think Wildcat, the updated Apache, Ajax and those still in the development pipeline such as Challenger 3 – are dependent on network connectivity to operate at their full potential.

We recently learned via the strategic defence review that these capabilities will help form the sharp end of a £1 billion “digital targeting web” which for the first time will enable sensors and main platforms – whether on land, sea or in the air – to combine and form a single kill chain.

And a new tri-service Cyber and Electromagnetic Command is being set up right now to coordinate all the armed forces' cyber resources – including 13 Sig Regt's unique defensive capabilities.

“The demand for our services has grown exponentially since we were formed back in 2020,” notes Maj Neil Donaghy (R Signals), OC 233 Squadron.

“People are realising just how important cyber security is.

“The truth is, the more data you handle and devices you operate the more routes there are for an adversary to attack.

“If you look at Project Asgard, the MoD's initiative to network the UK's reconnaissance and strike capabilities, it requires the rapid passage of data and if an enemy can deny or corrupt it, you've lost the battle.”

As the core of the Army Cyber Information Services Operations Centre, 13 Sig Regt's four specialist squadrons are dedicated to sustaining and assuring the army's digital networks through the provision of expert engineering advice (see panel right).

“Currently we deal with anything from nation states trying to access our networks for strategic reasons, to hacktivists doing it for a bit of fun,” adds Maj Donaghy.

It's a hectic workload and over the last couple of years the regiment's personnel have helped shield UK military systems from around 90,000 attacks, not to mention incidents caused by less malevolent but, potentially, equally destructive actors.

“The internal threat is very real,” Maj Donaghy explains.

“For example, people plug a USB into their device they don't realise contains some kind of malicious code, or someone in a field headquarters accidentally damages a piece of hardware placed under a table, bringing the network down.

“Formations have to make sure they have the appropriate security controls in place to protect their own systems from themselves as well as foes.”

13 Sig Regt is well-equipped to offer informed advice on virtually all aspects of cyber security. >>

13 SIGNAL REGIMENT'S SQUADRONS...

224

(Cyber Protection Teams) defend and respond through monitoring. If there is an incident they might deploy forward to restore services.

233

(Global Communications Network) are based at the Army Cyber Information Security Operating Centre in Corsham. They sustain and defend the army's critical data networks, deal with compliance and ensure updates keep networks secure.

259

(Global Information Systems) deploy to support systems and networks that don't have reach back to support teams in the UK. They also support the Royal Navy's networks on ships and harbours and Royal Air Force forward bases.

254

(Specialist Group Information Services) are a nationally recruited reserve unit that provide deep specialist advice. Personnel are typically chief technical officers and data engineers for mobile service providers or multinational tech companies.

Report: Steve Muncey Illustration: Ollie Brown Pictures: Graeme Main; Shutterstock



MY ADVICE

LCpl James Leedham (R Signals), serving with 233 Signal Squadron, has these tips for budding cyber specialists...

Do the immersive labs

These are free to anyone, and can be found on the Defence Learning Environment. The virtual scenarios provide valuable practice and are a good way of getting clued up on cyber.

You've got to want it

Be prepared to do lots of courses and revision in your own time. I've done external CompTIA qualifications, for example, which provided a very good knowledge base.

Take part in Defence Cyber Marvel

Anyone can participate in this contest that tests your skills to stop cyber attacks. I've been part of the red team – the hackers – twice and found it a really useful. I got to travel to South Korea and Estonia to take part.

Get on the cyber foundation pathway course

I worked up to module four and there are six in total. It's a tough course that sets you up for success in the trade. Anyone can apply, although it's easier to get on for those who are in a cyber role already.



» Although it's an army unit, it is staffed by top cyber specialists recruited from across the forces, as well as civil servants and contractors – and it provides services to the whole of UK defence.

"We monitor and assure any IT system the army owns or is responsible for," says Maj Donaghy (shown above, lower image). "That ranges from local IT networks at home and overseas right up to Falcon – our tactical internet – and includes OpNet, the new deployed mission system used on ships, field headquarters and forward air bases."

For army units that are deploying, the regiment can support what are called 'level two defensive cyber operations', which protect information systems devoted to unlit activity. Formations can apply for this by completing a support request through the Land Operations Centre.

"We can advise, help, train, mentor, do policy wraps and even provide deployed support, where our engineers go forward to the location if deep technical capabilities are required," explains Maj Donaghy.

"Some existing operations have recently started using our services after they experienced cyber security incidents.

"Deployed commanders have to consider digital fires as well.

"An adversary might deny your reach back to the UK and if you're unable to have a fast decision cycle because your enemy has somehow congested or corrupted your network, they have got the upper hand."

Not surprisingly, the demand for talented cyber warriors to protect these functions is growing fast and 13 Sig Regt is as keen as any organisation operating in this realm to attract the best possible talent.

"Anyone in the Royal Signals can apply to join us and if they have the interest and

ability we will grow them as a cyber security specialist," says Maj Donaghy. "If you want to be deployed on operations or exercises then this is the place to come because our soldiers are constantly committed, supporting the army and UK defence around the globe.

"If you're not in the Royal Signals then there are posts in 259 Signal Squadron, which has 17 cap badges supporting the army's tactical communications systems. More opportunities will also open up as the new cyber career pathway is established."

This will be open mainly to personnel who've advanced their skills on the cutting-edge cyber foundation pathway course or the cyber direct-entry programme that was launched earlier this year. Both are run out of the Defence Cyber Academy at Shrivenham.

Open to serving troops and civilians, the direct-entry pilot scheme is currently run by the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force, with the army slated to join in 2026. The personnel on it are not required to serve in dangerous environments or handle weapons.

Meanwhile, its accelerated learning syllabus will churn out the first graduates before the end of the year.

For those already serving in cyber roles, the move to open doors to a wider pool of individuals is a welcome development.

"We want and need diverse people – even those with a background in the arts," says Maj Donaghy. "When you are protecting a network you have to be able to think differently – you have to be able to see things from your adversaries' point of view."

Fast-tracking specialists to bolster the armed forces' world-class capabilities is a major statement of intent. Ultimately, it can only make the army even more adept at fending off the growing number of threats lurking out there, deep in cyberspace. <<



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personnel from all 3 Services




ARMY
BE THE BEST





Army musicians strike the right chord as they march through Cleethorpes on Armed Forces Day. More than 200,000 visitors enjoyed the weekend celebrations as the town played host to the national event.

Picture: POPhot Lee Blease, RN



**‘Next time, I intend to have us
spitting out drones day and night’**

A DRONE IS BORN

British soldiers build weapons
in the field, in an exciting first

I **MAGINE a British Army infantry platoon attacking an enemy position with wave upon wave of first-person view (FPV) suicide drones.**

During the battle the troops get through not just ten or 20 of these deadly little devices, but hundreds – battering their foes with a lethal and sustained assault. And what's more, they didn't have to rely on a single resupply mission.

If you think this scenario sounds far-fetched, think again. A recent experiment on the plains of Kenya proved it could be a reality in the very near future.

In a probable first for the service, FPV devices were manufactured in the field and deployed on attack missions.

They were made in a workshop fashioned

from a cam net attached to a Land Rover.

The bodies of the drones were produced on a portable 3D printer powered by a lightweight field generator. Meanwhile, REME technicians at two trestle tables attached small batteries, cameras and circuit boards to complete the assembly.

The self-made devices were used on Exercise Bull Storm, 11 Brigade's major test of recce strike tactics, staged near Nanyuki.

"I can't be 100 per cent certain but I believe it's the first time anyone in the army has done this," says Maj Steve Watts, Officer Commanding F Company, 3rd Battalion, The Rifles. "We obtained what's called special purpose clearance from the Military Aviation Authority to build and fly our self-made drones during this training.

"It was a big deal because previously >>

Report: Steve Muncey Pictures: 3 Rifles

» they'd only allowed the army to build drones and race them inside the wire, under civilian aviation rules, or fly off-the-shelf platforms if the operators had the right qualifications and permissions."

The serials in Kenya saw 3 Rifles personnel and reconnaissance and surveillance specialists from 2nd Battalion, The Royal Yorkshire Regiment assume the opfor role against troops from 3rd Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Scotland and 1st Battalion, The Royal Anglian Regiment.

Around 1,400 soldiers were involved in total and both sides used a range of drones, sensors and surveillance kit to try and steal a march on the other.

The self-made FPV drones were not being used specifically to influence outcomes on this occasion, but rather to prove the viability of producing such equipment in the field. Five whole devices plus spare parts were produced and deployed – and a lot was learnt in the process, says Maj Watts.

"Manufacturing your own equipment in austere field conditions has its challenges – when you do this in camp it's a lot easier," he adds. "But we wanted to understand the impact of running power from a field generator to a 3D printer and how the environment impacts the whole process."

"For example, we found if it was too hot or too cold the printer didn't operate well so we had to learn to manage its temperature carefully, making sure we kept it in the shade during the day."

What the exercise also taught the officer



The troops turned a cam net hitched to the side of a Land Rover into an FPV attack drone manufacturing facility

and his colleagues was that the potential returns on investing in this technology are too significant to ignore.

During the training, much of what would have been artillery and mortar fire was replaced with FPV drone attacks using Tes simulation technology to track results. The success rate was significant.

"They are only part of our one-way effector capability but they proved their worth," explains Maj Watts.

"Imagine if we had whole platoons trained to use these weapons on operations, armed with a virtually endless supply of them. That would increase the army's fighting power many times over."

"We only used our self-made platforms sparingly, but they are potent, flying at

190mph for three-and-a-half minutes, which means they can cover 15 miles and are very hard to intercept.

"By Exercise Bull Storm 26 I'd like to have tens – if not hundreds – of self-built FPVs flying, which will make the formation extremely lethal."

There's also a tactical edge to be gained by 3D printing the weapons, as conflicts abroad have already demonstrated.

"I follow developments in drone tech and its military application all the time," says the officer, who developed his expertise in small UAS during a previous role at the Combat Manoeuvre Centre.

"In Ukraine they are printing and building them on the front line as well as back in their factories and they'll design and assemble

'Imagine if we had whole platoons trained to use these on operations – that would increase fighting power many times over'

them to a spec determined by the type of mission that's required. It might need a certain range or load capacity, or to be wire-guided and have specific sensors.

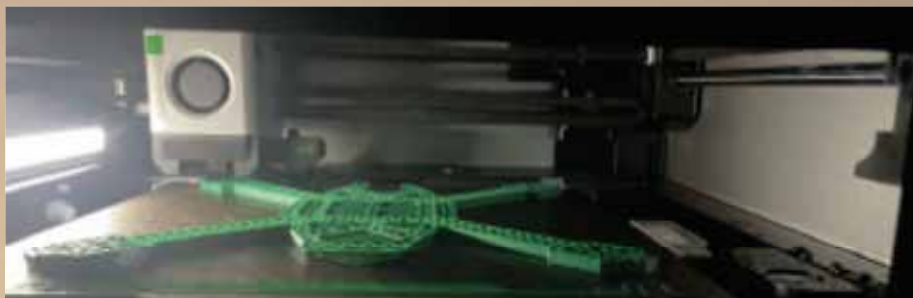
"It took about three-and-a-half hours for us to print one drone in Kenya and another hour to put it together, so if we have this capacity in the British Army and I'm a platoon commander planning a mission I could print off some bespoke FPVs now and fly them on the same day."

The team also unearthed logistical and economic advantages during the trial.

Shipping out boxes of electronic parts, batteries and small ordnance saves on space compared to containers full of assembled drones. And the production cost of each device was significantly lower than buying off the shelf.

"If we go larger in future we could have just one truck full of 3D printers, generators, parts, cameras and small ordnance and our build capacity would be huge," says Maj Watts. "Off-the-shelf FPV drones suitable for army purposes are roughly £2,000 each, but we are assembling these for about £400 a pop, so if we build hundreds the economic argument is very strong."

With small UAS gaining an ever-increasing foothold in military strike capability and this exercise throwing up some fascinating potential solutions around the supply of such kit for even the most protracted of battles, who'd bet against swarms of 3D-printed platforms dominating the near surface environment at the army's major exercises in the near future? <<



3D printing: how it works

Maj Watts used the Commander Field Army's Innovation Fund to get the 3D printing trial off the ground and the venture attracted the attention of CFA himself, Lt Gen Mike Elviss (bottom left), during his visit to the exercise in Kenya.

The officer (shown) teamed up with a firm called the Edinburgh Drone Company to source the hardware and the outfit also taught technicians how to print the parts.

"The body is made from a special type of plastic," he explains. "Five reels of plastic wire sit on top and feed the 3D printer. It then prints the bodies in incredible detail – even the thread in the tiny holes that the technicians put their screws in during assembly."

"The platforms we manufactured in Kenya are based on the company's Dirk 5 design and they emailed us the printing programme after we'd arrived in country."

"We loaded it into the 3D printer and a few hours later the first FPV drones were ready to fly."

"At the next exercise I intend to have a larger printing base located back in the echelon spitting out drones all day and night, and sending them forward to sub-units with their ammo and rations, to see how that works."

"The army's priority right now is increasing its fighting power and there can be few more effective ways of achieving that than printing our own attack drones in the field at the point of need."



Maj Steve Watts, Rifles





NUMBER CRUNCHING

6,200

Members of the Army
Servicewomen's Network – almost
half of all female troops

8

Date of this month's Army Servicewomen's
Network Conference in Bristol

FEMALE VOICE

The **Army Servicewomen's Network** is ten years old. Three personnel involved from the start tell us what impact it's had, and why everyone should consider joining

'I didn't know I needed it'

Brig Sarah Pringle-Smith was a CO in the Royal Military Police when the network began, and was initially nervous about how it would be received. But it went on to transform her as a leader...

"A SENIOR officer once told me 'to succeed in the army you have to behave like a man' and I spent a good part of my career fitting in, trying not to be recognised as a woman.

Some of the leadership qualities I have, such as empathy and emotional intelligence, weren't championed. They were termed 'soft skills', but leadership comes in many forms.

The network allowed me to unshackle myself from being the leader I thought the army wanted, to the one I am. And that was liberating.

I was able to celebrate the strengths I bring as a woman, and not disguise myself.

In the beginning it was all about raising awareness of the issues affecting women, and creating a forum for them to share their ideas for betterment. It also gave a single voice to policy makers about where improvements could be made.

I think people felt a bit hesitant and sceptical to start with, but we saw exponential growth once

word got out that it wasn't a militant feminist organisation.

It was a group of people with very real concerns who needed a platform.

We began around the same time as the ban on women in ground close combat roles was lifted, and we were able to contribute to conversations on all things - from how you refer to female personnel in a particular role, to what uniform or mess kit they wear to how to transform culture within units.

Changing perceptions is always hard. The army was built with a particular soldier in mind and needed to modernise itself - that takes time.

But diversity is everyone's business to understand so they can command and lead all of our people appropriately.

The impassioned, capable women who run the network now do it in their spare time, at great personal sacrifice.

I commend them for it - it can be hard work and emotionally exhausting.

I didn't know I needed it until we'd established it."



Report: Sarah Goldthorpe and Becky Clark Pictures: Graeme Main and Sgt Cameron Eden, RLC

» 'It will have saved lives'

Capt Sheridan Lucas (RLC) is a former co-chair of the body and says it can be a place for people to turn to in dark times...

I'VE always been part of the network, but I leaned into it heavily after I became the first female company sergeant major at the Infantry Training Centre in Catterick.

It was about making sure the young women going through training at that time knew where to go for help, because they were obviously about to be quite isolated within their work departments.

They were so brave - walking any untrodden ground means putting yourself out there and it's tough. I wanted to make sure they had the right support.

Anyone can go on the Facebook group and ask any question, anonymously, and the people running it will get back to you.

I believe, hand on heart, that this network will have saved lives because when I was involved as co-chair messages would come into the inbox from people who were in a dark place and didn't know who to turn to.

We were able to signpost and get them looked after.

If I didn't know who to reach out to it would be my first port of call - there are women from all backgrounds, trades and cap badges who have been through different experiences and can help.

I'd encourage all servicewomen to join - even if they don't think they'll get anything from it, one of their soldiers might and as leaders we all need to be looking after people.

That's why I also tell all commanding officers, male or female, to attend the conferences. If you command women you need to know what they're thinking and feeling.

We are in a minority and we always will be in the army. The network gives us a platform to instigate discussions and without people being part of those conversations - about kit, women's health or whatever - nothing ever changes."



Making a difference

How the network has ensured women's voices were heard over the years...

Women in combat

Members helped shape the army's approach when the ban on female troops serving in close combat roles was lifted in 2016-18.

Kit

Better fitting body armour and uniform, plus issued sports bras, were among the improvements that the network helped to lobby for

Health

Members helped to start more open conversation around female issues such as periods and menopause

Family

Pregnancy and breastfeeding support, parental leave, childcare, flexible working and dual-serving couple policies have all been updated thanks to the ASN

Behaviour

The network is helping the army tackle widespread allegations of sexual misconduct, assisting with policy on unacceptable behaviours and more training for troops



'You are not alone'

Soon to become the first ever female RSM at AFC Harrogate, **WO1 Hayley Cornforth (AGC (SPS))** says the network opened her mind...

I DIDN'T want to get pregnant and I didn't want to be on drugs – those were the options for me growing up in Teesside. So I joined the army.

Being a female, serving in the Adjutant General's Corps and being a clerk, I felt there were certain expectations. Obviously, I was just a pen pusher! So I decided quite early on that I was going to make a point of being at the front.

I'm quite headstrong and I thought 'no - I will be fit, I will push myself to be great at everything I do, and make myself someone people come to if they need something'.

I threw myself into courses like skill at arms, drill, live-fire tactical training; it was all about proving I could do what the guys did.

And, to be honest, it's been like that through my career – always having pushback and having to do more.

Ten years ago I heard the network had been set up, and I didn't really want to be part of it.

I felt it wasn't something I particularly needed, but I could see some might benefit.

I took my role as an instructor seriously, and I wanted to prove to other women they could be really good at what they did, so I asked to join the committee.

I come from a place where if you didn't look after yourself, you didn't get looked after. But through the network, I came to realise that we are not all built the same.

When I saw other women struggling sometimes in PT, I used to think things like 'come on, let's go'. I used to wonder why some struggled.

But there's more to it than that. Perhaps they were recovering from an injury but couldn't find their voice to say so. For many women in the army, that's what it's about, finding your voice to ask or to speak up.

Just because we are in the same sort of job, doesn't mean we have to be looked after in exactly the same way.

I am more empathetic now, and over the last decade the network has helped me grow – not just as a person but as a leader as well.

It has your back, gives guidance, and helps women realise that they are not alone. I encourage everyone to join and advocate for their servicewomen."



GET INVOLVED

Join the Army Servicewomen's Network Facebook group, follow them on Instagram or head to their Defence Connect page.





Instructors from the Irish Guards embrace Ukrainian soldiers as they depart the UK and head for the front lines at the end of their training. More than 56,000 have now benefited from the Op Interflex programme since its launch three years ago.

Picture: Sgt Anil Gurung, RLC

**Army
Benevolent
Fund**

CATERAN YOMP



The Cateran Yomp is the endurance event that raises vital funds to support soldiers, veterans and their families in times of need.

Each year, soldiers and charity supporters from across the globe gather in the Scottish wilderness to trek through the stunning foothills of the Cairngorm mountains for 22 (Bronze), 36 (Silver) or 54 (Gold) miles in under 24 hours.

"It is an amazing charity, an amazing challenge, 54 miles. It's tough going, but the camaraderie when you're out there in the hills is wonderful."

Peter, two-time Yomper



CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR 2025 GOLD DISTINCTION AWARD WINNERS

This year, 13 teams achieved the Gold Distinction Award. Exclusive to serving soldiers, the award challenges teams to start and finish all 54 miles together, as a team, in under 24 hours.

The award celebrates the values of the modern British Army: preparation, training, camaraderie, teamwork, and resilience.



1 LANCS

Liam Cleaver
Ross Metcalfe
Max Hudson
Kyle Andrew-Ellor

1 LANCS AA

Michael Parry-Jones
Blair Webster
Richy Arbuthnot
Thomas Robertshaw

1 LANCS CIS

Chris Cooper
Carl Yates
Sam Marks

2 FS BN REME

Steven Young
Joshua Winstanley
John Buchan
Ben Carter
Ross Smith
Desmond Kanu

7 SCOTS

Craig Sloan
David McGregor
Darran Pasifull
David Robertson

9 Regiment RLC

Will Taylor
Bridget Etiang
Deuman Limbu
Prem Bahadur

11 EOD&SEARCH Regt RLC

Harry Johnson
James Walker
Carl Davey
Edward Thurston
Jessica Smale
Molly Gerrard
Karna Gurung
Harjot Gill

77X

David Brookes
Stuart Cotton
Cormac Ford
Guy Scott
Jonas Aborchie
Harry Ross

150 Regt RLC

Scott Hardstaff
Bradley Turner
James Fairbairn
Fraser Hill

ATR (Winchester)

Mahesh Khatri
Barry O'Neill
Connor Harper
Yam Budhamagar
Rabindra Mugrati
Rob Melling
Satyam Niroula
Sandesh Rai
James Downie
Subash Moktan
Jack Smith

ITC Catterick

Binod Rai
Sagar Thapa
Sanam Magar
Amrit Gurung

TDDG CMC

Daniel Cope
Scott Pocock
Andrew Kempton
David Mullan

The Kings Royal Hussars

Struan Duncan
Casey Jay Morgan
George Bell
Harry Scott
Jack Roberts

Find out more about the Cateran Yomp and how you can get involved at
events.armybenevolentfund.org/cateranyomp



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The Independent Inquiry relating to Afghanistan

Do you have knowledge of alleged wrongdoing by UKSF in Afghanistan between 2010-2013?

The Independent Inquiry relating to Afghanistan would like to hear from you.

Allegations made about unlawful behaviour by UKSF are extremely serious, so the MOD established the Inquiry and is doing all it can to support its work and those affected by it.

The Secretary of State, the Permanent Secretary, Chief of Defence Staff, and the Service Chiefs have urged all personnel who may have relevant information to come forward. You can contact the Inquiry directly via their website (<https://www.iiia.independent-inquiry.uk/>) or you can contact the MOD's Military Witness Legal Team, which provides free, independent, and confidential legal advice to all current and former personnel who give evidence to the Inquiry. They can be contacted via

Raveen.Patel@governmentlegal.gov.uk

The wellbeing of our Armed Forces is of utmost importance to Defence. We recognise that the prospect of supporting the Inquiry may be stressful, bringing up complex and mixed feelings. The Department has set up a Witness Support Team, who you can contact here:

MODSI-WitSpTeam@mod.gov.uk

The Royal Military Police (RMP) has been granted separate status for the purposes of this Inquiry and is represented by separate lawyers. The RMP team can be reached at:

ARMYPM-IIAGroupmailbox@mod.gov.uk









Further information can be found on GOV.UK.

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TALKBACK

mail@soldiermagazine.co.uk WhatsApp +447973 614782

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

'Why am I not eligible for reserve medal?'

FOLLOWING a 22-year career during which I received my Long Service and Good Conduct (LSCG) medal I rejoined on full-time reserve service (FTRS) and I'm currently in my 12th year.

My administration officer said I had qualified for the Volunteer Reserve Service Medal (VRSM) which reservists receive at their ten-year point.

My application went to the Medal Office and it was approved but I was then informed that it had been delayed by the roll out of the King's Coronation Medal.

After I chased this up the Medal Office declared I no longer qualified for the VRSM due to **2024DIN09-002**, which says FTRS personnel can only receive the award if they'd originally served as a reservist.

If they haven't, a bar for the LSCG is awarded instead.

This is a massive insult and sheer discrimination to all serving FTRS who are not being equally recognised.

I have submitted formal complaints to the DIN author and the medal complaints department and have only received an automated reply. – **SSgt Michelle Patterson, RA**

**Lt Col Tony Frank, SO1
Conditions of Service,
Personnel Directorate, Army
Headquarters, replies: To**

be considered for the LSCG medal personnel must be serving in the regular forces and have completed 15 years of unblemished eligible service from the date of attestation.

Any entry on a disciplinary record will automatically lead to a delay of 15 years for the award.

Clasps are available for each further period of ten years' regular service. This should not be understated – I congratulate you on being a recipient.

To qualify for the VRSM you must be currently engaged or have previously completed a period of volunteer reserve

service on or after April 1, 1999 and have compiled ten years of continuous service.

Within this period, nine efficiency markers must have been achieved. Clasps are available for additional periods of five years of continuous efficient service.

A key requisite is volunteer service, defined as volunteers who accept an annual training commitment and a liability for call-out for permanent service.

While FTRS service can be counted towards the VRSM where the individual is also a volunteer reserve, in cases

such as yours, where that isn't the case, qualifying days count towards the award of a bar for your LSCG medal only.

Importantly, the DIN you reference is a policy clarification, rather than a change in policy.

The Medal Office is aware that the VRSM had previously been awarded incorrectly to personnel in your exact position.

As these were awarded in good faith there is no appetite to recover them, but it would not be appropriate to continue to award these medals where we are aware the qualifying criteria has not been met.



Tough home choices

THE repurchase of service family accommodation (SFA) from the Japanese financier Nomura Securities (Annington Homes) is most welcome.

In your May issue, Phil Riley, DIO's director of

accommodation, was probably right in saying that the sell-off in 1996 of almost the entire stock of SFA was a "disastrous contract".

Anyone looking in an estate agent's window at the time of

the sell-off would have found the unit sale price of £31,000 laughably cheap.

But such contractual incompetence is not the full story. The army, which sets great store by accompanied service and patch life, occupied the vast majority of the SFA and

seemingly had the most to lose.

However, it also wanted the attack helicopter programme, which the Treasury declared unaffordable without the receipts from the housing sell-off. Faced with that choice, what would you have done? – **Lt Col (Retd) Nick Larkin, RE**

DIRECTORY

SOLDIER

Bite-sized data to keep you in the know

WELFARE

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

Army HIVE

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

Forcesline

A free and confidential telephone helpline and email service for regulars, reserves, ex-forces and their families.
0800 731 4880
ssafa.org.uk/get-help/forcesline

Army Welfare Service

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

ALCOHOL AND SMOKING

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

Drinkline

A free, confidential helpline
0300 123 1110

NHS support

Various information can be found at nhs.uk/livewell

BULLYING/HARASSMENT/DISCRIMINATION

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

Army Speak Out Helpline
0306 770 4656 or **mil 96770 4656**
army-speakout@mod.gov.uk

Defence BHD Helpline

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

DEBT AND MONEY PROBLEMS

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

Forces Pension Society

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

Joining Forces Credit Union

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

Money Helper

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

National Debtline

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

StepChange Debt Charity

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

GAMBLING

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

GRIEF

Cruse Bereavement Support
0808 808 1677

SSAFA supports people who have been through a similar tragedy, giving you the opportunity to talk through your emotions with an understanding group
supportgroups@ssafa.org.uk

HOUSING

Single living accommodation

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

RESETTLEMENT

Career Transition Partnership employment fairs help support the transition to civilian life by providing resources, networking opportunities and direct access to forces friendly employers.

To book your place at an event visit modctp.co.uk

York – July 2

Elgin – July 9

Bournemouth – September 10

Newmarket – October 8

Belfast – October 15

Cardiff – November 5

Telford – November 19

properly dealt with.

Pinnacle Home Services Team

The primary point of contact for families for housing and the allocation of SFA
UK 0800 031 8628
Overseas +44(0) 161 605 3517
pinnacleservicefamilies.co.uk/contact-us

Forces Help to Buy

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

Single Persons Accommodation Centre for the Ex-Services
01748 833797
spaces.org.uk

Veterans Gateway

A first point of contact for veterans seeking support
veteransgateway.org.uk

INJURY/SICKNESS

Personnel Recovery Centres

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

LONELINESS

Armed Forces and Veterans Breakfast Clubs

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

Samaritans

Someone to talk to, night

or day, for free and without judgement
116 123 samaritans.org

The Royal British Legion

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

MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

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

Combat Stress 24/7

Helpline
0800 138 1619

Headspace

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

Mind – The Mental

Health Charity
0300 123 3393 mind.org

NHS

General mental health support
nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters

Op Courage

A specialist NHS service for armed forces leavers, reservists, veterans and their families. Search for "Op

COMPETITIONS

May 2025 HOAY WINNER

Majority Folio turntable
Robin Kelly, Bristol

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

Courage" on [nhs.uk](https://www.nhs.uk) to find your local team

Samaritans
116 123 [samaritans.org](https://www.samaritans.org)

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

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

RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN/ABUSE
Aurora New Dawn
Safety for survivors of domestic abuse, sexual violence, stalking
02394 216 816
aurorand.org.uk

ManKind
Support for male domestic abuse victims
01823 334244
mankind.org.uk
Relate
Relationship support
relate.org.uk

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

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

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

Alternatively, complaints can be reported directly to the **civilian police**. To discuss victim support contact the **Victim Witness Care Unit**, which operates independently from the chain of command, on **07974 074259** or via people-dscc-vwcugroup@mod.gov.uk. Your information will be treated in confidence and you can discuss your options for reporting any allegations.

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

STAFF NETWORKS

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

LGBTQ+ Network
elizabeth.corbett117@mod.gov.uk

Multicultural Network
priscilla.quansah100@mod.gov.uk

Parents Network
armypers-parents-network@mod.gov.uk

Servicewomen's Network
samantha.dodge733@mod.gov.uk

REUNIONS

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

The Balkans 30 Years On...
Calling all **Fusiliers** who have served in Bosnia and Kosovo with the battalions since 1995 (including in 2023) or those who have undertaken individual deployments or postings in the region. The regiment will hold anniversary events on October 24 in Newcastle and 25 in Manchester. For more details visit the What's On page on fusiliersconnect.com

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

PAY

For pay policy queries read JSP 754 *Pay and Reward Payments* or visit the AF Remuneration Pay Policy team page on Defnet. Further information can also be found on the JPA portal or via your local unit admin office. You can also contact the

Army Rem Pol team via their information page on Defence Connect.

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

Attestation date	Apply
2021	
1/9-31/12	1/4-30/6 2025
2022	
1/1-31/3	1/1-31/3 2025
1/4-30/6	1/4-30/6 2025
1/7-30/9	1/7-30/9 2025
1/10-31/12	1/10-31/12 2025

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

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

PENSIONS

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

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

AT



Visit the **Army Adventurous Training Defence Connect page** via the QR code above for information on upcoming activities on offer – including skiing, climbing, mountain biking, caving, sailing, canoeing, diving and parachuting. You can also

use the portal to apply for individual and unit courses, download resources for expedition planning and find out about instructor trawls.

FAMILIES

Army Families Federation briefs
Immigration (virtual) briefs
July 29, 1900-2000
August 26, 1900-2000
September 30, 1900-2000
October 28, 1900-2000
November 25, 1900-2000
A specially trained adviser will give a short brief followed by a Q&A. All topics covered. Visit the link below for details of how to join the Microsoft Teams meeting.
aff.org.uk/aff-events/

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

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

Hive information centres
Support for all members of the service community and their families, with hubs in Aldergrove, Bovington, Brunei, Brunssum, Catterick, Colchester, Colerne, Cyprus, Gibraltar, Grantham, Hereford, Leconfield, Leuchars, Lichfield, Lyneham, Naples, Preston, Sennelager, Shape (Belgium), the South East (including Aldershot and London District), Stafford, St Athan, and Tidworth.

For more information follow the ArmyHIVE on Facebook or Insta or visit armyhiveinfo.blogspot.com/

Carers
The Supportability, Additional Needs and Carers Guide is designed to help soldiers, their families and commanders navigate service life. The MoD Carers Passport has also been introduced along with carers' leave. For more information read JSP 760 *Tri-Service Regulations for Leave and*

Other Types of Absence.

Flexible working
An option for service personnel to formally amend their working pattern to aid their work-life balance. It includes **flexible service**, which allows regular troops to temporarily work part-time and/or restrict their separation from the home base subject to operational need, and **alternative working arrangements**, which allow a degree of freedom when attempting to balance work and personal life but do not reduce pay – including remote working, variable start and finish times and compressed working.

Further information can be found in JSP 750 *Centrally Determined Terms of Service* and AGAI, vol 2, ch 44 *Army Flexible Service*.

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

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

Supporting partners fund
A cash pot for unit and base projects that improve life for partners of personnel has been reopened. Applications to the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust's Supporting Partners Programme are welcome for initiatives to bolster mental health, make employers more aware of challenges faced by other halves and assist partners seeking support, including those of non-UK nationals. Grants of £10,000 to £70,000 can be made. Closing date is July 23. Visit covenantfund.org.uk

PHYS

Soldier Conditioning Assessment
As part of the collective effort to multiply fighting power, a revised fitness test

continued >>

is being piloted army-wide until March 2026. The gender free assessment is not a pass or fail test and is designed to measure and improve physical conditioning. It includes a best effort:

- 2km run
 - deadlift (following progressive incremental lifts)
 - press-ups (in 60 secs)
 - pull-ups
- Further information is available on the Individual Training Requirement SharePoint page, in the aide memoire for commanders *A Tool For Progression* and in **ABN 016/2025**.

Defence Perinatal Handbook

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

APPS

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

My Digital Skills

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

Digital Transfers

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

Army Health & Wellbeing Defence Connect page

Pushes health, performance and wellbeing resources out to personnel who follow the

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

MyDEFENCE

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

Armed Forces Personnel Portal

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

SUMMITS

July 8

Army Servicewomen's Network Conference at Ashton Gate Stadium in Bristol. This event will commemorate ten years of the organisation. All female troops and their chains of command are invited to attend. Arrival time 0900 for 1000 start. The day will feature panels, briefs and addresses until about 1700 and there will be a networking event after.

NCO ACADEMY

Tea & Toast Talks

July 2 at 1000 – Royal School of Artillery
July 16 at 1000 – Sandhurst Instructor Aptitude Course
July 30 at 1000 – Army Recruiting and Initial Training Command Sgt Maj
Sept 9 at 1000 – Life Skills
Sept 17 at 1000 – Inclusion
Oct 1 at 1000 – TBC
Oct 15 at 1000 – TBC
Oct 29 at 1000 – TBC
Nov 11 at 1000 – TBC
Dec 12 at 1000 – Army Sgt Maj, WO1 John Miller

Development days

July 9 – Edinburgh
September 24 – Catterick
October 23 – Blandford

Level-up leadership course

July 1-3 – Sandhurst
July 4-6 – Sandhurst

Visit the NCO Academy group page on Defence Connect

Your chance to
WIN

Majority Naga 60 Bluetooth soundbar



TEN details have been changed in the image below of the Massed Bands of the Household Division marching down the Mall during the Major General's Review.

Circle all the differences on image **B** and send the panel to HOAY 998, Soldier, Ordnance Barracks, Government Road, Aldershot, Hampshire GU11 2DU, along with contact details, including email address, by July 31.

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

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

The first correct entry drawn after the closing date will win a stylish Majority Naga 60 2.1 Bluetooth soundbar (see competition rules on page 54).

Featuring a built-in subwoofer and speakers, it delivers cinematic sound to your room and will breathe life into movies, music and games via dynamic equalisation controls. Accompanied by a premium remote control for easy listening, users can easily adjust volume, modes and settings as required.





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www.kidmilitarystore.com

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VOLUNTEER PARTICIPANTS REQUIRED FOR THE PEBA STUDY

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kcalm102@pgr.army.ac.uk
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REVIEWS

★ MUSIC ★ PODCASTS ★ BOOKS ★ GAMES ★



Picture: Paul Kent/Red Dog Productions



Rural riffs

Army's own Midwest musician eyes success in folk-rock scene

MUSIC

COUNTRY music has been enjoying a renaissance in recent years – from enduring classics including the likes of **Johnny Cash** to the tunes of newcomers such as the **Wandering Hearts**.

The military has not been immune to this surge in popularity, as evidenced by the slide guitar riffs blasting out at cookhouses, offices and workshops during *Soldier's* latest on-camp visits.

So it is unsurprising to hear that the service's musicians – ever ready to soak up something new – are also getting involved.

Enter CSgt Liam Compson (RCAM, above). A cornet player and current bass guitarist with the Household Division's Blue Red Blue pop band, the Swindon-raised country fan is working after hours to put his stamp on his favourite genre with his own group.

Overcomplicated, as the outfit is known, combines a distinctive sound with some original material.

"I'd actually formed the group with my brother over a decade ago – but rather than having a set line-up, we had several serving and ex-military people we could call on to play for us, hence the name," explained CSgt Compson, who has served for 20 years.

"We were gigging for a while but it went dormant for a few years because life got in the way. Everyone was busy, managing the band took time and work must obviously come first.

"Things eventually arrived at the stage where I'd written a fair bit of my own material but never had the guts to release it – I'm 36 and time is moving on."

The reforming of the band has marked a return to a scene that has been a constant throughout CSgt Compson's musical life.

While playing cornet and performing with his dad's rock outfit as a youngster, he was inspired by a series of folk-rock legends including **Mumford and Sons**.

"As we largely played covers when Overcomplicated started, there were a few styles including funk and pop

in the repertoire," the musician added.

"Don't get me wrong, I like both of these but country music has always had a special place with me – the lyrics are heartfelt and there are great harmonies."

A combination of CSgt Compson's aptitude as a wordsmith and experience in uniform is certainly evident in the two new songs released for the group's reformation.

Since '89 is a pacey outing based on a conversation between a serving soldier and seasoned veteran, while *Whiskey Away* is a classic country standard focused on the tumultuous emotions of love.

"It's a song all about coming and going in the British Army," said CSgt Compson of the latter.

The piece references an exchange between a soldier born in the same year as him and a veteran from the Falklands war era.

"Although the service has a transient lifestyle, the different generations of troops have a common bond – you get to see a lot over the years and outside of music, for example I did an Op Herrick tour as a top cover sentry," he continued.

"Elsewhere, the video of us playing on *Whiskey Away* was filmed by the lake at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst – so the song also has an army connection."

The tracks are well delivered with the polish of corps musicians evident throughout.

Along with CSgt Compson on vocals and guitar, plus singer Sgt Tiff Ellen across both, violinist Musn Yas Chu excels on *Whiskey Away* while keyboardist LCpl Natalia Horoba, drummer Musn Dylan Tanswell-Lowe and lead guitarist Sgt Al Lambert tackle *Since '89* with great dexterity and energy.

Army colleagues have certainly been vital to CSgt Compson's output.

"The corps is a great place to work, not least because there are always so many talented people around you," he said.

"Everyone has something different to bring and you have the certainty of a regular job performing – this is often not something guaranteed in civilian life.

"You also travel and play in different places, from the Edinburgh Military Tattoo to The Royal British Legion Festival of Remembrance in London. And I've been at the British Embassy in Estonia – all great opportunities."

This is certainly true. The wealth of experience, contacts and skills provided by the army are a powerful combination when it comes to a career in music.

And it is no accident that the sound of Overcomplicated – packed with great melodies, polished harmonies and delivered with solid technical skill on every front – bears the hallmarks of the military environment from top to bottom.

This band is – in no uncertain terms – one to watch.

Interview: **Cliff Caswell, Soldier**

Easy access to Overcomplicated

Since '89 and *Whiskey Away* are out now, with further music in the pipeline from the band. Watch this space.

Both singles are available digitally from online stores and streaming platforms including Apple, Amazon and Spotify

PODCASTS

The General & The Journalist

from *The Times*



FAR from disappearing from public life and enjoying some downtime, former chief of the general staff Gen Sir Patrick

Sanders has teamed up with journo Tom Newton Dunn to discuss defence matters on this new *Times* series. Combining their military and media expertise they analyse hot topics like the strategic defence review and developments in Ukraine. Along with the insightful commentary, Sanders' candid revelations of behind-the-scenes "bollockings" he received from politicians for speaking truth to power will appeal to serving listeners – even the boss answers to someone. Highly recommended content from two people who know their stuff.



Review: **Capt Mike Owens, RE**

The Wargame

from Sky News



SET in a hypothetical future a few months from now, this five-partner sees defence correspondent Deborah Haynes

assemble a crack team of former politicians, military bods and other experts to wargame a direct attack on the UK by Russia. As the missiles rain down, the likes of Ben Wallace in the role of prime minister and Gen Sir Richard Barrons as chief of the defence staff call on Nato's article five protocol, only to find themselves worryingly short of allies in the world of 'America first'. While the simulation is intentionally dramatic, it is disconcerting to hear Britain's vulnerabilities laid bare. Time to start digging a bunker in the back garden...



Review: **Becky Clark, Soldier**

BOOKS

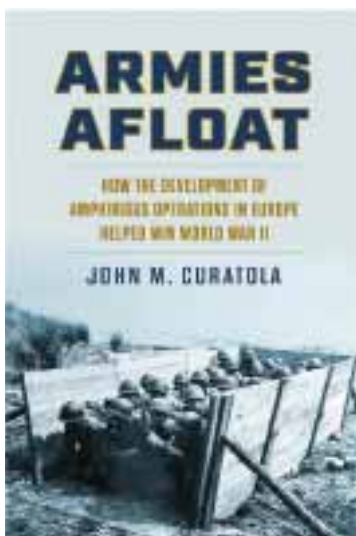
Armies Afloat

by John M Curatola

THE dramatic United States Marine Corps island-hopping campaign across the Pacific dominates our understanding of American amphibious operations of the Second World War. This timely release goes a long way to balancing the narrative and charts the dynamic evolution of Allied amphibious doctrine from North Africa, through the Italian campaign to Normandy, and ultimately the Rhine. It is a book packed with lessons that still resonate today.



Review: **Mike Peters, ex-AAC**



GAMES

Atomfall: Wicked Isle

Out now on all formats, priced £14.99

THE first downloadable content for this British-based post-apocalyptic survival actioner, *Wicked Isle* ups the ante with a new coastal location and mystery set around four hidden keys and a long-sealed crypt. There are different characters and a couple of new enemy types – including eerie 1950s-style humanoid sea monsters – plus a refreshed armoury, the highlight of which is the satisfyingly hefty blunderbuss. The overall experience, however, feels underwhelming. There's little sense of risk or meaningful reward, and outside of some new ending cinematics, nothing major changes. If you enjoy *Atomfall*'s investigative tone this is well worth a visit, but *Wicked Isle* is more of a side dish than a main course – tasty enough to please the devoted, but unlikely to convert the curious.



Review: **LSgt Ashley Ryan, IG**

Reviews



GAMES

ICBM: Escalation – Endless October

Out now on PC, priced £5.89

SET five years after the Second World War, the latest downloadable content for this title presents an alternate take on history where the Soviet Union has emerged from the conflict far more powerful and determined to reshape the world. In countering the Russian bear, players must navigate, negotiate or neutralise their way through obstacles with units ranging from armoured divisions and nuclear artillery to carrier groups and submarines. But be warned, this isn't all about charging in and obliterating the enemy. In order to avoid being seen as the aggressor, subterfuge and clever manoeuvring are needed. Playability-wise, graphics and the interface are both great, but some bugs cause occasional issues. Overall, this is a solid strategy game that tests attention to detail over 11 missions ranging from 1950-2047. Highly recommended.



Review: David McDougall, MoD civvy



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GAMES

Panzer Corps 2: Elite – Ghost Division

Out now on PC, priced £4.29

OVER the course of six years of combat the German 7th Panzer Division, also known as the Ghost Division, earned a fearsome reputation. And this is an opportunity for armchair officers to test their mettle in leading it. While *Panzer Corps 2* is already a sound title with great mechanics and enjoyable gameplay, *Ghost Division* takes that a step further with additional missions that see players moving at a considerable pace. While it's not perfect, this is a great expansion that allows you to be aggressive with armoured warfare, instead of carefully hoarding tanks. The only downside is the length of missions. You can easily complete the whole outing in a single afternoon. Some of the dialogue in the game is a little distracting, too. But if you're a tank enthusiast, you'll enjoy it.



Review: David McDougall, MoD civvy

LEVEL PEAKS



QUANTUM SYSTEMS

Twister™

Short-Range eVTOL sUAS

Compact, rucksack portable system that delivers real-time high resolution video to the warfighter.



Flight Time
90 Minutes



Maximum Take-Off Weight (MTOW)
3.8kg



Data Link Range
15 km



IP Rating
IP55

Nighthawk2-UZ



EO Zoom
20x Optical
2x Digital, continuous

IR Zoom
4x Digital

EO Resolution
1280 x 720 px

Additional Features
KLV - Stream / Geolock / Image stabilization / Object tracking

Always Delivering the Advantage

SOLDIERSPORT

Army hopes were raised with a 7-3 win over the Royal Navy



BLADES FALL SHORT



Capt Lee Holland (RAMS) drives the Blades forward

ICE HOCKEY (MEN)

THERE was final day heartbreak for the Army Blades as they fell agonisingly short in their bid for glory at the Inter-Services Ice Hockey Championships.

Having relinquished their grip on the title last time out, the soldiers made the perfect start to the 2025 campaign as they recorded a 7-3 win over the Royal Navy Destroyers in the opening match at Ice Sheffield.

The senior service then went on to beat defending champions the Royal Air Force Aces 4-3, leaving the Blades as favourites for the silverware.

But a 4-0 loss in the concluding fixture left the players pondering what might have been as their rivals lifted the trophy courtesy of a superior goal difference.

Such a disappointing conclusion appeared unlikely after the army turned on the

style against the Destroyers.

In a frenetic opening 20 minutes, goals from SSgt Mark Morrison (R Signals), Pte Andrew McMillan (RLC) and Cpl Ian Spridgeon (REME) edged the soldiers 3-2 ahead before a clinical second-period performance saw them seize control of the tie.

With the workload of goaltender Lt Col Rob Warrington (RE) significantly reduced, the Blades dominated the puck and further efforts from WO2 Scott Boyle (Scots), Cpl Harry McBride (REME) and Maj Ross Walker (R Welsh) opened the lead to 6-2.

Boyle claimed his second goal of the night in the third period, before a navy consolation saw the match end 7-3.

"I'm absolutely stoked for the team," Spridgeon told *SoldierSport* at full-time.

"It was a physical game and we're glad to come out on top.

"We came out for the second

period in a different gear and showed how our hockey should be played."

Spridgeon, who lined up for National Ice Hockey League outfit Cardiff Fire last season, said the squad travelled in determined mood following their disappointment 12 months earlier and was pleased to see the plans formed in the build-up pay off against the navy.

"It was sore to come back with a loss last year," he continued. "We looked back at the video footage and highlighted the areas we needed to work on – that paid dividends tonight."

"Our approach hasn't really changed though."

"We know the navy will be a physical challenge, while the RAF have more speedy and technical players."

"We've been holding regular training camps, although it has been quite gruelling trying to get away once a month – at times we've just had a skeleton squad on the ice."

"But we have strength in depth and the sport is coming on leaps and bounds."

"This tournament is getting harder every year. Ice Sheffield do a brilliant job, the fans are amazing, and the crowds are getting bigger and bigger."

"It is superb in terms of retention. We all come from different cap badges, but it is an incredible team to be around – whether we win or lose."

Despite the services setback, it has been a year of progress for the Army Ice Hockey Association, with a number changes behind the scenes.

"We brought in a new manager this season," said operations manager Capt Rory

INTER-SERVICES ICE HOCKEY CHAMPIONSHIPS

ARMY 7 V NAVY 3

ARMY 0 V RAF 4

McLuskey (REME).

"He has held training camps every six weeks at locations all over the country."

"We have also paid for physios to come here, patch guys up and keep them in the game."

"We are trying to treat our players more like professional athletes and now have three men and two women competing at semi-pro level. We also have four personnel on the army's talented athlete scholarship scheme."

"Batus was always our natural feeder, but with that drawing down we've had to look at organising learn-to-play sessions and have bought all the kit we need to run those."

"So, we are looking strong, and that is highlighted by the fact we have brought the biggest ever army contingent to this event."

While the Blades and the Army Fury women's team battled for forces honours, the competition also featured the Tri-Service Championships in which corps sides faced the challenge of their navy and RAF equivalents.

The Royal Navy Kings claimed the overall title, with the Infantry triumphing in the plate competition. The Royal Air Force Bluewings and Vulcans B secured the bowl and quail honours respectively.

FURY CONTINUE TO MAKE PROGRESS

ICE HOCKEY (WOMEN)

THE continuing development in women's ice hockey was highlighted as the Army Fury faced off against the Royal Air Force Pumas in just their second Inter-Services fixture.

A 3-1 defeat at Ice Sheffield came on the back of a 7-5 reverse last season, but team manager and assistant captain Cpl Paige Atwell (RLC) insisted the squad is moving in the right direction.

"After the last Inter-Services, we held a couple of learn-to-play camps for the women who have shown an interest in getting involved," she told *SoldierSport*.

"We had between 25 and 30 people showing up with a mix of abilities."

"We held three further camps since Christmas, focusing on the key players who were going to be selected for this competition."

"It was a chance to drill down on our skills and build

some team cohesion as we didn't really know each other that well."

"It has all come together and we now have a great atmosphere in the group."

Atwell, who was victorious at the inaugural UK Armed Forces Strongest Man and Woman contest in April, was introduced to the sport while posted at Batus eight years ago and from there progressed to her corps team, the Chiefs.

When the Fury formed, she was desperate to join the ranks and is encouraging more females to follow suit.

"I've always enjoyed high risk sports and ones that show how strong women can be," the NCO explained.

"Last year was the first time we've had an all-female ice hockey team and that has inspired others to get involved and ask about it. There is massive interest."

"You can see those who have skated before, and those who have been involved in other sports take to it quite quickly."

"Plans are taking shape for our next learn to play sessions and we are looking for women, and men, to get involved."

For more information email paige.atwell100@mod.gov.uk

'THERE IS A GREAT ATMOSPHERE'



Picture: Trish Thompson Photography

ICE HOCKEY BY NUMBERS

10 Army teams competing during the week

7 Titles for the Royal Navy Kings at the Tri-Service Championships

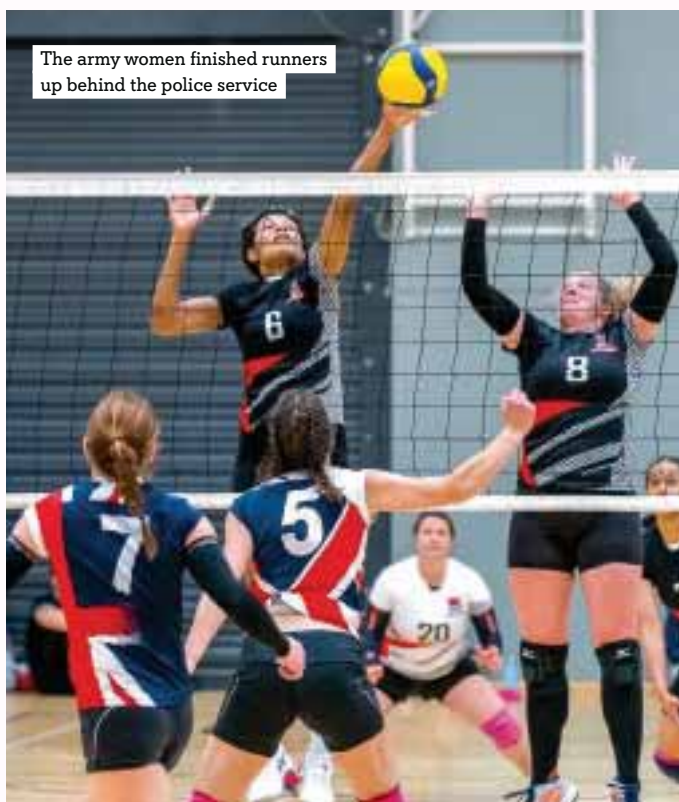
4 Nights of Inter-Services action staged at Ice Sheffield

20 Years of ice hockey being an official forces sport





CROWN RUN CONTINUES



The army women finished runners up behind the police service

VOLLEYBALL

THE army men's volleyball team made it four title wins in a row at the Crown Services tournament in Scotland.

In a dominant showing, the soldiers emerged from the pool stage with a 100 per cent record from four games – including wins over the Royal Air Force and Royal Navy – dropping just one set in the process.

Their fine form continued in the final, where a 3-0 victory over the police service saw them top the podium once again.

"Looking back to when we first won this, there was so much excitement," skipper Cpl George Morris (REME) told *SoldierSport*. "It's not quite the same now, but there was still a lot of joy."

"It is about the chemistry in our squad. A number of us have been playing together for years and that familiarity translates to the court."

"Even if we make changes, we have strong foundations in place

– there is a deep pool of players across the army."

Crown success followed victory at the Inter-Services earlier in the campaign (pictured above) and Morris said playing in the Volleyball England shield and cup competitions has helped the team become the premier forces outfit.

"That exposure has been crucial in pushing individuals to another level," he added.

"Traditionally, we have dominated the military competition but going up against civilian clubs, who train weekly, is a different challenge."

"Despite that, we still managed to reach the quarter-finals of the shield this year."

"If we can get more time to train, and have more players released, that will help us progress even further."

Elsewhere, the army's mixed team lost to the RAF in their respective final, while the women finished runners up to the police.

ROAD TRIP PAYS OFF FOR SCOTS DG

RUGBY LEAGUE

A NEW name was added to the Yeoman Cup as The Royal Scots Dragoon Guards triumphed at the end of a gruelling day of action in Aldershot.

A solitary try from Tpr Inoke Verevuni was enough to settle their final showdown with 1st Battalion, The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment – a match that followed on from their victory over The Royal Welsh in the semi-finals.

"This is great for the regiment," player Tpr Orisi Nabuka told *SoldierSport* as his side prepared to lift the trophy.

"It is the first time we have entered this competition as we are usually so busy with work.

"But as we had the time this year, as well as having a few players available, we managed to make it. We are so happy.

"It took us nine hours to drive down from Scotland; it

was a long journey, but it was worth it – the boys have done a great job."

The Royal Welsh went on to be crowned plate champions, with 1st Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers winning the bowl competition.

Organisers had to tweak the format prior to kick-off as, in a sign of the service's busy workload, five teams had to withdraw due to commitments on exercises.

Elsewhere, the army have enjoyed a successful start in the Women's Southern Championship, where a 34-4 win over Brentwood RLFC was followed by a 72-0 thrashing of the Anglian Vipers.

And a festival of rugby league was being staged in Warrington as this issue went to press, with Crosfields ARLFC taking on the army men in the Tom Sephton Memorial Trophy match.

Held on Armed Forces Day, the event also saw the Royal Marines face the army development squad, with The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment battling rivals The Royal Yorkshire Regiment.

'IT WAS A LONG JOURNEY'

YEOMAN CUP
INTER-UNIT FINAL
SCOTS DG V 1 LANCS
4 V 0



Picture: Graeme Main

CHAMPIONS FOCUS ON ARMY SELECTION

BOXING

THE curtain closed on another season of in-ring action as fighters from across the service tested their skills at the Army Open Boxing Championships.

A total of 14 finals were staged at the end of the week-long tournament, which saw more than 70 athletes square off for individual and team honours.

The Royal Engineers enjoyed a successful start to the blue riband events, with Spr Caden Turney taking gold in the featherweight final – a feat matched by Spr Jamie Lowe at light welterweight.

"I worked on my two-phase attacks; stepping to the right and letting him come in," Turney said after defeating LCpl Thomas McCallion (RLC) on a split decision. "I thought I handled his pressure well.

"I joined the army to box, and it feels great to be in this ring. I've worked hard and have done what I said I was going to do."

Lowe, who fought with Sheffield Boxing Centre before joining the service, claimed a unanimous verdict against Pte Marco Collins (RLC) and like the other champions, has been invited to trials with the army development squad in August.

"It is a brilliant feeling," he

told *SoldierSport* as he reflected on the win. "I was nervous beforehand and as a civvy you do not get to tournaments like this as an individual.

"It is a completely different atmosphere, and I loved it."

One of the most impressive performances in the opening round of finals came from Cfn Harry Fisher (REME, pictured), who took the middleweight title with a unanimous win against WO2 Lewis Arthey (Ranger).

"I'm buzzing," he said. "It was planned to perfection – I boxed and moved the whole time.

"I knew he would be a strong opponent, and you cannot get into a scrap with people like that. Even though my legs were tired, I managed to keep moving.

"I will not stop until I make the army team. It is there for me now and if I keep training hard and improve, I know I can do it."

2025 OPEN BOXING

INTER-CORPS

- 1 INFANTRY
- 2 ROYAL ENGINEERS
- 3 ROYAL ELECTRICAL AND MECHANICAL ENGINEERS

INTER-UNIT

- 1 1 LANCS
- 2 2 RIFLES
- 3 RRF

Picture: Graeme Main

ARMY TRAVEL

YOU MUST

CHECK SERVICE ACCOMMODATION AVAILABILITY
BEFORE BOOKING A HOTEL



ALWAYS BOOK ONLINE

Check Cancellation Policy & Rate
(with breakfast included UK)

Book cheapest option offered
to ensure value for money.

Any Issues or Queries Contact:
ArmyStratCen-Res-Army-Travel@mod.gov.uk



Capt Connie Cant (RA) was named
player of the tournament



CAPTAIN CANT LEADS THE WAY

INTER-SERVICES
TWENTY20

RAF **152-7** V **155-7** ARMY

Pictures: Graeme Main

CRICKET (WOMEN)

THERE was a dramatic conclusion to the Inter-Services Women's Twenty20 Cricket Championships as the army overcame a rejuvenated Royal Air Force outfit to retain their title.

Chasing 153 to win, the soldiers were being expertly guided by skipper Capt Connie Cant (RA) until she was run out for 67 – with seven runs still required from seven balls.

LCpl Shema Quashie (REME) suffered the same fate from the next delivery, but tailenders SSgt Emily Wall (R Signals) and Cpl Abbie Sullivan (RAMS) held their nerve, with the latter finding the boundary to seal victory with two balls to spare.

The RAF were indebted to a superb performance from newcomer Plt Off Ellie Stanley in posting such a challenging total

as the opener smashed 12 fours on her way to an unbeaten 96.

The army's bowlers kept the rest of the order in check, with Quashie (pictured right) and 2Lt Gabie Clark (RY) claiming two wickets apiece, while two run outs also helped the cause.

Cant, alongside twin sister LCpl Georgie Cant (Int Corps), made a steady start in reply before the latter fell for 17. Clark departed soon afterwards as the score slipped to 36-2, leaving all-rounder Maj Mel Vaggers (AGC (SPS)) to help steady the ship.

She was bowled for 23 to end a 44-run stand and Cant then did the bulk of the scoring until her late dismissal set the stage for Sullivan to complete the job.

"That was insane," Cant told *SoldierSport* afterwards. "This is the best Inter-Services we have had in ages. The RAF were so close, and I would have been pleased if they won, but I'm

obviously happy that we did.

"I felt quite comfortable at the start of the run chase. We lost Georgie but I was thinking 'everything is grand'. Gabie was dismissed a lot quicker than expected and it went up and down from there.

"I was trying to keep the run rate in mind and should have dived on the run out – I thought I was in. But the girls did an amazing job at the end, they really kept their heads.

"The RAF have found a great opening batter and have a couple of new bowlers coming through that are exciting. The Royal Navy have some fresh talent as well.

"To see everyone playing flat out is great for women's cricket."

The Cant sisters both scored unbeaten half-centuries as the army successfully chased a target of 139 to beat the senior service in their opening game.

UP NEXT...

The focus now switches to the longer format with the army aiming for an Inter-Services double at the 40-over championships.

A number of friendlies are planned in the build-up to the competition, which runs from July 15-18. The army men will then compete for forces honours in their 50-over championships from July 28-31.



Pictures: Peter Davies



WATER SPORTS

AFTER stepping onto the international stage at Defi Wing, Gnr Jack Harrison (RA) is urging fellow personnel to take advantage of the many courses on offer at the Army Inshore Sail Training Centre.

The site runs programmes in everything from dinghy sailing and windsurfing to powerboating and kitesurfing, from basic to instructor level.

"Many people think that you have to have done this before joining," the wing foil racer said. "That isn't true."

"I had never wing foiled, it was among the many courses on offer, so I signed up."

"That was in 2023. With my newfound love for the sport, I put my name down to come and work at the centre for a season. I then passed my instructor qualification and started sharing my passion."

"I also did some fun racing at Thorney Island. One thing led to another, and I was selected for Defi Wing."

"It all started with signing up for that course and pushing myself outside my comfort zone. If you're thinking about it, just go for it - you never know where it will take you."

For more details visit sailing.britisharmysport.com



Gnr Jack Harrison (RA) in wing foil action

HARRISON TAKES FLIGHT

WATER SPORTS

WING foil racer Gnr Jack Harrison (RA) faced his sternest test in the sport to date as he took to the start line at Defi Wing.

Featuring some 600 competitors, the three-day event is the world's largest wing foiling race and saw the soldier, who started in the discipline through the army in 2023, take to the water in an experienced field

that included several Olympic athletes and medallists.

Staged at Gruissan Plage, in the south of France, it was comprised of seven races ranging from 20 to 50 kilometres in length.

"The beginning of each was a spectacle in itself," Harrison, part of a five-strong service team in action, said.

"There was a 600-metre-long start line with a rib flying down at 40 knots to kick off the chaos."

"From there, we'd head out to the first mark, ten kilometres down the coast, and then back and forth, completing the entire course twice."

"By the end, your legs are cramping, and you'd be pushing yourself between 20 and 35 knots towards the finish - all while doing it another two times that day."

"This was an incredible opportunity and a once-in-a-lifetime experience."

Picture: Defi Wind Eyes/J M Cornu

JUDO

COMMITMENTS in the day job took their toll on this season's Inter-Services Judo Championships as depleted squads battled for mat honours.

Despite missing some key individuals, the army were still able to field a full team and duly sealed the senior honours ahead of the Royal Navy.

The soldiers also claimed 11 individual titles from the 18 categories competed in across the open dan, intermediate, women's and veterans' divisions.

Unfortunately, the Royal Air Force were only able to enter one athlete in Cpl Liam Hart, although he went on to win gold in the 100kg+ senior ranks.

"It was really important to give those that could attend the opportunity to fight at a higher level than the individual service championships and push for selection at the British Judo national teams event," said Army Judo operations manager Lt Col Jim Crompton (AGC (ETS)).

SERVICES TEST PRESSES ON



Picture: Graeme Main

Open dan under-73kg champion	Cfn Jack West, REME
Open dan under-81kg champion	Pte Harry Stone, Para
Intermediate under-81kg champion	SSgt Ollie Dales, RAPTC
Intermediate under-90kg champion	LCpl Charlie Sprake, RLC
Women's under-79kg champion	Lt Nicola Cairncross, RAMS

AirTpr Francesca Woods (AAC)
works on her elbow strikes



SEMINAR SUCCESS

MUAY THAI (WOMEN)

ARMY Muay Thai continued to build on its growing momentum by hosting its first women-only seminar in Aldershot.

Having been recognised by the service as an official martial art earlier this year, the set-up invited one of the country's leading female fighters, Dani Butler, to put personnel through their paces in a two-hour session aimed at learning the basics of the discipline.

"We are trying to attract as many people as we can and thought 'let's get more women involved,'" said army coach SSgt Sam Cooney (RAPTC), who trains alongside Butler at the Allstyles gym in Camberley.

"People think this is male dominated but it is not – Dani is testament to that.

"Her technique is flawless, and she is here to help them with the basics of punches, kicks

and elbows.

"She is a great technician of the sport."

Butler, a WBC British champion at bantamweight, was impressed by the talent on show and said she was open to returning in the future to further help with the army's development.

"They worked hard all the way through," she told *SoldierSport* at the end of the session.

"It was a surprise to see how well they have done. They got what we were trying to teach really quickly, which meant we could progress to more advanced stuff.

"That is probably down to the discipline they have as soldiers, and I saw a lot of potential out there today.

"I love working with other women. They don't always have confidence in things like this so it is nice to be able to help out and show we can do anything we put our minds to."

The seminar was part of a wider three-day programme for men and women that attracted more than 45 personnel.

Other guest instructors included Richard and Lisa Smith, founders of one of the leading Muay Thai gyms in the country, and coach and ring announcer Kyle Greaves.

It followed on from the first team selection day in May, when a seven-strong squad was named for the army's competitive debut on July 12.

Further auditions follow in October, when personnel will be vying for a place on the UK Armed Forces team.

"It is like a snowball," Cooney added. "It is getting bigger and bigger, with more people joining and asking questions about how they can do this at their units."

For more information follow @britisharmymuaythai on Instagram or visit the British Army Muay Thai page on Defence Connect.

AMERICAN FOOTBALL

AMERICAN football was handed a boost in service circles after it was granted category two status by the UK Armed Forces Sports Board.

The move, which has initially been made for a probationary period, means army players will benefit from extra funding, while also opening the possibility of international fixtures.

"It means the world to all of us, especially the small group of coaches who came together six years ago and established the initial foundations for the sport," a team spokesman said.



Picture: Graeme Main

ARMY SPORT

LOUGHBOROUGH University and Army Sport have announced a new strategic partnership designed to enhance high-performance opportunities for personnel.

As part of the deal, service athletes will gain access to the establishment's renowned facilities for training, competitive fixtures and flagship events.

There will also be shared research and innovation projects as well as direct student engagement with the service's career opportunities.

The army experienced what the site has to offer in January, when the women's netball team played Malawi (pictured).



Picture: Cat Goryn/Alligin Photography

OCdt Milly Wood took the women's title on her competition debut

Pictures: Graeme Main

FRESH FACES TAKE TOP PRIZES

TENNIS

NEW names were added to the roll call of winners as the top seeds tumbled at the Army Tennis Championships.

In the women's draw, debutant OCdt Milly Wood (East Midlands UOTC) defeated the top ranked Cpl Chloe Pike (Int Corps) in the semi-finals to set up a clash with Sig Emma McMahon (R Signals) in the final, where she claimed a straight sets victory.

Having traded blows early on, the aspiring army doctor won five consecutive games to take the first set 6-2, before clinching the second 6-3.

"This is my first experience of army tennis, so I didn't really have any expectations coming in," the University of Nottingham student told *SoldierSport*.

"My first serve percentage was quite high, and I was concentrating on the third and fourth balls, the rallies were breaking down a bit after that.

There was not much between us.

"It has been a unique opportunity and it is brilliant to come here and win."

Wood will be in the mix for the army teams that will compete at this month's Inter-Services at Wimbledon, as will newly crowned men's champion LCpl Warok Rai (REME).

He defeated second seed Maj Tristan Williams (R Welsh) in the semi-finals before taking on Capt Sean Marren (Gren Gds) in the final.

After taking the first set 6-1, Rai saw his opponent - who earlier triumphed over defending champion and top seed Pte Marco Wright (Para) - withdraw through injury in the second.

"It is an unreal feeling," Rai said after lifting the trophy.

"I left tennis a few years ago and didn't know if I would enjoy it again, so I'm thankful to the army for this opportunity.

"This is not the way I wanted to win, but sometimes that's how it goes."

Men's singles champion LCpl Warok Rai (REME)



RUGBY UNION

THE army under-23s rugby union team have appointed Pte Junior Bulumakau (Scots) as their new head coach.

A decorated player who represented the service at all levels, he transitioned to coaching in 2020 and guided the Infantry to the Corps Merit League One title this season.

"This team was a key part of my own journey and I'm passionate about helping young players develop both as athletes and as people," Bulumakau said on taking the role.



Picture: Cat Goryn/Alligin Photography

ATHLETICS

DISTANCE runner Cpl Dean Williamson (REME) continued his fine form in 2025 as he topped the podium at the National Masters Half Marathon Championships.

The soldier clocked a time of 1hr 6min 32sec to win the M35 category at the event, which was staged as part of the Swansea Half Marathon. He also finished fourth in the overall race.

Williamson (pictured) was one of a number of army athletes to represent the UK Armed Forces on the day, with WO2 Will Ewens (RA) third in the M35 field and tenth overall.

Cpl Francis Okumu (AGC (SPS)) claimed second place in the M50 ranks and Sgt Roanna Vickers (RAMS) was third in the women's 35-39 division.



Picture: Lee Crabb



BROOKES MARCHES ON

Picture: Graeme Main

BOXING

WELSH champion LCpl Niamh Brookes (REME) continued to impress in the ring with victory at the Three Nations Championships in Cardiff.

The 52kg fighter, who was crowned national champion in April, defeated England's Madi Gittins via a unanimous verdict on home turf to retain the title she won last season.

"England came down for a

camp at the end of last year and I sparred her then, so I had an idea of what she was like," Brookes told *SoldierSport*.

"Going back-to-back is a great feeling. Yes, I'm bringing the title home for the army team, but for myself it shows that I am making a good level of progress."

Brookes went on to represent Wales for the first time on the international stage at the Eindhoven Box Cup, where she was defeated by Mongolia's

Mungunsaran Balsan in the quarter-finals.

"She has had more than 180 bouts, so it was a big step up - I've only had 26," she continued.

"You learn so much going in the ring against someone with that experience. It's the little things, such as how they control the bout and the tactics they use.

"I'm now waiting to see if I go full-time with the team, but I think they were happy with the way I performed."

RUGBY UNION

FORWARD Gdsm Manuqalo Komaitai (IG) stepped onto the international stage as she made her debut for Fiji at the Oceania Championships.

The soldier only started in the sport in 2021 but has become a mainstay of the army women's team - crossing for six tries in two Inter-Services fixtures this season as the Reds retained their title in style.

Such form saw her invited to trials for her national side and after impressing, came off the bench to score in a 59-5 victory over Tonga.

Komaitai (pictured left in the army's 96-0 triumph over the Royal Navy in May) then started in the final against Samoa, which Fiji won 24-20.

"It is an honour to represent Fiji and the British Army," the back rower said.

"I'm proud of where I come from and am thankful for the support of my regiment and the Army Rugby Union."



KOMAITAI SHINES ON FIJI DEBUT

Picture: Graeme Main

Crystal balls

We asked troops how the army should look, a decade from now...

Interviews: Cliff Caswell Pictures: Graeme Main, Cliff Caswell

We need to make sure we use our young tech-savvy people to gain an advantage. Ask them for their ideas and give them plenty of opportunities to do drone courses.



LCpl Keston James, RLC



We'll need to be prepared for things that haven't been a feature of our most recent conflicts – our thermal signature being one of them. Maybe thermal cloak kit will feature in the future.

Maj Griff James, Coldm Gds

As well as the introduction of a next-generation personal weapon, we need to be prepared in the cyber domain. The information war is also key – the army must showcase its operational capability to draw recruits and deter hostile nations.

Lt Samuel Griffiths, RE



force across a full spectrum of conflict at scale.

CSgt Gavin Dillon, R Yorks

An over-reliance on technology risks eroding lessons hard earned on the battlefield. There will always be a requirement for dismounted close combat basics. Hopefully, we will see the army become a well-resourced, agile, integrated and lethal



We need to have good armoured vehicles and the latest technology – basically, I want better kit than any potential enemy. Equipment such as drones are going to be important – as are the right people to operate them.

Kgn Tyron Graham, Lancs



Some of the lessons from history are still relevant to future conflicts – notably that the quality of our soldiers will be critical.

Capt William Skeith-Foreman, Lancs

We will need to have relationships with our allies – Nato is so important. Our people are also key. If you are not investing in them, you are falling short.

Maj Lance Morris, Lancs



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