

SOLDIER

MAGAZINE OF THE BRITISH ARMY

BROUGHT BACK FROM THE BRINK

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hands-on to save this many
people from suicide –
and what the wider Army can learn



D-DAY AT 80 LAST VETERANS RELIVE THE LANDINGS



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“When you’re in charge of stopping suicides, every one really hurts”

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Family matters

THIS month's magazine highlights the sort of experiences that bind Army personnel together as a family.

From extreme highs and adventure (page 32) to steadfast support in times of crisis (page 20), these are the peaks and troughs of life that create a sense of belonging between British soldiers.

As our D-Day feature on page 40 brings home, this is something which shouldn't be taken for granted – especially when the call comes.

The sight of Operation Overlord's last remaining heroes congregating on the beaches of Normandy this month will illustrate just how important military bonds continue to be, well into civilian life.

And in *The Rifles*, a small group of veterans who have long since hung up their uniforms are committing their days (and nights) to hunting down stricken ex-soldiers and ensuring they understand just that (page 24).

These troops may have been temporarily estranged from their regimental family, but they will always be a part of it. After all, having a place or clan to call our own is fundamental to every human being.

And while those unfortunate enough to have never known a loving family may find that Army life fills that void, if such a bond isn't maintained once their service ends the result is surely nothing short of a bereavement.

Sarah Goldthorpe • Editor



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Where to find *Soldier*

> Printed copies

Sent to Army sites at the start of the month.

> Facebook, X and Instagram

ALONG with news and glimpses behind the scenes at *Soldier*, we publish a link to the latest magazine at facebook.com/soldiermagazine and on X (formerly known as Twitter) (@soldiermagazine).

> Online

DIGITAL versions of current and past editions are available on the Army website at soldiermagazine.co.uk. Just click on the "read it now" tab.

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Pictures: Media Drum World

'It's important we never forget'

Special ceremonies planned for last major anniversary involving survivors of D-Day

VETERANS who fought during the Normandy landings will have places of honour at this month's 80th anniversary commemorations.

Former D-Day combatants will be joined by serving military personnel, politicians and other dignitaries at events in the UK and France. And they are likely to be the last surviving troops to be involved in major ceremonies.

A ticketed event at Southsea Common, Portsmouth on June 5 will open a busy programme on both sides of the English Channel. There will be testimonies from those involved in Operation Overlord as well as orchestral music.

The evening will see a light show at the Bayeux War Cemetery and vigil by soldiers. The names of 25,000 people buried at the grounds will be read out.

Meanwhile, veterans sailing to France will be despatched with a salute from Royal Navy ships and a possible Battle of Britain Memorial Flight flypast.

A formal act of remembrance at the British memorial near Gold Beach in Ver-sur-Mer will begin the commemorations on the anniversary on June 6.

There will also be a special service at the UK's National Memorial Arboretum

in Staffordshire in the afternoon.

Around 1,600 military personnel will help lead events in France, with a parachute drop by the Red Devils.

An installation of 1,500 life-sized soldier silhouettes – created by charity Standing with Giants – has also been established close to the memorial.

They represent the number of British troops killed on D-Day alone.

The outlines, which were produced with the help of Army veterans, are the brainchild of artist Dan Barton. He told *Soldier*: "It's important we never forget and preserve these memories for younger generations."

Those making pilgrimages to the beaches this year have said the experience has been a once-in-a-lifetime moment.

Annabel Maamoun, whose 100-year-old dad Richard Styan served as a Royal Artillery officer during the invasion, said she had been "deeply moved" by her trip (page 40).

Colin Mills, chairman of the Taxi Charity for Military Veterans, which is taking ex-combatants back to Normandy this year, said the troops represented a "golden generation".

It was important to preserve their stories for the future, he added. ■

Above: Photos coloured by Royston Leonard (page 16) show troops of 3rd Infantry Division assaulting Sword Beach and, inset, American soldiers at Utah

“We must preserve the memories for younger generations”

SOLDIER

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GLOBAL SITREP

1. CALIFORNIA OCEAN ADVENTURE

A FOUR-MAN crew from the Royal Engineers will chart a course from the US mainland to Hawaii this month as part of the World's Toughest Row event.

The Salty Sappers team of Maj Adam Siggs, Capt Josh Warne, Cpl Adam Sedgwick and LCpl Rich Wilkinson will leave from Monterey in California, bound for Kaua'i, some 2,800 miles away.

While shorter in distance than the Canary Islands-Antigua race also staged by organisers Atlantic Campaigns, conditions in the Pacific are notoriously tricky.

"The weather systems will be very different," said Maj Siggs, who along with Capt Warne has previously rowed the Atlantic.

"Because of the prevailing winds it will be a challenge to even get off the coast of America, but we have a strong team – I hope this will inspire soldiers to do insurmountable things."

The quartet aim to complete the crossing in around 35 days and are fundraising for the Royal Engineers Association.



1. CALIFORNIA



2. ARKANSAS



2. ARKANSAS GOING GREAT GUNS

THE British Army Reserve operational shooting team tested their aim in an international field as they crossed the pond to take part in the US Armed Forces Skills at Arms Meeting.

A 15-strong squad, comprised of personnel from a variety of cap badges, faced off against rivals from Italy, Ireland and Holland, as well as the host's National Guard and Army Reserve, finishing second overall.

They also collected a host of individual and team medals.

"We competed really well and were up against two very strong American outfits," said team adjutant Maj Ady Kyle (SASC).

"We took five new shooters with us who had not been to this event before. The different weather and range conditions had an impact, and the opposition included the top shots in the National Guard – but they held their own."

"People tend to forget they are Reservists with proper jobs. They gave up their time to come away for two weeks and compete, and trained for six months beforehand to reach the required standard."

3. FALKLAND ISLANDS TOUR ROLLS ON



TROOPS from 2nd Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Scotland face a tough stint in the South Atlantic after taking over as Roulement Infantry Company.

As this issue went to press they had been put through a specialist package on HMS Forth to sign them off for simulated amphibious assaults from the ship.

Meanwhile, the outgoing Grenadier Guards (pictured) rounded off their outing with a capability demo, including a mock advance to contact and live firing.

3. FALKLAND ISLANDS



4. GIBRALTAR RIGHT ROYAL TRIBUTE

PERSONNEL on The Rock marked the first anniversary of the King's coronation with a gun salute.

The three-minute tribute was carried out by members of The Royal Gibraltar Regiment, with dignitaries and members of the military community stationed in the territory looking on.



INTELLIGENCE FOR THE ATLAS?

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Picture: Cpl Nanda Atherton, RLC

5. ITALY

LIGHTING THE FLAME

A SOLDIER whose relative fought in Monte Cassino carried a torch of commemoration during a ceremony marking the 80th anniversary of the pivotal battle.

Tpr Daisy Crichton (HAC), the granddaughter of Capt John Frendrought Grey Crichton – a member of the 10th Battalion, Royal Berkshire Regiment who went on to survive the war – said she felt “emotional and privileged” to have taken part in official proceedings.

“It’s really good for me to connect with the family history,” she added.

The service at Cassino War Cemetery was attended by the Duchess of Edinburgh, outgoing CGS Gen Sir Patrick Sanders and 100 troops from the Royal Tank Regiment and The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers.

Part of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission’s Legacy of Liberation 80 campaign, the torch has since been making its way across the UK and on to Normandy for the D-Day commemorations.

6. LATVIA

RETURN OF THE ‘CAT’

BRITISH Challenger 2 crews took on their international counterparts in a tank skills competition in Latvia.

Members of The Queen’s Royal Hussars travelled down from their station in Estonia for the Canadian Army Trophy – dubbed The Cat – which was last held in Grafenwoehr, Germany in 1991.

The contest has been revived to promote lethality, training and interaction between allies. Alongside the UK and the host nation, teams from Italy, Germany, Norway, Poland and Spain also took part.

After a testing series of static and on-the-move shoots, the cavalymen finished second on the podium, between winners Canada and Italy.



SAPPERS past and present have dug deep to restore monuments to the Normandy campaign in time for the D-Day 80th anniversary this month.

Members of 6 Headquarters and Support Squadron, 22 Engineer Regiment and the Fenland Sappers veterans group cleaned and painted a number of Second World War-era armoured vehicles dotted along the French coast.

Among the vintage kit to get a makeover was a section of Mulberry harbour at the corps’ memorial in Arromanches, which will form the backdrop to commemorations on June 6.

The pontoons were key to the 1944 campaign, having enabled crucial supplies to come ashore during the invasion.

Steve Cleator (ex-RE, QDG and RTR) began the project on behalf of the Royal Engineers Association last autumn. He said: “The monuments haven’t been touched in years – but they deserve this level of attention.

“It’s important – after I’m dead and gone I’d like to think someone would look after my memorial, if I had one.”



PATHFINDERS

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PATHFINDERS are 16 Air Assault Brigade's advance force reconnaissance unit held at extreme high readiness, providing high altitude parachute insertion capability.

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PFSC 1/25: 08 Feb to 28 Mar 25

PFSC 2/25: 06 Sep to 24 Oct 25




ARMY
BE THE BEST



Waiting out: Soldiers who appeal are being left in suspense for too long



Picture: Graeme Main

Another year, another rap

...but the handling of troops' grievances is improving, ombudsman says

THE Service complaints system continues to operate in a way that is not efficient, effective or fair.

It is a familiar statement – the eighth successive year, in fact, that this conclusion has been reached in the annual ombudsman report.

Issues that continue to plague the process include the time taken to resolve appeals and a lack of trust and confidence in the system.

Serious concerns also remain around the experience of troops who report bullying, harassment or discrimination.

However, Mariette Hughes, the Service complaints ombudsman for the Armed Forces, welcomed the improvements made over the past 12 months – particularly the removal of the chain of command from the paperwork, which has boosted the system's independence (*Soldier*, July 2022).

"While I remain unable to say it is efficient, effective or fair, this has been another year of significant improvements," Hughes added.

"All three Services have engaged with each other and my office in a positive and meaningful fashion, seeking to identify areas for improvement and achieving the best performance.

"I have not made any further recommendations, to allow the agreed guidance from 2022 to take effect and deliver real and lasting change." ■

IN NUMBERS

2023 ombudsman report

614

complaints from soldiers ruled admissible

67

percentage of Army cases closed within 24 weeks – the target was 90 per cent

PROMOTION WARNING

■ COMMANDERS should check changes to appraisal deadlines after it was confirmed the JPA system is being taken down for essential work from mid-August until early September.

Reporting officers are encouraged to submit documentation for some Regular and Reserve ranks as soon as possible to ensure they can be presented to promotion and appointment boards. Read **ABN 016/2024**.

DECENT SANDHURST DIGS

■ STAFF at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst are to benefit from upgraded accommodation.

Two single living blocks – one for 53 NCOs, the other for 45 junior ranks – are under construction and will be delivered this summer and next spring, respectively.

They will boast more space with a smart heating system and are part of a wider defence programme to improve standards (*Soldier*, September 2022).



NICE LITTLE EARNER

■ MORE Reservists are set to notice hundreds of extra pounds in their wallets as they complete different elements of initial training.

Defence chiefs confirmed that enlistment, basic training and officer training payments of up to £2,000, introduced in 2022, have been extended by another year after successfully bringing more troops through the door.

See **ABN 010/2024** for details.

A SECOND CHANCE, SIR...

■ OFFICERS, warrant officers and NCOs can now ask for isolated incidents of bad behaviour to be ignored when applying for the **Long Service and Good Conduct Medal**.

Single offences that saw an individual deducted up to seven days' pay, plus one-off reprimands and other minor punishments, can be discounted by presiding boards.

The award is normally presented after a spotless 15 years in uniform.

But the move follows changes to regs just under a decade ago, which allowed private soldiers with similar out-of-character blemishes to request discretion.

Lt Col (Retd) Kestrel Simson – who oversees Army medal matters – said the move brought senior ranks into line with their junior colleagues.

He told *Soldier*: "There had been a couple of Service complaints brought in relation to the discrepancy so a decision was made to make the further change.

"It applies retrospectively to 2016, so personnel with a minor offence who have previously been unable to come forward may now do so."

Anyone with a misdemeanour on record



should first speak to their regimental admin officer before putting in their paperwork, Lt Col Simson added.

For more information read **ABN 014/2024**.

Veterans can search "apply for a medal" on the internet to be directed to official military channels and information about the changes.

"We are expecting a number of enquires, and I would say there have already been a few dozen calls relating to this issue," Lt Col Simson added.

HELPING FEMALES TO STAY ON FORM

■ SERVICEWOMEN are being reminded of the wellbeing resources available to them on Defence Connect.

Visit the portal's "Army Health and Wellbeing" page to find specialist advice on topics including pregnancy, menopause, incontinence and contraception.

DOER-UPPER MILESTONE

■ MORE than **1,000** dilapidated quarters which have stood empty for months and years have been refurbished and made ready for military families to move into.

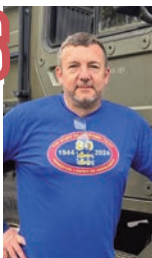
New kitchens, bathrooms, boilers and carpets are among the upgrades made over nine months as part of a £400 million investment into military housing.

The homes stood empty due to age, condition and lack of funding for repairs.

Under the same project, 4,000 properties have been given new windows, roofs and insulation to prevent issues with mould and help families save on heating bills.

FEARLESS FUNDRAISING

MoD civil servant Dave Westall is marking the 80th anniversary of D-Day with a 243-mile trek from his base in Bristol to the invasion beaches. He is raising cash for The Spirit of Normandy Trust, which takes ex-combatants back to their battlefields. Search his name at [justgiving.com](https://www.justgiving.com) to help him meet his £5,000 target.



40 YEARS' SERVICE



HIVE centres are marking 40 years of helping troops to navigate military life.

Established in 1984, their locations are spread across the Forces world to assist soldiers with relocation, accommodation, health, finance, education and local information.

Staff can also support foreign and Commonwealth personnel with immigration applications.

Gdsm Thando Dlamini (SG) was recently given help with paperwork to bring his wife, Thobani, to the UK

after he was diagnosed with a serious medical condition.

He explained how his local Hive in Catterick stepped in to assist the pair, who are from Eswatini.

"It was very stressful because I was dealing with my illness while worrying about everything else at the same time," the Serviceman said.

"Then someone in the welfare office suggested I go to the Hive and a wonderful lady, Lindsay Russell (shown with the couple), helped me with the

admin and arranged it all.

"It was a weight off my shoulders."

The 32-year-old urged others to make use of the service.

"People are there to help you but if you don't speak out, they won't know what you're going through," he continued. "The Army provides the support, so ask for it."

Set up in Germany with families' welfare in mind, Hive began life as the Hohne Information and Volunteer Exchange – hence its name today.



Picture: Graeme Main

“Peer pressure encourages you when you don't want to”

Sink or swim for Channel crew

■ NTREPID personnel are taking on the unfriendly waters of the English Channel later this month to raise money for military causes.

Two teams of six from the Land Warfare Centre and Recruiting Group will tackle the 21-mile route by relay, swimming hour-long stints in turn.

They will set off from Folkestone in the small hours aiming for Cap Gris-Nez near Calais.

The duration of the crossing will depend on the currents and weather conditions, but is expected to take at least 12 hours.

Team member Maj Rob Hanking-Evans (Coldm Gds) said: "The biggest

challenge on the day will be getting back into the water for your second or third leg. But peer pressure encourages you when you don't want to. And if someone can't continue, the whole team forfeits."

Maj Johannes Kuhn (RLC) added that nausea and the effects of frigid water could also cause an issue.

"Cold and fatigue cause disorientation," he said.

Both outfits are fundraising for the Army Benevolent Fund and will launch their swim in the latter half of June when conditions are favourable. ■

● Taking the plunge – page 22



Ground view

Army Sergeant Major,
WO1 Paul Carney,
talks Service life...

Contact Paul on Defence Connect

“
We need
to look at
the wider
picture
”

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

Q Anything particular
you learned in
Morocco's desert?

A Yes – take stock
cubes. They're great
for rehydration.



Picture: Graeme Main

TODAY'S Army may have gone back to applying cam cream and clearing trenches as we did in Afghanistan, but we are also flying drones and preparing for war on a digital front.

We therefore need to ensure we have the right skills, as well as addressing some wider issues in defence.

With procurement, for example, technology is moving so fast that we face kit being out-of-date before it gets anywhere near service.

The Sergeant Majors' Convention last month was therefore a really useful forum to discuss all these sorts of challenges.

As well as bringing together our own leaders, we had guests from many allied nations. And what was clear was that several of the big topics affecting today's Service – recruitment being one – are affecting other Western militaries too. This makes working together all the more important.

Our senior warrant officers are critical in helping us find solutions to these problems.

They work in the space between the NCO chain and the officer ranks above, which can be a testing position with pressure from both sides.

However, there were useful discussions at the Sandhurst summit, and we have put our findings to senior leaders.

Also this month, the Service marks the 80th anniversary of Operation Overlord – and the great sacrifices made by the Second World War generation (page 40).

The veterans of this conflict inspired me to sign up, and I have been privileged to be in their company over the years.

With fewer and fewer of them now, their memories are precious and we must learn what lessons they offer us.

They saw what war between nation states looks like, with its huge losses and demands.

Finally, thank you to everyone who supported the Rinder's Run team through the Marathon Des Sables in Morocco.

It was the race-of-a-lifetime in the company of great people and we banked a total of £31,000 for our wonderful Army Benevolent Fund.



Defender rolls on

● THE latest manoeuvres in **Exercise Steadfast Defender** have seen thousands of British troops demonstrate their skills across Poland and Estonia.

On Drawsko Pomorskie Training Area the 12th Armoured Brigade Combat Team was out in force for a package that tested Nato's ability to reinforce its eastern flank.

"We must be under no illusions – Russia will be watching us as we prepare, deploy and operate in Europe," said Lt Col Grant Brown, CO of 1st Battalion, The Mercian Regiment, which led one of two battlegroups. "That's a good thing."

In Estonia, the 16 Air Assault Brigade Combat Team took part in the US-led Exercise Swift Response, where more than 2,300 soldiers, sailors and aviators seized a three-kilometre long trench system.

More on Steadfast Defender in the next issue.



Pictures: Cpl's Becky Brown and Aaron Stone, both RLC

WOMEN UNITE TO PROTECT HEALTH

■ HEALTH support is being offered to female veterans at a series of drop-in events in London.

The first session will run 1230 to 1400 on **July 16** at Ronald McDonald House in Lambeth Road and is open to ex-personnel of all three Armed Forces.

It will include the opportunity for free health checks, wellbeing chats and refreshments, and is being led by Reservist LCpl Manpreet Maycock (Int Corps, shown) in her role as assistant general manager at Guy's & St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust.

"The aim is to prioritise the health and wellbeing of our female veterans, while giving them an opportunity to engage in topics that matter most to them," she told *Soldier*.

"We want to celebrate the endurance of women, and build a brighter and healthier future for all those who served their country."

Future dates (same time and location) for the events will be August 20, September 17, October 15, November 19 and December 17.



Call to arms for military

Veterans' group gains momentum with hope it could

“We want to build a healthier future”

CONSOLE-MAD former Servicemen and women are being encouraged to hit the power button and sign up to an expanding community of like-minded players.

Started by two ex-Royal Air Force personnel, **UK Veterans Gaming** has been fast enlisting members – and some are proving their mettle in competition.

Now community bosses are hoping to bring more ex-troops into the fold, whether they want to battle it out at esports level or blast away at a more leisurely pace.

Dan Penter, a retired group captain and one of the outfit's co-founders, told *Soldier* the set-up had grown steadily since starting out a few years ago and had fielded a presence at shows

including the Insomnia festival.

The ex-fast jet engineer, shown below and right, said that the gaming industry rivalled Premiership football and movies in its value.

"It is now worth some £6 billion," he added.

"And with the UK veteran community reckoned to be in the region of 1.8 million people, there are realistically tens of thousands of players out there."

The group had several hundred members signed up so far, with a handful gathering most days and many more involved in different competitions, Penter explained.

"There are a number of titles – obviously, the first-person shooter *Call*



Committed to canvas

■ HE WAS once a model soldier – but now Normandy veteran Richard Styan has tried modelling of a different kind at his local Huddersfield Art Society.

The retired Royal Artillery captain, who recently celebrated his 100th birthday, posed for more than an hour for 15 members of the group ahead of the 80th anniversary of Operation Overlord. And he was a popular guest all-round.

Artists captured the likeness of the former wartime commander – who led anti-tank ops at Caen and in the Battle of the Bulge before being retrained for the Far East – using watercolour, oils, graphite, charcoal, acrylic and pastel.

Styan told *Soldier* he had been delighted to take part, adding "it was difficult keeping still for such a long time".

His daughter Annabel Maamoun, who is a member of the society and created her own portrait (shown), said she was proud of her dad's wartime service.

– **Illumination Rounds, page 40**





Main pictures: Psyonix

gaming fans in the UK

accumulate thousands more members in future

of *Duty* remains extremely popular but there are also squads for the sport game *Rocket League* (main pictures) plus the fantasy offering *League of Legends*," the veteran continued.

"In addition, there are a group of sim racers that are regularly meeting up."

As well as promoting a vibrant gaming community, some ex-personnel have reported significant health and wellbeing benefits from being involved.

"We have found that people will open up in these environments – a place in which they do not have to give out their full name," Penter pointed out.

"There are a couple of mental health first aiders with us – and we'd like some more."

A former member of the Royal Signals – who wanted to remain

anonymous – said he had experienced huge benefits from joining the group.

It was helpful to be with like-minded people who understood the demands of military life while enjoying the social side of gaming, he added.

Search UK Veterans Gaming online. ■



“We have found that people will open up in these environments”

‘My switch just went off’

■ A FORMER infantryman who wrestled an intruder away from a terrified 17-year-old girl has been handed a courage award by his regiment.

Nacanieli Wakolo Bale was taking a walk through Broxbourne, Hertfordshire when he noticed a commotion outside a house. Removing his headphones, the former lance corporal realised a man had forced his way into the teenager's home.

"The girl was crying," the 40-year-old recalled. "And there were young people outside figuring out what to do. When one of them said there was someone in the house trying to do something, my switch just went off."

The veteran, who served with the Royal Green Jackets, walked into the house to confront him.

"It was fast-paced, a bit like a video game or a Fibua exercise," he told *Soldier*.

After coaxing the intruder downstairs, Bale wrestled him to the ground and tied him up with the laces from a nearby pair of shoes.

He then ordered the others to call the

police, before handing over the offender, who has since been given a prison sentence, to officers.

"He was bigger than me," Bale said. "But when he tried to escape, that's when my Army training kicked in and I rugby-tackled him to the ground."

"When danger comes to the public, that's when those lessons come back. We need to look out for each other."

"When I was first taught this stuff I think I took it for granted, but I rang one of my old bosses afterwards to thank him."

"Looking the other way is the wrong thing to do."

UNION JACK JOSTLE

■ BOSSES at the Union Jack Club have taken their case to 10 Downing Street in a last-ditch effort to overturn a planning decision they claim will have a devastating effect on the venue.

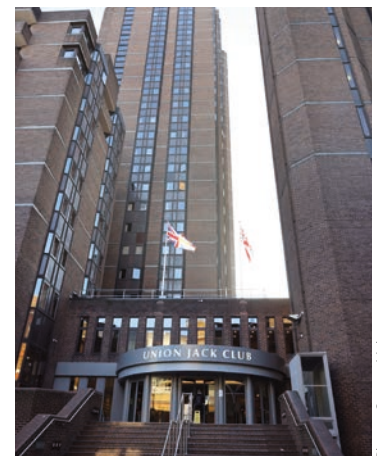
Senior staff say a blueprint to redevelop London's Waterloo district will block out light in rooms – which are used by lower ranking personnel and veterans – as well as being out of character for the wider area.

Lambeth councillors recently gave the green light to the development – which has a 70-metre office block as its centrepiece – after hearing that it would help Waterloo to become a cultural hub.

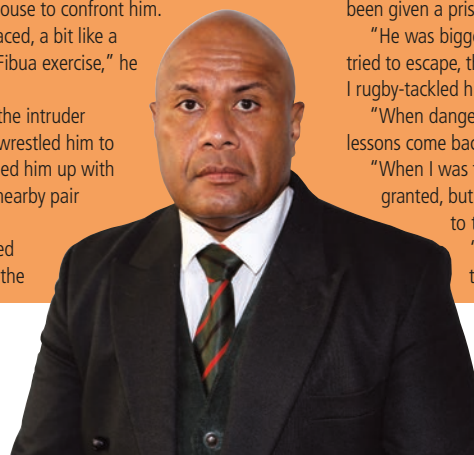
Developer Bourne Capital said it had the "utmost respect" for the work of the military venue, adding that the company had endeavoured to address its concerns.

But Union Jack Club Deputy Chief Executive Sarah Pittway said only a prime minister could now halt the plans. She added: "Our building has been here since 1975 and we are not Nimbys – we know there must be development but these proposals will have a huge negative effect."

Lambeth Council had received 2,500 letters of objection, Pittway added.



Picture: Graeme Main



THE BIG PICTURE

Normandy, France

Overlord in colour

A RETOUCHEd photo released to coincide with the 80th anniversary of D-Day captures the extraordinary scale of the invasion.

This image of American troops coming ashore at Utah beach – one of five coastal invasion sectors – is part of a collection painstakingly colourised by Cardiff resident Royston Leonard.

Others show airborne forces preparing for parachute drops and even defending German soldiers. Each of them took up to five hours to complete.

Leonard said working with the pictures had been a labour of love. He told reporters: “I find that giving them a bit of colour helps the younger generation connect and not just see them as something that happened long ago.”

Picture: Media Drum World





WANTED

NEXT STEPS / EXPERIENCE / NUTRITION / FITNESS

A life less

The Pathfinders are recruiting
– and they could be after you

► IF REGULAR deployments, niche skills and the adrenalin of airborne insertions sound like your bag, you might want to read on.

The Pathfinders are keen to attract new personnel to the fold – and with the next selection course taking place in September, now is the time to start prepping.

Part of the 16 Air Assault Brigade Combat Team, the 50-strong unit is held at very high readiness as an element of the UK's Global Response Force.

Their role on ops is to enable air manoeuvre, carry out surveillance and reconnaissance, and conduct offensive action.

Patrol members therefore hold a variety of specialist qualifications including joint terminal attack controller, sniper, demolitions and advanced team medic – as well as being experts in high-altitude parachuting, heavy weapons, mobility operations, communications and escape and evasion.

Soldier asked the unit for the low-down on recruitment...

ordinary

Who is eligible?

Regular and Reserve soldiers or officers of any rank, gender, cap badge or trade from all three Services. No prior experience within 16 Air Assault BCT is required.

What are you looking for in applicants?

They must be highly motivated, mentally and physically robust, reliable, mature and intelligent, as well as being able to work at significant reach in small teams.

How do personnel apply?

The selection course is seven weeks long and runs twice a year, in February and September. Anyone interested in attending should access the Pathfinders recruiting page on the Defence Learning Environment for more information and the application form (see QR code on page 10). They will be loaded onto the next course for which they are available.

What does the course involve?

Five phases, each of which has an element of training followed by an assessment.

The first four cover aptitude, day and night navigation drills, weighted and timed marches – some across the Brecon Beacons – standard operating procedures, marksmanship and live-fire contact drills.

Then there's an arduous final exercise where troops are expected to demonstrate all the skills they have been taught on the course within a realistic mission scenario.

Those who pass can immediately join the unit and complete a short induction cadre, followed by further courses to fully qualify them in-role.

Are non-infanteers at a disadvantage?

No – we're looking to see how quickly candidates can learn, remember and apply the training. All the skills assessed are first taught on the course and it's a steep learning curve for everyone, regardless of cap badge.

What can people expect to be doing if they make the grade?

Regular overseas operations and exercises and top-class training, bolstered by the financial benefits of enhanced recruitment and retention pay. It's a level of fulfilment, adventure and quality of life unrivalled within the Army.



Pinch-yourself moments

A lance corporal in the Pathfinders – whose details cannot be revealed for security reasons – tells us about the highlights of his first year in role

“ The last 12 months have been pretty mental. Learning to military skydive in Arizona on the high-altitude parachute course before bouncing straight into Sere (survival, evasion, resistance and escape) and the mobility cadre meant I completed my continuation training a few months after passing the selection course.

Over the rest of the year I deployed on three contingency operations in Turkey, Sudan and Lebanon, jumped into Estonia on Exercise Swift Response and conducted a short-term training team focused on mobility operations in the Middle East.

When we're busy we're very busy, so in the margins our camp routine is fairly chilled, with plenty of leave. Being at very high readiness means you need quality downtime otherwise you burn out, so the balance is good between deploying and getting time with my partner and kid.

As far as a first year goes, there's been plenty of pinch-yourself moments. ”

● Pathfinders 'First In' – p10

'It's what you do for family'

What happened when a selfless Serviceman donated his kidney to help out a fellow guardsman

► WHEN Paul Baines began experiencing some vague health issues while serving with the Coldstream Guards, he put it down to the demands of the job.

His career included tours of Northern Ireland and Iraq, two of Afghanistan – the second of which saw him awarded the Military Cross – as well as a stint in Sierra Leone.

But in 2013 he was diagnosed with a rare form of kidney disease and told he would eventually require a transplant. Ten years later in civvy street, the married father-of-two found himself on dialysis facing an uncertain future.

Help arrived, however, in the shape of his former colleague Lt Col Crispin d'Apice (now Rifles), who had heard of his plight and offered to donate a kidney.

Last month, the operation went ahead via a system that allows transplant recipients to swap donors in order to get the best possible match.

With both patients now on the mend, *Soldier* caught up with the pair to hear their remarkable tale...



Lt Col Crispin d'Apice

Paul Baines

THE DONOR

Lt Col Crispin d'Apice

“ It was almost an immediate decision. I'm on a *WhatsApp* group of former Coldstreamers and someone posted about Paul having to go through dialysis and I remember thinking, 'well, that's rubbish'.

I looked online at how you donate a kidney and within 45 minutes I had sent an email to the hospital.

It seemed like the normal thing to do and not really a big deal. It sounds cheesy but it's about the whole 'belonging' thing – the battalion is a family and this is what you do for your family.

We overlapped in the Coldstream Guards for 15 years. He was always a good bloke and an

impressive individual, having got the MC. I just thought, 'there's a comrade who needs a hand'.

It was a three-way swap – which meant Paul didn't actually get my kidney but one from another volunteer. All the donors have their kidneys removed at roughly the same time, then the organs get driven to wherever the recipients are in the UK.

I could have donated to Paul directly because our blood groups work, but this way it was a closer tissue match – which means a higher chance of success.

As far as we understand, the other two recipients are both doing well, so that's good to know – because there's no guarantee it will work.

My family were surprised at first, but they understood – I'm from a military family anyway.

Paul and I are really lucky – we spent our formative years in the Army doing lots of different things, the majority of which were very positive.

So it seems natural to me. But people who haven't gone through it might find it more unusual perhaps.

I'll be downgraded for six months but you are allowed to carry on serving after donating a kidney.

I feel fine and I have absolutely no regrets – I'm glad to know the transplant has already had a positive impact for Paul.

”



THE RECIPIENT

Paul Baines

“ I was on dialysis every other day. It becomes a lifestyle – most people stop work, but I kept going as I had my business to run and a family to support.

It clears your blood of toxins but it's an unnatural process; it takes a lot out of you. I lost lots of weight, had no appetite and was very drawn. By then, I had already been on the transplant list for two years and nothing had come up – I was just waiting.

I was going to hospital in Exeter to be taught how to use a new home dialysis machine when, through word of mouth, it got back to Crispin, who had become the commanding officer of 6 Rifles, just down the road in Wyvern Barracks.

My honest reaction when I heard he wanted to donate was one of surprise – we had worked together, but there's always a certain distance between a commissioned officer and an enlisted man, however well they get on.

When I thought about it though, I realised if it had been one of my best friends, it might have ruined our relationship – whereas this has only made us better friends.

He's doing this purely as a good deed – he's getting nothing from this. But that's the sort of bloke he is.

After the operation we were in the ward next to each other and we were telling dits about the places we'd been and the people we knew. It was really nice, although he skipped out of there after five days like he was about to run a PFT, while I had to stay in for another week.

I'm still sore, but I feel like I want to be up and doing stuff again – the bags under my eyes have gone and I have more colour.

And even though I haven't actually got his kidney, I feel like I do.

It's a phenomenal system – it produces so many more donations, because otherwise people are just waiting around for years.

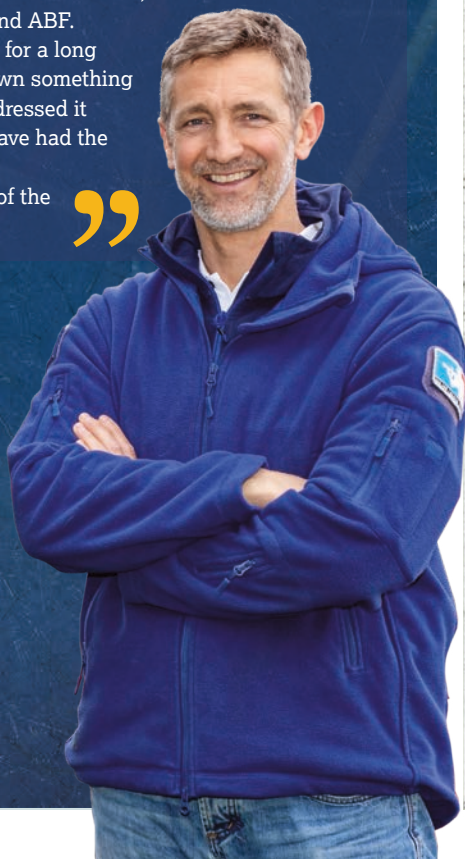
I'm so grateful, both to the NHS and Crispin, as well as the charities that have helped me financially while I've been ill – the Coldstream Guards Regimental Association, Ssafa, Royal British Legion and ABF.

I overlooked my symptoms for a long time when I should have known something was wrong, but then if I'd addressed it in the beginning I wouldn't have had the career I did.

I think of it as all just part of the journey.

”

“ Even though I haven't actually got his kidney, I feel like I do ”



NUTRITION

Breakfast bounty bowl

Start the day well
with this easy DIY
recipe

► A NUTRITIOUS breakfast is key to being the best version of yourself – it prevents you hitting the biscuit tin later in the morning and helps you recover between PT sessions.

So says Army chef WO2 Sam Coote (RLC), catering warrant officer at 2nd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment.

This bounty bowl is his go-to, make-in-the-block recipe...

Ingredients

- 200g Greek yoghurt
- 1 scoop protein powder
- 40g porridge oats
- 80g raspberries
- 10g desiccated coconut
- drizzle of honey
- 10g grated dark chocolate/dark choc chips

Method

- Combine everything in a bowl or container, allowing the mixture to soak overnight.
- Consume in the morning or after a hard fitness session to replenish your body.

Stats



Taking the

Troops gear up for cross-Channel challenge



► **LATER** this month, 12 Service personnel will brave the unwelcoming waters of the English Channel to raise money for the Army Benevolent Fund (page 12).

Here, members of the Recruiting Group team give *Soldier* the low-down on the punishing relay...

Name: Maj Lance Morris, Lincs

Age: 35



Why did you want to be part of this?

It's a personal challenge I've always wanted to conquer. It's not about the physical feat, but the mental and emotional endurance it demands of you. Crossing more than 21 miles of perilous open water, battling the night temperatures, jellyfish and the elements, while navigating one of the world's busiest shipping lanes pushes you beyond your limits and symbolises the resilience and determination within the British Army.

What's your nutrition plan?

Carefully preparing and training on the same food and drink is key. Given the likely duration of 15 hours or longer, we will have to make sure we consume hot meals and drinks at the right time to help stay warm and ready for the next leg. We'll use a buddy system, with one person on hand to have hot chocolate and tea ready on the boat for the swimmer once they're out.

Name: Capt Gray Searle, AAC

Age: 48



How will you motivate yourself when you begin to tire?

I will think about all the Allied troops who sailed across the Channel on June 6, 1944, as part of Operation Overlord 80 years ago, and how they would have been feeling about what they were heading into.

Anything you'd wish you'd known before you started?

How small the swimming trunks were going to be! But in all seriousness, the journey we have had as a team – learning about each other and ourselves, finding out our strengths and weaknesses has been a fantastic experience. It's what being in the Army is all about.



plunge



Name: Capt Kate Major, AGC (SPS)
Age: 26



How much swimming experience did you have before trialling for this?

I swam competitively as a teenager and at corps level in the Army. It's been a means of keeping fit my whole life and I also enjoy triathlons. But this challenge is something to tick off the bucket list.

What will you eat and drink to fuel the swim?

Beforehand – all the bagels! Then on the boat I'll have jam sandwiches and hot chocolate to warm up. I'll also be looking forward to a glass of bubbly at the end.

Name: Sgt Nicola McCarthy, RAMC
Age: 39



What mental tricks will you use to keep going?

When fatigue sets in I'll dig deep and remind myself why I'm doing this. If I fail, the team fails. The thought of letting my teammates down is all the motivation I need to keep going.

How will you combat the effects of the cold?

I'll keep moving in the water, increasing my speed for a couple of minutes to elevate my heart rate to stay warm, then layer up with cosy clothing when I'm out. And nothing beats hot meals and drinks to chase away the chill.

Name: Lt Col Vickie Warrington, RE
Age: 44



What's been the toughest thing about training?

The sheer amount of it! Spinning work, being a mum, training and life in general has been really difficult. It's not just the swimming – it's about strength and conditioning in the gym, nutrition, sea and lake sessions, incredibly cold water and jellyfish stings, as well as getting comfortable swimming in the pitch black. In my eyes this challenge is 60 per cent physical 40 per cent mental.

How do you think you'll feel when you step ashore?

Pure and raw emotion. This has been an entire year in the making, so arriving on that beach in France makes me emotional just thinking about it now.

IN NUMBERS

21

distance, in miles, from Folkestone to France

11

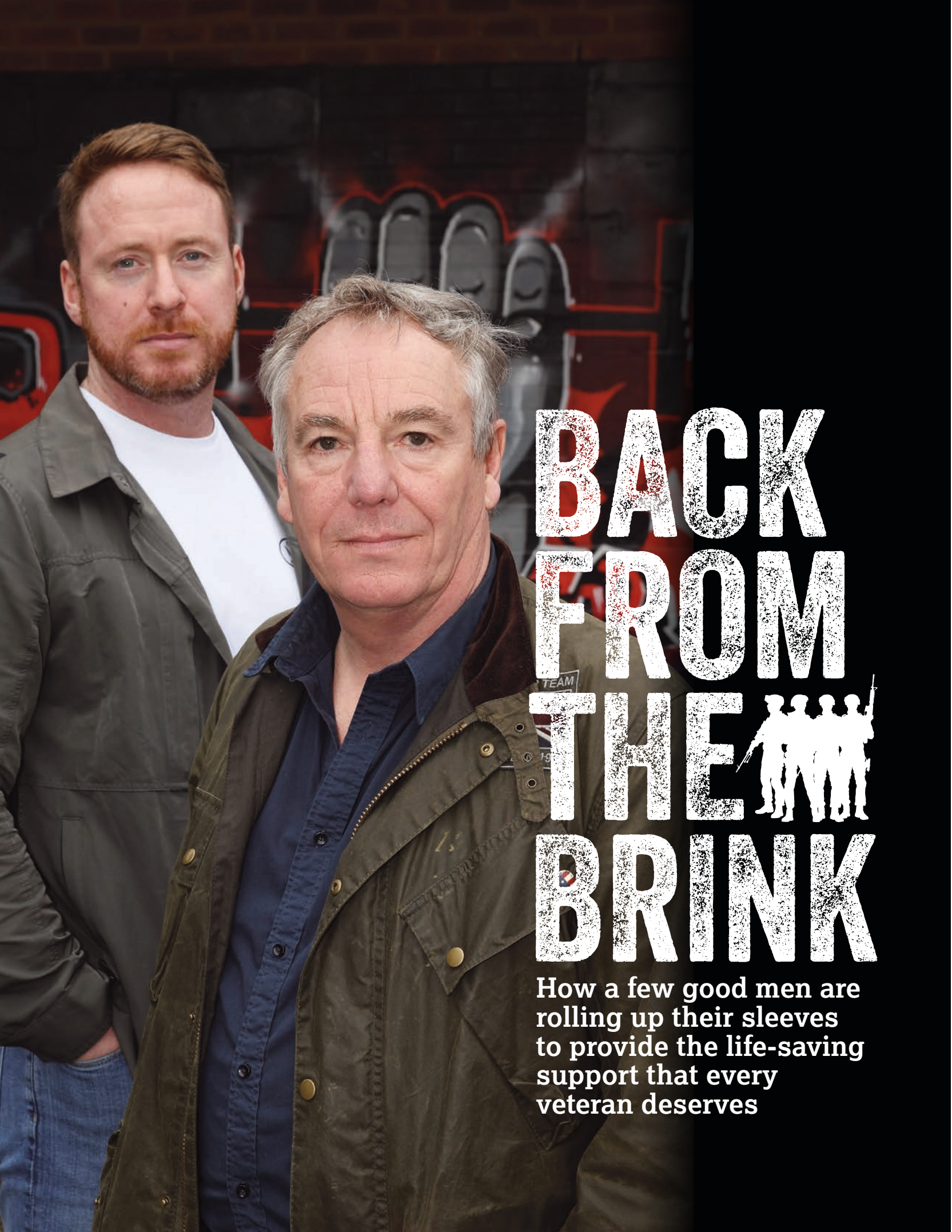
months of training

40

percentage success rate for swimmers taking on the Channel

1

hour each swimmer completes before their teammate takes over



BACK FROM THE BRINK



How a few good men are
rolling up their sleeves
to provide the life-saving
support that every
veteran deserves



BAZ Melia is racing along the M4, desperately trying to dodge the rush-hour traffic in his white Seat Tarraco.

It's a family car, driven by a family man. But today, as with most, the family at the forefront of this retired lieutenant colonel's mind is his military one. And it's one staring tragedy in the face.

A few moments ago Baz was alerted to an ex-soldier propped up in his hotel bathroom, having taken a massive overdose in a bid to end his life.

The deed is done.

And as you might expect from an ex-infantryman, it was planned and executed with meticulous care.

The accommodation was booked; prescription pills collected; message posted to the regimental web page – "tell my family I love them".

By the time those words are read by Baz and his team seconds later, the fatal meds have already been swallowed in a quiet room on the outskirts of Swindon.

Now, as the motorway grinds to a standstill in the dim early morning light, the race is on for Baz to stop this individual becoming another statistic.

This – awfully – is just one in a series of 46 suicide attempts that The Rifles regiment has intervened in. And a handful of those were personnel still serving.

These taskings are not for the faint hearted; they have seen volunteers talking people off bridges, removing hosepipes from their cars, prising knives out of hands and removing pistols from mouths (all real-life examples).

It is demanding and harrowing work that pushes the term "firefighting" to its most extreme definition.

But suicide prevention effort the Always a Rifleman programme is not only saving lives across the regiment – it is helping to reimagine what may be required in order to prevent more military veterans spiralling into despair in future.

And it is an intensely personal business.

As the 59-year-old decorated veteran dodges the traffic, he could be forgiven for

questioning why he didn't just retire to the sun after 40 years' service.

But this is family, and even though recent academic studies may have concluded that suicide risk in veterans is not much different to the wider population, statistics are scant comfort when it is one of your own who is affected.

As the individuals involved with Always a Rifleman know all too well, solutions can be stupidly simple once you have made first contact with a desperate person. But that is the problem.

"You know there is a route out if you can just get to them in time," Baz says with obvious frustration as he recounts the rescue mission.

"We were calling this guy, but he was already drifting into unconsciousness so couldn't tell us where exactly he was.

"He said it was a hotel close to Swindon. I knew the rough location – I just needed to know whether it was the Travelodge or Premier Inn.

"He told me he was in the bath, which he wanted to sink into once unconscious. »



IN NUMBERS ALWAYS A RIFLEMAN PROGRAMME

140 MENTORS
TRAINED

46 SUICIDE ATTEMPTS THE
TEAM HAS INTERVENED
IN, AND REVERSED, SINCE 2021



» “Bath! And because I spend most of my life in these places, I knew that must mean it was the Premier Inn. Travelodges have showers.”

What then ensued was a race against the clock to find the ex-Rifleman before his overdose took hold – with police call handlers, paramedics and Rifles RHQ all involved in the scramble.

“The ambulance got there 15 minutes ahead of me – the crew carried out CPR, kept him alive and took him off to hospital,” Baz continues.

“And he’s alright now?” *Soldier* enquires.

“He’s thriving,” Baz says, his eyebrows raised into something a little less than a smile. “Absolutely thriving, in fact.”

Around 140 volunteer mentors have been trained up by the regiment since Always a Rifleman was first set up back in 2021.

And it is not just suicide survival that these personnel, all part of the Rifles family in some way, can chalk their success up to. These souls will help anyone who wore the green beret, with

any sort of crisis – from employment and mental health to addiction, housing issues and relationship breakdowns.

If life has knocked you around since you signed up, these people will go out of their way to hunt you out and help put it right.

HOW IT WORKS

At the centre of the operation is a network of volunteers who run a 24/7 helpline that can be accessed from anywhere in the world, 365 days a year.

This service aims to have someone on the doorstep of a Rifleman in crisis within one hour of notification.

Incoming calls bounce between several standing-by members of the team who may be contacted by individuals or their concerned friends or relatives.

In addition to this, the volunteers act as the “eyes and ears” of the regiment, screen-shotting worrying social media comments and passing on any intel about people who may concern them.

This is a far cry from the “don’t bottle it up” approach to mental health.

“Technology is so critical to this”



“We need to stop expecting people who are struggling to speak out, because often they won’t,” says programme volunteer and trainer John Barry (ex-Rifles).

This alone is an impressive level of outreach from an RHQ – but what happens next is truly ground-breaking. And it is all down to artificial intelligence.

In order to determine who might be best placed to respond to a particular call, RHQ used to undertake manual research into every individual – phonecalls, conversations, emails.

But with the clock ticking and lives on the line, the regiment’s in-house tech expert Simon Hazlitt (ex-LI) sourced some software that would revolutionise their rescue operations.

Now, when someone’s welfare is at stake, an AI-powered system developed by defence supplier Adarga runs a “human terrain analysis” on that person.

Knitting together data from the web, especially social media, and any personal information stored on the regiment’s widely-used digital portal Swift, a list of

“likely contacts” for the person of concern is quickly produced.

From there, RHQ can select the individual they believe would be most appropriate to make an intervention, according to whatever metric – proximity, shared tours, battalion or even their country of residence.

“The app is designed to be intuitive and display structured data previously held in formats such as spreadsheets,” explains Peter Bradbury, a principal engineer at Adarga. “It enables the user to quickly filter information, visualise relationships, and identify who is best placed to respond to a veteran in crisis.”

Charlie Maconochie, Adarga’s senior vice president, is a former commanding officer of 3 Rifles.

The regiment’s head of engagement, Pete Corbin, continues: “Without this tech everything we do would just be by word of mouth and analogue.

“Technology is so critical to this effort, it has undoubtedly saved lives.

“I know some people are terrified about

ROLLING UP THEIR SLEEVES

We asked staff on the ground-breaking Always a Rifleman programme about their hands-on crisis work

‘WHEN WE’RE TOO LATE IT HITS HARD’

We went looking for one guy we thought had killed himself – we call that a ‘man down’ project – and when we got to the property and kicked the door down, he was dead. We had been searching for him for three days, and that hit us hard. We all felt it. But no one we have done an intervention with has gone on to take their own life.”

Baz Melia

Head, Always a Rifleman



‘IF WE DON’T, NO ONE ELSE WILL’

I work away for six or seven months of the year in my civvy job, but when I come back my time is often dominated by crisis calls. And that can impact home life. My wife was in the car once when I took a call, though. It lasted 45mins and she saw the effect it had on me. This is life and death – and if we are not doing it no one else is. Unfortunately, there are people who go under the radar, and you feel like you have messed up when that happens.”

John Barry, ex-Rifles

Lead analyst and trainer, Always a Rifleman



AI, but when harnessed properly it’s astonishing and can do wonderful things for us as humans as well as an army.

“And we don’t plan to stand still on this side of things, either.”

SWIFT AND BOLD

The technical wizardry is exciting, but anyone who has spent more than ten minutes with this set-up will tell you it is Baz who is the beating heart of the mission.

Donning smart jeans and a wax jacket, with his mobile phone glued to his hand and a slightly frazzled disposition, he traverses the country to fish men and women out of situations that none of us would wish to be in.

And he does so with the warmth and care of a “regimental dad”.

This, however, has led him to some colourful locations — from the ganglands of East London to a drug den in Liverpool.

“I have used Baz as a threat before now,” laughs John. “I tell guys that if they don’t let me help them, I’ll bring him in. People know exactly who I mean – they ”



» probably recognise the car,”

Baz continues: “When I arrive at the door I will usually say, ‘I’m here because someone has told me that things aren’t going so well’. Remarkably, no one has ever asked who that was.

“They know it means people are worried about them.

“I lost six of my blokes in one day in Iraq, and somehow that taught me to compartmentalise trauma and life.

“The British Army taught me to be resilient, but nonetheless when you’re the man in charge of stopping suicides, every one really hurts.

“There are nights I can’t sleep because I’m worrying.”

The personal sacrifice he is making in this role is certainly something that is recognised and respected by his fellow Riflemen, with RHQ staff sometimes stepping in when Baz’s expense claims reveal him to have been spending too long on the road or stopping in lay-bys to catch up on sleep.

Outgoing Chief of the General Staff,

Gen Sir Patrick Sanders, summarises the feeling across the regiment.

“Baz Melia is a legend and has done more, I think, for Riflemen’s welfare and mental health than anyone I know,” he says. “Always a Rifleman is a brilliant initiative because, although all of us joined the British Army, we really joined our regiment or corps.

“And when we think of ourselves, that is often as fusiliers, guardsmen or gunners.

“These are our tribes; the families that we joined. So often the most effective organisations to look after people in those families are the regiments themselves.”

Localised support takes its toll, though. And perhaps unsurprisingly, the lion’s share of the emotionally draining work in The Rifles regiment falls on the shoulders of a few committed veterans, despite wide support generally.

“Everyone in this programme has had personal experience of suicide,” Baz continues. “They have either attempted suicide or are a casualty of suicide, from the telephone operators to the doctors,

analysts and mentors.”

That’s not because this is a prerequisite, but because there has been such a considerable number of these deaths, with the figure now at more than 30 since the start of the war in Afghanistan.

Given The Rifles is the largest of the British Army’s infantry regiments – which has sustained a high operational tempo since it was stood up in 2007 and which saw some of the fiercest fighting in Helmand – perhaps this figure seems rather less surprising.

“If you served in, for example, C Coy, 2 Rifles; A Coy, 4 Rifles or E Coy, 1 Rifles you are certainly going to get my attention if you contact us,” Baz says.

But according to the regiment, combat stress is only one of multiple factors when it comes to suicide.

It can happen to anyone, anywhere. And the project has stepped in to save lives as far afield as Saudi Arabia and the US, covering every age group, from 22 to 55 years old.

“We have done interventions on people

Boxing clever: Luke Nevin is one of the Rifles vets being supported to achieve new goals



“It was all about showing he was still valued”

who have never seen combat and one on a woman who had only been a Rifleman for five minutes in the Reserves – but that’s enough,” Baz adds.

THWARTED BELONGING

Something that many of these cases have in common is the idea of “thwarted belongingness” – a clinical term that refers to the psychological pain of feeling disconnected from others.

Luke Nevin (ex-3 Rifles) understands this concept all too well, having tried to take his own life twice after being kicked out of the Army on a failed compulsory drugs test at six years.

The boxing professional says the help Always a Rifleman offered with setting up a not-for-profit gym where vets can support each other was fundamental to him turning his life around.

“When you’re in the Army everything is set out for you,” he explains. “Your wage goes in your bank, you’re told when to get up, when to shit, when to shower and

when to eat. But then that’s taken away.

“I lost a lot after leaving, for four or five years I was in total chaos.”

But in 2021 The Rifles team made contact, helping Luke find a way through substance abuse and crime and getting him “back around good people”, as the veteran puts it.

“They gave me a sense of focus,” he continues. “And I needed that.

“That’s what 90 per cent of people need after leaving.

“That stage of going stagnant and doing nothing in your life is dangerous.

“I joined at 16, came out, had not one qualification and no idea of what I wanted to do. I was just out there.

“I needed to find money and took the easy route instead of re-educating myself.”

He continues: “To say I was abandoned by the Army would be shifting blame onto other people; we’ve all got choices.

“But I moved between two totally opposite worlds – one where my family had been so proud of me, and another of absolute hurt.

“And do you know what I think it was? I’ll be totally honest, I was fixated with the Army and so ‘in’ that I had nothing else.

“So when I came out, I needed something to fit into quickly, and that’s where I fell.

“I just tried to fit into any sort of surrounding or any group I could find at the time.

“I had a big void inside me.”

Baz and his team encounter this a lot, but rather than executing a simple recovery operation as a police officer or mental health worker might, they make a point of sticking around indefinitely.

“We provide the recovery wrap,” Baz says. “We make sure people are padded, left and right, so they continue thriving, then we bring support if they wobble and prevent things from escalating.

“But it’s lifelong support, unquestionably.

“Out of the 200 or so we’ve supported in some way now, there have to be less than ten who we have agreed no longer need our assistance.”

” THE WAY FORWARD

Baz finishes the rescue story from our opening chapter.

“He is thriving – and it doesn’t end there,” he continues. “Once the hospital did its job we stepped in and said ‘you’re coming with us’.

“We put him into a location that was safe, away from the streets, and had lots of veterans nearby.

“That place gave him medical support, mental health assistance and found him a suitable placement to employ his skills.

“And before you know it, two weeks later he has a new job, new home and new outlook on life.”

The realisation that someone can be helped back to happiness in such a relatively short space of time is, no doubt, hugely painful for anyone who has lost a loved one to suicide.

“After four weeks I went to see him one sunny day in London,” Baz recalls. “And he was so grateful.

“Like all people who get to that stage, he truly regretted what he’d done.

“It was about showing him he was still valued, and that there was somebody willing to do something.

“If you can get through that moment, you can see a future – and that’s what this programme is about.

“But we must not accept suicide as inevitable. The moment we do, that will stop us trying to prevent it.

“Clinicians will say it is inevitable, but if you say that you are almost telling people to crack on.”

John continues: “Suicidal thoughts might be inevitable, but suicide is only an option – not the option.”

As word spreads to other services and arms of this ground-breaking Always a Rifleman programme, units are sending representatives to the RHQ in Winchester to learn more about how exactly it has been pulled off.

In the meantime, losing your fear of saying the wrong thing and being comfortable speaking about the uncomfortable is a good starting point for anyone facing this issue, The Rifles team say.

“Asking someone if they want to kill themselves doesn’t make them want to kill themselves,” John points out.

“I simply ask people, do you want to die or do you want what you’re going through to stop?”



Luke believes that making soldiers aware of the enduring nature of regimental support would also go a long way.

“If you keep the right people around you, or it’s been drilled into you that they are there for you, you are going to reach out when the shit hits the fan,” he says.

“But if things are left to fester over time, that’s when suicide happens.”

ASPIRATIONS

This is something that resonates with Baz, who explains his tough childhood in a deprived part of Liverpool.

“The areas where I go to find people are often the very same ones they started from,” he observes. “And unless you have worked really hard to break the chains, soldiers can find themselves going back to these places.

“All those standards they accrued while serving – and you leave the Army with some extremely high standards, even if you’ve been kicked out – are not always respected by society.

“They don’t care about your contribution.

“So you can quickly regress and lose those standards because you have to assimilate into the environment you live in – and that’s exactly what people do.”

Corps and regimental support might hold many of the answers for floundering personnel, but Baz believes a scaled-up version of his system is now required.

“My aspiration would be to have The Royal British Legion run this for every regiment in the Army,” he says.

“If they can emulate our model, they could reach out to so many people and stop suicides.

“It’s not a hard initiative to follow, but regiments don’t always have the money to do it.”

But even more important than money is the time.

How many others might be willing to give up their life and commit to such a full-on role in the way that Baz and his volunteers have?

“People ask me what they can do, and I



Family life: Rifles soldiers are benefiting from a ground-breaking anti-suicide programme set up by their RHQ



say I need your time, not your money,” he admits. “The most valuable commodity we have in the military is our personnel, and they need our time.

“And these people, by the way, are also the best recruiters we have for the Army – not some tank or sniper rifle.

“But there’s often no consideration given to the recalibration of people’s minds when they leave service.

“It takes one-and-a-half years to turn a civvy to a soldier, but three days to become a civvy again.

“Infanteers are often pushed into jobs in HGV driving, security or short-term construction contracts, which are all isolated roles. And construction has a high suicide rate – they wear high vis to work but suicide kills more of them.”

He takes another call on his mobile before we have terminated the interview.

“It’s a guy who tried to kill himself two days ago,” he tells me when he returns to the room. “He needs help.

“He’s currently with the GP, but they will give him 15 minutes, and he needs more

than that.”

When this article was first committed to page, 37 interventions had been made by Baz and his team.

As the magazine went to press, that number had risen to 46.

“We’ve also just had police hunting for somebody in a wood who disappeared with a cargo strap,” he continues.

Their helicopter was deployed, and another life was saved.

If this isn’t family support at its best, it’s hard to imagine what is.

This operation may have stemmed from tragedy, but the Always a Rifleman programme is showing military personnel a depth of care and love that many human beings never come to know.

The challenge is to ensure that every one of them, regardless of rank or role, understands that backing long before they feel the need to check out.

By wrenching troops back from the brink at their darkest moment, Baz Melia and his colleagues at Rifles RHQ are succeeding where many others have failed. ■



**ALWAYS
A RIFLEMAN**

IN CRISIS?

Contact the *Always a Rifleman* programme on **0800 470 0941** or alwaysarifleman@the-rifles.co.uk

SERVING ELSEWHERE?

Contact **SSAFA Forcesline** on **0800 260 6767** or the *Samaritans* on **116 123**






Report: Steve Muncey Pictures: SSgt Mark Jones, R Signals

Divers say adventurous training has hidden depths

BELOW THE SURFACE

A portrait of Lt Jake Langford, RAMC, a young man in military uniform with a beret and a watch, standing with his arms crossed. The background is a blue sky with a large, faint 'US' watermark.

“It’s incredible to explore as lots of vehicles remain on that ship and in the accommodation areas you can still see personal items such as phones lying about”

Lt Jake Langford, RAMC

ADVENTUROUS training has been a hot topic of late. A halt on funding expeditions, imposed as a cost-cutting measure last year, caused consternation across the Service and was eventually repealed in April.

Meanwhile, a letter in our May issue denouncing it as superfluous and disruptive to over-stretched units generated some impassioned responses (page 50).

Lt Jake Langford (RAMC) is a big fan of AT and has just organised his first exped – a diving outing to Cyprus for a dozen or so members of his unit, 22 Multi-Role Medical Regiment.

After successfully completing the trip, and receiving great feedback from the group, the Serviceman says he is even more convinced than ever about the benefits of such activity.

“It is vital for the retention of personnel, especially in peacetime,” he tells *Soldier*. “Expeditions allow us to get out and do challenging, physical stuff, which is what most of us join for. And it brings teams together.

“There’s also the fact that, whoever you are and whatever role you’re in, you can get tired of the daily grind – whether you love your work or you don’t.

“Adventurous training helps keep people interested by providing experiences they didn’t expect to have. Every soldier from my exped now wants to do more diving and progress their skills with the Army.”

The Cyprus trip required Lt Langford’s troops – only one of whom was a qualified scuba diver – to complete boat handling courses in the UK and Cyprus, as well as the British Sub Aqua Club’s ocean diver course. Some also gained a nautical VHF radio qualification.

On their arrival in the Med, the group conducted coastal dives in relatively shallow water to gain further experience.

But the main element was several 40-metre descents on the wreck of the MS »

» Zenobia, a Swedish-built roll on-roll off ferry that sank near Larnaca 44 years ago.

“It’s incredible to explore as lots of vehicles remain on board that ship and in the accommodation areas you can still see a number of personal items such as phones lying about,” explains the officer.

“The ship is on its side, so navigating the corridors is tricky and it’s very easy to turn the wrong way and go too deep. You forget what way is up and what’s down, so you have to keep looking at your bubbles for a reference.

“The truck deck is fascinating because all the vehicles have fallen onto what was the wall,” he continues. “You’ve got probably about eight minutes of swimming to get through there due to the depth and you don’t see the little pinprick of light at the exit point until you’ve been swimming for about three or four minutes, which is quite an eerie and challenging experience mentally.

“You’re definitely in that stretch zone. As cheesy as it sounds, we all know ourselves better and what our limits are having gone through that.”

Most of the personnel also attained their sport diver credentials, demonstrating advanced scuba techniques and broadening a number of professionally relevant skill sets. »

“You don’t see the little pinprick of light at the exit point until you’ve been swimming for about three or four minutes, which is quite an eerie and challenging experience”



Cpl Liz Pickup, QARANC

Pte Holly Andrews, RAMC

PROFES

CYPRUS SUMMARY

“

The exped was a fantastic experience, which came with challenges. I was stretched with dives that made me uncomfortable due to depth or darkness. But that's made me more confident and resilient, which will hopefully be reflected in the way I perform as a soldier. The trip has also sparked a love of diving that I will look to pursue.

Cpl Liz Pickup, QARANC

I found the chartwork and positioning modules of our boats course really useful. They had principles that I can transfer over to regular map-reading. The VHF radio course also covered emergency broadcasts – another transferrable skill.

Pte Holly Andrews, RAMC

In addition to the diving experience, I was really pleased to gain a recognised qualification in preparing for use, operating and recovering mark six assault craft as well as an understanding of seamanship.

LCpl James Balicki, RAMC


”



LCpl James Balicki, RAMC



**“Having the sport
diver qualification
means our people will be
able to take on new,
more complex tasks in the
future such as,
potentially, an ocean
clean-up”**



» “The first aid training provided an interesting crossover,” says Lt Langford. “We enjoyed expanding our knowledge around oxygen toxicity, narcosis and decompression issues – skills that could prove very useful to us in future.”

Teamwork was another aspect of the outing that struck a chord.

“When you’re 40 metres down, you’ve got to rely on your buddy,” adds the officer.

The regiment is now planning its next diving expedition, one that will build on the skills they garnered in Cyprus. The aspiration is to use a live-aboard boat to conduct a mission that will help the environment.

“Having the sports diver qualification means our people will be able to take on new, more complex tasks in the future such as, potentially, an ocean clean-up,” explains Lt Langford.

“Our plan is to do the trip to Cyprus every year, so we have got a flow of new people coming through.”

Whatever your personal view on adventurous training, for these personnel it has undoubtedly revealed some hidden depths to Army life. ■

TOP TIPS

to keep your diving exped afloat

- 1** Get your head into the DINs and operational staff work before you plan. Joint Services Adventurous Training have published a particularly good exped planning guide for diving, with a checklist
- 2** Use Defence Connect to find instructors and/or subject matter experts
- 3** If you can, get sustainability or conservation angles into your business case – then you may be eligible for other funding pots
- 4** Engage with your sub-aqua diving supervisor early – they have a wealth of knowledge
- 5** Give yourself a few days’ grace pre-deployment for basic admin so you leave in good order
- 6** Keep a diary. What went well and how could I do better? This helps when writing the post-exped report
- 7** Always have a contingency plan – especially when using trooper transport as you might get “bumped” off the flight



THE BIG PICTURE

D-Day, 6 June 1944

Operation Neptune

THIS illustration of the Normandy landings by Terence Cuneo was commissioned by *Soldier* for the front cover of our June 1964 issue commemorating the 20th anniversary of D-Day.

It captures the biggest seaborne invasion in history, which began the liberation of northwestern Europe from Nazi control and contributed to the Allied victory on the Western Front.

Cuneo served in the Royal Engineers during the Second World War and completed a number of commissions for the Foreign Office and War Artists' Advisory Committee.

He was also the official artist for the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953.





ILLUMINATION

Report: Cliff Caswell Pictures: Graeme Main, Taxi Charity for Military Veterans

From the Arromanches clifftops the remnants of one of the two Mulberry harbours set up by the Allies during the invasion can be clearly seen

ROUNDS

Last veterans
cast light on
the human story
of Operation
Overlord

IT IS hard to believe – walking across the D-Day beaches on a summer morning – that these sands were the scene of the largest military invasion ever mounted.

Few locals are about at 0700; the air is cool with the tide out, the sea distant and shimmering.

If the signs pointing to the battlefields and cemeteries were not here, or flags draped across the streets by a grateful people who refuse to forget the liberators, this could be any French seaside town.

Yet thoughts are inevitably consumed by all that happened on June 6, 1944, 80 years ago.

Now Normandy and its inhabitants are preparing for the arrival of world leaders, dignitaries and the few remaining veterans who participated in this seismic world event.

It will, in all likelihood, be the final »



Richard Styan, Royal Artillery shares some of his service mementoes

» major commemoration of D-Day involving living ex-combatants.

“You have to remember that those alive now are the kids of the bunch, just 18 or so when they fought,” Colin Mills, chair of the Taxi Charity for Military Veterans, tells me. His organisation is preparing to bring a handful of the remaining former personnel to see the battlefields of their youth.

“This was a golden generation and they are treated like gods by the local population when they come here – they’re recognised in the streets, people queue up to talk to them and they never have to buy a drink.”

They are indeed the last human faces of the most brutal confrontation the world has ever seen.

The military facts of Operation Overlord have been told and re-told many times – the landings of 150,000 troops and attacks on five beaches codenamed Gold, Sword, Juno, Omaha and Utah; the parachute and glider assaults inland.

The sites are well preserved, among them Pegasus Bridge, where the airborne forces struck, and Pointe du Hoc – a fortification that American Rangers took by scaling cliffs with grappling irons.

There are museums and centres for visitors while cemeteries tell their own stories; testament to the enormous cost.

But all that is left of this story now falls to those who survived the longest of old ages. And their words are perhaps more important than they have ever been. Just as illumination rounds expose the darkness of a battlefield, their testimony shines as a light in a Europe where fighting is raging again.

Steam is now rising from the sands.

Further along the coast to Ver-sur-Mer at Gold Beach is the memorial to more than 22,400 personnel under British command who died on D-Day and in subsequent fighting. Hundreds of life-sized soldier silhouettes – a striking installation created by charity Standing with Giants for the anniversary – have been erected in tribute, like sentries.

It is here then that 2Lt Richard Styan, Royal Artillery came ashore as a replacement for a junior officer killed during the fighting.

The rugged cockney had married



One of many posts in Normandy marking sites of battles between Allied and Axis forces

earlier in the war but had barely seen his wife since the ceremony.

Now he was waist-deep in seawater en route to the front line as part of the 91st Anti-Tank Regiment (Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders).

He recalled a vile stench hitting him as his sodden troops began to move inland.

“It still lives with me now,” the veteran, who retired from the Army as a captain and recently celebrated his 100th birthday, said.

“The smell was coming from the carcasses of all the cattle killed by bombing and shelling – it was awful.

“The place was deserted – we came across the occasional farmhouse but I don’t remember seeing any civilians.

“They must have left because of the fighting and our first action was in Operation Epsom, the battle for Caen.”

The fact that her father, an anti-tank gunner, replaced a fallen officer is not lost on Richard Styan’s daughter.

Annabel Maamoun is visiting the D-Day sites for the first time and wipes away tears as she stands among the stark black outlines, nearly 1,500 of them, representing the British losses on »

IN NUMBERS: D-DAY

156,000

ALLIED TROOPS LANDED...

5

BEACHES STRUCK

7,000

SHIPS INVOLVED

18,000

PARATROOPERS DROPPED

14,000

AIR SORTIES FLOWN



There were

4,000

ALLIED DEATHS

9,000

GERMANS KILLED



Reg Pye with Huguette at their reunion

» the June 6 landings alone.

"I've been so emotional," she admits. "How must it have been, with the deaths of so many men?"

"They were so young and had families waiting for them back home – we cannot know how the fighting affected those who lived through it and returned to civilian lives either."

I'm moved by the words and suddenly thinking of an uncle – a dry-witted, ex-London cabbie with cropped jet-black hair and thick-rimmed 1970s-style glasses who is my family's own Normandy connection.

He was once in the Royal Navy, defending landing crafts delivering men like Styan to the beaches.

George Elliott was also an East Ender. He loved art in all its forms, meeting his second wife Joan at a class after the tragic death of his first spouse early in their marriage. His paintings were beautiful but his conversation was economical, often clipped and always to the point. On his desk he had a pencil sharpener shaped as an anti-aircraft gun he once fired.

When I was younger, I showed him some books about aeroplanes – our joint interest. We flicked through a few photos before landing on a colour schematic of a B-24 Liberator, an American Second World War heavy bomber.

He flattened the pages with both hands and stared through his lenses for a moment.

"I actually saw one of these go down once," he remarked.

"Go down?"

"Yes – during the fighting of the invasion, in the war."

Suddenly animated in uncharacteristic flow, the artist began to paint a vivid scene. How he was scouring the skies from his vessel, putting armoured vehicles ashore. Then there was the volley of flak that left acrid black rings of smoke against a distant blue sky.

There was a flash as one of the engines ignited, and a trail of flame as the aircraft went into a shallow dive.

"I saw the crew, just specks, bailing out one by one; their parachutes opening." Then he was quiet and began systematically turning the pages of the book once again.

Annabel Maamoun is right. How must

it have been for the men of D-Day?

The American writer and veteran Tim O'Brien once remarked that conflict never offered anything of decency.

"If at the end of a war story you feel uplifted, or that some small bit of rectitude has been salvaged from the larger waste, then you have been made the victim of a very old and terrible lie," he wrote.

"There is no rectitude whatsoever; there is no virtue."

Yet Reg Pye, who served with the Royal Engineers and was moving towards the front lines in Normandy the same time as Styan, bears witness to a very different perspective.

Manning an ammunition convoy that had been held up in the town of Vigny, he was eating his meagre supper of bread, jam and a tin of pilchards. Noticing a hungry French girl fixated on the food, he gave her his sandwich and the following morning awoke to find a photo of her, with a name and a message of thanks on the back, plus milk in his mess tin.

He had thought about the young girl – named Huguette – in the decades after the conflict, and had kept her picture with him in the hope of meeting her again one day. He realised the dream as he approached his 100th birthday.

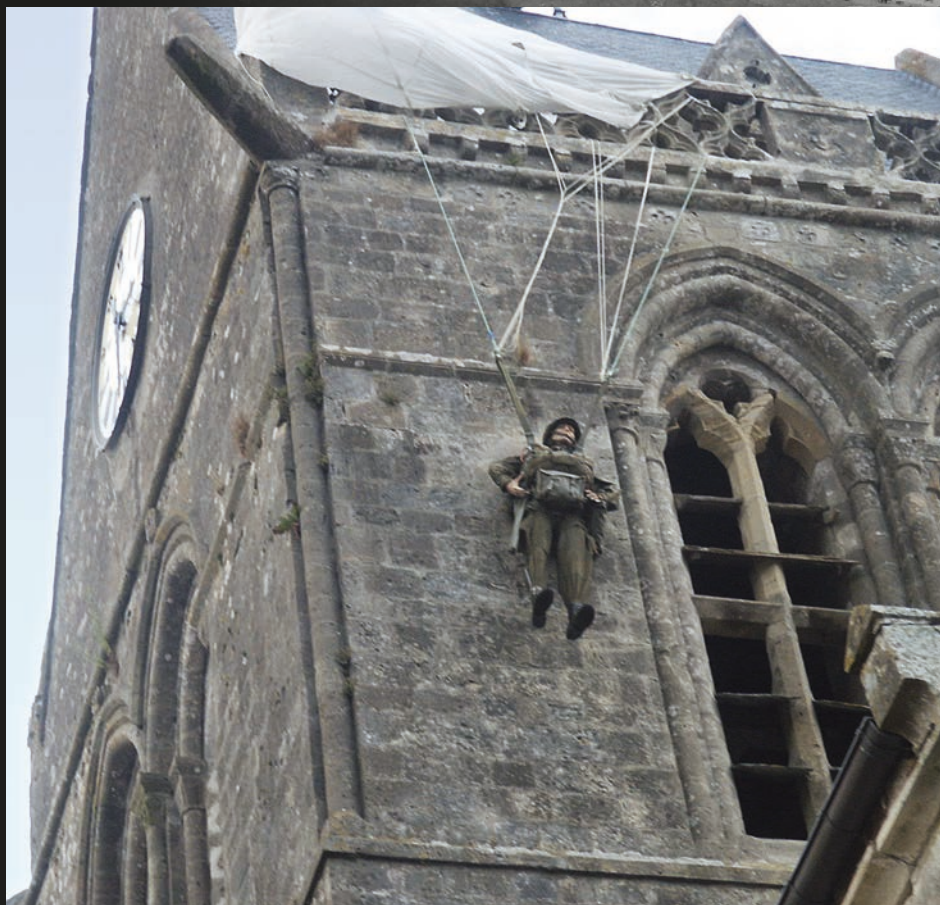
Assisted in part with a *Searchline* request in the pages of this magazine, the pair finally met each other again with their respective families (*Soldier*, July 2022). During their rendezvous in Normandy, this time with the champagne flowing, Pye described how he had carried the Second World War recollection through the years.

"The memory of my very brief encounter with this young girl will stay with me forever," the former sapper remarked of the meeting.

"In the bleakest of times, this little bit of human interaction made a huge mark on my life and I had always carried her picture in my wallet in the hope we might meet again."

I'm now at Sainte-Mère-Eglise – a town attacked by US paratroopers from the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions, many of whom were shot dead as their canopies became entangled in trees.

One of them – John Steele – found himself helplessly trapped on the church



spire, feigning death to survive and later taken prisoner. A mannequin of him dangles from the structure in tribute.

Inside is a stained-glass window depicting the battle and there is a haunting light as the sun illuminates the panes, spreading across the chapel.

It is, somehow, a fitting way to remember the generation that is now passing. Preserved in striking colour are representations of men who changed the course of history, and whose sacrifice freed a continent from tyranny.

But in an uncertain world, this place is also a lesson in the cost of total war and a reminder of the all-consuming effort required in a grinding conflict between nations. In the wake of Russia's territorial ambitions, and ongoing attack on Ukraine, it underscores the importance of modern deterrence.

As the American historian Stephen Ambrose once said: "The past is a source of knowledge and the future a source of hope – love of the past implies faith in the future." ■



Top: The mannequin of John Steele dangling from the church roof. Above: A stained glass window depicts the fierce fighting of June 6

Soldier dips into the archive for some of the recollections shared with us over the years by a fading generation...

80

YEARS ON

"It was the greatest battle that happened in our generation. Yet many young people today don't seem to know about D-Day, and that knocks me.

I remember we left from Southampton. We knew very little and were told it was an exercise – you got away with saying things like that in those days. We were pushed into the hold and off we went. I recall looking out the portholes and seeing the tops of the waves. It was rough as anything and lots of chaps were ill.

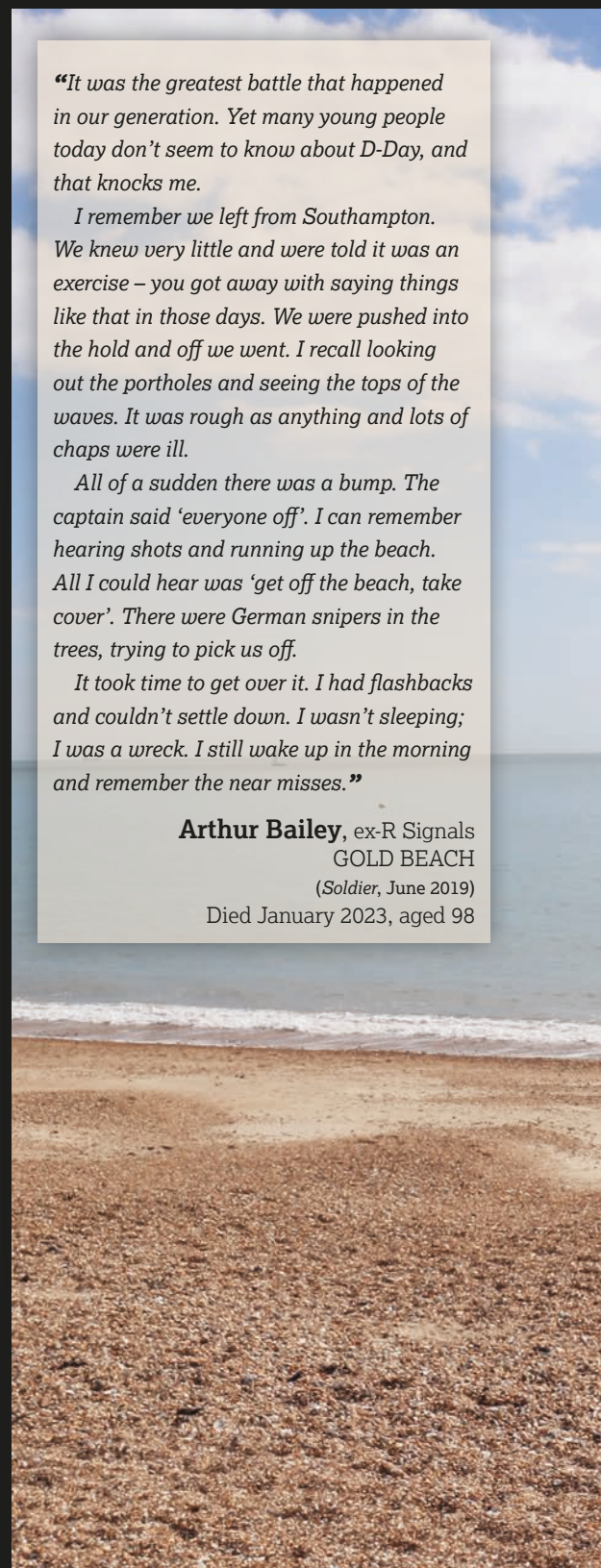
All of a sudden there was a bump. The captain said 'everyone off'. I can remember hearing shots and running up the beach. All I could hear was 'get off the beach, take cover'. There were German snipers in the trees, trying to pick us off.

It took time to get over it. I had flashbacks and couldn't settle down. I wasn't sleeping; I was a wreck. I still wake up in the morning and remember the near misses."

Arthur Bailey, ex-R Signals
GOLD BEACH

(*Soldier*, June 2019)

Died January 2023, aged 98







"We got to the beaches and there were bodies all over the place in the water. You had to focus on yourself; you could not stop to help anyone. I'd just got married and was thinking of my family back home.

I remember one chap in the regiment was one of those unfortunate people who couldn't do anything right.

He got killed right beside me. That sticks in my mind; the whole thing does.

I lie in bed every night thinking about it."

Charlie Jeffries,
ex-Highland Light Infantry
SWORD BEACH
(Soldier, June 2014)
Died January 2017, aged 92

"We went to a secret camp in the south of England surrounded by barbed wire and guarded by American troops. We weren't allowed to leave and it was here we learned about the secret D-Day plan but were told not to divulge this plan to British soldiers.

It would have been a catastrophe if word had got out.

We were glad because we were going back to our own country; we didn't think about fighting the Germans, more we had a job to do.

On June 6 it was 0700 when they started firing at us. The shells were coming in near our landing craft but we were disciplined because of our training; that is the way of the British Army.

They had told us to land on the beaches and run as fast as we could without stopping to look for our friends; we had to carry on.

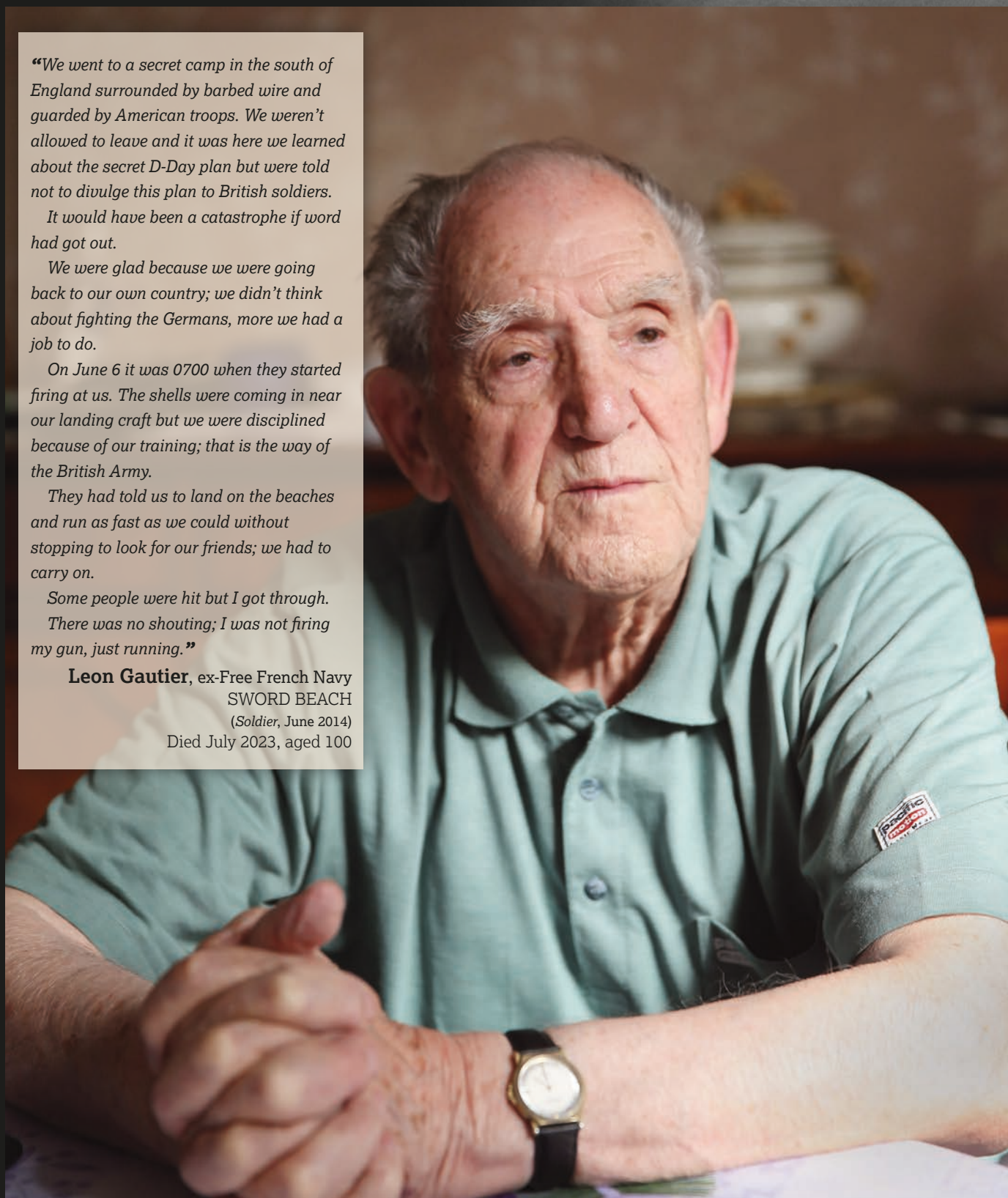
Some people were hit but I got through.

There was no shouting; I was not firing my gun, just running."

Leon Gautier, ex-Free French Navy
SWORD BEACH

(Soldier, June 2014)

Died July 2023, aged 100



“Talkback”

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

✉ mail@soldiermagazine.co.uk
WHATSAPP 07973 614782



‘Anti-AT soldier on slippery slope’

AS SOMEONE who has benefitted hugely from adventurous training during my career, including scuba and sky diving, mountaineering and skiing, I couldn't disagree more with last month's anonymous letter writer, who argued that such activities do little for recruitment and retention.

I compare Army life to a brick wall – its trials and tribulations often cause it to crumble, while AT is one activity that helps repair the damage.

And in a world where combat tours are currently non-existent, where else are

you going to get genuine opportunities to hone your mental resilience and leadership skills through exposure to fear?

Studies have shown that stress inoculation training significantly reduces anxiety, depression and even PTSD.

Contrary to the correspondent's complaint that colleagues are left to pick up extra work, one would hope that what goes around comes around, should they themselves ever take up the pursuits on offer – because the positives, in my view, far outweigh any temporary absences.

– WO1 Mike Owens, RE

‘Nigeria neglected by WSM’

● I AM perplexed by the lack of medallic recognition for training teams and deployments on Op Turus in Nigeria combatting Boko Haram.

Only those who served in the joint operations area qualify for the General Service Medal with West Africa bar, leaving the majority of us who were elsewhere in country with nothing.

The excuse given was that while many teams were delivering operational impact, the risk to life was lower than traditionally required for such a medal. This justification seems at odds with reality, but it was accepted.

Now, however, even though the Wider Service Medal's criteria takes this into account, we are still being left out. And I was disappointed that Op Kipion in the Gulf and Op Cabrit in Eastern Europe do qualify for the WSM despite being deployments to first world countries.

– Capt Tom Oakley, Rifles

Maj Josh Moyle, Personnel Policy Branch, Army Headquarters, replies: To ensure that the WSM was not delayed, only a handful of operations were initially considered regarding their eligibility, with others to be looked at later.

The process for assessing these is done through the Operations Recognition Board (ORB).

As the list of possible operations is significant, PJHQ will convene several ORBs to examine each deployment for its eligibility towards the WSM.

PJHQ are hoping to have covered the majority of operations by September, therefore those deployed to Nigeria on Op Turus and the British Military Advisory and Training Team should have indication on whether their tours will count towards the medal later in the year.

“I couldn't disagree more with the letter writer”

Massive medal miss

● I DEPLOYED to Estonia on Op Cabrit in March 2017 and spent seven months attempting to keep my soldiers motivated while we were confined to Tapa camp.

For this reason, despite having served in Afghanistan and Iraq many times, Tapa ranks as one of the toughest tours I have done.

Morale was raised when the chief of the Estonian defence staff issued us the Estonian Defence Medal.

Then we were told that we were not allowed to wear it as Op Cabrit did not meet the UK's medallic recognition standards and that, anyway, a medal for wider service would be introduced in time.

Imagine my delight when seven years later the Army did just that for the contribution of Service personnel fulfilling crucial operational roles.

This quickly turned to frustration when I read that it was only being awarded for operations from December 2018 onwards.

Does that mean that I can now wear my Estonian Defence Medal? Or will the Wider Service Medal be backdated to include all those personnel who served on Cabrit from March 2017? – **WO1 Martin Godfrey, Int Corps**

Maj Josh Moyle, Personnel Policy Branch, Army Headquarters, replies: Although the Wider Service Medal was announced in March, we await full details which will be published in a DIN in due course.

However, we do know that awards can only be backdated to December 11, 2018 as this is when Her Late Majesty approved the concept of an operational medal without physical risk.

At that time there was no intention to include any retrospection. So, using December 2018 as a backstop is a balanced approach that recognises what was discussed and approved in 2018.

You may not wear the Estonian Defence Medal instead.

For British personnel to be authorised to wear this it would require agreement by all three single Services and approval from the Sovereign.

This option has not, to date, been explored.



‘Coming in from the Cold War’

A LONGSIDE the recent publicity on the Wider Service Medal, I noticed a story in your news pages about a petition for a Cold War campaign award.

This made me think – there are many parallels between the situation now and then. Our troops on Cabrit in Estonia are not in a dissimilar role to those of the past era. The nature of the op, the threat and even the potential enemy are the same. Why, then, should they not have their own decoration?

We already have a precedent for medals issued retrospectively – one recent example being an award for nuclear test veterans. And in the 2000s those who served in the Suez Canal Zone finally had medallic recognition.

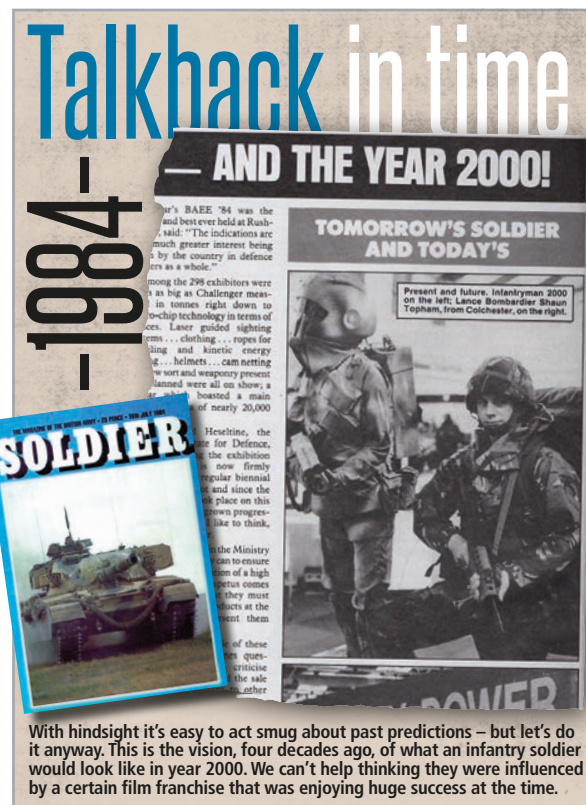
I wasn't serving in the British Army of the Rhine era – being of the more recent British Forces Germany generation when I was a Regular. But I know that, far from the unfair beer-swilling stereotype, the troops who faced the formidable Warsaw Pact forces were on perpetual alert in the name of deterrence.

They lost colleagues on exercise and

knew the exact location of the position they would take up in the event of a Soviet invasion.

In tandem, the British Army of this era was consistently validated by their Cold War training and their state of readiness. This was demonstrated on ops including the Gulf War and the many tours of Northern Ireland. – **Capt Laurence Roche, QOY**

“
There are
parallels
”



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BULLET POINTS

Bite-sized data to keep you in the know



COMPETITIONS

APRIL 2024

HOAY winner (personal kit worth £500 from Edgar Brothers): Tom Robinson, Warminster

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.



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 well-being, 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

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

CHILDCARE/CARING/FAMILIES

Army Families Federation

The independent voice of Army families, offering confidential advice and support
01264 554004
aff.org.uk

Flexible working has been introduced by the Army to help personnel tailor their work-life balance. This includes arrangements such as remote working, variable finish times and restricted separation. Read more in the *Flexible Working and You* guide on Modnet. Regulars can find out how this impacts pay and benefits at discovermybenefits.mod.gov.uk

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 support groups

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

Joint Service Housing Advice Office

The MoD's tri-Service focal point to provide Armed Forces personnel and their dependants with civilian housing information
07814 612120
rc-pers-jshao-0mailbox@mod.gov.uk

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.
There are a number of charities and
other organisations that 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 email address
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 Courage"
on nhs.uk to find your local team.

Samaritans

116 123 samaritans.org

The Ripple Pond

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

Togetherall

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

> continued overleaf

HOW OBSERVANT ARE YOU?

No. 985

WIN

A goody bag of personal
kit worth more than £500



TEN details have been changed in this image of the winning
team from the Coldstream Guards, at this year's pace-stick
competition on the Wellington Barracks parade ground.

Circle all the differences on the left image and send the
panel to HOAY 985, *Soldier*, Ordnance Barracks, Government
Road, Aldershot, Hampshire GU11 2DU along with your
contact details – including email address – by June 30. 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 superb goody bag of personal kit, courtesy of Edgar Brothers
(edgarbrothers.com) – one of the most renowned suppliers
of cutting-edge equipment for the UK Armed Forces and police.

The winner will receive a collection of some of their latest
offerings, including the impressive Surefire G2X tactical
flashlight, Princeton Tec Charge helmet light, V-Lite lighting
marker – an alternative to chemlights with multiple programme
functions – Surefire aerospace aluminum pen and an Arc'teryx
Leaf SMU 50-litre duffel pack.

The winner's name will appear in the August 2024 issue
and all the usual competition rules apply (see details on the
opposite page). Good luck!



BULLET POINTS

Bite-sized data to keep you in the know

> continued from page 53

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



REUNIONS

The Artillery Clerks' Reunion and Association Dinner for all members and partners at Larkhill on June 21-23. Visit artyclerkassn.org to sign up and see who else is attending.

Royal Hampshire Territorials and Hampshire Companies, The Wessex Regiment 77th post-war reunion luncheon. Saturday September 21, 2024. To be held at The Winchester Royal Hotel. Contact Jim Cooper (convener) on 023 9281 6165. Email rhwsxtar@yahoo.com



SEARCHLINE

Applications are open for the SSAFA short break scheme. Free trips to the Lake District and Exmoor for serving (inc Reservist) families with a child with developmental, emotional, behavioural or physical additional needs. Activities include kayaking, climbing, horse riding and archery. For details visit ssafa.org.uk

Syd Taylor is trying to track down Peter Snape, who served in The Staffordshire Regiment in the 1980s. Contact sydtaylor000@gmail.com



RESETTLEMENT

Last year the **Career Transition Partnership (CTP)** supported more than 310,000 Service leavers in its 25 years as the official provider of Armed Forces resettlement. Regardless of service, time served or reason for leaving, all members of the Armed Forces can benefit from CTP support. Here are **six top tips** to ensure you make a smooth transition to civvy street:

1. Prepare yourself and get engaged early. Too often the CTP hears from workshop attendees who wished they'd started sooner. Remember, regardless of your reason for leaving, you're entitled to CTP support – embrace it.

2. Make a plan. Confirm your timelines, set yourself "smart" goals (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-based), and identify what path you want to pursue. CTP career consultants can help you on a one-to-one basis to ensure you find the right option.

3. Avoid making snap decisions. Instead, research the sector you want to work in and people to talk to. The CTP team can support you by introducing you to a wide range of employers and providing detailed guides on various sectors as well as an ongoing supply of vacancies.

4. Identify what skills gaps you might have and give yourself time to mitigate against these through some vocational training or a civilian work

attachment. The CTP can advise and offer a wide range of qualifications and experience for you to add to your already considerable bank of transferable skills.

5. Explore and promote your brand. Who are you beyond the uniform? How are you going to let the world know you exist? The CTP will work with you to develop and hone your CV and LinkedIn profile to ensure you make a good first impression.

6. Perform well in interviews by practising with friends, family, your network and online digital tools. Let the CTP support you so you land the right outcome at the right time.

Where to start with resettlement

– Speak with your local unit resettlement information staff, who can offer advice on your entitlement.

– Contact your Service resettlement adviser (SRA) to discuss your resettlement package and available funding. You can find their details on ctp.org.uk/contact-us/sra-contact

– Register with the CTP via JPA and one of the team will contact you to book your first appointment.

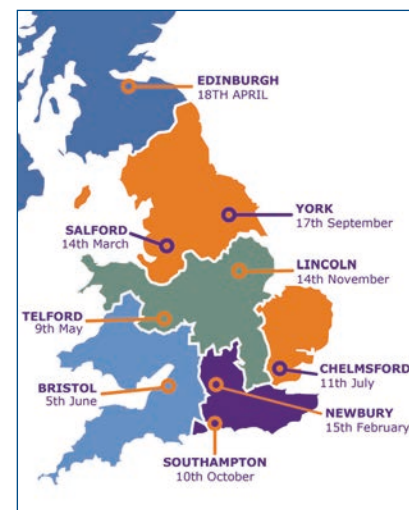
CTP TRAINING COURSES 2023/24

- LCL L3 Certificate in Refrigeration, Air Conditioning & Heat Pump Systems
- Domestic Electrical Installation Full Scope
- 18th Edition Wiring Regulations
- C&G 2391-52 Level 3 Award in Inspection and Testing
- C&G 2391-52 Inspection & Testing Resit
- EAL L3 Certificate in Traction and Rolling Stock Systems
- EAL L3 Award in Programmable Logic Controllers
- IMI L3 Certificate in Cycle Maintenance
- Hard Landscaping and Bricklaying
- Plastering
- Plumbing
- Property Maintenance
- Cisco Certified Network Associate
- CompTIA A+
- CompTIA Network+ and Security+

- CompTIA Cyber Security Analyst
- Strategic Finance for Non-Financial Managers
- Executive Mini MBA
- Director Development Programme
- QMS ISO 9001:2015 Lead Auditor Level 3
- Level 5 Certificate in Service Improvement (Lean Six Sigma – Green Belt)
- APMG Change Management
- Management of Risk
- IWFM L4 Certificate in Facilities Management
- CIPD Level 5 Associate Diploma in People Management
- First Aid at Work Level 3 Award
- Managing Safely (IOSH)
- NEBOSH National General Certificate (SQA Level 6)
- NEBOSH Certificate in Fire Safety
- NEBOSH Health & Safety Management for Construction

Information about all courses can be found on ctp.org.uk and troops can attend any of the below employment fairs in 2024 across the UK. Book via ctpevents@ctp.org.uk

CTP provides support for up to two



years post-discharge, during which time troops can access its full suite of support. After two years, you have life-long employment support through the Forces Employment Charity (forcesemployment.org.uk).

WHAT'S ON AT MILITARY MUSEUMS

Imperial War Museum North

Northern Ireland: Living with the Troubles runs until the end of September, shining a light on the 38-year Op Banner deployment. iwm.org

Imperial War Museum London

Storyteller: Photography by Tim Hetherington showcases the celebrated photojournalist's images and films. Runs until September 29. iwm.org

National Army Museum

Immerse yourself in the stories of British soldiers who have lived and served in Germany at the *Foe to Friend* exhibition, on until September 24. nam.ac.uk

Norfolk Tank Museum

Fans of military vehicles are gearing up for Armourfest, a two-day festival on August 17-18. Find out more at norfolktankmuseum.co.uk

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Sarah Stafford: SStafford@ctp.org.uk
or SO2 Life Skills 160X: Nicholas.Gould169@mod.gov.uk

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REVIEWS

100%
2-5



100%
0-0

GAME OF THE MONTH

Headquarters: World War II

Out now on PC

THE Second World War has seen a plethora of strategy games over the years – covering every theatre, the conflict has been played from all sides and across land, sea and air.

Hypothetical situations have been put to the test – some titles have even introduced a touch of sci-fi into the mix. And the rich vein is showing no signs of drying up just yet.

Headquarters World War II is the latest turn-based offering for virtual commanders of the 1940s era.

Produced by the specialist strategy maestros Slitherine Software, and with an emphasis on authenticity throughout, *Soldier* had high hopes this one would be a winner. And we are delighted to report that it is not bad at all.

Set in the aftermath of the Normandy invasion in the summer of 1944, players can lead either the assaulting Allies or Axis defending forces as they take to the battlegrounds of Europe and attempt to tactically crush the opposition.

Beautifully presented and rendering the battle-scarred landscape of the Nazi-occupied continent with style, it certainly is a fine-looking affair.

The clashing armies are well modelled too, with the troops sporting kit and equipment typical of the Second World War period, while there are attractive cinematics on offer as the game progresses.



GAMES



Additionally, there is a decent gameplay mechanic in deciding the outcome of combat encounters using a few basic principles.

Infantry troops in the open, for example, are vulnerable to armoured units, but the foot soldiers are devastating if they happen to hold the high ground in urban combat – conducting top-down attacks against a tank's weak point.

Artillery provides the range, but snipers will rapidly clear out exposed gunners with extreme prejudice.

While advancing across open ground with dismounted infantry is particularly dangerous, the risks can be countered with the effective use of long-range fires and deployment of suppression from support weapons such as mortars or heavy machine guns.

The experience provided us with moments of drama, notably praying the 75mm gun from our Cromwell would penetrate the formidable armour of a German Tiger.

On the downside, however, the ranges and sight lines do not always make sense as, in the context of the game rules, many weapons are too restricted to make the rock-paper-scissors mechanic viable.

Some units over-perform too – snipers are perhaps a tad too good against any soft



target while artillery has a whopping power, often able to destroy medium tanks – a trait which frequently caused us some problems.

And the voice acting is a little ropey at best, especially the irritating bark of the British commander.

But overall, *Headquarters* will please the Infantry officer.

Gameplay is smooth throughout with an intuitive camera that is easily controlled to get to the heart of the action.

This is likely to appeal to fans of the *X-Com* and *Sudden Strike* series while being worth the spend for those who enjoy a Second World War tactical experience.

Catch our detailed playthrough of the title on the British Army Esports Twitch channel (search M Games). ■



Review: Maj Griff James, Rifles;
Cliff Caswell, Soldier

MORE TOP PICKS

PODCASTS



The Mighty Eighth Podcast

WITH TV series *Masters of the Air* reigniting interest in the work of American bombers during the Second World War, this series focusing on the Eighth Army Air Force is well worth getting into.

Helmed by journalist and podcaster Johann Tasker – along with veteran, historian and author Mike Peters (ex-AAC) – this month's episode will examine the formation's contribution to D-Day, with a ten-part back-catalogue charting the actions of its personnel throughout the conflict.

Each instalment is recorded at the UK airfields where crews and planes were based, a deliberate choice to lend the product a battlefield tour vibe, according to Peters.

"It brings it alive for listeners," he explains. "It's not just two middle-aged blokes talking to each other across a table."

"You hear the crunch of the gravel as we walk up to a memorial or notice an aircraft in the background."

"We also try not to get overly technical – it's a 40-minute snapshot of a topic with as much context and texture as we can add, zooming in on the humanity of it."

With around 50 per cent of the audience hailing from America, the former major says the UK listener base is growing steadily, especially since the release of *Masters of the Air*, to which the co-hosts dedicate a myth-busting episode.

The pair plan to put out roughly one instalment per month indefinitely, other commitments allowing.

"We'll carry on until we get to the point where we feel like we've finished," concludes Peters, who fits in his podcasting work alongside a full-time MoD job, freelancing as a battlefield guide and writing his first novel.

"Subjects keep hitting us between the eyes."

"Ultimately, it's a testimony to the guys who flew, the incredible things they did and the sacrifices they made."

"There's so much more to say."



Interview: Becky Clark, Soldier

The Mighty Eighth Podcast is available on all major platforms, including Apple, Spotify and YouTube Music

BOOKS



Sword Beach

by Stephen Fisher

▶ THOSE thinking there can be nothing new left to write about the Normandy landings will be pleasantly surprised by this book, which plugs any gaps in

knowledge around the British effort – specifically the assault on Sword Beach.

Stephen Fisher's in-depth appraisal of the famous site is a superb piece of work.

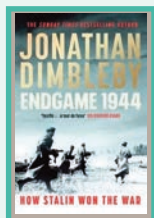
His attention to detail and analytical approach combine into an extremely neat narrative that rivals some of the big names in military history.

Having heard the author at a speaking engagement last year, this reviewer was left in no doubt about his passion for the subject and the lengths he went to in his research.

This title is a must for the D-Day section of anyone's collection. And with frequent references to the Sappers and their modified armoured vehicles, what's not to like!

★★★★★

Review: WO1 Mike Owens, RE



Endgame 1944

by Jonathan Dimbleby

▶ ALL eyes will be on the D-Day 80th anniversary in Normandy this month. However as this fascinating book points out, the

decisive battle of June, 1944 actually took place on the Eastern Front.

Operation Bagration saw Russian troops vanquish 28 out of 32 German divisions between the Baltic and the Black Sea, yet few have heard of it.

Jonathan Dimbleby sets the record straight here, packing his compelling account with newly translated sources from both sides.

And pertinent to current geopolitics, he also reveals how these victories enabled Stalin to dictate the terms of the post-war settlement, setting the stage for the Cold War and all that followed.

Not to be missed.

★★★★★

Review: Becky Clark, *Soldier*

MOVIES



Love, Courage and the Battle of Bushy Run

▶ OUT now on UK digital platforms, this impressive new film tells the true story of a tribal uprising in 18th century America after the British defeated the French in the Seven Years' War – and a pivotal clash that followed.

Soldier caught up with actor Tom Connelly – who plays officer Col Henry Bouquet – to ask how he dealt with military life of the era...



great to have that extra time to prepare.

Do you have any previous knowledge of the era?

No – I knew nothing about it before I took on the role but it was fascinating to learn. It was a very different time but the Battle of Bushy Run was actually a pivotal point in US history. It's strange we don't know more about it.

Tell us more about Col Bouquet

He's a complex individual; on one hand he's a soldier who has learned the native American way of fighting. He maintains stability in the middle of chaos.

But he also has a different side, with a sense of humour.

Were there any particular challenges of the role?

Yes – there are a fair few big speeches Col Bouquet has to make at various points in the film, which were quite a challenge, but I threw myself into them.

Would you like to play other military characters?

I'd love to – this has been an interesting role.

Interview: Cliff Caswell, *Soldier*

How did you prepare for 1700s officer life?

After casting I went out to Georgia – where we shot the film – to learn more about the era and handle the weaponry involved. Working with the firearms is actually more complicated than you might think and safety is paramount.

You spent a fair bit of time on horseback too?

Yes – riding was a really big focus for me. Fortunately, I had some good tuition and it was



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SOLDIER SPORT



MAGIC MOMENT >>

WING Rfn Vereimi Qorowale (Rifles) sprints to the line to complete a stunning comeback win for the Army at Twickenham. Read a full debrief on what were successful Inter-Services rugby union campaigns for the men's and women's teams on pages 64-65...



DRAMA IN THE DOUBLE

MEN'S TEAM GRAB NAIL-BITING WIN AS ARMY GO ON TO CLAIM TWIN SERVICES CROWNS

VICTORY in one of the most dramatic matches in the competition's history paved the way for a successful title charge by the Army men in this season's Inter-Services Rugby Union Championships.

Trailing the Royal Navy 42-38 in the dying embers of their Twickenham clash, the soldiers snatched the most unlikely of wins as Rfn Vereimi Qorowale (Rifles) sprinted home on the left to send the Reds' support into wild delirium as the team triumphed by a solitary point.

They were also indebted to the powerful running of LBdr Senitiki Nayalo (RA) who crashed over for a hat-trick as the Army overcame a 29-5 deficit at the break to crush the defending champions' hopes.

"I've never won a match in the last few seconds, so to do that against the Navy at Twickenham was amazing," skipper Bdr Pete Austin (RA) told *SoldierSport*.

"At half-time we had a split between the forwards and backs to discuss what was going wrong. Our head coach, Lt Col Tim Osman (RA), said they have scored five tries and that we have got to go out and score six, which is what we did.

"For me it was all about going back to basics and not letting the occasion get to us. Perhaps we were trying too much at times, but we kept pushing to the final whistle. It was a great feeling when Imi scored."

Injuries took their toll on the squad ahead of the tournament finale against the Royal Air Force, with scrum half Spr Mikey McDonald (RE) and centre Tpr Levi Roper (QDG) among those missing out.

However, the Reds strength in depth was at the fore as they went on to record a 45-21 victory and lift the trophy that was relinquished last season.

Austin opened the scoring from a slick lineout routine and tries either side of the break from LCpl Solo Radianirova (REME) and Lt Al Gliksten (RA) offered a semblance of control.

But the RAF came roaring back before a penalty score, coupled with efforts from Qorowale and Sgt Matt Dawson (Int Corps), broke the resistance. Cpl Ifereimi Boladau (R Signals) then completed the Army's scoring.

"The Navy game was huge, but we still had a job to do," Austin continued. "We had to manage ourselves and the medical team did a brilliant job in getting us to where we needed to be.

"Our ethos all year has been that this is not just the first team and the rest; it is about the wider squad, and it was those players who helped us win.

"To captain them has been a huge privilege and it is the first time I have skippered any side. Players from all teams want to lift that trophy and to do it as captain was brilliant."

It was a familiar story for the Army women as they enjoyed a routine win over the Senior Service before facing a sterner test against the RAF.

Braces from skipper SSgt Jade Mullen (AGC (SPS)), LCpl Courtney Pursglove (RLC) and LBdr Jess McAuley (RA) formed the bedrock for an emphatic victory first up, with six other players crossing in a 78-5 rout.

But the Reds had to fight back from 19-5 down a week later to beat the RAF and retain

INTER-SERVICES
RUGBY UNION

MEN

ARMY
WOMEN
ARMY



their trophy, Lt Hannah Gilmour (RE) touching down twice – to follow her score at Twickenham – to seal a 36-19 victory.

"We always knew the RAF would be the hardest battle," Mullen, who also scored against the light blues, said.

"But our warm-up fixtures really helped. We played the likes of England and Wales under-20s and that gave our new players, who have not experienced the Inter-Services before, an understanding of the pressure they would face.

"At 19-5 down we had a moment under the posts, and I could see a few heads dropping. I told them we are only here because of our own mistakes – the RAF hadn't done anything.

"I said we had to believe and that if we got two tries before half-time, we were back in it – and that's what happened.

"We had a few words from the coach at the break and Gnr Amy Carr (RA), who came into the leadership group last season, picked everyone up and got the whole team going."

Mullen praised the efforts of LCpl Isabel Bibby (AGC (RMP)) over both games, saying she was "phenomenal" in defence as she displayed her "raw talent", and insisted the team will be working hard to avoid complacency moving forward.

"When you are on top you can get comfortable," she added. "The other teams are striving to knock us off so we have to keep pushing on.

"I play my civvy rugby at Harlequins with some of the best players in the world and they strive to keep standards high at all times.

"We want to bring those same standards in at Army level." ■



REDS RUE SHOCK LOSS AS TITLE SLIPS FROM GRASP

A SURPRISE defeat to the Royal Navy in the opening match of the tournament saw defending champions the Army relinquish their grip on the men's Inter-Services Twenty20 cricket crown.

After losing the toss and being asked to field at Middleton-on-Sea, the Reds restricted their rivals to what appeared to be a manageable total of 154-6 at the close of their innings.

Spr Aidan Hawkesworth (RE) and Gnr Denzel James (RA) both claimed two wickets apiece as the bowling unit largely performed with a degree of control throughout.

However, as is often the case in the game's shortest format, it is a single player who can make the difference and skipper AET Ben Johnston did just that for the Senior Service with a knock of 67 from 44 deliveries that included five sixes.

The Army made a rapid start to the run chase courtesy of James, who blasted 20 from the

opening over. But the departure of Cpl Liam Fletcher (REME) four balls later saw the momentum halted and with wickets falling at regular intervals, the much-changed soldiers failed to recover.

Four of the top-five batters posted single-figure scores and the lower order followed suit as they stumbled their way to a 46-run defeat – the first time the Navy had triumphed over the Army since 2010.

James (pictured above) formed the sole source of resistance with 57, while captain WO2 Ross Dearden (RE) was the only other player to reach double figures.

"We fielded pretty well but were slightly off with the ball," Dearden said afterwards.

"Ben Johnston came off for them and is a real talent. We had a great start with the bat but after a couple of early wickets we went into our shell.

"However, we took it deep and showed a lot of heart and courage; the Navy are a hard team to play against when they

INTER-SERVICES
T20 CRICKET

NAVY

154-6

ARMY

108

are on top."

The action switched to Lord's two days later and, after rain washed out the UK Armed Forces women's fixture, the Army faced the Royal Air Force in a shortened match that was impacted by the weather.

The light blues posted 87-3 from 12 overs with James snaring two wickets in successive deliveries.

After a revised total was calculated via the Duckworth-Lewis-Stern method, the soldiers set about chasing it down.

They made the worst possible start as James was dismissed from the first ball and Fletcher also fell in the opening over to leave them 2-2. The middle order pairing of Pte Keddy Lesporis (RLC) and Lt Oscar Kolk (Para) steadied the ship and the latter went on to finish 44 not out as the Reds reached their target with two balls remaining.

The Navy then defeated the RAF in the final match to be crowned champions. ■

SAME AGAIN IN CORPS CLASH



IT WAS a case of recent history repeating at the Inter-Corps Hockey Championships as last year's winners successfully defended their titles in Aldershot.

There was high drama in the men's final as the Infantry again locked horns with the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers in a match that was decided by a penalty stroke with just 30 seconds remaining.

The conversion saw the Infantry prevail 5-4, with Gdsm Tom Goodwin (Gren Gds) scoring a hat-trick – a feat matched by Cpl Scott Rawlings in the REME's losing cause. The women's showpiece proved to be more of a routine affair as the Adjutant General's Corps got their hands on the trophy once more. Sgt Hannah Kenyon (AGC (RMP)) bagged a hat-trick and a further strike from SSgt Emily Lewis (AGC (SPS)) saw them win 4-1 against the Royal Signals (pictured), with Lt Col Nic George posting a consolation goal.

Elsewhere, 8 Training Battalion, REME beat 32 Engineer Regiment 5-2 to lift the Army Cup, while the REME defeated the Royal Engineers 6-1 in the masters final. ■

SPORT SHORTS



Infantry on tour

THE Infantry squash team enjoyed their first overseas tour since 1992 in the form of a two-week visit to Nepal.

A nine-strong squad made the trip, which saw them compete in the host nation's International Inter-Club Championships. Ten teams from countries including India and the USA took part and the soldiers played more than 100 matches in a 48-hour period.

Other highlights saw them run coaching sessions for local children, orphans and club players.

"We interacted with disadvantaged youngsters, playing in makeshift courts, and it provided us a real opportunity to put a smile on their faces," said captain Maj Simon Hamilton (R Anglian).



Picture: Neil Kennedy/Allegri Photography

Masters end on a high

HAVING suffered an opening day defeat to eventual champions the Royal Navy Mariners, the Army masters rugby union team fought back to secure the runners-up spot in their Inter-Services Championships.

Sgt Pauliasi Taura (RA), SSgt Nicky Lloyd (R Signals), Maj Sam Richardson (AGC (SPS)) and man-of-the-match WO2 Ben Fulton (RA) all crossed for tries as the Reds defeated the Royal Air Force Vultures 24-0 in Gloucester.



● **THE** Army rugby union under-23 team is on the lookout for fresh talent ahead of the new season starting in September.

Plans for squad trials are now taking shape and personnel under the age of 23 on September 1 who are interested in getting involved should scan the QR code left to register.

Anyone with queries should contact head coach Capt Gareth Slade-Jones (RAPTC) via gareth.slade-jones586@mod.gov.uk



SPORT SHORTS



Crowning glory

A STRAIGHT sets victory over the British police saw the Army men's volleyball team reign supreme at the annual Crown Services tournament.

It is the third successive year the soldiers (pictured at last season's Inter-Services) have lifted the silverware and the result followed dominant displays in a round-robin stage that featured the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force.

Victory over the Senior Service also secured the Forces honours for 2024, while the Army women's team won their respective Crown Services title.



PT Corps on tour

NINE riders from the Royal Army Physical Training Corps clocked up 427 miles on the roads of Mallorca as they prepared for the new cycling season.

The week-long trip was designed to foster team cohesion and assess the physical condition of personnel ahead of the Army Cycling Road Race Series.

Each day featured routes of varying length, the furthest of which spanned 106 miles and saw the soldiers tackle the Spanish island's highest peak, Puig Major, with an elevation of 4,711 feet above sea level.

"In total, we ascended 27,444 feet throughout the week and are now eagerly anticipating the new season," said SSgt Tom Chennell.

OFF-ROAD ACES SURGE AHEAD

MOTOCROSS riders have been making the most of the discipline's inclusion in the Army sporting fold with the new season now in full swing.

Having been formally added in 2023, the set-up is forging ahead with teams competing at national level and in the tri-Service championships.

Given its popularity, the soldiers have introduced a three-tier structure while also running a development team that features between ten and 15 personnel. Among them is Cpl Matthew Pickthall (RLC).

"It is very competitive," he told *SoldierSport*. "Motocross is one of the most physically demanding sports there is, especially at the professional level. You are racing 100kg bikes at high speed and it is such an adrenalin rush – you don't find many people riding who are not fully invested in it."

"We ran our team selection last October and there will be another at the end of this season. With injuries and work commitments we've had three or four people from the development team step up into the tier system, so there are lots of opportunities to progress."



Pictures: Cpl Matthew Pickthall, RLC

**"YOU
ARE
RACING
100KG
BIKES
AT HIGH
SPEED"**



● ARMY skipper Bdr Anna Birtwhistle (pictured) played a starring role as the Royal Artillery claimed their first title in football's Edwards Cup.

The midfielder scored twice and set up the other as the Gunners downed the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers 3-2 to be crowned women's corps champions for 2024.

They twice came from behind to win the contest, with Birtwhistle scoring directly from a corner before firing home a free kick to seal the silverware.



FURY MAKE DEBUT

THE Army Fury women's ice hockey team will play their first Inter-Services final this month when they lock horns with the Royal Air Force Pumas.

Having only formed in the past year, the squad is squaring off against a more experienced rival, but the sport has proven to be a welcome addition with interest in female learn-to-play events proving high.

They can also call upon Team GB star Sig Jess Sprules (R Signals, pictured above), who lined up for men's team the Army Blades last season.

"They have been playing regularly and have a good mix of development and experienced players," said Capt Rory McLuskey (REME), secretary of the Army Ice Hockey Association.

"The expectation is that the RAF will win, but anything can happen. The main thing is that this is good for the sport."

The fixture forms part of the wider Inter-Services and Tri-Services Championships which run from June 3 to 7 at Ice Sheffield. The Blades will look to defend the title they won in 2023, while corps sides will face off against their equivalents from the Royal Navy and RAF.



Pictures: Archivist Media

INVALUABLE EXPERIENCE DOWN UNDER



**"IT
COULD
HAVE
GONE
EITHER
WAY"**

A RMY fighters faced a tough test down under as they did battle with their rivals from the Boxing Victoria programme.

Competing in front of a crowd of more than 400 spectators in Melbourne, the soldiers gave a strong account of themselves in a card that featured 16 bouts – eventually slipping to a 9-7 defeat.

Head coach SSgt Shane Sadler (RAPTC) told *SoldierSport* the trip had been a fantastic experience for the team, the highlight of which saw Pte Dylan Swales (RLC) triumph over state and national champion Rocco Brigante.

"That was the standout performance," he added. "He fought a lad at the weight above and did brilliantly."

"I told him I would not have put him in if he did not deserve it and he was outstanding."

"Their boxers were very good. Technically, I would say perhaps we were better, but they were aggressive

and kept coming forward. It could have gone either way; it was two well matched teams performing in a competitive night of boxing."

Other highlights saw Sig Tobi Lawal (R Signals) secure victory via a stoppage in his clash with Kiliona Mauava, while Cpl Terri-Leigh Stuart (REME) put her loss in the semi-finals of the England National Amateur Championships behind her to beat Teretia Toaurivi.

Elsewhere on the trip, four fighters were tested in sparring against one of the rising stars of Australian boxing, Jacob Cassar – a fighter who boasts an impressive record of 30 wins from 30 bouts.

"He is the best boxer I have seen in person and is their next big thing, so it was great to get in the ring with him," Sadler added.

"I said from the outset this was all about getting experience and making memories – we did that." ■

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LANCS LEAD THE CHARGE IN WAR OF ROSES FINALE

FIGHTERS from 1st Battalion, The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment produced a stunning display of in-ring skill to claim an emphatic win in the final of the Army Major Units Boxing Championships.

Billed as the 'War of the Roses', the Cyprus-based outfit downed their rivals from 1st Battalion, The Royal Yorkshire Regiment 7-2 in Aldershot – a result that followed on from them retaining their crown in the Infantry Cup earlier in the campaign.

The 1 Lincs team – which also defeated 2 R Yorks in the quarter-finals – claimed all four bouts in the first half of the contest, with Kingsmen William Whitby, James McDermott, Alfie Evans and Kian Collier raising their hands in victory.

Whitby's performance against Cpl Haw H'too (main picture) earned him the night's best boxer accolade, while Evans stopped opponent Pte Robbie Chapman with a punishing body shot to win by TKO in the first round of

his clash in the 67kg ranks.

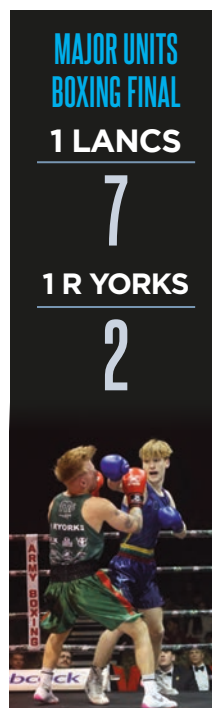
Further success followed after the interval as Kgn Ryan Wainwright, LCpl Waisea Liunavuna and Kgn James Annandale-Johnston all picked up wins to open a 7-0 lead before 1 R Yorks reduced the arrears through LCpl Tyler Mullins – who saw 92kg rival Kgn Kiniviliams Rokotagane disqualified – and LCpl Lloyd Kinnersley.

"It was a closely fought final even though the score says 7-2," 1 Lincs' boxing officer Maj Carl Gardner told *SoldierSport*.

"Both battalions are part of the King's Division which means we know each other very well – that friendship showed through on the night and the atmosphere was brilliant.

"Our boxers were hungry and aggressive – they went out there and got the job done. What they have achieved is amazing."

Gardner leaves the Army this month and said the result was the perfect send-off following a lengthy career in uniform.



He also praised the efforts of coaches Sgt Joey Benson and CSgt Tony Marlow – as well as the battalion as a whole – in helping secure the title.

"Joey is the heartbeat of the team and people don't understand what goes into this," he added.

"They get up at 0600 and run four sessions a day, eventually finishing at 2100.

"They have also introduced boxing to the local community; they've done phenomenal work.

"1 Lincs have been on operations in Cyprus with four platoons in different locations, but have made sacrifices to allow soldiers to train full time for this – it is a battalion effort.

"We want to push forward as the elite sports team in the Army in boxing, as well as football and rugby, and our next target is the Army Individual Championships."

The unit will send a 20-strong squad to the tournament, which gets under way on June 3. ■



NEW BREED DELIVER

VICTORY for 1st Battalion, The Mercian Regiment made up for the disappointment of missing out at the same stage of the Army FA Challenge Cup in 2022.

With head coach WO2 Luke Mason deployed in Poland, Sgt Ash Foster took charge in the final and told *SoldierSport* his young squad of players had done the unit proud.

"This is a new team from what we had two years ago," he added. "We have quality throughout but needed an early goal to settle everything down.

"We have come in with a different approach this year and have tried to create a calm, relaxing environment.

"I thought we played some good football in the first ten minutes, but it then became a bit scrappy with a few long balls.

"The Royal Tank Regiment are a good outfit and very disciplined, but I think the best team won in the end.

"It is brilliant for the lads. The majority of them are aged between 19 and 22 years old which means we can have a real go at this standard for the next four or five seasons."



MKANDAWIRE SEES MERCIANS HOME

ARMY FA CUP
FINAL

1 MERCIAN

3

RTR

0



TWO late goals from flying winger LCpl Watitemwa Mkandawire ensured 1st Battalion, The Mercian Regiment emerged victorious in the Army FA Challenge Cup final.

The speedster raced clear of a tiring back line to calmly convert in the 81st minute and pounced again in the dying embers of his team's clash with The Royal Tank Regiment – strikes that sealed a 3-0 win in the showpiece fixture of the Service football season.

There was little sign of such composure in the opening stages of the clash, with both teams struggling to establish a foothold in the game or create opportunities of note.

The Mercians' Pte Lewis Kennedy dragged a low shot wide of the near post in the early exchanges before a header from the Tankies' Sgt Joe Benfield was comfortably gathered by keeper Pte Aidan Orchard.

The first real moment of quality came in the 38th minute and it was the Mercians who profited as Pte Samuel Barber (pictured left) pounced on a loose pass to drive through the midfield on a jinking

run that saw him beat four defenders before rifling a low shot into the bottom left corner.

LCpl Paul Kennedy came close to doubling the advantage with a side-footed effort moments later and their rivals immediately threatened at the other end, with Orchard saving at the near post from Tpr Darreo Glasgow.

Trailing 1-0 at the break, the Tankies made a strong start to the second period and a drilled effort from skipper LCpl Matthew Hill was cleared on the line after their rivals failed to deal with a long throw.

But the Mercians then seized control and Sgt John Wood, Mkandawire (pictured above) and Barber all went close before the tie was finally put to bed.

Having sprinted free on the left, Mkandawire wrong footed WO2 Lance Rugg on the edge of the area and then found the bottom corner with a low shot.

And with the Tankies throwing men forward he added a third goal in injury time, tapping home from six yards following good work on the counter from Barber and Kennedy. ■

MONTH IN SPORT

June's key dates...



WHAT: Army Tennis Championships
WHEN: June 8 to 12
WHERE: Aldershot
NEED TO KNOW: A full men's draw took

part in 2023 and hopes for more females are high after last month's women's festival of tennis. Top players will hope to hit form ahead of the Inter-Services



WHAT: Women's Inter-Services Twenty20 Cricket Championships
WHEN: June 13
WHERE: Arundel
NEED TO KNOW: The Army will start as firm favourites following their recent domination of the competition. Last year's win proved particularly comfortable as their rivals were dispatched with ease



WHAT: Inter-Services Martial Arts Championships
WHEN: June 29
WHERE: Aldershot
NEED TO KNOW: Service athletes will square off against their

Forces rivals in Brazilian jiu-jitsu, karate, kendo and taekwondo in an action-packed day of competition at the Army Combat Sports Centre



ALL SQUARE AS NEPAL COME TO TOWN

FOOTBALL
FRIENDLY
ARMY

0

NEPAL

0



ALDERSHOT'S Military Stadium played host to a historic first meeting between the Nepal national side and the Army men's senior team.

Personnel from across the Brigade of Gurkhas were bussed to the home of Service football for the clash and while they were not treated to any goals, there was plenty of entertainment on offer in the 0-0 draw.

The visitors were the first to threaten as Bharat Khawas created space on the edge of the area only to blaze his shot high and wide of the target.

Cpl Jamie Turner (R Signals) had the soldiers' best opportunity of the first half as the striker drew a smart save from Kiran Kumar Limbu after being played through by LBdr Harry Beckley (RA).

Laken Limbu then forced a

routine stop from the home keeper with an effort from distance before LCpl Dom Walmsley (Para) fired just wide as the Nepalese defence failed to clear from a long throw.

Replacement keeper Cpl Luke Cairney (RE) had a big say in the second half and he kept the Army in the contest with a stunning save from a Khawas header before thwarting Saubhagya Rai after the forward pounced on a defensive mistake and ran through on goal.

The final moment of note saw centre back Sgt Craig Stevenson (RE) rattle the crossbar with a curling effort at the far post.

Nepal completed their UK tour with a 2-0 defeat to England C – a team comprised of the best players outside the Football League – at Aldershot's EBB Stadium. ■



Our veterans are an important part of The Parachute Regiment's past. As an instructor at Infantry Training Centre Catterick, I still explain the importance of our history to recruits – the battle honours are part of our DNA.

Maj Tony McGrane, Para



We try to follow the example we have been set. Our soldiers serving now would do everything possible to defend the country if called upon to do so.

LCpl Joe Greiff, RLC



The Second World War generation is definitely special. They motivated me to join the Army after the 9/11 attacks on the USA more than two decades ago.

WO2 Adrian Dibbs, RLC



The Second World War generation commands huge respect. Our deployments can be demanding but there is no comparison with the job troops had to go out and do on June 6, 1944.

Cpl Tom Conroy, RLC



Both of my grandparents served in the Second World War – they had an influence on me and I'm mindful of the sacrifices made. However, I don't think there would be public acceptance of the losses suffered at Normandy these days.

Cpl Daniel Downing, Int Corps



I think soldiers today are inspired to demonstrate the same qualities as their forebears. Our personnel upheld the highest standards on the recent Gaza air drops – putting themselves at risk to help others.

2Lt Tom Thrussell, RLC



They are absolutely inspiring. Commanding 47 Air Despatch Squadron – and knowing its Second World War role – I am proud that all of us serving today are part of an ongoing story.

Maj Aaron Thompson, RLC

Past meets present...

With the 80th anniversary of D-Day in mind, we asked serving soldiers how the Second World War generation had inspired them

Like many people my age, I grew up reading *Commando* comics and the tales of brave soldiers – so even as a child I had a sense of history. But being in the Army, you realise the seriousness and significance of all that the Second World War generation did, and the sacrifices they made for us.

A/Lt Col Dec Lynn, AGC (ETS)



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