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SOLDIER

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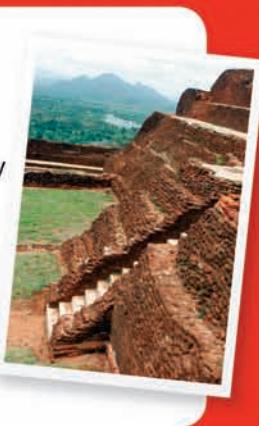
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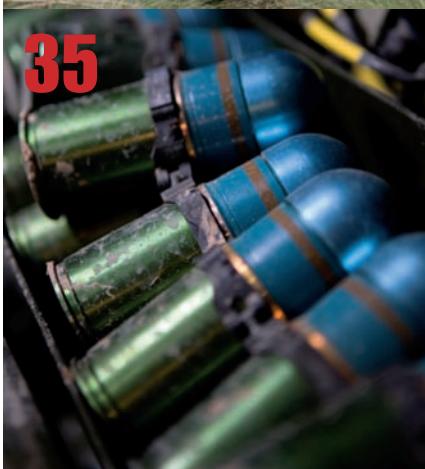
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Cover picture (left): Kgn John Quaggan, armed with a Minimi, covers his dismounted colleagues during a route clearance operation in Basra. See Pages 19-21 Picture: Steve Dock

Background image: Line of sight – Spearhead Platoon's Kgn Chris Simpson scans the area for enemy activity. Picture: Steve Dock

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SMOOTH OPERATOR



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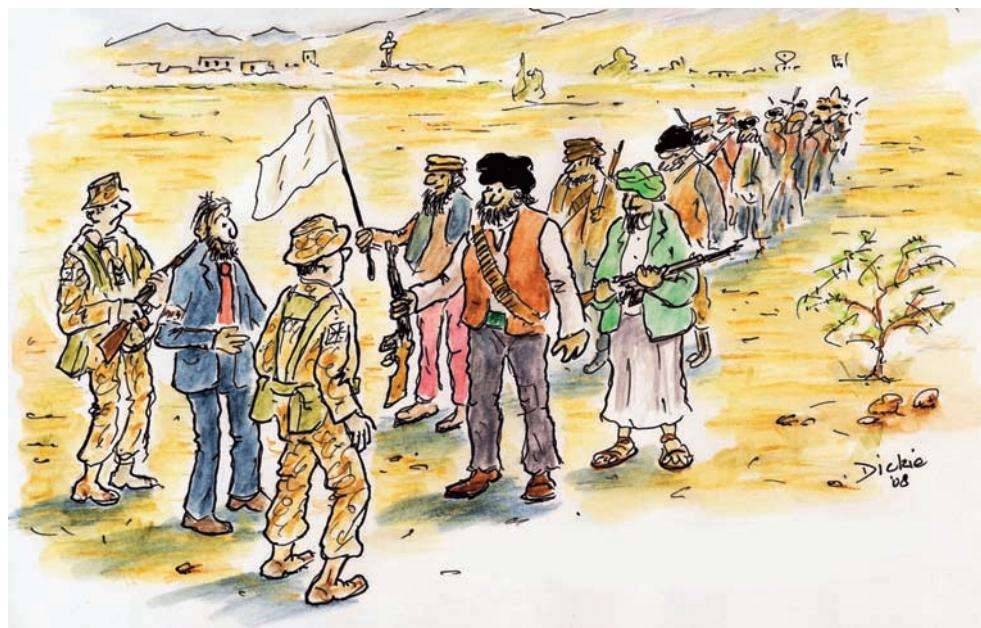


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SOLDIER - Magazine of the British Army



"Their leader says if Ross Kemp is on our side, they'd rather be with us than Osama Bin Laden."

● My Army – Pages 46-47

'Forgotten' Telic troops soldier on

IRAQ is not easy. It was a complicated global burden even before the 2003 intervention but five years on and it's still complex, divisive and guaranteed to get somebody onto their soap box.

Throw Afghanistan into the mix and it's tempting to just tuck Iraq behind a pot plant and hope nobody notices as her older sister scoops the media limelight. Perceived as clearer cut and more straightforward, the UN-backed Nato actions in Helmand are perhaps easier for the public to understand and support.

British soldiers working at the sharp end in Basra are only too aware of the distinction made between the two operations but remain firmly committed to their duties in the province. But while it is not admitted in public, there is a whiff on the Contingency Operating Base that Op Herrick overshadows Op Telic.

Yet the 4th Mechanized Brigade soldiers cheerfully make banter about their "forgotten war" as they hoover up the few positive news crumbs discarded their way. Expectations reach little further than accepting that the public fervently supporting the troops might be equally robust in their opposition to operations in Iraq.

The comparison is unfair on soldiers working in the two theatres. Despite calling for the same professionalism and courage,

'Perceived as clearer cut, actions in Helmand are perhaps easier for the public to understand'

FIRST SIGHT

both demand vastly different approaches to securing the peace. The full-on war-fighting in southern Afghanistan no longer has a part to play in southern Iraq.

The handover of provincial control to the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) in December last year ignited a new momentum on all sides for peace. The British Army's emphasis has shifted to training and mentoring the ISF in the specialist skills needed to consolidate the improved security in Basra province (see Pages 26-27).

Reflecting the reducing intensity of combat operations, one of the battle-groups deployed as a fighting force on Telic 11 is returning home early. With their job done, The Royal Dragoon Guards and 1st Battalion, The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment find their role superfluous as the ISF take the security lead.

However, hostilities have not ended and the threat of insurgent attacks remains. As British Forces continue to be targeted with rocket fire and roadside bombs, units such as the Royal Artillery and Spearhead Platoon (see Pages 19-25) are as vital as they have been during the past five years. ■

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Picture: Steve Dolk

Role reversal: British troops observe as the Iraqi forces they have been mentoring cordon off an area surrounding a suspected improvised explosive device

Partners in peace

British Army offers guidance as Iraqi Security Forces police Basra streets

CAPABLE Iraqi forces are achieving greater stability in Basra after taking responsibility for security, according to a senior British officer, **reports Karen Thomas from Basra**.

Brig Julian Free, commander of 4th Mechanized Brigade, told *Soldier* that the handover of the last British-supervised province before Christmas had created a "fresh impetus" for peace, but stressed that the work of British troops was not over, and that they were renewing their reconstruction efforts in rural areas.

Brig Free said that his soldiers were also playing a vital role in mentoring their Iraqi counterparts, who were taking the

lead in clamping down on insurgents.

He added: "We have been in de-facto Provincial Iraqi Control since withdrawing from Basra Palace to the Contingency Operating Base, after which British Forces concentrated on training the ISF [Iraqi Security Forces].

"We have seen the Iraqi Army and police stepping forward to take on some of the gangs and militias. In conjunction with the ISF clearing out the bad elements, there is reconciliation between the militias."

Brig Free said the shift in focus to training the Iraqi troops had released British soldiers from ops, adding that 350

soldiers from The Royal Dragoon Guards battle-group had returned to the UK early. Remaining troops were re-engaging with civilians in rural areas with renewed reconstruction efforts in Basra and the farming heartlands of the province.

"I'm keen for the boys to make contact with the locals, as that's the interesting part of the job and there is masses we can do," said Brig Free. "We want Iraqi people to associate us with doing good things so they will resist the insurgents, and help the Iraqi Army to do the same."

Despite the progress made in theatre, however, the senior officer said British troops remained under fire from the enemy. "There are still improvised explosive device and indirect fire threats," he confirmed. "The boys are aware of the definite change and you rely on them to make the right calls when they are out on the ground and responding to threats."

"It is a huge leap of faith in young lads but they have demonstrated an innate understanding of what is right and what is wrong."

Brig Free pledged that efforts to improve stability would continue apace, and that a key priority was making the Iraqi forces more effective. He said: "What I really want to see is the ISF stepping up to the plate – understanding their own capabilities and asking us to use our capability to their benefit. If we get to that point, we've cracked it."

● **Taking charge – Pages 26-27**

Compensation boost

WOUNDED soldiers are set to receive more cash after the Government announced improvements to the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme.

Under the new rules, which come into force this month, troops will get a lump sum payment for each injury they suffer in a single incident [up to a maximum sum of £285,000]. Those whose claims have been paid since the start of the scheme will get extra money to bring their compensation levels in line with the new system.

Claimants will also continue to receive a tax-free, index-linked guaranteed income

for life once they have left the Services.

The changes follow a Government review into the compensation scheme. Previously, lump sum compensation was paid in full only for the first wound.

Veterans' Minister Derek Twigg said: "This review ensures that our most seriously injured personnel will be compensated in full for all their injuries up to the full £285,000 lump sum. This is in addition to a guaranteed tax free payment paid to them, on discharge, monthly for life."

"This can amount to hundreds of thousands of pounds over a lifetime."

● THE MoD has set up a special helpline for anyone worried that their personal details may be on a laptop stolen in Birmingham on January 9.

The number, 0800 085 3600, is available between 0800 and 1700 Monday to Friday. Callers will be asked to verify their name, date of birth and post code to check whether they are at risk. The MoD laptop was reported to contain information on 600,000 people who are serving with, or have expressed an interest in, the Royal Navy, Royal Marines and the Royal Air Force.

The MoD said it was treating the theft "with the utmost seriousness".

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And there are even interactive links to some of our advertisers. For example, if you want to make a donation to the Army Benevolent Fund, all you have to do is click on the ABF page to take you straight to the charity's website.

● **SOLDIERS** from the Scots Guards have been settling into a new home in Westminster after marching out of their traditional base at Chelsea Barracks for the last time.

The troops, from F Company, have moved into accommodation near Buckingham Palace after parading through the capital with the Pipes and Drums of The London Regiment.

The move was prompted after the MoD decided to sell Chelsea Barracks to a private development consortium following a review of the Defence Estate.

Maj James Hughes, officer commanding F Company, said the soldiers had many happy memories of their time in south London but were now settling into their new barracks.

He added: "We had six fond years being based in the Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and have enjoyed being part of the local community. We now look forward to making our new permanent home in Wellington Barracks opposite Buckingham Palace."

Exceptions to the rule

Professional humility upheld by abuse report

A BUSE of Iraqi civilians by British troops between 2003 and 2004 was confined to "a very small number of isolated incidents" according to research compiled by a senior Army officer.

In his report, Brig Robert Aitken, the Director of Army Personnel Strategy, said that the Army's reputation was recovering after being damaged by the scandal.

But he said the research, which examined six cases where there was an allegation or a proven case that British troops had abused or killed Iraqi civilians in their custody, was needed to maintain the Army's "professional humility".

During an exclusive interview, Brig Aitken told *Soldier*: "There is no way we can try to brush this under the carpet nor pretend that none of this happened. It did happen.

"There is no doubt that the Army's reputation was damaged by these incidents, but I think we have come back from it."

The report was commissioned after images of Iraqi prisoner mistreatment were published during the 2005 Camp Breadbasket case, in which three soldiers of the 1st Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers were convicted of abuse.

Gen Sir Mike Jackson, then Chief of the General Staff, ordered an investigation

to establish if these incidents, which happened just months after the end of the war in Iraq, were more widespread.

The Aitken Report found that there had been no authenticated instances of abuse since 2004 although other allegations had been properly investigated. Brig Aitken accepted that some of the military doctrine for handling prisoners of war was outdated at the time of the conflict in Iraq and that procedures had since been changed.

He said that the study had found no evidence that the prisoner abuse was "anything other than an isolated number of and very small number of incidents".

But he added that the Army could not be complacent.

"We still have more to learn about all this and we will continue to have things to learn," he concluded.

The report can be read on the Defence News website www.mod.uk/defenceinternet/home and ArmyNet.

The death of Baha Mousa while in British custody in Iraq is the only case from the six examined by Brig Aitken that is still not closed.

Defence Secretary Des Browne is expected to make a decision on whether to hold a public inquiry into Baha Mousa's death soon.

Risk of infection small

NEARLY 20 soldiers seriously wounded in Iraq and southern Afghanistan are being offered screening for infections amid concerns over the emergency blood they were given.

In a statement, the MoD said it had contacted those involved as soon as the issue came to light, but stressed that the risks of becoming ill were small.

While the policy is to use certified blood in theatre, emergency military donor panels are used by both UK and US Forces when supplies run dry.

If donor panels are used, the blood is screened for infection after the transfusion. But the MoD is concerned that blood from American personnel given to 18 Brit-

ish soldiers "might not have had a valid retrospective test".

Veterans' Minister Derek Twigg emphasised that the risk of infection was small, but said that he was taking the screening matter "extremely seriously". Mr Twigg added: "These 18 Service personnel would almost certainly have died without receiving an emergency blood transfusion at the front line. The actual risk of infection is low. However we are taking it extremely seriously."

"We are working with the appropriate authorities to do all we can to test and reassure the people involved," said Mr Twigg. "We are, and will continue to do, all that we can to support them and their families through this uncertain time."

Garrison gold

Home of the British Army wins race to host Great Britain's 2012 Olympians

ALDERSHOT Garrison's successful bid to become the British Olympic squad's preparation camp for the 2012 London Games has cemented its reputation as a first-class training venue for élite athletes.

All Team GB's London Olympians are likely to attend the residential camp at the military's Centre for Sporting Excellence in the weeks leading up the world event.

The home of the British Army saw off competition from venues including the University of Bath and Loughborough University, with its proximity to the Olympic village in East London and the availability of top-class training venues proving a winning combination.

Simon Clegg, Chief Executive of the British Olympic Association and a former battery commander of 7th (Parachute) Regiment, Royal Horse Artillery, said all the competing venues had a great deal to offer, but Aldershot had come up with the best overall package.

A huge programme of refurbishments planned for the garrison will include new accommodation and sporting venues in a project managed by Aspire Defence.

The preparation camp is expected to place Aldershot – which staged the 1948 Olympics' pentathlon and equestrian



Picture: Steve Dicks

Familiar territory: Former 7 Para RHA commander Simon Clegg will return to Aldershot with Team GB

events – firmly in the spotlight and attract large numbers of media and visitors to the area.

However, Maj Gen Peter Everson,

GOC 4 Division, insisted that Army life would continue as normal.

He said: "It was a pre-requisite that not a single Army soul would be disrupted – if there was any chance of that happening the situation would have been unacceptable.

"All in all, this announcement is very good news. The preparation camp will be an advantage to the Army.

"Soldiers have a very clear ethos about qualities such as courage and commitment, both of which are shared by Olympic athletes."

Col Nigel Josling, the Aldershot Garrison Colonel, was also delighted to host the preparation camp, claiming it would be an opportunity for troops to "raise their own game".

He told reporters: "This is a fantastic opportunity for the Army and Army sport in particular.

"It has come about because of a fortunate coincidence of the 2012 games being held in London at a time when Aldershot is being redeveloped.

"With sensible management, we are convinced we can provide Team GB with a unique opportunity to prepare for the Games, and at the same time maintain support for our soldiers."

● See next month's *SoldierSport* for a low-down on what Aldershot has to offer Team GB's Olympians in 2012

Career under canvas

TENS of thousands of soldiers and officers are about to be canvassed about their views of military life in one of the biggest surveys ever undertaken by the MoD.

The department confirmed that the new Valuing and Investing in Service Personnel (ViSP) project would ask young soldiers as well as their more seasoned counterparts about issues such as the Military Covenant, health matters and salary.

Crucially, those chosen to take part in the study are also to be questioned continuously throughout their careers to see whether their views change over time.

A spokeswoman for the MoD confirmed that the study, which is being carried out in collaboration with King's College London, would target 50,000 men and women from all three Services, with the first questionnaires being sent out during February and March.

Those invited to take part had been divided into four groups, ranging from young soldiers to long serving personnel.

The first batch of results will be published towards the end of this year, with the next tranche of surveys carried out in 2010.

The spokeswoman stressed: "The study is unique in that we will be following individuals through their Service career and their responses will be linked to their records. The questions on the survey include what promises soldiers have been made at the start of, and during, their careers, and whether they have ultimately been kept or broken."

The spokeswoman urged anyone receiving the survey to return it completed, adding that all those who took part would be entered into a £1,000 prize draw. "All the data collected will help determine future policy and potentially the scope and nature of allowances. The survey is the soldiers' opportunity to put the scores on the doors – so please return the forms if you receive them."

For further information visit <http://bravo.dasa.r.mil.uk/visp/home.php>

UNDER Big Ben

A digest of what is being said on Army matters in Parliament

Troops prepare for Afghan long haul

EQUIPMENT procurement procedures have been beefed up to reflect a predicted long deployment in Afghanistan, Defence Secretary Des Browne has said.

Addressing colleagues in the House of Commons, Mr Browne added that troops would need the correct kit to carry out the campaign in years to come.

While he did not believe soldiers would be war fighting in the long term, he maintained that the current standards of kit and protection needed by personnel would continue to remain "the norm" in future.

"We have made progress in readjusting our procurement processes so they have the agility and ability to respond to changing environments," Mr Browne added.

Iraq commitments: Claims that British combat units in Iraq are seriously under strength have been slammed by the Defence Secretary. In answer to a question from Conservative MP Patrick Mercer, Mr Browne flatly denied that soldiers were under-trained. He added: "In fact, the opposite is the case. We specifically ensure that the forces deployed into operational theatres are appropriately trained."

Forces recruitment: The Army is not set to achieve full manpower for two years, it emerged during a debate in the House of Lords. Responding to a question from Lord Astor of Hever, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Defence Baroness Taylor of Bolton said the Army was not expected to achieve "manning balance" before January 2010.

Transport flights: The Royal Air Force C-130 Hercules fleet will leave Lyneham for Brize Norton by summer 2011, according to Armed Forces Minister Bob Ainsworth. Responding to questions in the Commons, Mr Ainsworth said there were no plans to retain any military presence at the base – which is a well known airhead for soldiers deploying abroad – beyond 2012.

Lords lambast JPA pay errors

Peers angered at news of short-changed troops

MEMBERS of the House of Lords have opened fire on the Joint Personnel Administration (JPA) system amid concern that significant numbers of troops are being underpaid.

During a lively debate, peers were told that hundreds of Servicemen and women had wrongly received less than they were entitled to in their wage packets after the scheme was fully rolled out last year.

Just over 320 personnel were underpaid in September 2007 and only slightly less in November. The revelations prompted an angry response from peers, who asked for assurances from Government representative Baroness Crawley that errors would be resolved immediately and that personnel would get their full pay.

Lord Craig of Radley was concerned at the effect the issue was having on personnel and their families, even though relatively few had been hit by underpayments. He said: "This is obviously very important for the individuals concerned. Have the Government and the MoD thought of any recompense to those who have been affected adversely?"

The peer's comments were backed by

Lord Addington, who questioned whether help would be given to anyone who found themselves in trouble as a result of JPA. "If anybody is financially embarrassed by underpayment, will the Government undertake to guarantee that they will be assisted," Lord Addington asked.

Baroness Crawley stressed that the overwhelming majority of troops were paid correctly and pledged errors would be sorted out as JPA became more familiar. She pointed out that help was available to underpaid personnel, with assistance often given at unit level to ensure they received their full pay as soon as possible.

Baroness Crawley told peers: "The vast majority of Service personnel are paid correctly. Since the first full pay run of this system in April 2007, the accuracy rate has been 99.3 per cent against the submitted data.

"We recognise that with any new system, particularly on one supporting a large complex payroll, there will be mistakes. They should not be tolerated, but should any come to light then they must be dealt with as soon as possible."

Deepcut set for demolition

THE Surrey training base at the centre of a controversy focusing on the mistreatment of recruits is set to close its doors for the last time in the next five years.

Armed Forces Minister Bob Ainsworth confirmed that the Princess Royal Barracks at Deepcut would be sold off as part of a long-running review of the Defence training estate. He said the site, home to the Defence College of Logistics and Personnel Administration and the Director Royal Logistic Corps, could be redeveloped for houses while the Army training facilities were moved elsewhere.

As this issue went to press, the relocation proposals had not been finalised, but it was confirmed the military exercise areas and Service family homes around Deepcut would be retained by the MoD and no move was expected before 2013. Staff at the base would be kept informed about the proposals and the implications for those working there managed sensitively, said Mr Ainsworth.

He believed it was in the best interests to close Deepcut, adding the site could make a "significant contribution" to the

Government housing strategy. Mr Ainsworth stressed that the intention to shut the base would not stop ongoing improvements to enhance the welfare of young recruits there, and the four soldiers who died at the barracks – Sean Benton, Cheryl James, Geoff Gray and James Collinson – would not be forgotten.

He added: "The closure in the future will not lessen our commitment to improve the care and welfare of trainees and to continue to address the areas where performance can be improved. In seeking to improve the environment in which our people are trained we are continuing to meet the recommendations made by those such as the Adult Learning Inspectorate and Nicholas Blake QC."

● RLC personnel have praised their new accommodation at the Duke of Gloucester Barracks in South Cerney.

Troops have been settling into three new blocks with all the latest creature comforts, including en-suite shower rooms, phones, the internet and digital TV. The blocks are part of a wider £9 million MoD programme to improve accommodation.



Battle to beat the bombers: Tpr Elliott Pilling, KRH, rehearses his IED drills during a training exercise on the EOD lane at Camp Bastion

Picture: Graeme Main

Diffusing danger

Bastion training facility helps Brits neutralise threat of roadside bombs

BRITISH forces are coping well despite an increase in the number of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) in southern Afghanistan.

A dedicated training lane at Camp Bastion in Helmand province helps soldiers learn how to spot IEDs and what action to take if they come across the deadly devices out on patrol.

The training has led to scores of

roadside bombs being uncovered and front-line troops are becoming increasingly confident in their ability to neutralise the IED threat.

"In areas we are using a lot, the Taliban are using more IEDs to try and disrupt our freedom of movement," explained SSgt Kev Taylor of The King's Royal Hussars, whose regiment has discovered six devices since arriving in Afghanistan

last October. "We all would rather spend an hour confirming something than cracking on and potentially getting hit."

"Our drills have got better and better and we are now able to confirm a device quite quickly so that we can get out of the way and let the EOD team deal with it."

KRH troop sergeant Chesh Lloyd told *Soldier* that he had noticed an increase in the amount of IEDs, but that his soldiers were becoming much more efficient at dealing with them as a result.

On finding a potential explosive hazard, one or two troops use metal detectors to confirm the discovery while others provide top cover from Mastiff-mounted heavy machine guns. The technique minimises risk to those involved and was responsible for the Hussars finding a roadside bomb containing eight 60mm mortar rounds.

"Down south it's almost unheard of, but further north it's becoming more common," said Sgt Lloyd.

"But we are confident in our ability to confirm IEDs ourselves and I think that is a big help."

"Although we can always call people out of Bastion, it's a long way for them to come if it turns out to be innocuous."

'We don't do medals'

POLITICIANS should not become embroiled in the debate over whether there should be a campaign medal for troops who have served in southern Afghanistan, according to Defence Secretary Des Browne.

During a visit to the Army Training Regiment in Bassingbourn, near Cambridge, Mr Browne told *Soldier* the question would be left to military chiefs.

He said: "Politicians do not do medals, and nor should they – it is not a political decision. It would be on recommendation of the Chiefs of the Defence Staff who have the military ethos. It is not for me, as the

Secretary of State for Defence, to make that decision of who should be awarded medals, and the media have been getting mixed up over this issue."

As previously reported in *Soldier*, the head of the British Army, Gen Sir Richard Dannatt, has already thrown his support behind a special clasp to recognise those who have served in southern Afghanistan. He said: "I'm going to argue the case for it. I think that would be proper recognition of the very difficult circumstances and the fighting that's going on there – a way for a grateful nation to say thank you."

What the Press has been saying

● FIFTY heartbroken pals of a soldier killed in Afghanistan have had themselves tattooed with a touching tribute to him. Dmr Tom Wright died after an Army Land Rover struck a roadside bomb while it was escorting a military survey team. Now as a lifelong show of respect and remembrance, his friends have had the word Tom, a single military star, the date of his birth and the date the 21-year-old died tattooed on their backs, necks or arms. – *The Sun*

● DEFENCE chiefs have spent hundreds of thousands of pounds on art while troops face equipment shortages in war zones and decrepit housing at home. In 2004/05, MoD civil servants bought a set of paintings by Zil Hoque called *Nimbus I, II, III, IV* at a cost of £160,000 and a set of four paintings by Louise Cattrell – *Eyrie, Aerial, Tempest* and *Keep* – that cost £72,000, all excluding VAT. – *Daily Telegraph*

● TOP officials, including President Bush, lied a total of 935 times about Iraq and weapons of mass destruction, or links to al-Qaeda in the two years before the invasion of Iraq in 2003, a study by the Centre for Public Integrity said. – *The Times*

● SCORES of soldiers flying home from Afghanistan on Christmas leave were ordered to change out of their uniforms on a freezing Birmingham runway before being allowed into a civilian airport terminal. Troops were told not to be seen in public in their uniforms – which they had worn with pride while risking their lives during months of intense fighting against the Taliban. – *Daily Mail*

● TROOPS battling to get fit were given an extra boost in their fitness regime – sessions of the extreme sport Parkour. The tough urban activity sees participants running, jumping and hurdling through streets using any walls or building as platforms for take-off. It's the latest technique to be added to the Army's strict training routines. – *Daily Star*

● RESIDENTS of a tiny village are regularly invaded by tanks because of a sat-nav blunder. Soldiers looking for their barracks at Donnington are being directed to the picturesque hamlet of the same name 15 miles away. Tanks and transporters thunder into the area up to seven times a week, damaging roads and knocking down trees. – *The Daily Mirror*

Recruitment row rumbles

Researcher stands firm after MoD counter-attack

THE MoD has issued a firm rebuttal to a controversial study which criticised Armed Forces recruitment practice and alleged "ethical shortcomings" in the enlistment process.

Responding to the well-publicised report, *Informed Choices: Armed Forces Recruitment Practice in the United Kingdom*, the department maintained that some assertions were wrong and others were "selective in their interpretation of recruitment practices".

In the document, author David Gee said that anyone considering a career in the military needed to be told more clearly what they were getting into and dismissed claims that there were inaccuracies in his findings.

Researched in 2007 and published last month, the paper said military adverts failed to mention the realities of Army life. Gee also believed signing up under 18s should be phased out and insisted that some Army literature targeted children – an assertion flatly denied by the MoD.

The researcher, whose project was funded by the Quaker-inspired Joseph

Rowntree Charitable Trust, told *Soldier*: "Being in the military is not like a civilian career. It is different – there are unique risks and unique terms of service, and it is important that people know what they are getting into when they go into recruitment offices and pick up literature telling them what Army life is like."

However, a spokeswoman for the MoD said: "A career in the Armed Forces provides amazing and unique opportunities for a wide range of people from all sectors of society."

"The success of our people on operations reflects the standard of our recruitment processes. Joining the Services is not taken lightly."

The spokeswoman said that parents of those under 18 were fully involved in their child's enlistment and there was "clear information" on all aspects of military life.

The spokeswoman added: "Armed Forces careers must compete against other potential employers in a competitive environment and it is right that they have the opportunity to recruit people when they are legally able to leave school."

Blast kills talented NCO

FRIENDS and colleagues of a young NCO who was killed in southern Afghanistan following a mine strike have described his death as a "bitter blow".

Cpl Darryl Gardiner of the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers was attached to 5th Regiment, Royal Artillery and 52 Brigade's Reconnaissance Force based in Lashkar Gar.

The 25-year-old had been taking part in an op to disrupt enemy forces and reassure Afghans near Musa Qala, Helmand province, on January 20 when his vehicle was caught in the explosion.

The armourer, from Salisbury, Wiltshire, was evacuated by helicopter to the field hospital at Camp Bastion but later died from his injuries. Five other soldiers were injured in the blast.

Known to friends as Daz, Cpl Gardiner was remembered as a highly capable soldier and an accomplished skydiving in-

structor who had represented the Army in parachute competitions.

Capt James Ashworth, ops officer of the Brigade Reconnaissance Force, said the loss of such a bright and talented young soldier had been keenly felt.



● Cpl Darryl Gardiner

Capt Ashworth added: "Cpl Gardiner showed a rare sensitivity and compassion for others and his warmth of character has been a comfort to many."

Maj Tony Philips, OC of the Brigade Reconnaissance Force, shared the sentiments.

"We have lost a good friend, a courageous soldier and a remarkably skilled tradesman."

"As the armourer he was key to maintaining our battle worthiness. Cpl Gardiner had proved himself on a number of occasions during this tour and epitomised the cool, calm and courageous modern soldier. His death is a bitter blow."



Packing a punch: Capable of firing 340 high explosive rounds a minute, the grenade machine gun has already seen action against the Taliban in Afghanistan

Incoming arsenal

British soldiers in Helmand to take delivery of grenade machine guns

TROOPS on operations in Afghanistan are poised to hit the Taliban harder when the latest batch of a powerful new weapon arrives in theatre.

Military chiefs confirmed that extra grenade machine guns (GMGs) had been ordered for front-line soldiers after the kit had proved its worth against enemy positions.

The consignment will be in the hands of infantrymen by the spring, adding to the "significant numbers" of the weapons already in service.

Col Peter Rafferty, who heads up the Dismounted Close Combat Team at the MoD's Defence Equipment and Support Organisation, said the GMG had been well received.

He added: "Reports from the front line have been extremely favourable, with the weapon's effectiveness allowing company commanders to defeat the enemy at range."

"This contract completes our planned buy of the equipment, a large proportion of which has been delivered ahead of schedule to meet urgent requirements."

Bought as part of the Fire Support Weapon Programme, the GMG can spray 340 high explosive rounds a minute in single shot and automatic modes.

The 40mm diameter grenades have a

range of more than a mile and can smash enemy defensive positions at long range.

The weapon can be vehicle-mounted or fired from a tripod, and a package, including a telescopic day sight and night vision kit, means it can be used around the clock. The GMG was put through a barrage of tests in extreme jungle, desert and arctic conditions by expert British soldiers before deployment to ensure it was robust and versatile.

Col Rafferty said the £18 million GMG programme was needed to support troops operating in difficult terrain and to oust the Taliban from the battlefield in Helmand.

He added: "While this programme will deliver the system mainly from a tripod-mounted role on the ground, it can also be mounted on vehicles including armoured Land Rovers and the Mastiff patrol vehicle."

Gong for Embassy guardians

MILITARY personnel who served in Iraq but not as part of Op Telic may be eligible for a new medal approved by the Queen.

The Iraq Reconstruction Service Medal (IRSM) was issued to recognise Servicemen and women and government-employed civilians who have worked in Iraq but who do not qualify for the Telic Medal.

The only military personnel – apart from defence attachés – who have qualified so far for the IRSM have been members of the Close Protection Team deployed to the British Embassy in Baghdad since 2003 under Op Bandog. Now the Close Protection Unit RMP at Longmoor, which is planning a presentation parade in March, is looking for personnel who may have qualified for the reconstruction medal but have left the Army.

Anyone who thinks they fall into that category should contact Maj (Retd) T P Broadfoot at the Close Protection Unit RMP, Kitchener House, Longmoor Camp, Liss, Hants GU33 6DS, tel 01420 537079.





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Treasure trove: Thousands of packages destined for front-line troops are processed at the Defence Postal Services depot at RAF Northolt

Picture: Steve Dock

Army's parcel force

Postal staff work around the clock to deliver morale to troops at the front

HARD-pressed military posties have been working day and night to get morale-boosting parcels to soldiers in the wake of tight cargo space on flights to theatre.

Troops from the Defence Postal Services at London's RAF Northolt pulled out all the stops to get a recent backlog of packages cleared and to keep

soldiers in touch with home, but WO2 Andy Wright, technical warrant officer at the depot, acknowledged that air freight space remained an issue, particularly with the huge popularity of the free parcel service.

He urged members of the public sending goodies to troops to do their bit to speed up delivery by making sure

packages were correctly sealed and did not contain banned items.

WO2 Wright, who is a Territorial Army NCO and former Royal Mail employee, stressed: "Iraq and Afghanistan are just two of the 30 or so countries we deliver to. There is limited space on aircraft out to theatre and we are bulking out every flight we can."

"The Royal Air Force is not to blame; the logistic issue has hit everybody."

The senior NCO stressed that the delivery process could be made smoother if prohibited items, such as aerosols and alcohol, were not included in packages to troops.

WO2 Wright told *Soldier*: "Parcels should not be bigger than a shoebox in size and should not contain prohibited items such as aerosols, alcohol of any kind or imitation weapons."

"We don't like cans of pop either, because they can cause a package to burst open, and we would strongly urge people not to send food of a perishable nature."

WO2 Wright said that all parcels were scanned and any prohibited items were removed. This took up valuable time and slowed down processing.

Recruits' peer prestige

A SPECIAL accolade awarded to the best recruit passing out of basic training is continuing to grow in prestige and esteem with troops, according to senior officers.

The Soldiers Medal – which is presented to the recruit judged best by their peers – is now a regular feature of final parades following its introduction just over a year ago.

Brig Richard Smith, commander of the Army's Initial Training Group, is delighted with the success of the medal, which, he said, has become highly prized.

Brig Smith added: "This award has certainly grown in prestige, and it is something that we make a big thing about for the

recruits. It is an award that is ultimately made by their peers. From the very start of their careers the medal builds the ethos of what the Army is all about. Our core values, including respect for others, are vital to what we do."

Brig Smith went on to stress that officers and NCOs needed to keep what the British Army stood for fresh in the minds of their troops during their careers, particularly when on operations.

"It would not do the Field Army any harm to keep reappraising and reassessing the core values. The key issue is that we continue to build on our high standards."

A photograph of two soldiers in military uniforms climbing ropes. One soldier is on the left, looking up, and the other is on the right, also looking up. They are both gripping thick, dark ropes.

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IN BRIEF

● PREMIUMS for the Pax insurance scheme are set to increase by 30 per cent to mitigate a big rise in claims as a result of the number of injuries and deaths on operations, the MoD has confirmed. The hikes mean the maximum monthly payment for the top cover package will rise from £67.50 to £81. As previously reported in *Soldier*, Aon – the company behind Pax – accepted that premiums would have to rise in light of operational risk.

● THE Territorial Army have blasted to the top of the international combat shooting community after winning a hat-trick of awards at a competition held in America. The TA's acclaimed combat shooting team won all three major international awards at the Armed Forces Skill at Arms Meeting (AFSAM) in Arkansas.

Over a period of five days, the squad of 15 overcame Regular and Reserve shooting teams from all three British Services, the US and Europe.

Col Bill O'Leary, chairman of the TA Rifle Association, said: "Winning all three international team awards was a proud achievement, and with two top individual awards this was the most successful AFSAM yet."

● A CHARITY dedicated to helping blind and partially sighted ex-Servicemen and women has bought a new property in North Wales. St Dunstan's acquired the former medical centre in Craig-y-Don, Llandudno, and will use the building as a base for rehabilitation, training, respite care and holidays for former Forces personnel when it opens next year.

● GUNNERS from 32 Regiment Royal Artillery had a hairy encounter for charity – they had their locks chopped to raise cash for Help for Heroes. The soldiers paid £5 to the organisation in return for a close shave from trainee barbers and hairdressers studying at Basingstoke College of Technology. Sgt Major Darren Auty said: "We do a lot for Help for Heroes, especially as one of our ex warrant officers, WO2 Andy Stockton, lost one of his arms in Afghanistan."

Help for Heroes has so far raised £2.8m towards a target of £5m for a new swimming pool complex at the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre, Headley Court. The charity is selling a special £2 wristband for its growing legion of supporters. It can be ordered online from www.helpforheroes.org.uk



Balkans flashback: A Sea King delivers a 105mm light gun to 29 Cdo Regt RA in Gornji Vakuf, Bosnia

Ops remembered

Special events mark end of European missions

BRITISH Servicemen and women who lost their lives in two long running operations that drew to a close last year are being remembered at special commemoration events.

The 55 personnel who were killed in the 15-year deployment to restore stability to Bosnia and more than 750 who died during four decades assisting in Northern Ireland will be the focus at services in Staffordshire and London.

The special events will also be an opportunity to reflect on the many troops seriously injured in the deployments, which were both successfully concluded

in 2007. The Bosnia service is taking place at the National Memorial Arboretum on May 22 while the Op Banner (Northern Ireland) event will be held at St Paul's Cathedral on September 10.

Veterans' Minister Derek Twigg said the commemorations would be an opportunity to remember the thousands of Forces personnel who had served in both theatres.

He added: "The two services will also be a time to pay tribute to those personnel who made the ultimate sacrifice in bringing stability, security and peace."

Guards mourn model soldier

TROOPS from the 1st Battalion, Scots Guards have been remembering a "superb infantry soldier" who died in Birmingham's Selly Oak Hospital following an accident in southern Iraq.

Gdsm Stephen Ferguson had been driving a Warrior near the Contingency Operating Base in Basra when the vehicle slid into a canal on the night of December 12 last year. The 31-year-old was given first aid and evacuated to the UK but died a day later.

Originally from Lanarkshire, Gdsm Ferguson had forged a reputation for being

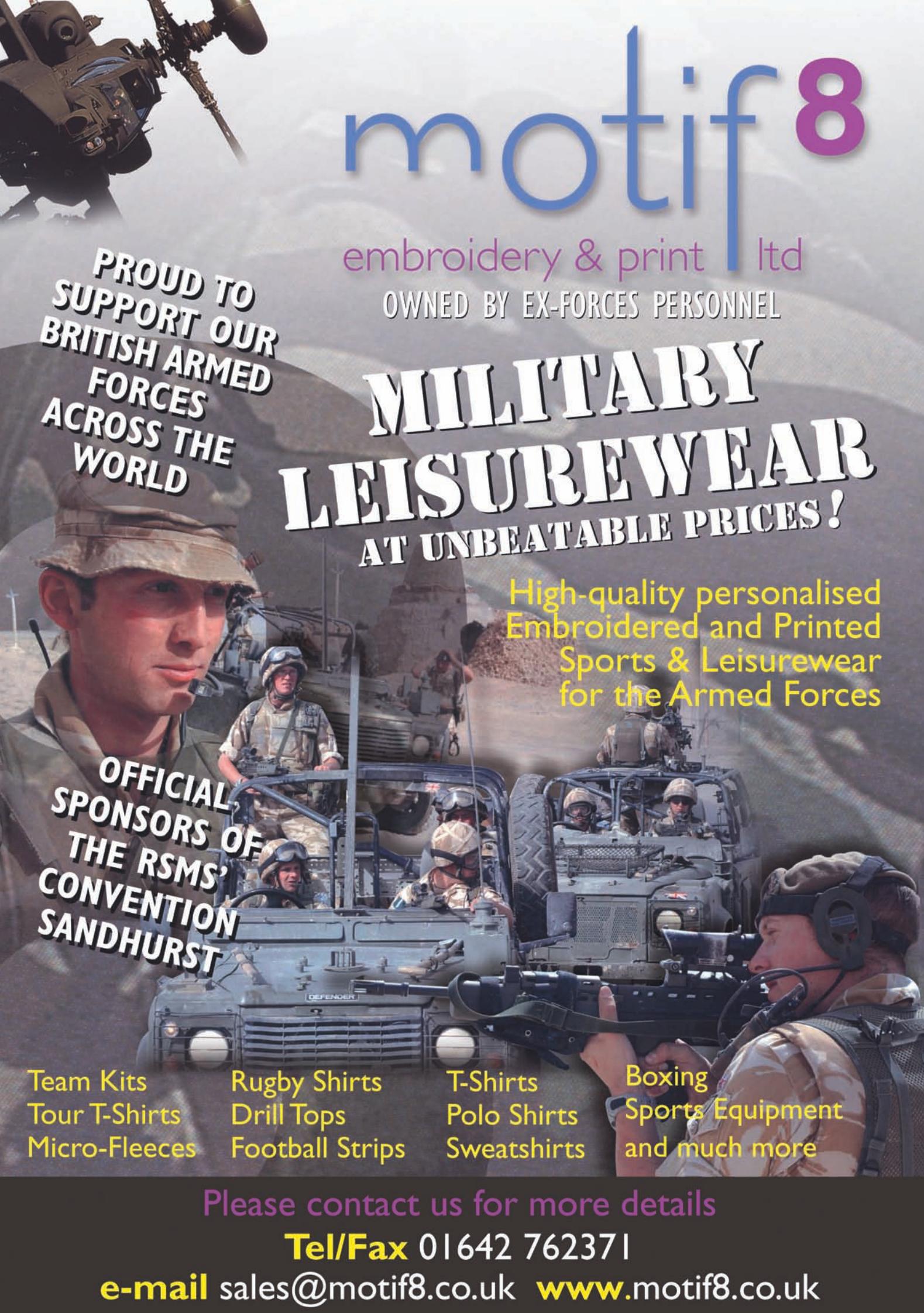
fiercely loyal, proud of his job and willing to go the extra mile for his comrades.



● Gdsm Stephen Ferguson

Lt Col William Swinton, commanding officer of 1 SG, said the battalion had lost a "loyal and faithful comrade". He added: "Stephen was a friend and brother to us all. He gave his life in the protection of his brother guardsmen, doing what he loved."

"He was a superb infantry soldier who made a success of everything he turned his hand to. The thoughts of the whole battalion are with his family at this very difficult time."



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Hunter v hunted:
Kgn Mike Garner,
1 Lancs, keeps
the upper hand
watching for
insurgents



Report: Karen Thomas
Pictures: Steve Dock

SPEARHEAD Platoon's Warriors and Bulldog squatted on a bridge straddling the main drag into Basra city, its men exposed as they combed the withered grass and litter for signs of roadside bombs.

Cars and lorries were already bustling along the highway in the grey dawn, barely noticing the British soldiers braving southern Iraq's bitter winter winds. Satisfied the insurgents had not left a deadly calling card on the bridge, the platoon hustled back into the warmth and relative safety of the armoured vehicles and moved on.

Handing back control of Basra province to the Iraqis at the end of last year did not end the threat against British Forces, it just changed it. A subtle moving of the threat goalposts for the convoys moving people and supplies in and out of the Contingency Operating Base (COB). And the work of Spearhead Platoon must mirror that change.

Clearing routes around Basra province of lethal traps before vital supplies pass through is a regular part of the job. Evolved from a reconnaissance platoon and hand-picked from the 1st Battalion, The Duke of

Lancaster's Regiment for Telic 11, Spearhead searches for bombs and insurgents with mayhem in mind.

Demand for the platoon's skill in outsmarting a rapidly adapting and sly enemy is high. Spearhead's work reduces a convoy's need to stop and check out a dodgy piece of ground, and keeping on the move lessens the risk of attack from indirect fire. Its soldiers' instinctive feel for the ground outside the COB wire and vigilance also relays an essential situational awareness.

They are kept on the go and rarely snatch more than a few hours of sleep at the COB between ops. Capt Chris Martin, platoon commander, told *Soldier* that recruiting more senior troops with a range of abilities, from sniper to reconnaissance, made Spearhead "more flexible, streetwise and savvy" when screening for enemy activity.

"They're a bunch of motivated specialists brought together specifically for this tour for the depth of capability they bring to the battle-group within one platoon," he said, outlining the need to keep on top of fast evolving Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and other hazards along the few roads around Basra province.

"We have to stay one step ahead of the insurgents while, at the same time, operating in a

constrained area and trying to mix it up and be unpredictable – we are playing cat and mouse."

The Warriors continued trundling along Basra's highways in the morning traffic. Adept at spotting suspicious and shifty behaviour of people and vehicles, the platoon suddenly ground to a halt and set up a vehicle checkpoint. Moving deftly between family hatchbacks and commercial trucks, the soldiers politely chatted to the Iraqis while thoroughly checking their pockets.

"The threat is still high when you're out on the ground so you have to keep your wits about you. The platoon works in pairs so you must keep an eye on yourself and your mate, especially when you're working at night," explained LCpl Danny Royle.

"But I prefer being outside the COB as it's more productive. I don't want to sit in a tent for six months, especially as we trained so hard to do this job."

As Telic veterans – the platoon has collective experience of Telics 2, 7 and 9 – their experience and specific training has proved priceless in protecting people and supplies since the provincial control handover. And they have a healthy respect for the changes to Basra between tours. Kgn Darren Watts compared the current situation to when he was in Iraq a year ago.

"Telic 11 is not as bad as Telic 9 when there was more activity looking for IEDs. Now everything has quietened down and the major

'The threat is still high when you're out on the ground so you have to keep your wits about you'



threat is indirect fire whereas the IEDs have decreased," the Warrior driver said while doing his impression of taking the up-armoured beasts out for a spin.

"With the Wrap 2 armour you notice the suspension is a lot better – it's like driving a big go-kart – and it offers better protection for everyone inside too."

Capt Martin confirmed everyone had to start over on each deployment and even during a tour. His team had to find its feet again after the handover of the province, especially as the Army no longer moves on the Basra city streets.

"Even from Telic 9 we have had to adjust our counter-IED work, especially as we have moved from urban to rural areas.

"The Explosive Ordnance Disposal protocols and technology evolve as the threat evolves so we are always updating and adapting," he stressed, praising the platoon for remaining unruffled by events around them.

"The job was not what we expected but they've achieved everything asked of them with their characteristic sense of humour and ability to adapt to the ever-changing environment.

"I can't commend them enough." ■



Clockwise from left, Highway code: Kgn Chris Simpson, 1 Lancs, takes up a defensive position at an Iraqi police checkpoint
Force multiplier: Kgn Paul Lawson (back) and Kgn Mike Garner, hunker down in a roadside ditch as they provide route clearance and

security for a British Army convoy on a routine replenishment run
Sun, sand and sweat: A soldier from Spearhead Platoon checks his arcs of fire as the specialist team secures a section of a convoy route





Striking defence

Royal Artillery's special K team coiled to bite back with venom

Report: Karen Thomas
and Bdr Luke Stevens-Burt
Pictures: Steve Dock

SIREN'S wail and everyone across the Contingency Operating Base (COB) hits the deck, desperately shielding themselves from the lethal rockets launched indiscriminately by Iraqi insurgents.

But before the first shockwaves of impact subside, AS90s are already returning fire thanks to Mamba, the hi-tech surveillance and target acquisition kit of K (Hondegem) Battery, 5 Regiment, Royal Artillery. For everyone huddled in body armour or sheltering in a bunker, morale lifts – K Battery's fast-striking response is not going to let the enemy have everything their own way.

The Mobile Artillery and Monitoring Battlefield (Mamba) radar is critical to defending the COB, which it watches over 24 hours a day. It locates rocket and mortar firing points around Basra, swiftly relaying highly accurate strike area data to counter-firing assets such as artillery, fast air and attack helicopters.

Named after a species of snake notorious for aggressive defence and a deadly and swift-acting poison, Mamba's intense scrutiny of incoming enemy fire has made it a must-have strategic asset for 4 Mechanized Brigade on Op Telic 11. Sgt Anthony Lavery, detachment commander, acknowledged the vital role of K Battery's small team but

'We're under pressure as soon as the COB comes under attack'

emphasised the responsibility that came with the job of protecting British Forces under fire.

"We're under pressure as soon as the COB comes under attack from indirect fire (IDF), as we have to relay the right firing locations. Our work reflects on 5

Regiment, and we feel in the spotlight when an attack happens," he told *Soldier*.

"The more frequently the COB gets targeted the more likely the insurgents are to hit something, so it's very important to keep K Battery with Mamba and the guns here."

The radar has proved indispensible since Telic 1. Deployed with 5 Regt in the war-fighting of 2003, Mamba



Snake charmer: Sgt Anthony Lavery, K Battery, 5 Regiment, Royal Artillery, adjusts Mamba's navigation system

and Asp (Advanced Sound ranging Programme) supported 7 Para RHA and 3 RHA in securing Basra and south east Iraq. When camp Abu Naji, Al Amarah, came under increased IDF, the battery provided soldiers on patrol and the quick reaction force with data on enemy firing points.

Since Op Telic 4, 5 Regt has been a permanent part of the Telic furniture. With just three Mamba-equipped batteries rotating through theatre, these gunners find themselves on pre- or post-deployment training when not serving in theatre.

And having deployed for the first time to southern Afghanistan last year with the lightweight counter mortar radar, one of the batteries now finds itself in the fight to defeat the Taliban.

The demand on 5 Regt to supply

qualified Mamba operators, combined with the short tour intervals, has inevitably placed a burden on the three K teams but they have responded



with aplomb. LBdr Lindsay Butteree, radar operator, found herself training on Mamba just after completing a tour working with the counter battery radar (Cobra). "The training was harder and I had so little time to do it because of squeezing it in between tours. I came off Telic 8, got my leave in but was then immediately training for this tour," she explained. "I enjoy it and like being out here. When you pick up the enemy's incoming rounds, you feel quite important because we are the only radar that can authorise the guns to fire."

It's not only the kit that changes. The situation in Basra has shifted many times over the past five years and K Battery had to adapt to new roles. On Telic 1 the enemy gun and rocket positions they located were engaged by the AS90s and light guns.

When British Forces handed over control of Al Amarah during Telic 8, the Battery's efforts were focused in and around Basra, where the use of IDF and roadside bombs had increased.

Now, on Telic 11, Mamba is used for counter firing to restrict enemy attacks and save lives on the COB. Capt Steve Bell, troop commander, commended the expertise of his gunners in knowing their job "inside out". "We're unique because the battery commander does not usually accompany us to theatre.

"So if the guys let me down it puts a lot of pressure on me with my senior officers," he said. "They have commitment and dedication and there are exceptionally good dynamics between the older and newer members of the team. What I like about my soldiers is that they have their own views but are always professional."

Proving their worth in Iraq since 2003 in the battle to counter insurgent attacks, these special K gunners now find themselves in demand in two theatres of operation.

Working in tandem with other defensive assets, they take the fight back to the enemy and allow their comrades to sleep a little easier. ■



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Bird's-eye view

Insurgents watched like a hawk as gunners take to the skies over Basra

Report: Karen Thomas
Picture: Steve Dock

CIRCLING above Basra, Desert Hawk has a neat trick of seeing round corners to spot the enemy before the enemy spots British troops out on the ground.

The compact unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) is regularly deployed outside the wire of the Contingency Operating Base (COB) with battle-groups, providing them with vital air reconnaissance.

Equipped with an array of cameras including infrared, the Hawk's "eyes" are effective in locating potential threats day and night.

It lends itself to a variety of tasks such as force protection for convoys, route clearance, target tracking and base security – an ideal asset for 4 Mechanized Brigade in Basra.

Sgt Maj Lloyd Gillingham, RA, said it didn't take long for soldiers to appreciate the diminutive surveillance system's defensive worth.

"One of the battle-groups wouldn't deploy unless they had a Desert Hawk

'One of the battle-groups wouldn't deploy unless they had a Desert Hawk with them – it's quick to get up in the sky'

with them, as it's so easy and quick to get up in the sky.

"They demanded to have it, even though it's not their asset," he told *Soldier*, adding that the UAV's popularity in both Iraq and Afghanistan had led to his gunners from 47 Regiment, Royal Artillery being re-roled from air defence for Telic 11.

"The work is very different and the team is loving it. They trained on a new bit of kit, hit the ground running, have gone out with the battle-group and flown it.

"They saw the re-role as a challenge."

Switching from air defence to being a UAV battery took four

months, of which six weeks were spent acclimatising with Desert Hawk in the Iraq-like deserts of California.

Keeping the Hawk in flight usually requires a crew of five – a tactical group commander who liaises directly with the battle-group, a signaller, detachment commander, pilot and operator.

Weighing in at just 3kg and with a 5ft wingspan, the gunners' bird of prey is easily portable and can be

dispatched into the heavens in a matter of minutes using a bungee cord. It made its first flights in Afghanistan's Helmand province in 2006, supporting commanders in offensive actions by providing real-time imagery and battle-winning intelligence.

The Taliban learnt to fear the tiny UAV flying low over their positions, although Desert Hawk is virtually undetectable at higher altitudes.

LBdr Kirsty Cox trained as a pilot and commander of the Desert Hawk for her first tour.

She praised the preparation and training for looking after and deploying the mini-UAV, and confirmed it had become a vital piece of kit to have on operations and around the COB.

"It's important to be out here and we're in demand."

"Everyone seems to want us because we've got a good defence asset and can give them a bit of eyes-on down a route."

"It's rewarding to do an overwatch and give the lads on the ground a bit more confidence that they're being protected from above." ■

Fancy a flight: Gnr Zoe Shackcloth holds Desert Hawk – the Army's model aircraft-sized reconnaissance UAV – in its launch position





Taking charge

Pillars of wisdom guide Brits training Iraqi Security Forces in Basra

Wise words from Lawrence of Arabia, *Arab Bulletin* – 1917

Do not try to do too much with your own hands. Better the Arabs do it tolerably than that you do it perfectly. It is their war, and you are to help them, not to win it for them. Actually, also, under the very odd conditions of Arabia, your practical work will not be as good as, perhaps, you think it is. ’

Report: Karen Thomas
Pictures: Mark Nesbitt

LIETENANT Colonel Thomas Edward Lawrence counselled his peers to be hands off and stand back when helping the Arab people in their war against the Turks – not to win it for them.

The legendary officer's words, published 90 years ago in the *Arab Bulletin* during the First World War, offer valuable guidance for British soldiers working with the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) in modern-day Iraq. And his advice took on even greater importance when the responsibility

for security in Basra province switched from British to ISF control at the end of last year.

No longer a fledgling army, Iraqi soldiers are suited and booted and taking charge of Basra and its future. This sits well with the British Army – the less the ISF depends on coalition forces to intervene with warring militias or stopping arms being smuggled into the city, the quicker the end game of reducing troop numbers can be reached.

But the Army, police and border enforcement agency that make up the ISF have recognised they need more training to handle the aftermath of five years of instability before the Brits can



the British instructors get to work on those areas in need of attention. Sgt Stevan Skinner, 1 Scots and DTC instructor, emphasised the benefits of getting the Iraqi Army up to speed.

"The more we train them, the more they can go out on the ground and the more the public will respect and have confidence in them," he told *Soldier*. "Training this army up to rely on itself is, in my eyes, an achievement."

Mentoring needs a different approach. Treading the fine advisory line on combined operations led by the ISF, Cpl Dougie McLean, 1 Scots, patrolled with his Iraqi Army counterparts after they had completed their combat vehicle training on the British Warrior.

He had noticed a competitive streak when they got out on the ground with their own Russian BMP armoured personnel carriers.

"We use the same vehicle drills so they can understand the similarities but they like to see the difference too – they have competitions and race us," he laughed, adding that his mentoring role had turned out to be very different to

'They realise they have to step up and do things themselves if they don't want us here'

what he had expected. "A lot of them are really motivated because they realise they have to step up and do things themselves if they don't want us here. And they are getting better with the skills that are now being tested in the field."

One of the major challenges had been strengthening the Iraqi Army mission command structure by proving the worth of the junior and senior

NCOs. Leading by example, and despite being on his first tour, Pte Dylan Hughes, 1 Scots, appreciated the difference between training and mentoring.

"We let them do their own thing, as we're there to make sure nothing goes wrong. So we need to sit back and watch to see if we are needed. They've picked up the training we've given them quite well and most of them are really keen," he said. "It's been good for me, as it has given me confidence in speaking up and trying to train people."

"And it's rewarding to get the Iraqi Army trained to a level where the local people have full confidence in their own forces and our guys can go home." ■

Picture: Steve Dock

leave. British soldiers have learned they must strike a delicate balance between fully equipping the ISF with potentially life-saving skills but not over-stepping the cultural mark and teaching their counterparts to suck eggs.

A mix of hands-on instruction in advanced skills such as marksmanship and hands-off mentoring while on the ground with the ISF conducting operations is proving to be a winning formula. About 250 Iraqi soldiers are trained each month on two-week advanced drill courses at Shaibah's Divisional Training Centre (DTC) to prepare them for controlling security around Basra province.

Mons Company of the 1st Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Scotland, runs the DTC. Iraqi company commanders are asked what training they want and, after assessing the men's strengths and weaknesses,





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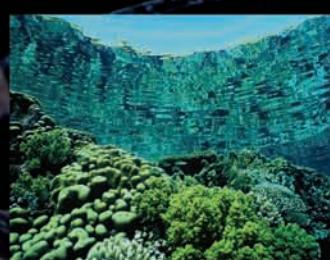
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Cold comfort

Coldstream Guards warm the hearts of their Helmand province neighbours »

Reassuring presence: WO2 Colin Pote, Coldm Gds, takes up a position on a hearts-and-minds patrol outside FOB Keenan



INFANTEERS from 3 Company, 1st Battalion, Coldstream Guards have had every opportunity to put their rigorous front-line training into action against the Taliban during their tour of southern Afghanistan.

Since taking over Forward Operating Base (FOB) Keenan from B Company, 2nd Battalion, The Mercian Regiment in October, the guardsmen have sunk their teeth into scores of contacts as they continue the mission to drive the Taliban out of Helmand's green zone.

As their efforts bear more fruit, many of the civilian population of the surrounding village of Zumbelai have begun to move back to their homes and the guardsmen have embarked upon an equally important operation to win over the hearts and minds of their new neighbours. Company commander Maj Tom Charles, Welsh Guards, explained that many of the residents moved into the desert during September's Operation Palk Wahel, when the Mercian Regiment first captured the area from Taliban control.

"When we arrived in the consolidation phase, we had to create a degree of security and persuade people to move back in and start living their lives without the Taliban interfering," said Maj Charles.

"Over the time we have been here the number of locals has definitely increased and that is because they see Isaf (International Security Assistance Force) as a force for good.

"I think they understand that we are here to help them and to support the Afghan Government. Because this is such a remote area the Government's tentacles are yet to reach out here, but in the meantime we are trying to meet the problems they encounter."

Venturing out of FOB Keenan on a patrol with the Guards, it is obvious that the civilian population appreciates the Army's presence.

Platoon commander Lt Storm Green is enthusiastically greeted by a group of residents immediately after leaving the compound and the ensuing conversation – carried out through an interpreter – is upbeat and lively.

After enquiring about the residents' well-being, Lt Green is steered onto the subject of compensation which Isaf forces are distributing to homeowners whose property was damaged during contacts with the Taliban.

He said: "There has been a lot of fighting in the green zone and previously it had just been troops pushing through and then leaving. We have the job of rebuilding the place, so there are a lot of claims that come forward – some truthful, some not so.

"The idea is to push the friendly zone further and further away and influence more people by helping them out with compensation and new equipment. The Mercians made the big push into the green zone but the consolidation was done by us. They met with the locals but we have had to reassure them and then put the words into practice. You can see the relationship improving."

Although the mood on the patrol is generally upbeat, there is no room for complacency from any of the nine platoon troops involved as the Taliban's favoured method of attack is using ambush tactics. The Guards are well rehearsed in their formations and have become familiar with the patrol routes, but the terrain encompasses everything from urban dwellings to woodland areas and progress can be difficult.

Soldier finds out just how tricky it can be when we turn down a narrow lane lined on either side by towering walls and have to wade through ankle-deep



mud left over from heavy rain several days before.

The surrounding area is prime agricultural land and the ground alternates between muddy fields dotted with evidence of harvested poppy and a criss-crossed network of irrigation ditches, which take on added menace when torrential downpours cause them to swell and widen.

As we negotiate the hazardous conditions underfoot, the discovery of a number of Taliban firing points and the fact that the infantrymen constantly have to raise their weapons at the sudden appearance of people and motorbikes in surrounding fields reminds us that the threat of attack is very real.

Section commander LCpl "Shakey" Marks said: "It's a small area that we have to cross but the ground makes it difficult. It can take an hour to move 1km and that's really going for it. When we first got here there was green on the trees and the ground was OK but it has deteriorated and become really boggy over the winter."

Dominating the ground through the "friendly" patrols has helped the Coldstream Guards get to know Zumbelai's prominent figures and allowed them to address some of the most pressing needs of the villagers, many of whom live in desperate poverty.

Compensation cases are the main order of business, but a series of shuras – meetings with the key men – identified





Clockwise from main picture, Rural roll out: The Coldstream Guards cut alongside a field next to FOB Keenan All ears: Lt Storm Green listens to a Zumbelay villager's concerns

Crack on: LSgt Chris Hunter, Coldm Gds, leads Cpl Coral Loveday, RMP, on a patrol

Eagle eye: WO2 Colin Pote, left, and Lt Storm Green scan the horizon for Taliban activity

religion, medical care, electricity, education and, most importantly, security as the primary concerns.

The distribution of four mosques' worth of loudspeakers, batteries and prayer mats has helped villages practice their religion and several residents have received free blankets to protect themselves against the excesses of winter when night-time temperatures drop tens of degrees below freezing.

A weekly clinic offered by company medics provides free care for the sick and injured and anyone seriously ill is given financial help to travel to the

nearest hospital 15km away in Gereshk.

"They absolutely crave security. This is the number one issue to all locals," continued Maj Charles. "Unfortunately this means we have to fight much of the time, but locals understand why and are prepared to be inconvenienced for security. We do anything we can to help them practise their religion because it's a good way of winning their consent, and that's why we gave them the mosque equipment.

"This area is not ready for a school because the Taliban would bomb it and probably kill the teacher, but we have

bought some equipment – blackboards, notebooks, pens, pencils – and in the meantime we are going to try and get a teacher in once a week."

The battle to rid Afghanistan's green zone of the Taliban's oppressive rule is moving full steam ahead thanks to the Coldstream Guards excelling at their traditional light infantry role.

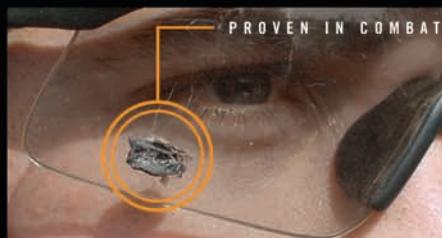
But the human touch of the non-kinetic hearts-and-minds patrol teams is playing just as big a part in ensuring that life after the Taliban is enjoyable and prosperous for the farming village of Zumbelay and its surrounding area. ■



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Guards driving Taliban from the heart of Helmand's green zone »

Bright sparks: The mortar platoon of 3 Coy, 1 Coldm Gds, lights up the night sky with an illuminating round

YOU don't have to look too hard to find evidence of the ferocious fighting that has taken place around Forward Operating Base (FOB) Keenan since it was captured by The Mercian Regiment last year.

The mud and stone walls of the former farmer's compound bear the scars of erratic small-arms fire and RPG attacks and the surrounding terrain is pitted with the telltale pockets of scorched earth and bullet casings of Taliban firing positions.

The attacks peaked last October when enemy fighters tried to take advantage of the arrival of 3 Company, Coldstream Guards, by launching a week-long assault on the FOB, which lies in the village of Zumbelay, about 15km from Gereshk.

But despite throwing everything they could muster at Keenan, the Taliban were beaten back and the Guards have spent the ensuing months gradually pushing the insurgents out of the area.

Company commander Maj Tom Charles, Welsh Guards, explained that

Operation Palk Wahel – the initial push into Zumbelay – was designed to drive the Taliban out of the area to the east of the River Helmand.

"Palk Wahel was very successful and we came here in the consolidation phase to try and bring a degree of normality to the area," he told *Soldier*. "Straight after we took over, the Taliban hit to test our tactics and see what firepower we had available. We were attacked four or five times at this location.

"That happened for about a week but they kept on getting hit with our more substantial firepower. After that we got into a routine of normal patrolling to dominate the ground and disrupt the Taliban's movement."

Since the initial onslaught on Keenan proved ineffective, direct Taliban attacks on the heavily-fortified base have become much rarer.

Contacts now most frequently occur in the form of hit-and-run ambushes on the Guards' fighting patrols which cover a radius of approximately six kilometres of the agricultural land that

"Straight after we took over, the Taliban hit to test out tactics and see what firepower we had available"

makes up the fertile strip of Helmand's green zone.

"It is a game of cat and mouse with us both trying to find each other," continued Maj Charles. "What we are now encountering is small pockets of enemy, using insurgency type tactics, that hit and leave quickly. They are very agile and know the ground, which makes it difficult to pin them down.

"During the rain the irrigation ditches filled with water and got wider and wider. It became an ambush paradise, but because there's no high ground the only way to get through it is to clear through on foot."

Working under a Danish battle-group, the men of 3 Company have spent their entire tour to date working in the relative isolation of FOB Keenan and have perhaps not received the recognition their efforts deserve.

But although living conditions are basic and the soldiers are required to put their skills into action on an almost daily basis, the infantrymen's mood remains extremely positive.

"Morale is most high when they get back from fighting the Taliban," concluded Maj Charles. "When you watch a patrol coming in there's a big smile on everyone's faces. It's what they trained for and they really love it." ■



Ominous sign: Enemy fighters in and around Zumbelay have taken a pounding from the Coldstream Guards' fighting patrols and mortar platoon

**LSgt Andy Browell (medic)**

Every time a patrol goes out from Keenan one of us is on it. It lets us see a different side of the battalion. I was with mortars for years and with a rifle company as well, but

being a medic gives me a new opportunity.

LCpl Constantine and I have both had our fair share of the contacts. Once when we were contacted we had to dive face down in the mud in a ditch. There were six or seven of us behind quite a short wall and they were engaging us from the other side. Everyone was hoping they wouldn't look over the wall because we were quite easy targets.

We have got a job to do to look after the blokes in our battalion and although we have probably seen more contacts than anyone else here we are happy to do it.

Gdsm Jackie Patterson

I was out on the ground when we got contacted and had a casualty. The CSM got over to him and patched him up, but we knew that the quick reaction force (QRF) couldn't get out to us so

I just said I would get him out.

I gave someone my day sack and gave him a fireman's carry for a kilometre and a half. We both had our Osprey and helmets but I think it was adrenaline that helped me do it. As soon as we got 500m from camp the QRF got him into a wagon. I spoke to him when I was on R&R and he said he was doing OK and that he owed me a couple of pints.

LCpl Stephen Walker

Once when I was out in a gun pit – basically a big ditch – we heard one round go off. Everyone was looking around and just as someone asked where it came from, all hell broke loose.

There were three of us in there and we had everything coming in – RPGs, small-arms fire, heavy machine guns. They had us pinned down for a few moments so that was quite lively.

**Gdsm Marc Roberts**

We were stuck in a compound when we got into a contact and could see rounds flying over our heads. There was nothing we could do to get around it so we just had to sit there feeling quite useless.

We put two gunners in the middle of the floor and they just opened fire so we could all get up and make an escape.

We came out here expecting we were going to be working in an urban environment, but straight after we arrived we came to Keenan and have been here for the whole tour.

**Gdsm Scott Moore**

Ten Platoon got caught in an advanced contact that happened as we made our way towards camp. Normally it's just once then you can come back in, but this time it happened five times all the way back.

Instead of the usual four hours, it took us five hours to make it back to camp. We had to do a fighting withdrawal but luckily no one was hurt.

**CSgt Mark Burnett**

After we got here we were going out and taking over compounds every day, leaving at first light and not coming back until last light.

On one occasion there was a compound wall about 350m in front of us and the Taliban hit us there three times. Because it was the same building that they kept firing from we all sat there waiting and when they came back we hit them with everything – guns, Javelins and mortars. We know nine times out of ten when we are going to get hit so we make sure we are ready and waiting.



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Keenan company

**Coldstream Guards adapt to life at a Forward
Operating Base in the heart of rural Afghanistan »**



Cool camp: Dedicated walkways and brand new tented accommodation are the latest improvements to be installed at FOB Keenan

APIPING hot sausage and vegetable pizza was about the last thing the *Soldier* team expected to see as they stood shivering in the plummeting night time temperatures inside Forward Operating Base (FOB) Keenan in the heart of Helmand's green zone.

Cooked to perfection in a makeshift ammo tin oven by Gdsm Richard Payne, Coldstream Guards, the Italian dish is a prime example of the resourcefulness of British soldiers who have turned an uninviting, isolated compound into somewhere they can call home.

When 3 Company, 1 Coldm Gds inherited Keenan from B Company, 2nd Battalion, The Mercian Regiment last October, the compound had not been designated as a FOB and facilities were basic to say the least.

But since being told they would be spending their entire six-month tour at the FOB, the Guards have combined their rigorous operational commitments with upgrade work that has brought new tents, puffing billies to provide hot water and even a gym to their new home.

Sapper Cpl Bob Sleigh, of 36 Engineer Regiment, has been based at FOB Keenan ever

since the Mercians took over and said that conditions have been getting progressively better.

"When we came in here with the Mercians, this compound looked absolutely nothing like it does now," he said. "We started on new structures straight away and were working 18-hour shifts to build defences and get the sangars up.

"The workload has slowed a little, but we have been battling against the weather to get hardened accommodation up to make things more comfortable here.

"On top of that, we have also been going out on fighting patrols and advanced contacts with the infantry guys.

"I still feel like I have loads to do and like engineers all over theatre we are stretched and working hard, but it's good for us to get out with the infantry during the day and then do a bit of building when we get back."

Examples of the Coldstream Guards' innovations are never far away in Keenan. A welfare room containing a TV, DVD and Playstation 3 also has a settee and bookcase crafted

out of empty Hesco Bastion shells.

Likewise in the communal cooking and eating area, Hesco has been used to create more furniture and empty ammo tins have been converted into a fully functional oven.

A well installed by the compound's owner before the Mercians moved in provides fresh lukewarm water, but the puffing billies soon heat it up enough to be used for washing bodies and kit.

Perhaps the most-welcome addition to Keenan is the new tented accommodation laid out in a neat row on one side of the camp.

Before it arrived, soldiers at the FOB were sleeping under ponchos which proved slightly too flimsy whenever the tempestuous downdraft

from an arriving Chinook blew over.

"These are austere conditions. The boys have now got tents, but up until a week ago they were living under ponchos," said Maj Tom Charles, of the Welsh Guards.

"When it was raining and cold it was pretty hard going. We live off rations most of the time and the flights only come about once a week so you have to manage peoples' expectations over mail, but the boys know that and they have coped admirably."

Letter writing is proving as popular as ever at Keenan but, true to form, the Coldstream Guards have added their own individual touch.

The usual messages to friends and

“The boys like the job out here and they like roughing it. When they get back they know that they have done a hard job and they have done it bloody well”



family are common, but letters to radio stations, police stations and even a pasty shop have yielded welcome responses from unknown well-wishers offering everything from new pen pals to free cakes.

The inventions may be crude and the soldiers are undoubtedly looking forward to returning to their own homes, but one thing that is apparent, no matter who *Soldier* speaks to, is that morale is genuinely high for the men serving on Op Herrick's front line.

Maj Charles added: "The boys like the job out here and they like roughing it. When they get back they know that they have done a hard job and they have done it bloody well."

"They are all soldiers so they don't mind the rough stuff."

"They might want a few comforts, but as long as they have a welfare phone they are willing to get on with the cold and the wet."

"We really are in the middle of nowhere, but the boys don't complain. They just adapt and overcome." ■

● See Vox pop – Page 90

Clockwise from below, Pump it up: Troops at FOB Keenan take time out from their day-to-day duties for Op Massive

Pizza perfection: Gdsm Richard Payne puts the finishing touches to his improvised Italian culinary creations

Nerve centre: Patrols in the area around FOB Keenan are planned and commanded from the mud-walled operations room

Hand washed: The Coldstream Guards use water from a well to keep their bodies and clothes clean



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In confidence: Padre Fran Myatt, RACD, at the altar of his tented church at Camp Sharabak, Afghanistan



Padre Fran Myatt, RACD, tells *Soldier* about bad dreams, maturing soldiers and how he helps to manage morale when tragedy strikes

Interview: Stephen Tyler
Picture: Graeme Main

PADRE Fran Myatt rubbed the sleep from his eyes and dragged himself out of bed to answer the knock on the door of his accommodation block in Afghanistan.

His watch informed him it was still early – 0500 in fact – but previous experience of serving on operations told Padre Myatt that the person waiting outside his room might be in desperate need of his help and advice.

On this occasion, the reality was slightly less dramatic.

“I’m sorry to bother you Padre,” said the 2nd Battalion, The Yorkshire Regiment soldier stood in front of him in the early morning gloom. “But I’ve had a bad dream.”

In spite of the anti-social hour of the call, Padre Myatt invited the soldier in, made him a drink and provided the listening ear required of someone in a job that demands the skills of a counsellor, minister and friend.

“If there’s a drama in barracks then most people can have any argument sorted the same day because they are close to their family,” Padre Myatt told *Soldier* from the 2 Yorks base at Camp Sharabak, just outside Camp Bastion in Helmand. “If you have that same argument during a 30-minute phone call on operations then you might

not sort it until you get your next 30 minutes the following week, so that’s where I come in.

“When the guys come and see me, I try to be someone they can confide in no matter how strange their problem.”

After first attending a church at the age of 21 when his son was baptised, the former doorman realised his calling to the ministry and enrolled in theological college.

His first parish was a tough inner city church in Liverpool, but Padre Myatt knew he wanted to work with the Army and eventually got his wish when he accepted a job with The Princess of Wales’s Royal Regiment.

Subsequent postings have taken him around the world, including Iraq and Kosovo, and it is on operations that he notices the biggest difference in the soldiers he works with.

“The change in them when they come away is stark,” he said. “Some of the guys are unrecognisable when they leave because they mature so much.

“Being a padre is basic level ministry, but as long as you understand that then the job is fantastic. If you come here thinking you are going to save the world it simply won’t work, but if you are realistic about it then it gives you nothing but utter pride.”

The saddest moment of his career came in December when Sgt Lee “Jonno” Johnson of 2 Yorks was killed in an explosion during operations to recapture Musa Qaleh, in Helmand.

The popular sergeant had visited the padre the night before the mission to ask for a copy of the Bible. The book was found in his body armour after he died.

“There can be a sense that people come out to harsh places like this thinking they are going to live forever,” said Padre Myatt. “So when you lose someone – especially someone from your own regiment – the reaction can be breathtaking.

“The whole feeling in the camp when Jonno died was heart-breaking and people kept asking me why. My answer was that I didn’t know, but what I do know is that he took his Bible and put it in his body armour the night before he died.

“For me, I have done my job if I can help the lads take their faith with them wherever they go. It’s a special breed that becomes a padre, but that’s because it’s a special breed that becomes a soldier.”

“It is an honour and a privilege to do this job and I have loved every minute.” ■

‘Being a padre is basic level ministry, but as long as you understand that then the job is fantastic’

Walking back

Defence clothing team jumps feet first into task of re-booting soldiers

Picture: Graeme Main

HAVING enough boots on the ground is important in hotspots such as Iraq and Afghanistan, but issuing the best available footwear is vital to keep troops on their toes in battle.

Making sure the men and women of the British Army have comfortable feet is a priority in harsh environments. And after a series of tests in theatre, troops on the front line are now lacing up the cream of combat kickers designed to balance comfort with robustness.

The Meindl and Lowa heavy-duty desert boots proved the pick of the crop during a series of MoD trials in Iraq, Afghanistan and Cyprus last autumn, and they are being marched out to troops en masse.

In further changes to make feet more combat effective, women are now being

issued with specialist female footwear while soldiers are to get the option of new cold weather boots.

Col Silas Suchanek, who heads the Defence Clothing Project Team, said that the styles of shoes worn in civilian life, the changing role of the modern infantryman and soldiers' expectations meant the Army had to kick some of its old footwear into touch.

He added: "When we became aware in 2006 that the standard issue boots were not in some cases meeting the needs or providing the best fit for deployed troops, we launched a series of trials of unprecedented range and depth to find a solution.

'We try to offer a boot that provides as much support as possible, which is consistent with the need for comfort and ventilation'

"We were looking for boots that could minimise the impact of having to work in temperatures as high as 50C, that would provide support in carrying heavy loads and could withstand the rigours of conditions ranging from sandy desert to stony ground."

While infantrymen had previously been issued with hob-nailed ammo boots that had to be broken in, Lt Col Suchanek said recruits of yesterday

often came from hardy backgrounds.

But in a more affluent modern society with fewer people working in tough industrial jobs, many had grown up wearing comfortable shoes.

Col Suchanek said that Meindl boots

to happiness

were already being issued to troops while soldiers in combat roles would be getting Lowa footwear.

A further comfort boost would be provided with the arrival of two lightweight patrol boots, using the existing Magnum footwear and an alternative made by Lowa, in the coming months. These had been designed for soldiers who were not expected to go into battle.

In addition, troops involved in winter tours of Iraq and Afghanistan will be offered two different types of specialist boots for the cold weather. The latest Prabos footwear is available for anyone unable to wear the standard issue Ituri product. Both boots have insulation to protect against extreme conditions.

Col Suchanek added: "These are designed for use in cold and mountainous conditions and so are stiffer in

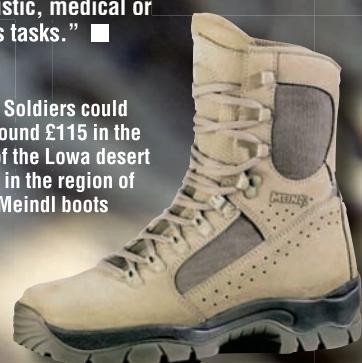
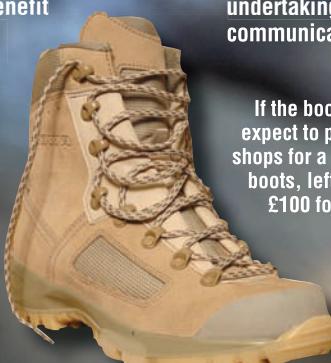
construction to aid moving in that type of terrain. The boots can be difficult to adapt to initially and so, to mitigate this, we have two versions on offer, one being somewhat softer than the other and requiring less breaking in."

MoD research had also identified that female troops would benefit from being issued with specially designed footwear, with Lowa-branded boots to meet their needs arriving this year.

Col Suchanek said: "Women's feet generally have a narrower heel than men's feet. That means that the normal Army boot, which is

suitable for male soldiers, is going to be either too tight or too loose in different areas as you try and achieve a proper fit.

"Although women are not recruited into the dismounted close combat role, such as infantry and tank crews, they can often find themselves in a combat situation undertaking logistic, medical or communications tasks." ■



If the boot fits: Soldiers could expect to pay around £115 in the shops for a pair of the Lowa desert boots, left, and in the region of £100 for the Meindl boots

Reality show

Hard man of TV drama braves a new theatre on southern Afghanistan's brutal front line



Interview: Cliff Caswell

NO-NONSENSE actor Ross Kemp has forged a reputation for playing some of television's grittiest and most uncompromising characters.

Having completed countless tours of duty as bully boy Grant Mitchell in BBC soap *EastEnders* and the tough-talking Sgt Henry 'Henno' Garvie in ITV drama *Ultimate Force*, he has rarely strayed from the thick of the action in his screen roles.

And, by all accounts, the fictional characters played by the 43-year-old have been more than adept at dodging enemy attacks and dishing out their own punishment. Tough, violent and occasionally on the wrong side of the law, SAS wildcard Garvie and psychologically scarred ex-Para, Grant, often used brawn and bullets to get their own way.

But when the Essex-born actor found himself in Afghanistan's real-life war

zone, and embedded with British troops fighting a cunning and ruthless terrorist enemy, he admitted cowering in the dirt with fear as small arms fire and grenades zipped over his head.

"In that situation your human instincts take over," Ross admitted. "You honestly just want the ground to swallow you up and don't want the next round to hit."

It was a desire to find out more about the British soldier at the sharp end of the war against global terrorism that led Ross to southern Afghanistan's notorious Helmand province and on operations against the Taliban.

After winning a BAFTA award for his Sky TV series *Ross Kemp on Gangs*, he came up with the idea of embedding himself with the 1st Battalion, The Royal Anglian

Regiment for a snapshot of life on the front line.

He joined the Vikings – the same outfit in which his father had served – for training on Salisbury Plain, Wiltshire,

before deploying to Helmand for two months of action in ops to smash the Taliban's control of the region.

His in-theatre exploits are shown in the Sky One documentary, *Ross Kemp in Afghanistan*. Filmed in high-definition, it is a gritty portrayal of a high-intensity and often unforgiving tour.

"I had felt for some time that if you are going to send young men into environments like Afghanistan, they should have a voice," said Ross.

"A lot of the time you hear from guys who have been taught media handling at

'I found the soldiers to be intelligent, witty and very aware of the political situation'

Sandhurst. But we've never heard from a squaddie, a young 18-year-old boy, explaining what it is like to be a British soldier in Afghanistan and what it is like to live with mum and dad one minute and then leave for foreign climes."

Nothing could prepare the actor, however, for his baptism of fire during Op Lastay Kulang last year.

Having already driven past a concealed improvised explosive device that later claimed the life of one member of the battalion, his film crew found themselves pinned down by bullets and rocket-propelled grenades as troops engaged Taliban compounds near Sangin.

"Fear is an unquantifiable thing. The next bump in the road could be an IED and you don't know whether a friendly aircraft will drop bombs where it is supposed to," said Ross. "But I'll never forget that day I spent face down in a field for the rest of my life. I was led to believe during both

of the Gulf Wars that battles are fought electronically, but I now know that if you are going to win then you have to have men on the ground."

It was only after the intervention of an Apache attack helicopter and ferocious fighting on the ground that the film crew broke contact.

Exhausted by his taste of combat and operating in a searing 50C heat, Ross was deaf with an ear infection and near-immobilised with cracked feet by the time the soldiers were extracted to the main British base at Camp Bastion.

Refusing to be beaten, however, the actor and his crew stuck it out for the full eight weeks, recording an enduring picture of life in the field.

Ross, who trained as an actor at London's Webber Douglas Academy and who has appeared in several high-profile roles since making his screen debut in the mid-1980s, admitted his time in Helmand

had been a mix of elation and tragedy.

While privileged to have sampled the close-knit community of men at war, he also experienced the low points when members of the battalion were killed. After his return home, the actor met the mother of a young soldier who died and admitted he was deeply affected at the sacrifices made by the troops and their families.

"I was very proud of all these young men and the job they were doing, and I hope that people will now appreciate them a bit better," Ross emphasised. "I found the soldiers to be intelligent, witty and very aware of the political situation."

"My documentary is about what it is like to be a British soldier in Afghanistan. People are risking their lives every day, and facing a continuous onslaught. We should be incredibly proud of them." ■

● *Ross Kemp in Afghanistan* is exclusive to Sky One and Sky One HD. Mondays at 2100.



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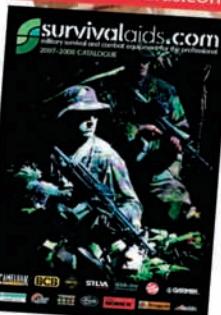
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TALKBACK

Fighting for extra £2.32

WRITE to ask why I could claim only a £2.32 daily allowance while based in the green zone just 150m from Taliban positions.

I worked with B Company, 2 Mercian on Op Herrick 6 in the green zone for 141 days of my tour in the Upper Geresh Valley.

We washed in a bloodworm-infested well, had no internet facility and the use of a satphone once in a blue moon. We were involved in fighting every day in Osprey body armour and lived with Taliban bodies in the rubble around us.

So, I ask, when a soldier of the same rank living in Camp Bastion has access to four super cookhouses, seven gyms, six internet suites, six phone cabins, a medical centre, an Efi shop and a Pizza Hut, why we should only get a £2.32 daily rate?

The Infantry deserves a bit more than £2.32 for the full success of Herrick 6 in Helmand. – Name and address supplied.

PS...

I HAVE just read your story "one shot wonder" (Update, Dec). Cpl Wilbor is in fact a member of the Royal Corps of Signals, his unit is 52 Infantry Brigade HQ Signal Squadron (258) and he is attached to the Brigade Recce Force. As his RSM can I ask that this error be corrected? – M D Wilford, Brigade RSM, 52 Inf Bde HQ and Sig Sqn (258), Op Herrick.

PRIZE LETTER

Brig Jamie Gordon, DPS(A), replies: *The first point I would like to make is that we are "all in one company" whether in the combat, combat support or combat services support arms.*

Each has their own job to do, each depends on each other and all contribute

to the success of Herrick, whether an infantryman, gunner, helicopter pilot or loggie. As infantrymen, we know that we will live at the sharp end – that is one of the reasons we joined, even with all the associated discomforts.

You are doing what you want to and are trained to do.

Secondly, the Unpleasant Work Allowance is relatively new (you are being paid level 1) and it is being reviewed as part of the Armed Forces Pay Review Board (AFPRB) 2008 pay award.

Stripped of my identity: I HAVE served on and off in the Army and Royal Air Force for more than 21 years but when I returned last year to the Territorial Army I could not have my old Army number due to the introduction of JPA. – Dvr T Steventon RLC (V).

Col Jeremy Taylor, SPVA Assist Dir Mil Svcs, responds: As part of the integration of the three Services into one system of administration it was decided that new enlistments would be issued with a number generated by the JPA system. His gap in service meant that at the time of the Army JPA roll-out Dvr Steventon did not have an active Army/RN/RAF record. Under JPA, a number stays with the individual, regardless of whether or not they transfer to one of the other Services. Consequently, the JPA number issued to him cannot be changed to reflect his old number.

Not much public support about when I needed it

I WAS serving in Iraq with The Royal Dragoon Guards and was lucky to be selected for the new JNCOs' command course back home.

But things started to go wrong when the flight out of Qatar was delayed by two hours.

I arrived at RAF Brize Norton to find that my hire car had been cancelled because my flight was late. The coaches to the railway station weren't running so I missed my connecting flight to Germany from Stansted.

My wife re-booked my flight and paid

for the excess baggage to get me back to Germany to collect my green kit, followed by a hasty return to the UK for my course.

Delays and cancellations on planes and trains caused stress when I was on a tight schedule but no one helped.

What the Prime Minister said about the British public being grateful for what we are doing in Iraq and Afghanistan is rubbish. If my treatment was typical no one cares what we are doing there. – **Unhappy soldier, name and address supplied.**

Five pages of your letters and emails on issues of the day

Brief is best

YOUR letters provide a real insight into the issues at the top of soldiers' agendas . . . but please keep them brief. Emails (mail@soldiermagazine.co.uk) MUST include your name and location (although we won't publish them if you ask us not to). Anonymous letters go in the bin. The Editor reserves 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. Our postal address is on Page 5.

Chefs . . . or skivvies?

IN RECENT months there have been several letters about Pay As You Dine. In every case, in particular in the November issue, the replies have sidestepped the questions or given a textbook answer with no relevance to real-time activities.

The questions are answered by senior officers or contract managers with no real grip on what's happening on the ground in units.

Here's my story. I am a lance corporal chef serving with a unit in Catterick Garrison. Since PAYD has been with us quality of life for JNCOs and privates has gone downhill rapidly.

There has been constant cost-cutting by the contractor and ignorance and a lack of manners shown by contract managers to junior chefs.

The portion size of most dishes is 200g – tiny – although we get unlimited

potatoes and vegetables. We are not an army of vegetarians. There are threats of action if anyone dares to cook outside the budget guidelines and poor-quality ingredients. We think the food often resembles school dinners.

We have to serve soldiers face-to-face and take abuse every day while the contract manager hides behind the computer screen in his office. Duty NCOs don't intervene as they side with the soldiers.

Morale is at its lowest. Most staff talk of signing off as they feel they are just skivvies and not RLC chefs. – **Unhappy chef, details supplied.**

Brig Jamie Gordon, DPS(A), replies: You highlight some worrying concerns, which are at odds with what I am hearing. The majority of soldiers welcome the introduction of PAYD and it has not gone

downhill rapidly as stated. Chefs now have more opportunities to train (PAYD as well as customer relations training), attend courses and participate in adventure training activities.

RLC MCM Div has confirmed that over the past 12 months out of 110 lance corporals and privates, only four chefs have signed off from Catterick units, which would indicate a different state of morale to the one you highlight. If soldiers are giving verbal abuse to the chefs, then the JNCOs as NCOs should grip it.

Finally, one of your duties is to provide quality assurance to the chain of command. If you suspect cost-cutting and poor quality ingredients, take it to your master chef so he can advise the QM.

If you think I have got it wrong, highlight your concerns through your chain of command to the Garrison Catering Warrant Officer so they can put it right.

Give this man a medal

I WOULD like to offer support to the National Service Veterans' Association for the striking of a UK Defence Medal.

My support was sparked after attending the Remembrance Service in Westminster Abbey in November when a few veteran friends and I settled down for a couple of drinks.

We'd each picked up a medal for an operational tour during our service but during the afternoon a chap approached us and bought us all a drink. He said: "You lads have all got a gong so you deserve it". It turned out he'd served five years during the 1980s as a tankie

but didn't attend remembrance events because he said he felt a fraud.

He explained that without a clear symbol of service (not a sad veterans' badge, which he didn't qualify for in any case) he felt he didn't fit in and that the assumption would be made that he had contributed less than others.

This is wrong. How can this veteran feel so excluded? Quite simply because there is no service medal to mark his contribution.

Without the Cold War generations attending remembrance and similar events we are in danger of letting valuable traditions become less conspicuous in the future.

We need to make such a medal inclusive of all ex-Service personnel. At a time when respect for our nation is diminishing those who have taken pride in serving it should be given the opportunity to display that commitment. Please write to Derek



"I got it on Amazon."

Twigg, the Veterans' Minister, at the House of Commons if you support this idea. – **Tony Morland, Salisbury.**

Raw deal over Christmas leave

I WAS disgusted to hear from my son that his unit had called him at 1700 (on December 21) to tell him he was on guard duty on December 25, 27 and 29, despite having been fell-out at 1200 on that day to go on leave. In fact, he had just arrived at his leave location after a four-hour drive when he got the call.

As a former WO2 I am amazed at the ineptness of his unit, which also expected him to pay for his return trip to camp as he doesn't have business insurance, having just finished his training.

I'm not surprised young soldiers go AWOL if this is the shabby treatment they get. – **Name, address supplied.**

PS...

AFTER spending many years of my life away from home, I found myself at the Forward Operating Base (FOB) on Herrick 7 attached to the 2 Yorks battle-group over Remembrance Sunday.

I was concerned that we saw no Poppy Appeal collection boxes during that period so were unable to pay our respects or contribute to the annual appeal.

I realise operational needs come first, but would one or two Poppy Appeal boxes have weighed down a helicopter? – Concerned WO (name and address supplied).

Not fair to blame TA staff for JPA issues

In response to complaints voiced in the November issue, Cmdr Ross [Military Director, Service Personnel and Veterans Agency (SPVA)] referred to "teething problems" with Territorial Army pay and bounties and suggested that TA unit admin staff should shoulder much of the blame.

Just weeks before JPA went live it appeared to come as a complete surprise to the SPVA that TA personnel receive attendance-based pay and an annual bounty. This resulted in staff being unable to pay personnel via JPA for several months and bounties eventually being paid via a spreadsheet forwarded to JPA staff for input action.

TA admin staff have indeed struggled to come to grips with a hastily introduced, time-consuming and cumbersome pay system while continuing to duplicate pay and training data on legacy systems to ensure we could produce accurate statistics to the chain of command and, more importantly, keep track of individual's bounty status.

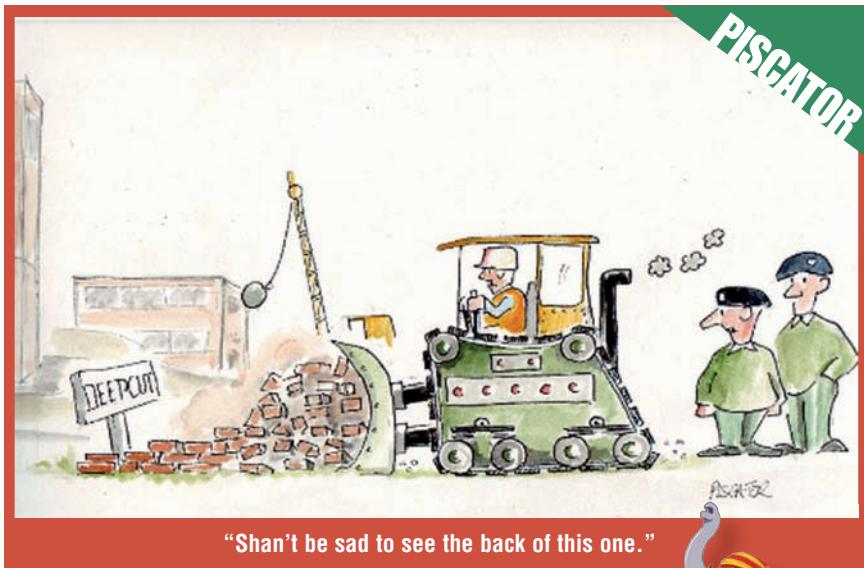
A "one-size-fits-all" system has failed to acknowledge the differing requirements of Reserve and Regular personnel administration and, while I have no doubt that JPA will eventually prove itself to be an invaluable and versatile asset, SPVA time would be better spent addressing current problems, including inadequate and incomprehensible training, rather than undermining the trust and credibility of dedicated admin staff.

A few days' fact-finding in a busy TA admin office would be time well spent.
– Name and address supplied.

More letters at **TALKBACK** online →

www.soldiermagazine.co.uk

- My very long wait for a golden hello.
- JPA held up my terminal grant.
- This is a real question from those of us on the Longer Service List.
- As far as JPA was concerned I didn't seem to exist.
- Why can't I use Education Learning Credits to suit my circumstances?
- What's the point of the HRMS system to the military?



"Shan't be sad to see the back of this one."



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I've been ripped off over cost of journey

I RECENTLY completed a course and returned to my home unit on a Friday to be told I had to report on the Sunday for a basic parachute course.

I went straight to my Regimental Military Transport Warrant Officer for a hire car, but no one was around to get me one at such short notice so I decided to take my own vehicle and to make a claim later.

Public transport on a Sunday is rather difficult and could not guarantee getting me to the course on time.

As it happened, I was not one of the lucky few to be selected for training and had to turn around and drive all the way back to my unit at my own expense late on a Sunday night.

In all I drove in excess of 500 miles in one day and thought it would be acceptable to claim back Motor Mileage Allowance (MMA).

Now I have been told that I should have had business insurance, which is a problem for me as my insurance company will not accept me for the

business rate as I am not yet 25. I feel let down and ripped off.

My admin cell and pay office have told me there is nothing they can do. Can an exception be made in my case? – LCpl Turrell, 39 Engineer Regiment.

Brig Jamie Gordon, DPS(A), replies: I am afraid your RAO staff is correct in what they say. I have answered several Soldier letters on this subject and I know why you think the policy is wrong, particularly given your circumstances.

But as you were travelling on duty, had you crashed, your employer (the MoD) would have been liable because it required you to undertake the journey as part of your work. This is why the MoD insists that soldiers who use their vehicles for any duty journey must have their own business use insurance.

That said, my staff are attempting to make some headway in changing this ruling for postings and long courses. I am rather more encouraged than I was before.

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Bounty is 'invite to sign off'

I RECEIVED an email a few days ago about a £6,000 rejoining bounty.

Why can't personnel in the Adjutant General's Corps have a retention bounty like the Infantry?

It was introduced because we are undermanned but it only makes the matter worse because it encourages people to sign off and sign back on after six months. – **Name and address supplied.**

DMA replies: The Rejoining Bounty (RJB) was introduced in November 2002 to offer a partial solution to critical manning shortfalls in certain Career Employment

Groups (CEGs). The scheme was expanded a year later as part of the wider Operational Pinch Point (OPP) Financial Incentive (FIs) Scheme. AGC(SPS) Military Administrators were added to the pinch point register on September 20 last year due to the extent of undermanning in certain ranks. This was easy to prove and quick to implement.

Financial Retention Incentives (FRIs), such as the £4,500 payment for infantry personnel, are determined by the current manning priorities and targeted to the area of greatest need. The decision to award an FRI is a much more complicated process and has to be backed by a more thorough justification

than that required to award PP status.

Staff at DPS(A) are currently looking at putting that work together to see if an FRI can be justified. Sadly, resource constraints restrict the number of soldiers who can receive payments within any financial year. Manning the Infantry to support current operations remains the Army's top priority, with the (AGC) SPS second.

We have no evidence that soldiers are actually signing off just to get the RJB. Any such plan could, of course, backfire since there is no automatic right to rejoin. You would also have to be earning enough to support your family in the meantime – is it really worth it?

Humble start

I READ with interest about the remotely-controlled vehicles now used for ordnance disposal ("Robot wars", Dec.).

It may not be generally known that Britain led in this field mainly due to the Northern Ireland situation in the early 1970s. The requirement was first met by Lt Col Peter Miller at Chobham/Chertsey who purchased a garden wheelbarrow from the garden centre at Sunningdale and modified it in the MVEE (RARDE) workshops to use to disrupt terrorist devices.

When it was realised that this was the way forward, especially to prevent manual approaches to a suspect device, a small team was formed to design more sophisticated vehicles. It consisted of Lofty Pattinson, Rod Crane and me. My part was to design the electronic control and various interfaces.

We hosted many visits from foreign countries as they experienced the same problem. Unfortunately, at times we



were denied funds, so many of the improvements we made came out of the scrap bin. – **C Luger (former WO1 (ASM) REME, Wokingham, Berks.**

Less pay in TA than Regulars

I SPENT three and half years in the Scots Guards before joining the Territorial Army in 2004 and deploying on Op Telic 6.

While being mobilised at Chilwell we had to sort out our pay. As a band 1, class 1 private I had previously been earning about £44 a day.

But the pay clerk told me that because I was in the TA my daily rate of pay would be £38. I was surprised but thought rules were rules.

When I was in the Regulars during Telic 2, two soldiers in my company

who had been called up told me they were getting the same as they had been before leaving the Army. Have I been penalised financially for joining the Territorial Army? – **Name and address supplied.**

Brig Jamie Gordon, DPS(A), replies: It has taken some time to reply because it was a complicated issue. Anyway, you were right – there was a muddle with your pay. Readers, and you, will be pleased to hear that this has been corrected and that you received your back pay before Christmas.

Confused by travel rules interpretation

PLEASE clarify the issue of Get You Home (Travel) (GYH(T)). I am married and live in a quarter but keep my own home elsewhere for which I am the sole council taxpayer. The house remains empty for the use of my family.

I have been told I am not eligible for GYH(T) because I took disturbance allowance (DA), which I understood to cover the cost of new school uniforms, curtains and so on, and not related to service mobility and the inability to live in one's own home.

Colleagues in the same position as me are being paid this allowance but through a different admin office. A new member of staff posted to my department submitted her form for change of mileage for GYH(T) and was told that despite receiving it for the past four years she was now not eligible.

If this is an issue of ineligibility because I received DA, could I under JPA repay the £1,100 or so I received, which would be recouped within a matter of months under GYH(T).

Are the rules being interpreted differently depending on which unit you are serving in? – **Lt Col P McAllister, DCMH Tidworth.**

Brig Jamie Gordon, DPS(A), replies: What you refer to is Get You Home (Stability Assistance), which you were entitled to prior to the introduction of JPA. For some reason it was not continued on the changeover. This has now been rectified and if you maintain an empty house for your own use you will be entitled to Get You Home (Stability Assistance).

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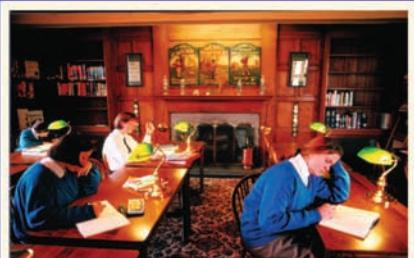
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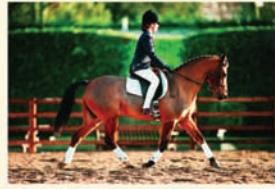
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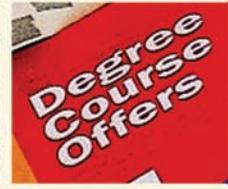


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Rocketing cost of cover

AM trying to obtain life and critical illness insurance cover. I already have PAX and have looked into life assurance schemes recently advertised in Defence Information Notes.

I need to cover my mortgage and ensure my family are looked after should the worst happen, but the cost of doing so has risen considerably because most companies are placing enhanced premiums on all members of the Armed Forces, regardless of role (desk job or front line).

The cost of this equates to £3 per £1,000 insured, which for a £120,000 policy nearly doubles the premium. In addition, you are not guaranteed a payout if killed or wounded in large-scale combat unless the MoD underwrites the risk. It appears the soldier is going to lose out again.

When is the MoD going to give financial help to assist us obtain this sort of cover?

The questionnaires you get from insurance companies should be viewed as a security risk as they ask about when you are deploying, units served in and so on. – **Name and address supplied.**



"No more volunteering for the 'Forlorn Hope', Frederick . . . my insurers won't have made it an exclusion."

Brig Jamie Gordon, DPS(A), replies: On this important issue, you are right to search out the best available insurance cover to meet the needs of you and your family.

In addition to general advice available on most high streets, the Services Insurance and Investment Advisory Panel (SILAP)

provide bespoke advice to the military and I would recommend you contact them. Visit www.siiap.org/index.jsp

In more detail, the MoD provides compensation for death and injury under the Armed Forces pension and compensation schemes. You should factor the amounts available under these schemes into any consideration of your own needs.

PAX also has an optional life insurance extension with critical illness cover. Service Life Insurance (SLI), which was launched on May 8 last year, provides cover for life and terminal (although not critical) illness. There is no war, terrorism, chemical, biological or radiological exclusion and all military trades are included.

SLI has been developed between the MoD and industry to meet the needs of Service personnel and, though not endorsed by the MoD mindful of its commercial status, is believed to be appropriately structured and competitively priced. The maximum cover available is £200,000. Visit www.servicelifeinsurance.co.uk for a quote.

On your last point, if you are concerned about security issues, talk to your unit security officer or regimental admin office.

Help us afford that last move

THERE is a widely held belief that a Service person's first and last move (start and end of service) will not be covered at military expense.

Clarity would be useful when you consider that the Army does pay for recruits to make their way to a training depot at the start of a career. Yet those serving overseas may need help at the end of service to return to the UK. We should question MoD policy if it means they face financial inconvenience. – **Name and address supplied.**

Brig Jamie Gordon, DPS(A), responds: You have muddled travel costs for enlistment and discharge with relocation costs, but you highlight an issue that irritates many soldiers. To be clear, it has always been the case that there is no provision for removals at public expense for those on first setting up home, or at the end of service in the UK. There is provision for the family returning from overseas on termination of service to a selected place of residence (SPR) in the UK. The latter is granted on the basis that as the Service posted the individual and

his family overseas, it has a responsibility to return them to UK.

Nevertheless, although less than ideal, there is Final Tour of Duty Provision and the Over 37 Provision, both of which provide removals at public expense to an SPR and allow soldiers approaching the end of their service to settle their families in an area of their choice at public expense.

We are working on options to extend these entitlements to cover final move costs more fully. In the meantime, we will continue to be irritated.

My £500 separation pay went AWOL

REGARDING Longer Service Separation Allowance (LSSA), I went skiing for my regiment in February a year ago, followed by a further six weeks teaching in Bavaria before returning to my regiment on April 15.

I know that LSSA has been replaced by Longer Separation Allowance (LSA) following the introduction of JPA, but that doesn't explain why I still haven't received my LSSA of more than £500.

I completed another course in mid-year but a month later still hadn't

been paid my LSA, even though I accumulated expenses on my course which took me into debt. – **Cpl McMahon, 2 LSR.**

Col Danny McCulloch, Col Current Ops, DPS(A), replies: Cpl McMahon was informed that the period initially spent skiing was classed as sport/adventure training, which did not attract Longer Separation Allowance.

LSA for the time spent in Bavaria as an instructor was unfortunately not actioned at the time but was rectified by publishing

his separation last July, with payment following in October.

The later course was carried out in Sennelager, 35 minutes from his permanent duty station and so attracted the Get You Home (Duty) allowance rather than LSA. However, this again was not published in a timely manner and Cpl McMahon will receive the allowance shortly.

It is clear that there have been some avoidable delays in dealing with Cpl McMahon's administration and for that I apologise.

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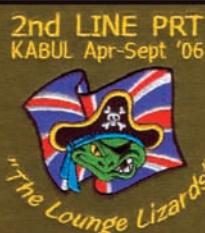
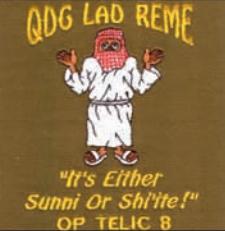
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Hearts and homes

Introducing our new columnist with an Army Families Federation viewpoint

WILL the Government listen only to civil servants and consultants? In December 2007 the Defence Secretary announced an independent study into how the British public could better express its support and gratitude for their Armed Forces.

The message has surely already been deafening from retired (and serving) generals, medical and social agencies as well as the Army Families Federation and other Service charities.

The welfare of Service personnel and their families is core to MoD business and, rightly so, a high priority is given to supporting the families of those who have given their lives or been injured during operations.

So it was disappointing to hear that the maximum payout from the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme (AFCS) was not increased from £285,000 for the most severely injured personnel.

That is far less than compensation figures awarded by civil courts and reported in the media.

Despite the advice of the Commons Defence Committee in 2003, the AFCS replaced the War Pensions Scheme. It has provision for Guaranteed Income Payments which are necessary to ensure that the injured soldier can continue to support their family.

If the sole bread-winner is rendered unemployable then the £285,000 cap for life-changing set-up costs is derisory.



A personal view from Jenny Fryatt, Editor of the AFF Families Journal

The news comes as a major disappointment for Armed Forces personnel and their families affected by injuries and the lack of any significant changes are seen by many as being for cost-saving purposes.

Before Christmas, and again in January, calls for the Government to honour the Military Covenant were loud and clear. "We are trying," says Armed Forces Minister Bob Ainsworth, "but it's hard and it's not our only responsibility."

ALTHOUGH not strictly within the Covenant, the welfare and accommodation of Service families is central to the retention of married soldiers. Most complaints to AFF and other agencies relate to Service housing, for which we are told there is no quick fix.

Years of under-funding and the sheer size of the Defence Estate mean that tackling the shortcomings will take time – and everyone acknowledges that.

The Government says it plans to spend more than £4.5 billion on Service accommodation during the next ten years, although this is not money solely for Service Families Accommodation (SFA) and Single Living Accommodation (SLA) as it also includes barracks and office accommodation.

Where does that leave families who

have to put up with the appalling state of some current SFA?

IN January, MODern Housing Services (MHS), the agency responsible for keeping our housing in a liveable condition, said complaints had dropped. This didn't ring true. On investigation it appears that many families are suffering from "complaint fatigue". It is only by reporting the good and bad that we'll get the service we deserve.

GOOD news was the launch of the Armed Forces Childcare Voucher scheme, which offers a tax-break to personnel who elect to take childcare vouchers from their gross (pre-tax) salary.

You will only pay tax and National Insurance contributions on the remaining salary and so can make savings of up to around £1,200 a year.

These vouchers can be used for breakfast and after-school clubs, childminders, or registered holiday clubs. The vouchers are valid until September 1 following your child's 15th birthday.

To apply you should go to the Sodexho Pass Armed Forces Voucher Scheme website www.sodexho.co.uk and request an application pack.

WILL the Government remember us this Valentine's Day and Mother's Day? I had thought of asking for a bunch of flowers, but a decent quarter would be much preferred. ■

Want to know more about the Army Families Federation? Log on to www.aff.org.uk

The column that offers you a confidential way to tackle debt – and it won't cost you a penny

MANAGE YOUR MONEY

Credit Action Director Chris Tapp will be pleased to answer, in confidence, specific questions addressed to the Editor.



Thrifty New Year

WHAT a difference a year makes. The first months of 2007 were buoyant – strong markets, record city bonuses, flourishing housing market, runaway borrowing. As I

wrote this markets are plummeting, banks are losing billions and there is gloom on falling house prices and soaring household bills.

Although the robust UK job market gives reason to believe that a full-blown recession is against the odds, we'll all feel the tremors in our pockets as the economy shudders.

At Credit Action we see three big issues coming up. Here's how to beat the crunch:

Costly mortgages: People coming off fixed-rate mortgages will find their monthly payments rising considerably. Even though rates are now moving downwards after hitting a peak in August, mortgages will still be a big issue so budget for them. They are a priority debt so take care of them each month before credit cards, loans, or other unsecured credit.

Rising utility bills: We'll all be paying more for petrol, gas and electricity so factor this in to avoid a nasty shock later. A few degrees less on your thermostat will save you cash, as would using the car less.

Tougher credit: Credit will be harder to come by and more expensive as lenders grow more cautious. Think carefully before borrowing at higher rates as this can be expensive in the long run. Try to plan your budget for the year on a "no credit" basis.

And visit www.creditaction.org.uk for more advice, resources, tools, and stats. ■

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HOW OBSERVANT ARE YOU?



TEN details have been changed in the latest in the series of drawings by our cartoonist, Chip. Circle the differences in the left-hand image and send the whole panel to **HOAY 795, Soldier, Ordnance Road, Aldershot, Hampshire GU11 2DU** by February 29.

A photocopy is acceptable, but only one entry per person may be submitted. First correct entry drawn after the closing date will win £100; the second and third will receive £25 gift vouchers. The results will be announced in the April issue.

Name: (Give initials and rank or title)

Address:

December competition (No 793): First correct entry drawn at random and winner of the £100 prize was **Sgt W G Baker, 3 Log Bn, 3 Wksp Coy, Burnham Camp, Christchurch, New Zealand.** Runners-up **Ms S J Shephard, Facilities Management Office, BFPO 40** and **Pte M Gale, MPGS, RAF Scampton, Lincoln,** each win a £25 gift voucher.

The ten differences were: (clockwise from far left) braces; pulley; lance corporal's stripe; lance corporal's cap; diver's helmet rivet; buttons on soldier's tunic; gauge on air machine; window in building; soldier's cap; diver's shoe buckle.

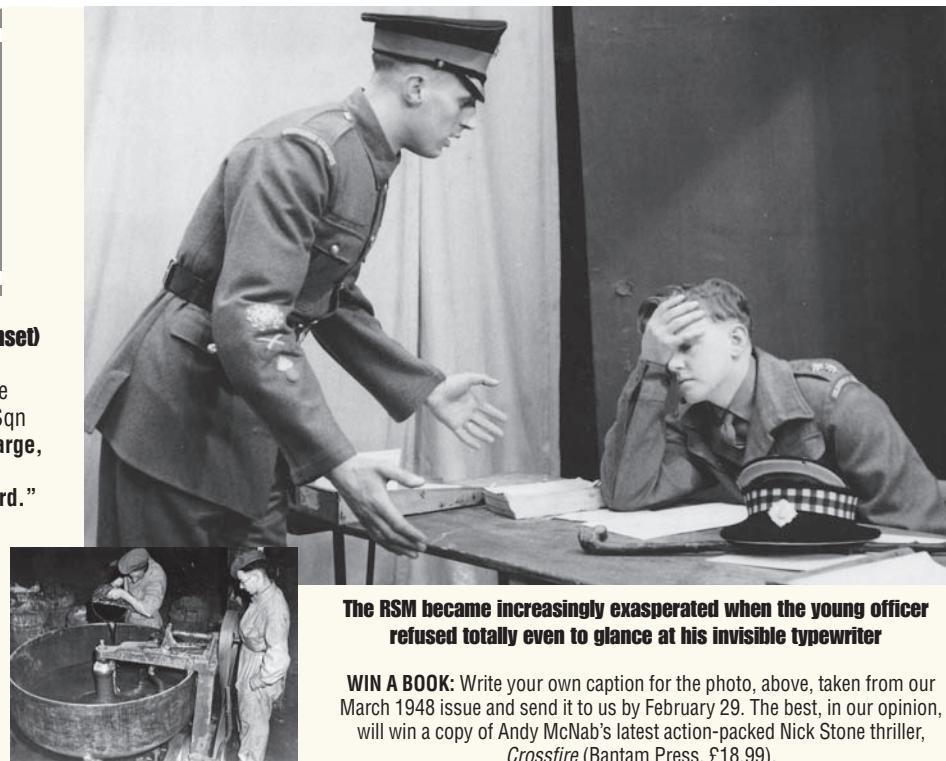


Winner of our December competition (inset)

FOOD processing jokes dominated the December captions, so we are sending the prize to Vince Scott, SAO 299 Para Engr Sqn RE (V), Wakefield, for his suggestion: "Sarge, there is no way the boys are going to be fooled. It does not even smell like custard."

We also liked "Sadly, when cooking at home, the Master Chef could only work in battalion-sized quantities" sent in by Ken Grant of Wheatley, Oxford; and "The Catering Corps' prototype chocolate fountain just didn't look quite right" from John Mill of Dundee.

Graham Drew of the Army School of Ammunition at Southam, Warks, suggested "The troops couldn't wait for Gordon Ramsay to get their letter about the cookhouse gravy" while the equally unfair "The hygiene inspector didn't know where to start when he saw the latest cookhouse



The RSM became increasingly exasperated when the young officer refused totally even to glance at his invisible typewriter

WIN A BOOK: Write your own caption for the photo, above, taken from our March 1948 issue and send it to us by February 29. The best, in our opinion, will win a copy of Andy McNab's latest action-packed Nick Stone thriller, *Crossfire* (Bantam Press, £18.99).

facilities at Catterick" was how Cpl Rawlings, HQ Coy, 1 RRF in Fallingbostel saw it.

Jordan Dickinson, Bn HQ, 4 Yorks, came up with a seasonal flavour, "The Christmas pudding mix needed just a little more

brandy to satisfy the mess" while Pte A M Jones, MPGS, RAF Church Fenton, North Yorkshire, saw it as "Jenkins had to dig deep for the sixpences to put in the Other Ranks' Christmas pud mixture".

Web watch

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www.batls.com

Battlefield Advanced Trauma Life Support – providing training in the management of trauma casualties under battlefield conditions.

www.nivets.org.uk

The Northern Ireland Veterans' Association, providing advice, support and assistance to veterans and families of those affected by the Troubles.

www.blesma.org

National charity for limbless ex-Servicemen and women, their dependants and widows.

www.ngvfa.com

The National Gulf Veterans and Families Association website.

SERVICES

www.stft.mod.uk

The Service Families Task Force website contains useful tri-Service information.

www.remerus.co.uk

REME R US – Unite REME wherever you are. REME R US members include serving, ex and future members of the REME, their families and friends, who want to have an exclusive online community website.

www.recoverypnp.niceboard.com

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www.baff.org.uk

British Armed Forces Federation, an association aimed at representing staff in the three Services.

www.YellowRibbon.org.uk

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www.ukforcegirls.co.uk

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www.armywivesunited.co.uk

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www.baor-locations.com

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www.armyaviation.co.uk

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Army Families Federation: 01980 615525
British Limbless Ex-Service Men's Association: 020 8590 1124. www.blesma.org
Career Transition Partnership: 0207 766 8020
Children's Education Advisory Service: 01980 618244; enquiries.ceas@gtinet.gov.uk
Confidential support lines: UK 0800 731 4880; Germany 0800 1827 395; Cyprus 080 91065; Falklands #6111; from operational theatres Paradigm Services *201; from anywhere in the world (CSL operator will call back) +44 1980 630854. Lines open 1030-2230 (UK) every day.
Ex-Services Mental Welfare Society: 01372 841600; www.combatstress.com
Family Escort Service: 020 74639249
Forces Pension Society: 020 78209988
Gulf Veterans Association: 0191 2301065
Joint Service Housing Advice Office: 01722 436575
MoD Medal Office: Medal queries to JPAC Enquiry Centre on 94560 3600 or 0141 224 3600
Mutual Support (Forces Multiple Sclerosis support group): 07962 023654, www.mutualsupport.org.uk email welfaresupport@mutualsupport.org.uk
National Gulf Veterans' and Families' Association Office: (0900-1700); 24-hour helpline 0845 257 4853; www.ngvfa.org.uk; fax 01482 808731
Regular Forces' Employment Association: 0207 321 2011; www.rfea.org.uk
Royal British Legion: 0845 7725 725
RBL Industries Vocational Assessment Centre: 01622 717202/718484; www.rbl.co.uk
Ex-Service Homes Referral Agency (ESHRA): 0207 8394466; www.eshra.com
St Dunstan's charity for blind ex-Servicemen and women: 0207 7235021; www.st-dunstans.org.uk
SAMA 82 (South Atlantic Medal Association) Falklands conflict veterans: 01495 227577
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Service Personnel and Veterans Agency (SPVA): 0800 169 2277 (from UK); 0044 1253 866043 (from overseas) Medical Assessment Programme: 0800 169 5401
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Reunions

Coldstream Guards: Liverpool Branch of the Coldstream Guards Association will hold its annual dinner at Litherland Masonic Hall on March 29. All guardsmen welcome. Contact WO1 A C Dunn on 01772 260261 or send an email to opswo.nw@recruitinggroup.mod.uk

Glosters: WOs and Sgts reunion, TA Centre, Eastern Avenue, Gloucester on April 5. For further details contact Tim Godden on 01453 835019 or email timmy.godden@virgin.net

74th Artillery Clerks: AGM, reunion and association dinner, April 18-20 at the Royal School of Artillery, Larkhill, Wilts. Details from Capt Ian Constantine, 19 Regt RA, Horne Bks, Larkhill, Wilts SP4 8RD on 01890 634215 or email ian.constantine758@mod.uk

10th Royal Hussars (PWO): Reunions at the Crown Inn, Swindon on May 18 (phone Liz Bentley on 01793 336136) and the Acton Court Hotel, Stockport on October 18 (phone Ron Fletcher on 01405 763235 or email ronxrh3873@aol.com).

The King's School Combined Cadet Force: Past and present dinner will be held at the school on Sept 6. Email Capt Alan Joseph at aj@kingschester.co.uk

Army Apprentice College: Group 48B, 60th anniversary reunion to be held at Chepstow September 19-21 in conjunction with BOBA reunion. Ring Jim Cahill on 02392 732903 or email him at jjcahill@ntlworld.com or call John Blount on 01903 721810.

Searchline

Gaby Staffhorst is trying to contact **Dean Christian Taylor**, a friend whom she last saw two years ago as he was passing through Hohne. In 1989/90 he was a private with **1 Armoured Field Ambulance** based at Hohne Camp. He came from Grantham, Lincs. Contact Gail Ramsay at Celle HIVE, Community Centre, Trenchard Barracks, BFPO 30 or email celle@hive.bfg.co.uk

National Serviceman 1953 wishes to locate **Eric Noble** and **Rob Roberts**, both RASC drivers who were stationed at Berlin Olympic Stadium. Also three officers, **Maj Reynolds**, **Maj Hallet** and **Lt C Brown**. Write to Daniel Williamson, Shortlands, Chandlers Lane, Alccannings, nr Devizes, Wilts SN10 3PG.

Does anyone have any information of or know the whereabouts of **Sgt T (Edward) Lancaster**, **PTI**, who served with The Sherwood Foresters around 1939? A Lt Collins wrote a book about him which was serialised in a newspaper. Sgt Lancaster was related to the Hollywood film star Burt Lancaster. Contact Roy Hale, 2 Kings Lane, Newton Regis, Tamworth, Staffs B79 0NN.

News sought of **Ian and Carla Muggleton** and son **Jack**. Ian was a corporal PTI at Arborfield Garrison and good friends with another Arborfield PTI, **Cpl Richardson**. **Sarah Langley**, who met Carla while working at a telemarketing firm in Wokingham, lost touch and is trying to trace the couple. Email sarah.langley@zycko.com or call 07920 820 892.

Defence diary

February 1-until further notice: Helmand: The Soldiers' Story – A free exhibition built, written and contributed to by soldiers of 16 Air Assault Brigade to tell the story of their experiences fighting in Afghanistan. National Army Museum, London.

Feb 1-until March 30: Weapons of mass communications – Exhibition of war posters, Imperial War Museum London.

Feb 2, 3, 9 and 10: Battle bowlers, whiz bangs and lucky bleeders – Handle artefacts from the First World War. Imperial War Museum London.

Feb 9-15: Life in the trenches – Interactive drama and handling session looks at recruitment and training. Imperial War Museum London.

Feb 9-April 27: Contact, George Rodger's war photographs – Free exhibition celebrating the centenary of the birth of photojournalism pioneer Rodger, who documented the Second World War for an American audience. Imperial War Museum North, Trafford Park, Manchester.

Feb 17: Helping heroes and their families – SSAFA Families' Day, featuring 10km, 5km and 1km runs, Aldershot Stadium.

March 14-16: The Ordnance Survey Outdoors Show, Birmingham NEC Arena. For more information visit www.theoutdoorsshow.co.uk

March 27: A memorial made of Loch Fyne stone will be unveiled by the **Duke of Argyll** at the Argyll Caravan Park, Inveraray – the former site of **HMS Quebec**, where 250,000 Allied troops were trained in **amphibious warfare** during the Second World War. All welcome. Contact James Jepson on 01499 500218 for more information.

May 22: Commemorative service to honour the 55 personnel who lost their lives in **Bosnia**, those injured and the many thousands who served there throughout the 15-year deployment. National Memorial Arboretum, Staffordshire. The MoD will announce further details, including how to apply for tickets, in the coming months.

■ Got a date for the diary? Email details to diary@soldiermagazine.co.uk

Appointments

Maj Gen: A C P Kennett, late Para, to be Director General Training Support, in Feb; R L Barrons, late RE, to be Deputy Commanding General Multi-National Corps Iraq, in Jul; I C Dale, late REME, to be Director General Land Equipment, in Sept.

Fingertip history

DVD's just the thing for unit battlefield studies

Somme 1st July 1916: An Interactive Tour of the Northern Somme Battlefield
by Michael Stedman. Two-disc DVD, Pen & Sword, £19.99.

WE asked *Soldier* book reviewer **Maj Mike Peters AAC**, himself a military historian and battlefield guide, to tell us what he thought of a newly-released guide. He writes:

THERE are numerous DVDs looking at the Battle of the Somme and the disastrous events of July 1, 1916 in particular.

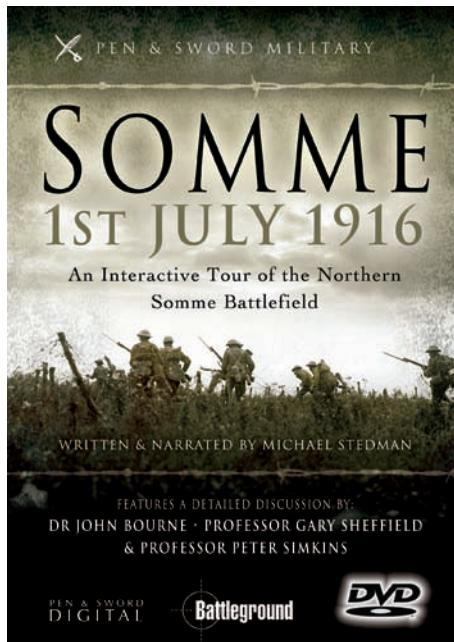
This one, however, is very different in both content and style to most of those on the market. For starters the format is based on that of a conventional printed guidebook and is pitched directly at the battlefield tourist or historian, which makes this an ideal tool for those lucky individuals "chosen" to organise a unit battlefield study period.

The two-disc set contains chapters on topography, orders of battle, monuments and Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemeteries.

The viewer can tour the northern sector of the battle area from flashpoint to flashpoint, accompanied by an informative commentary which ties together all the threads affecting the outcome of the action across the whole of the northern section.

Every attack is explained with archive and contemporary film overlaid by easy-to-follow graphics indicating troop dispositions, lines of advance and, in many cases, individual gun positions. The set also includes printable maps and photographs to further enhance your battlefield tour or pre-tour study day.

The academic discussion included on



the second disc is also excellent pre-tour research viewing.

If you are considering visiting the Somme and have no previous knowledge of the area this DVD would be a good starting point for your research – money well spent.

● WE'VE got five sets of the new Pen & Sword two-disc DVD interactive tour of the Somme battlefield to give away. To be in with a chance of winning one, worth nearly £20, just tell us in which country the great battle took place. Was it

a) Belgium b) Holland c) France?

Answers on a postcard or by email (comps@soldiermagazine.co.uk) to reach us by February 29. The first five correct entries drawn at random win the prizes. Usual rules apply.

Roadshows

THE Army Presentation Team wants to hear from members of the public who would like a personal invitation to attend its dynamic and hi-tech roadshow.

The event starts with a reception, is followed by a presentation and questions-and-answers session and culminates with a finger buffet. Military personnel will be on hand to answer all your questions about the British Army.

Call 01276 417000 or email your name and address to apt.mod@btinternet.com with the event you are interested in attending.

Feb: No presentations.

Mar: No presentations.

Apr: 8, Swindon; 9, Cheltenham; 10, Salisbury; 22 Dunfermline; 23, Aberdeen; 24, Hawick.

SOLDIER - Magazine of the British Army

British Army Badges

By Lt Col (Retd) Robin Hodges

Cap badge

THE Royal Army Medical Corps adopted the traditional medical symbol of a serpent climbing the rod of Aesculapius, the Greek God of medicine, as their badge when formed in 1898. The design was recently described to a group of recruits as "a snake climbing up a tree". The cap badge was authorised in 1902. The original scroll with the title was altered to the motto, which is commonly translated as "Steadfast in Adversity", in 1948.



Formation sign

JOINT Force Headquarters deploys from Permanent Joint Headquarters at Northwood and all ranks of the three Services wear the Combined Operations badge introduced in 1942 for all British, American and allied forces connected with combined operations. Personnel serving with 148 (Meiktila) Commando Forward Observation Battery wear a circular version of the badge as a TRF.



Specialist badge

THE Infantry Pioneers' crossed hatchets badge is one of the earliest official badges, being listed in a Horse Guards Circular dated 1868. The majority of pioneers are employed in Infantry Assault Pioneer platoons although some Royal Armoured Corps soldiers and Royal Logistic Corps pioneers are also qualified Infantry Pioneers and wear the badge.



Tactical recognition flash

WHEN on duty, the Royal Military Police, and more recently RN, RM and RAF police, are identified by an MP arm badge, which has also been adopted as the RMP TRF. Military Police are commanded by a Provost Marshal (PM) who wears the initials PM rather MP on their sleeve under certain circumstances.



THESE excerpts appear in **British Army Badges** by Lt Col (Retd) Robin Hodges, available from Court Hill Farm, Potterne, Devizes, SN10 5PN, tel 01380 723371. Email robinhodges@armymail.mod.uk



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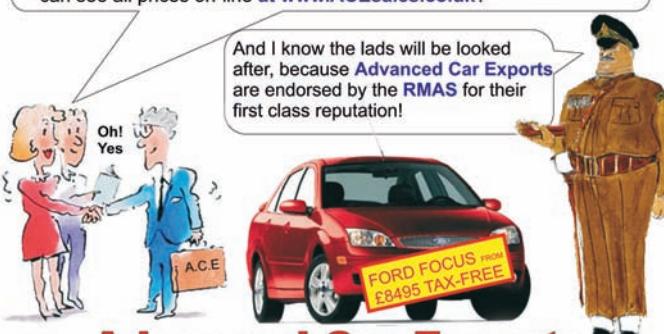
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Traci (45), 5'2", medium build, blue eyes and long dark hair. Divorced and enjoys driving fast cars, loud music, dogs, reading, people and dancing. Quite mad and enjoys life to the max, seeking pen pals, 35-50. P012

Wendy-Anne (35), 5'7", slim, blonde curly hair and blue eyes. Enjoys the cinema, pets, gardening, reading, the theatre and walking. Would like to correspond with single soldiers, 27-46. P013

Laura (26), 5'3", long dark hair, dark features and green eyes. Enjoys travelling, socialising, films, reading, music, the guitar, singing and sleeping. Seeking pen pals, 25-35. P014

Lady 40, enjoys outdoor activities, swimming, hill walking, the cinema, eating out, real ale, wine and nights in. Seeks male pen pals no ties, looks unimportant, any age group. P015

Patricia (32), tall blonde single professional. Mostly occupied as a versatile amateur actress and aspiring writer. Seeking like-minded male pen pals with a story to tell for honest correspondence, any age group. P016

Debbie (33), tall bubbly blonde. Enjoys spending time with her friends and romantic nights in or out. Looking for pen pals to have a lot of laughter with, brilliant sense of humour so what are you waiting for, go on write to her, 25-35. P017

Tina (42), 4'11", light brown hair and medium build. Enjoys shopping, writing and clubs. Genuine male pen pals only, 30-50. P018

Amanda (22), 5', slim, with brown hair and brown eyes. Enjoys going out, having a laugh and a joke with her mates. Seeking pen pals, any age group, no time wasters. P019

Janie, 5'4", 8.5 stone with long blonde hair. Enjoys yoga, swimming, travelling and motor sports. Outgoing, but a lady, seeking pen pals, 40+. P020

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Movies

FEBRUARY REVIEW



Cutting-edge cinema: Acclaimed director Tim Burton and Hollywood big-hitter Johnny Depp bring the *Sweeney Todd* legend to the big screen



Director's cut

Soldier's Cliff Caswell survives a close shave with *Sweeney Todd* cast

IT IS the stuff of criminal legend – a barber who sets himself up in a seedy backstreet shop, slits the throats of his victims and uses the bodies as pie fillings.

Sweeney Todd has been a feature of London myth for 150 years, working his way into books, plays and even Cockney rhyming slang. But his latest screen appearance, courtesy of director Tim Burton, leaves nothing to the imagination.

Don't be fooled by the fact that it is based on a Stephen Sondheim musical. *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* is 18-rated and the horrific throat-cutting scenes will have you choking on your popcorn. But despite the gore, this is terrific entertainment and fully deserved the Golden Globe it was awarded last month.

Johnny Depp is outstanding as the murderous lead and Helena Bonham-Carter excels as Nellie Lovett, whose pie-making business mysteriously takes off as the barber's killing spree begins.

Alan Rickman puts in a powerful performance as Todd's nemesis, Judge Turpin, with Timothy Spall equally convincing as Beadle, the lawman's unpleasant sidekick. Add to the mix the solid direction, with Burton's trademark darkness bringing a new slant to the much-performed musical, and the legend is complete.

"A movie like this is a strange gamble because it's an 18-rated musical – people who go to Broadway shows don't usually go to see slasher films and people who see slasher films don't usually go to Broadway shows," said Burton. "In directing the film, however, I was with one of the best casts I have ever worked with."

Burton cooperated closely with Sondheim in making the film and, despite some cutting and adaptation to bring the musical to the cinema, the director was determined to see the gruesome plot of the original production played out in full.

The story revolves around barber Benjamin Barker, who is shipped to Australia's penal colony by Judge Turpin for a crime he did not commit.

It becomes apparent that Turpin was motivated out of infatuation for Barker's wife, who killed herself when the lawman attempted to win her affections.

After escaping back to London 15 years later, Barker hooks up with old friend and pie shop owner Lovett and learns that his daughter is now a ward of the judge. With revenge in mind, he sets up a new business under the name Sweeney Todd and sets his sights on dispatching his enemies.

For Depp, playing his first musical role was a novel experience. While admitting that he had injected some of his own character into the deadly barber, he said: "I can confirm that I have shaved a grown man before, and he is still walking around today.

"Sweeney's obviously a dark figure, but quite sensitive and he has



experienced something dark and traumatic in his life. Anyone who is victimised to that degree and then turns around and becomes a murderer can't be all there.

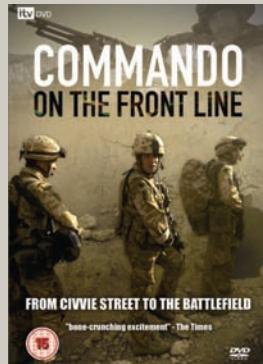
"The rug was pulled out from under his perfect life, he spent 15 years in a hell hole and the only reason he came back was to eliminate the people who had done him wrong."

Wielding his razors in acts of vengeance, however, was less intimidating for the *Pirates of the Caribbean* star than having to sing in a full musical. "Tim Burton is the only person brave enough to let me sing. I have never even sung in the shower before," Depp said with a smile. "But I started to enjoy it because Sondheim's melody and lyrics are a pleasure to work with."

The actor was also flattered to have his on-screen vocal performance compared to rock legend David Bowie. "If there is a similarity it was not intentional but Bowie is a big hero of mine so it is a nice compliment to have."

Certainly Depp, along with the rest of the cast, is in fine voice, and the combination of strong acting, vocal talent and sound direction make *Sweeney Todd* a definite winner. ■

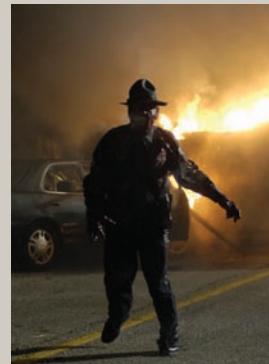
Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street is in cinemas now.



Commando: On the front line, DVD

THEY may be bootnecks and yomp instead of tab, but this no-holds barred journey of the Royal Marine Commando from civvie street to the front line in Helmand province should resonate with all those wearing a British military uniform. Created by award-winning documentary maker **Chris Terrill** (*HMS Brilliant, Shipmates*), who lived and trained with the rookie marines of 924 Troop, *Commando* – originally screened as an eight-part series on ITV 1 – provides an exclusive and unprecedented insight into training and life on the battlefield. The close quarter footage of contacts with the Taliban on the killing fields of Afghanistan is captivating. Facing a determined, canny and tactically au fait enemy, Terrill joins the marines on ops in Kajaki and, with a hail of "lead wasps" whizzing overhead, captures the nerve, stamina and raw courage of Britain's fighting men. In addition to the series – which averaged audiences of 2.3 million viewers per show – this two-disc DVD also includes the bonus feature, *The 55 Year Old Commando*, which tracks Terrill's own transition from film maker to the world's oldest ever commando. Reality television at its very best.

WE have six copies of *Commando: On the front line* to give away. To have a chance of winning one of them, tell us which Rifles battalion will be attached to 3 Commando Brigade from April 1. Answers by postcard or email (comps@soldiermagazine.co.uk) to reach us by February 29. Winners will be drawn at random. Usual rules apply.



Diary of the Dead, in cinemas March 7

HORROR guru **George A Romero**'s latest offering follows the misfortunes of a group of film students who find themselves at the mercy of a plague of zombies. All the usual clichés are here, with the spoilt rich kid, the drunken English professor and the screaming girl. Disastrous as this may sound, *Diary of the Dead* doesn't take itself too seriously and achieves its goal of B-movie monster mayhem with some style. The acting is dubious in places, but the plot still makes for curiously compelling viewing.



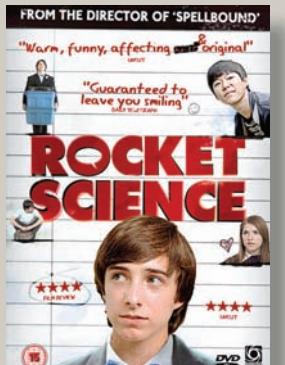
Eagle Vs Shark, DVD

OFFBEAT goes a long way to describing Taika Waititi's story of two lonely misfits who find love. **Lily (Loren Horsley)** is an awkward fast food waitress who proves there really is someone out there for everyone by falling for **Jarrod (Jemaine Clement)**, a video game champion pushing all the wrong buttons. While Jarrod's failings at social interaction are at times painfully funny (think Gareth Keenan in *The Office*) – "I was going to come as a shark but I realised an eagle was slightly better" – this rom-com, like its characters, is difficult to fall for.



America Unchained, premieres February 5

BAFTA award-winning *Googlewhacker Dave* **Gorman** sets off to discover the true independent spirit of America in this one-off feature-length documentary for Channel 4. Disillusioned by the USA's procession of indentikit hotels he plans to drive from coast-to-coast without giving any money to The Man [big, corporate brands]. Setting off in a Ford Torino, Gorman vows only to give money to Mom and Pop [family-run businesses]. Fans of the writer's previous madcap adventures will not be disappointed by his latest impulsive quest.



Rocket Science, DVD

DON'T fall into the same trap as this reviewer and dismiss prematurely this story of a high school geek with a stammer who joins the debating team to impress the girl of his dreams as just another run-of-the-mill, coming-of-age, feel-good movie. **Jeffrey Blitz's** (*Spellbound*) wry comedy of adolescent angst leaves behind the conventions and clichés of such tales. Refreshingly, a Gareth Gates-esque transformation from stammering songster to *Pop Idol* pin-up and chart-topper this is not. Will amuse all those who experienced the agonies and disappointments of a teenage crush.



Brothers in Arms: *Hell's Highway* gives players a commanding role in the disastrous airborne attack on Arnhem



The road to hell

Squad-based shooter series returns for first outing on latest consoles

Preview: Cliff Caswell

WITH the market for Second World War-themed games now completely saturated, it takes a brave software house to continue the conflict against Nazi Germany.

But in recent months there have been yet more additions to the 1940s line-up on the latest generation of consoles, with Midway's *Hour of Victory* and the more recent *Medal of Honour Airborne* from Electronic Arts to name just two.

Despite the growing battle fatigue with the genre among gamers, developers at Gearbox Interactive have re-grouped for a new outing in the *Brothers in Arms* series – this time focusing on the catastrophic Allied defeat at Arnhem.

In *Hell's Highway*, the latest instalment of the squad-based shooter due for release in the coming months, players assume the role of senior NCO Sgt Matt Baker, who is

charged with leading troops during the largest airborne attack in history.

As with other titles in the series, it is up to players to get to grips with tactics and take on the German forces in a series of increasingly intensive engagements during the Operation Market Garden action, which in reality proved a catastrophe for the Allies.

Despite venturing once again along the well-trodden Second World War path, the late-build demos of *Hell's Highway* on both Xbox 360 and PS3 are pleasing on two fronts.

Firstly the action is unfailingly slick, with excellent graphics and sound throughout. And, secondly, a team led by former US Army officer and historian Col John Antal have researched the events underpinning the game.

The developers paid a visit to Holland, mapping out the battlefields in meticulous detail, as well as interviewing veterans about their experiences in combat. They were even

given military training so they could appreciate procedures and tactics.

"The team had the opportunity to shoot some real Second World War weapons as well as taking part in paintball exercises," Col Antal told *Soldier* during an exclusive preview of the game. "And when I say paintball, I mean in a tactical environment."

"Eight of my own brothers in arms from the Army acted as squad leaders and gave everyone a vivid insight into what it means to be a soldier. The developers also saw real troops in action and witnessed the effects of different weapons."

Col Antal, who graduated from the West Point Military Academy in 1973 before serving 30 years in the US Armoured Corps, was adamant that a strong grasp of a soldier's way of life was vital to realism.

"The whole project has been very rewarding for us all," he added. "We interviewed a number of veterans, and I'm satisfied that the battle has been



very authentically recreated."

From the hands-on preview sampled by *Soldier*, the team's efforts have not been in vain. We played some of the early levels of *Hell's Highway*, and the developers have used the capabilities of the next generation of consoles to great effect.

Building on the success of the earlier titles in the series, *The Road to Hill 30* and *Earned in Blood*, the team have included a raft of enhancements in the new game.

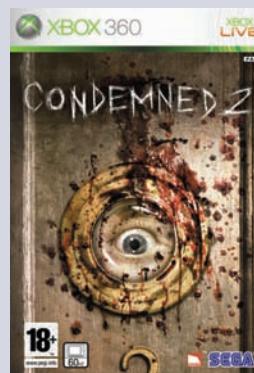
Landscapes can now be blown to pieces to deprive German troops of cover, while enemy artificial intelligence is ruthlessly effective in countering your moves.

A key addition to the gaming experience is the inclusion of heavy weapons squads. Players can issue orders to troops armed with machine guns and bazookas, giving them the opportunity to deal a hammer blow to the opposition.

The storyline underpinning the game also has great depth, providing an insight into the wider picture of the Market Garden action.

All in all, *Hell's Highway* is a welcome addition to the squad-based shooter scene.

Despite the well-worn Second World War theme, the battle, it seems, is not over yet. ■



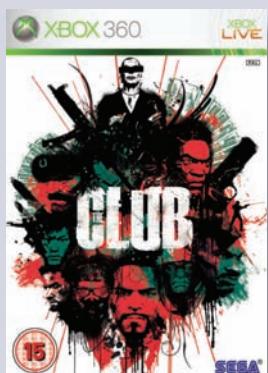
Condemned 2, Xbox 360 & PS3

THIS sequel to the gruesome X360 launch title puts players in the first-person perspective of an unfortunate detective on the trail of a ruthless serial killer. *Condemned 2*, however, is superior in every respect to its predecessor with more fluid action and a greater emphasis on crime scene investigation. The late-build demo *Soldier* sampled showed huge promise, with an atmospheric storyline and slick hand-to-hand combat sequences. Be warned, however, the game more than lives up to its 18 certificate with some violent scenes and strong language.



Unreal Tournament, PS3

ALREADY a legendary PC multiplayer title, *Unreal Tournament* is due to make its next generation console debut in the spring, initially as a PS3 exclusive. And it is without doubt the finest offering we have seen so far on Sony's highly capable but currently unproven machine, with slick action coupled with outstanding graphics and sound. Players must do battle, either individually or in teams, through a series of combat games in which the available weapons include tanks, aircraft and artillery. *Unreal Tournament* is one of those rare titles which looks as good as it plays, and is destined to become a classic.



The Club, Xbox 360 & PS3

LOOKING much like the classic first person shooters of the 1990s amusement arcades, *The Club* pits gamers against a legion of enemies in a frantic battle for survival. If you disregard the wafer-thin storyline involving a gang of wealthy men who bet on mercenaries putting their lives on the line in a deadly game show, you are essentially left with a bread-and-butter actioner, where players battle both enemy bullets and the clock. The demo version *Soldier* played proved to be a very simple, yet fun offering, with promising single and multiplayer options.



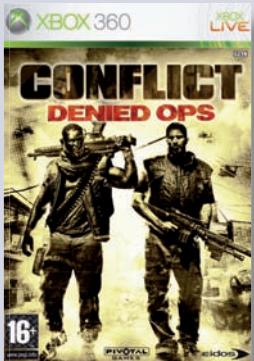
Beowulf, Xbox 360

A TIE-in based on last year's movie of the same name, *Beowulf* was never destined to be a gaming great. The title lacks sharp graphics and it would be fair to expect the gameplay to be more realistic. The control system is a reversion to button-bashing and the manner in which you combine moves to finish off opponents soon becomes tiresome. If you are simply looking for a good script with some superb one-liners plus a substantial amount of blood and gore, *Beowulf* fits the bill. Anyone seeking a serious gaming experience, on the other hand, should avoid it.



Ghost Squad, Wii

ONE of the first Wii games to use the console's Zapper gun attachment, *Ghost Squad* is an arcade blaster in the style of *Virtua Cop* and *House of the Dead*. Players are placed in the boots of a special forces squad commander tasked with foiling a terrorist plot. They have to take down the enemy while preserving the lives of any hostages they encounter. Game play is slick, with up to four people able to take part in the action at once, and dispatching bad guys by the score is overwhelmingly satisfying. *Ghost Squad* is a definite winner.



Conflict: Denied Ops, PS3, Xbox 360 & PC

THIS latest game in the long-running *Conflict* series has been simplified to place a greater emphasis on action, and it plays well as a result. Players are now given control of a two-strong team on worldwide covert actions. While *Denied Ops* offers a credible single player experience, the crowning glory of the title is by far the multiplayer options, which include split screen and network play. With one character wielding a machine gun and the other a sniper rifle, you have to stick closely together. *Denied Ops* works well on all formats.



Main picture, Forces frontmen: From the left, Flt Lt Dan Bell RAF, PO John Summerfield RN, Mne Loz Forrest RM and Capt Simon Pope AAC join up as the 122s Picture: Steve Dock



Purple rock

Tommy and Jack jam the Basra beat with Crab and Bootneck

Interview: Karen Thomas

ABRAVE new mix blasted the sound system in Basra's Contingency Operating Base (COB) when musicians from all three Services conducted a joint operation in the Camel's Toe bar.

Capt Simon Pope, AAC, thrashed the guitar as Flt Lt Dan Bell, RAF, took the vocal lead on crowd pleasers *I Predict A Riot*, *Johnny B Goode* and *I'm A Believer*. PO John Summerfield, RN, tickled some skin and Mne Loz Forrest, RM, usually hanging out of a helicopter as a door gunner, slapped the bass.

COMPETITION: Win an iPod Nano

Soldier has an Army-branded miniature MP3 player up for grabs. To win it, tell us who wrote and performed *Johnny B Goode*. Was it a) Chuck Berry, b) Little Richard or c) James Brown?

Write your answer on a postcard or the back of a sealed envelope and send it to the address at the front of the magazine. Or email your answer to comps@soldiermagazine.co.uk. Usual rules apply. The closing date is February 29.

Named after the rockets lobbed at the COB by insurgents, the 122s ignited the Christmas and New Year sparklers.

The awesome foursome got together after a disappointing lack of show from some popular UK bands who claim to support the troops but couldn't quite get themselves to board that Iraq-bound jet at Brize Norton last Christmas.

On exchange to the Royal Navy for two years, Capt Pope was the sole green pilot representative at the Joint Helicopter Force (Iraq) on the COB. Part of the Incident Response Team (IRT) along with Mne Forrest, he was sorting out the Christmas

"do" when he came up with the idea of organising some live gigging for the troops.

Having performed for the public back home, and shipped out his guitar to Telic, Pope began roping in his unsuspecting comrades from the other Services. Dan Bell, accomplished musician, singer and composer – enthusiastically stepped up to the band's impromptu mike.

They "found" a drum kit, purloined a bass guitar from the Royal Military Police and persuaded the padre to part with his public address and TV cables. Although bashfully claiming to have been absent from the drums for years, John Summerfield nevertheless expertly flicked the beat while Loz Forrest laid down his weapon to make some melody.

The quartet managed just three rehearsals before their public called them to perform their first gig at the JHF(I) bar. Undeterred by the Royal Marine door gunner's mickey-taking banners (which decorated the venue), the 122s from 847 Naval Air Squadron debuted in Basra to



"proper yelling between tracks".

"We got a rapturous reception and were quite stunned, as we were not expecting it to be quite so good," Simon Pope told *Soldier*, from the IRT lounge where he was on-call.

"It was great to do it for the lads, as they see a different side of you and it's nice to use a skill I've learnt outside the military. People enjoy doing something different. It's easy to sit in a room watching DVDs and it's not like you can drink and go down the pub. This was something people could talk about for a couple of days."

Even after a monster two-hour set, the crowd's thirst for the musical best of British Forces couldn't be satiated and the 122s were heckled for encores. Word raced round the COB of the new talent and the purple group found themselves booked for gigs all over camp until their farewell performance at the end of last month.

"The knowledge we had of the tunes was very important and the rapport between us was very good so even when we messed up we could cover it up," laughed Dan Bell, thanking his parents for making him learn to play the piano when he was a child.

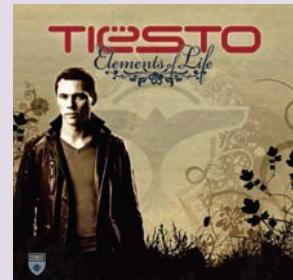
"They told me 'you will play it because one day you will walk into a pub and be able to play and people will love it' and now they've certainly been proved right." ■



8 Diagrams (Wu-Tang Clan)

SINCE their 1993 debut *36 Chambers*, the Wu-Tang Clan have displayed innovation – a rarity in the cliché-ridden hip-hop genre. This album shows them, once again, as leaders of the scene. The producer, RZA, provides a backdrop of squinted sound visions and beats, which the rappers weave tight rhymes around with swagger. *Gun Will Go* shows the Wu-Tang Clan at the top of their game. It's minimal music creating an edgy mood for the words about the darker side of life. Although at times not an easy listen, repeated plays reveal the genius of this essential album.

Cpl Charlie Lloyd, RLC



Elements of Life (Tiesto)

HAVING recently spun a global tour commemorating this album, world-renowned Dutch DJ Tiesto is not one to let down his ever-growing fan base. Although not to my taste, this album will please those with an ear for trance, especially those familiar with the artist. The majority of the tracks feature the usual uplifting melodies and strong beats layered with soulful vocals. Add to this a few rock-esque trance tunes and you have it. Nothing out of the ordinary but just what you would expect from someone who has created enough dance anthems to produce.

Bdr Luke-Stevens-Burt, 5 Regt, RLC



We're in the Music Biz (Robots in Disguise)

THIS is the third album from indie/electro-punk **Robots in Disguise**. As close friends of **Noel Fielding** of *The Mighty Boosh* fame, their look is eccentric at the very least. Having supported the like of **SSgt Mo Morrison** and **The Gossip**, Robots in Disguise will smack the British music press full in the face this year. The single *The Sex Has Made Me Stupid* stands out as an in-your-face electro-punk romp detailing the perils of doing something you may regret the next day. If you like **Echobelly** you'll love this pair. Go and buy it now.

SSgt Mo Morrison, 3LSR Regt, RLC



Count to Ten (Tina Dico)

LIKE Belgium, Denmark has been light on world influence despite early attempts at domination. An addition to the gene pool on the northern coast of Britain, a couple of decent goalkeepers (who were related) and that's about it. But Dane **Tina Dico** has clarity in her poetic voice that you just don't hear much today. Inspired by **Bob Dylan** and **Leonard Cohen**, the singer-songwriter has no obscure messages in her music – just melodic folk songs about people, places and circumstances. *Count to Ten* is the album title but, for me, it could have been called *10 out of 10*.

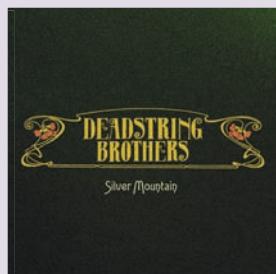
WO1 David Greaves, REME



Album X (Mexicolas)

JUDGING from the cover artwork, I thought I'd be in for a load of self-indulgent depressing gothic twaddle. It turns out that appearances can be deceptive as *Album X* is actually quite an accessible little rock album. The Birmingham-based three-piece have a sound similar to **Queens of the Stone Age** mixed in with pleasing melodies akin to **The Stereophonics** or **Green Day**. The credits for this debut include some of the biggest names in the business and **Mexicolas** are supporting **The Cult**. In my opinion, this is a band that is on the up.

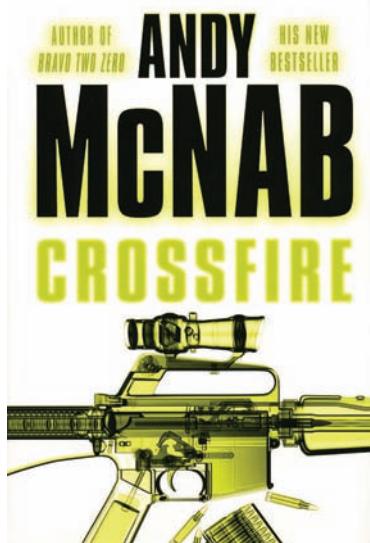
Cpl Tom Robinson, 151 Tpt Regt, RLC



Silver Mountain (Deadstring Brothers)

THIS the first album released by the Detroit-based group despite being together since 2002. It opens with the foot-stomping, thigh-slapping, hoe-downing *Ain't No HIDIN' Love* and just gets better the longer you listen. Their sound is akin to the **Rolling Stones** *Jumpin' Jack Flash* and *Honky Tonk Woman* shaken with **The Eagles**, smashed back, straight up, no ice. *Silver Mountain* delivers on all levels whether you're after a rock ballad, or some hard rockin' track. A superb album. Listen to it with a bottle of whisky. You need this music.

Lt Jim Berry, 1 R Irish



Another winner: McNab's tenth Nick Stone adventure joins the former junior leader's impressive list of best-selling titles



Million to one

Soldier-author has become an international publishing phenomenon

Crossfire by Andy McNab (Bantam Press, £18.99).

Review: John Elliott

WE rarely, if ever, review fiction on these pages, and never at length. So why this author and this novel?

Simply because Andy McNab is a publishing phenomenon and *Crossfire* is, remarkably, his tenth novel featuring "ex-deniable agent" Nick Stone. Every one has been a best-seller. His titles are bought in their millions and no self-respecting airport departure lounge bookshop would be without a dedicated Andy McNab section.

The McNab story – it isn't his real name – began when this shadow figure wrote one of the most successful war

stories of all time. *Bravo Two Zero* (1993), his warts-and-all account of an ill-fated covert patrol behind Iraqi lines, sold more than 1.7 million copies in the UK alone, was published in 17 countries and later turned into an acclaimed BBC film.

Here was someone who knew what he was writing about, someone who had walked the walk. McNab's decorations – a Military Medal and a Distinguished Conduct Medal – are testimony to his incomparable qualities as a man of action.

Soldier interviewed McNab (under condition of secrecy) in late 1993 to tell in his words the harrowing details of the B2Z patrol, during which three of his colleagues died and he was captured and tortured. Few personal details emerged

from the interview, although he did reveal that he had just bought himself out of the Army following his fourth marriage a few months earlier. Two years later he published an autobiography, *Immediate*

Action, on his time as a junior leader in the Royal Green Jackets and later the Special Air Service Regiment. It sold nearly 1.5 million copies despite an initial injunction granted to the MoD when he submitted the manuscript for clearance.

He told this magazine then that he was thinking about writing a novel, but had no firm idea of what form the plot would take other than he was sure the Special Forces would figure somewhere. "... rest assured that I will be drawing on my own experiences," he said.

Remote Control, introducing the indestructible Nick Stone, duly followed in 1997 and sold half a million copies. *Crisis Four* came two years later, then *Fire Wall*, *Last Light*, *Liberation Day*, *Dark Winter*, *Deep Black*, *Aggressor* and *Recoil*. With Robert Rigby he wrote the *Boy Soldier* series, including *Payback*, *Avenger* and *Meltdown*.

McNab's emergence as one of Britain's most popular – and wealthiest – novelists is no fluke. He knows his subject intimately and he writes convincingly.

Soldier ordering service

BOOKS mentioned on these pages are available from Helion & Company, who can also supply 14,500 in-print military books and operate a free book search; p&p is extra. Major credit/switch cards taken. Allow 28 days for delivery. Helion & Company, 26 Willow Road, Solihull, West Midlands B91 1UE, England (tel 0121 705 3393; fax 0121 711 4075). Email books@helion.co.uk Website <http://www.helion.co.uk>



His dynamic plots rip along on a narrative of taut, muscular prose, laced together by a sinew of sardonic military humour.

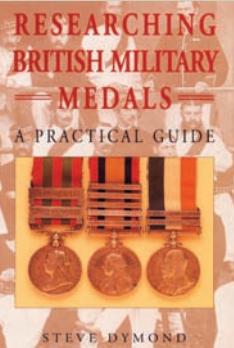
McNab has also found the time to advise Hollywood (*Heat* and *Dirty* are two of his credits) and he writes regularly for *The Sun* newspaper.

His admiration for British Servicemen and women is unbounded and he regularly rides into print in defence of the Armed Forces. "The Army has never been more professional and experienced. I'd love to be doing what they're doing. I'm proud of our soldiers," he told us last month.

Crossfire is dedicated to the men of the 2nd Battalion, The Rifles and the 2nd Battalion, The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment, who he met during a visit to Iraq.

The first pages of the novel are a tribute to Rfn Daniel Coffey, Aaron Lincoln and Paul Donnachie of 2 Rifles and 2nd Lt Jonathan Brach-Cooke, Sgt Graham Hesketh and Kgn Jamie Hancock, Alexander Green, Danny Wilson, Adam Smith and Alan Jones of 2 Lancs, all killed on duty in southern Iraq. ■

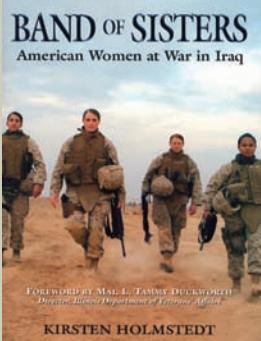
● WE have five signed copies of *Crossfire* to give away. To have a chance of winning one of them, tell us the motto of the SAS. Answers by postcard or email (comps@soldiermagazine.co.uk) to reach us by February 29. Usual rules apply.



Researching British Military Medals by Steve Dymond

YOU come across a medal, perhaps of a long-dead relative, and want to know more. Where do you start? This practical guide by former Royal Signaller and Intelligence Corps soldier Steve Dymond (now a police sergeant) points the way to a range of sources, starting with the Public Records Office for Army officers and other ranks. But there are also many other places to tap into, including print material, museums and genealogical societies.

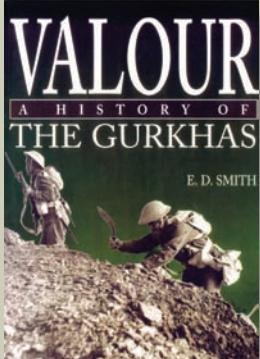
Crowood Press, 144pp, £16.99



Band of Sisters by Kirsten Holmstedt

MORE than 155,000 women in the US military have deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan since 2003 and at the time of writing, more than 430 have been wounded and 70 killed in action. These are the stories of 12 American soldiers, describing their experiences in Iraq, the pressures of the job and the difficulties of being a woman in the military. They include the first woman pilot to survive being shot down, a 21-year-old turret gunner and the first black female pilot in combat.

Stackpole Books, 327pp, £16.99



Valour: A History of The Gurkhas by E D Smith

THE late Brig Birdie Smith served in the Brigade of Gurkhas in Italy and Greece during the Second World War and later commanded the 1/2nd King Edward VII's Own Gurkha Rifles in Borneo, Brunei and Singapore, so was well qualified to write about the legendary fighting spirit of the men from Nepal. Another chance to read this fine history, liberally illustrated with images from the Gurkha Museum in Winchester, first published a year before the author's death in 1998.

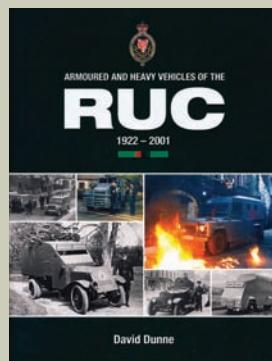
Spellmount, 190pp, £14.99



Best of British: Hendo's Sporting Heroes by Jon Henderson

THIS quirky compilation of Britain's top 100 sporting heroes includes Robin Hood (archery, obviously), Henry VIII (bowman, tennis, jousting, hunting, dart, bowls, wrestling, dressage) and Dame Kelly Holmes, described by the author as "one of the best young lorry drivers in the British Army before she returned to athletics to become the best female middle-distance runner in the world".

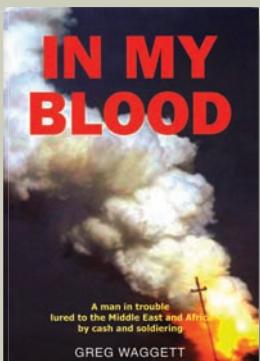
Yellow Jersey Press, 184pp, £9.99



Armoured and Heavy Vehicles of the RUC 1922-2001 by David Dunne

THE title says it all, really. For anyone with a passion for police kit, vintage military vehicles and, in particular, Land Rovers, will find much to interest them. The Royal Ulster Constabulary had great need of well-protected transport and specialist kit such as water cannon, much of it passed on or adapted from the British Army. Rolls Royce, Lancia, Crossley and Humber made contributions, but it is the ubiquitous Land Rover that dominates the pages of this book.

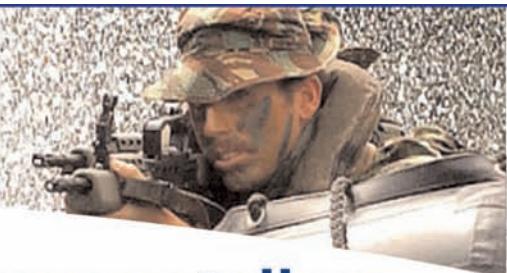
Ian Allan, 160pp, £19.99



In My Blood by Greg Waggett

IT was great working with soldiers again, even if it was in some dodgy places. So says this former Infantry officer (commissioned into the RRF after enlisting in the RGJ) who turned to the private security business when his advertising agency went belly up. Fifty and fit, he worked in Basra, but also writes lucidly about contracts in, topically, Kenya, Kuwait, Libya, Sudan and Tanzania. Keen observation, a smattering of political context and a way with words and people make this a rewarding read.

Oak Publishing, 191pp, £17



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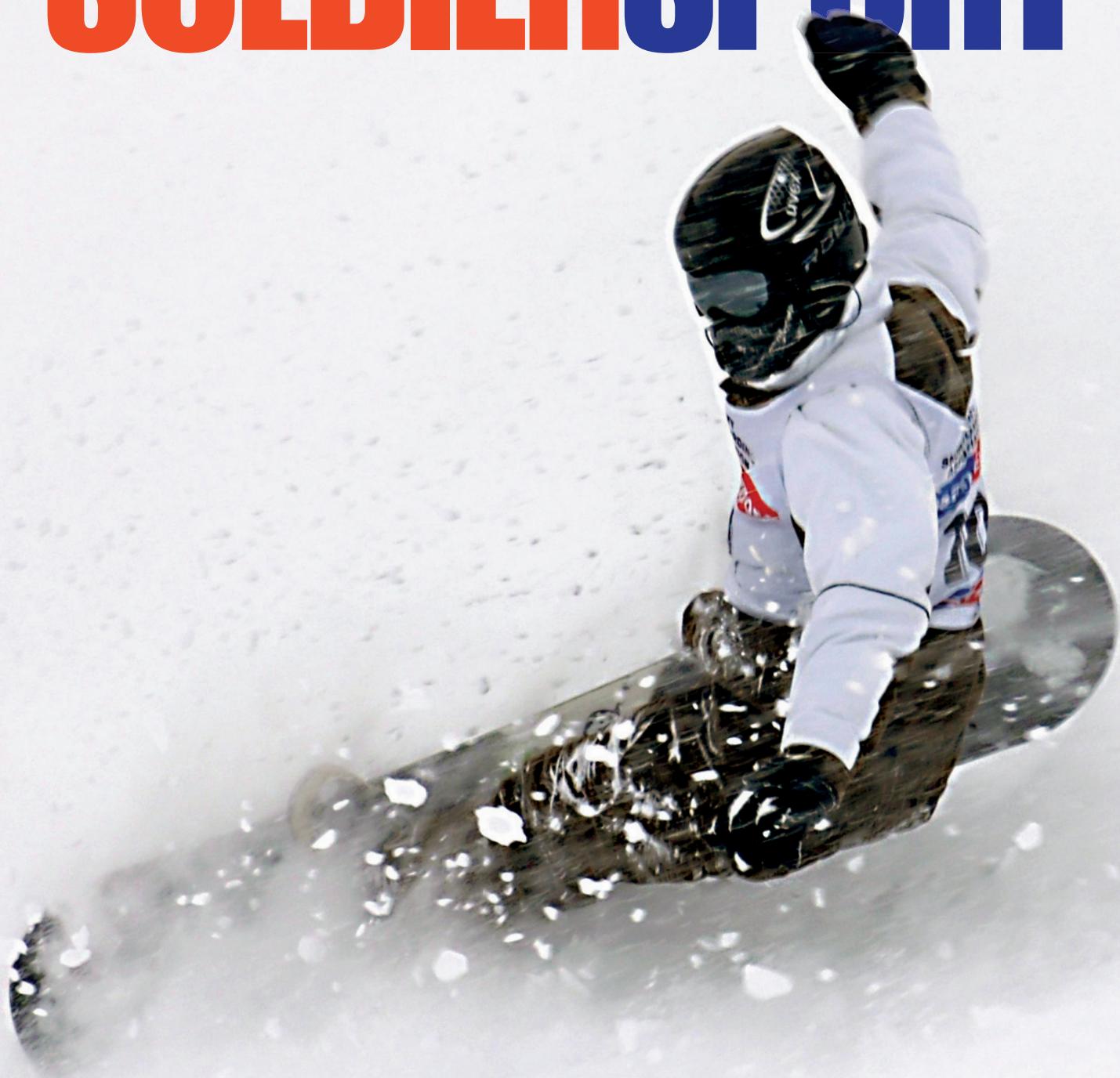
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SLOPE STYLE Snowboarders shine in Austria

White stuff: Riders were treated to excellent conditions at the Army championships on the Stubai Glacier

Picture: Roger Tutt



National treasure: England, Wasps and Army star LCpl Jane Leonard poised to pass during her promising international debut against the United States

England's rose

Americans left seeing stars on super sapper Leonard's international bow

Interview: Cliff Caswell

Picture: Roger Thompson

WHEN Army newcomer LCpl Jane Leonard signed up for her dream life in uniform, it did not take her superiors long to capitalise on her talent for rugby union.

Passionate about her career with the Royal Engineers and tough-tackling on the pitch, the NCO has forged a deserved reputation for professionalism and excellence in her work.

With an England appearance under her belt, the sapper – who only completed her Army training last year – believes women's rugby is on the up.

"It is great for me to see the sport growing in popularity. It has been shown on Sky Sports and there has been more interest in it over the past four or five years," she added.

"Anyone can get involved – it doesn't matter how big or small you are."

Certainly her combination of hard work and commitment has placed Leonard in demand. The Army and Wasps Number 7 made a well-deserved international debut for England against the United States of America in December, putting on an explosive performance during a thrilling game at Premiership side London Irish's training ground in Sunbury.

Helping to propel the popular Service game into its 12th year, the sapper is currently limbering up for what promises to be a demanding Army tour of New Zealand in May.

She is unfailingly keen to promote the sport within the military, and believes the opportunities offered by a Forces' career has helped develop her fitness and ability on the pitch.

"The lifestyle in the Army is awesome, especially as you actually get time off to play sport," the 24-year-old said. "In addition you get the chance to see the world."

"We'll be playing a few games in New Zealand, ending with a match against



their army," she added. "It should be enjoyable and I'm looking forward to the tour."

By all accounts, it has been a meteoric rise for Leonard, who is currently serving with 25 Engineer Regiment in Waterbeach.

The sapper, who is from Whitley Bay, Newcastle, was introduced to rugby while playing hockey as a teenager after a teammate suggested that she give the sport a try.

"My friend took me to some of the training sessions," she recalled.

"That was five years ago now – I thoroughly enjoyed them and haven't looked back."

After studying sports science at Northumbria University, Leonard signed up for the Army and quickly proved a formidable asset for the Service side. And it was not long before she found herself called up by her national team following the withdrawal of injured teammate Maggie Alphonsi.

She played a key role in a 32-0

demolition of the USA, winning the praise of England head coach Gary Street, who described her as "a supremely fit and talented player".

Leonard was one of England's driving forces during the game, with her speed and presence a constant thorn in the side of the opposition and her pace frequently providing an extra attacking punch to break through the American lines.

Playing open side flanker, her impressive 20-metre run down the field gave her side an immediate boost when she put winger Amber Penrith over for England's first try.

Leonard told reporters after the game that it

had been a great honour to make her debut with the national team, having previously only represented the England A side.

"It was a fantastic honour playing with such good players," she added.

Buoyed by success on the field – and due to return to the England line-up as this issue went to press – Leonard told

SoldierSport that she was exhilarated by the sport at all levels.

"I've played several games with the Army team and my number of England commitments is growing," she said. "I love the tackling and the aggression of the game, it is fast-moving and there is plenty of skill involved."

It is clear that Leonard is not short of talent or enthusiasm and, with the profile of women's rugby growing, and the future bright for the game at international level, she has become a key force in ensuring that the sport progresses to the next level.

Her enthusiasm was shared by Lt Col Eileen Cunningham (AGC (SPS)), the chair of the women's game in the Army, who urged anyone interested in playing to come forward.

Lt Col Cunningham said: "With our aim to challenge and develop the team, we have been extremely busy organising a demanding fixture list, playing both national and international teams from Canada, Scotland and Premiership clubs in the UK."

"Women's rugby is vibrant and played at all levels around the world." ■



Snow fall: An unlucky contestant takes a tumble as riders battle for position during a boarder cross race at the Army championships at Neustift, Austria

Cool boarders

Professional riders sing the praises of fast-improving Army snowboarders

Report: Stephen Tyler
Picture: Roger Tutt

WITH an injury list lengthy enough to make even the most hardened sports fan wince, British snowboarding phenomenon Jenny Jones certainly suffers for her art.

A shattered knee, two broken bones in her left arm and a chipped shoulder head the list of mishaps endured by the Bristol-born boarder during her career on the slopes.

But where lesser athletes might seek a more sedate challenge, Jones sees her knocks as part and parcel of big air

snowboarding and insists that no injury has been as painful as the eight months she was unable to compete following surgery to reconstruct her knee.

"I have had one or two scrapes," she laughed during a break from watching the Army snowboarding championships in Austria. "Although it might seem like I have had a lot of injuries, I have been competing for nine years now so really I have been quite lucky."

"It was frustrating having to wait to get back on the board after the knee reconstruction and I wouldn't want that to happen again, but the thought of injuring myself doesn't put me off."

Jones was joined by fellow British international boarder Nelson Pratt as guest of honour at the Army championships, held over two weeks on the Stubai Glacier.

More than 80 competitors battled through slalom, boarder cross and slope style events at Neustift to gain points towards individual and team titles.

SSgt Andy Moore (AMS) won the men's competition thanks to first place finishes in the parallel slalom and boarder cross. Capt Chris Elesmore (Int Corps) also won two disciplines to claim the women's championship.

Just one point separated the top



SPORTSHORTS

HOOKED ON ANGLING?

THE British Army's successful carp angling team is on the lookout for new fishermen to join its ranks.

Any UK-based serving soldier is eligible to join the Army Angling Federation Group 8 Carp Section team, which competes in Service and high-profile civilian competitions throughout the year.

For more information, visit www.armycarpers.com or email metal_smith@btinternet.com

UP, UP AND AWAY

ASPIRING airmen can propel their flying careers off the ground by applying for bursaries of up to £500 from the Royal Aero Club Trust.

The grants are available for young people aged between 16 and 21 and can be used to pay for training in a range of activities, including gliding, ballooning, parachuting and model aircraft building and flying.

For more information or to download an application form, visit www.royalaeroclubtrust.org

RUNNING FOR HEROES

RUNNERS of all ages are being invited to lace up their trainers and take to the streets of Aldershot to raise money for new short-term accommodation for families visiting wounded Service relatives.

SSAFA Forces Help has organised a day of running to aid its campaign to provide new facilities at Selly Oak Hospital, Birmingham, and Headley Court Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre at Epsom, Surrey.

Starting at 1100 on Sunday, February 17 at Queen's Avenue, the day features a showcase 10km race for over-16s, a 3km fun run (open to all) and a 1km event for children.

Prizes are on offer to the fastest individuals and military unit teams and further entertainment includes a bouncy castle, face painting and music from the Brigade of Gurkhas.

For more information about the day or to download entry and sponsorship forms, visit www.ssafa.org.uk/fundraising.html or contact your local HIVE at www.hive.mod.uk

two in the team event, with the 1st Regiment, Royal Horse Artillery edging out the 2nd Royal Tank Regiment.

World number two Jones, who coaches Army riders during the summer, said she was impressed with the standard on show in Austria.

"I always find that the Army guys are willing to listen and take on any advice I give them," she added. "I'm not sure whether their training makes them better at learning, but they are enthusiastic and give the tricks a go."

Since taking up the sport following a free lesson at her local dry ski slope, Jones has carved her path in snowboarding by concentrating on disciplines inspired by skateboarding, including the half-pipe.

Her love of hitting massive jumps has seen Jones claim three British big air championship titles and she is a regular winner at slope style competitions around the world.

Although the Briton's burgeoning talent has helped fill her trophy cabinet, Jones told *SoldierSport* that she is more

concerned about nailing the big tricks than she is about finishing first.

"For me, the enjoyment of snowboarding is in spending time learning new tricks, practising them and then pulling them off in competitions.

"Of course winning is important, but a clean run with some technical tricks would be a perfect competition for me regardless of where I finished."

Pratt, who spent the final week of the championships providing expert coaching on freestyle riding, echoed his compatriot's praise for the positive attitude of the Service boarders.

"Freestyle is the direction the sport seems to be moving in and it's good to have so many people wanting to try it out," he said. "I've found everyone here is focused and ready to learn. Sometimes when I'm coaching I'm not sure whether people are taking everything on board, but here the guys are ready to give anything a go."

"There are people here who have been going off ten metre jumps through what they learned in just one week." ■

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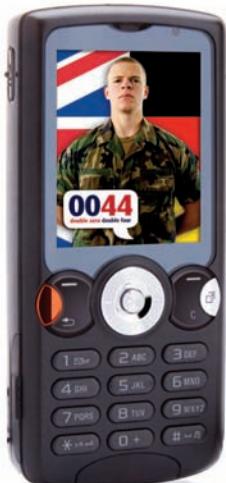


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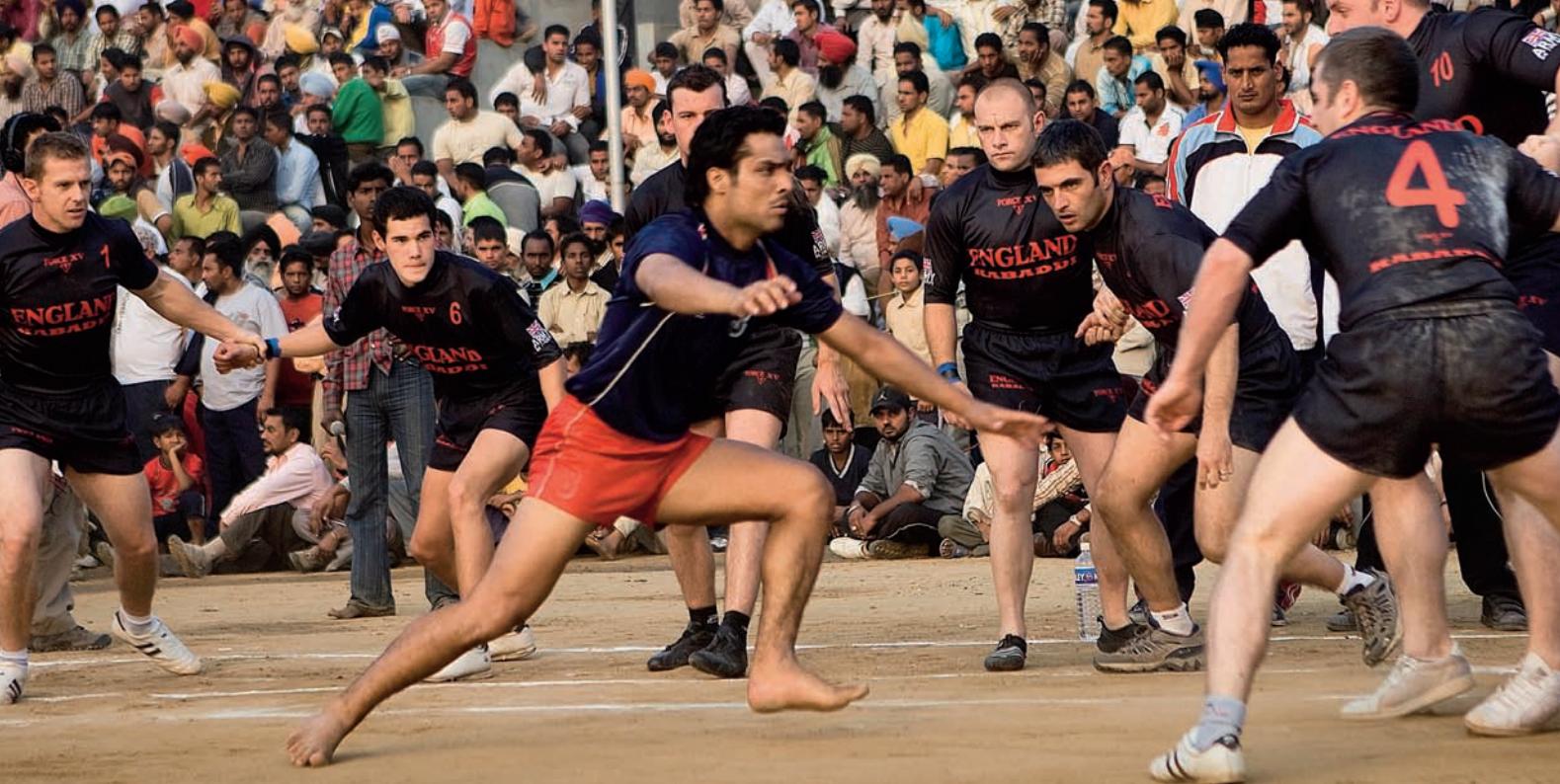
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Defensive domination: The Army's kabaddi team stands tall in the face of a blistering attack from a Punjab Police raider in front of 12,000 fans at Jalandhar

Not kabaddi

Fledgling squad defeated but not demoralised after exciting Indian tour

Report: Stephen Tyler
Picture: Duncan Kendall

MEMBERS of the Army's recently-formed kabaddi team sharpened their skills on a tour to India, the sport's spiritual home.

The squad, which cut its teeth on tournaments in England and Italy, headed to the subcontinent to play four representative matches in ten days.

And although each game ended in defeat, captain Sgt John Craig (APTC) said his team had learnt a lot from competing against experienced players in front of very large crowds.

"The positive point after losing some of the matches narrowly is that we have been able to understand the finer points of the game," explained Craig. "Next time you see us around you will find a different team, more aggressive and more technically sound."

The fact that the Army were able to provide their Indian counterparts with competitive matches is testament to the speed at which its players have picked up the sport.

Although most of the soldiers in the squad have played rugby, none of them had any previous experience of kabaddi.

The sport requires a raider to cross

the playing field's centre line, tag a defending opponent and make it back to his teammates without being wrestled unceremoniously to the floor.

It may sound simple, but the speed and agility needed by the raiders and the brute strength and quick reactions required from the defence make it extremely physically demanding.

But despite kabaddi's difficulty and their relative lack of playing time, the British athletes proved more than a match for their Indian Army opponents during the first game of the tour at the Rajputana Rifles Regimental Centre in Delhi, eventually losing 35-32.

The British contingent, made up of troops from Larkhill Garrison, moved to Mumbai for the next two matches and were soundly beaten by the city's highly-regarded fire brigade and police department teams.

A rural sports tournament near the Punjab town of Jalandhar, in northern India, hosted the final game of the tour as the Army competed in front of a vociferous 12,000-strong crowd.

Team member 2nd Lt Nick Burdick (RA) added: "The crowds were very supportive of our efforts and cheered us just as loudly when we took one of their players out as they did when they took one of us down."

"It has been a great experience on so many levels." ■

Dictating the Shots

THE Army's senior footballers launch their defence of the Inter-Services title at Aldershot Town's Recreation Ground later this month.

The Red's Constantinople Cup match against fierce rivals the Royal Navy kicks off at the home of the Blue Square Premier League leaders at 1900 on Wednesday, February 27.

Entrance costs £5 for adults, with under 16s and concessions admitted for free. All money raised will be donated to the Phyllis Tuckwell Hospice.

Maj Billy Thompson, Army Football Association secretary, said: "We are extremely grateful to Aldershot Town for allowing this high-profile fixture to be played at the Rec."

"The Army is hoping to emulate Aldershot Town's successful season by retaining the Constantinople Cup."

Three-times defending champions, the Army finish the 2008 Inter-Services tournament with a match against the Royal Air Force at RAF Uxbridge on Wednesday, March 5.

ATHLETICS

February 6 – Army cross country finals (Sandhurst); 23 – English cross country national race (Alton Towers); 29 – Inter-Services cross country championships (HMS Raleigh).

BADMINTON

February 6-8 – Inter-corps championships (Grantham).

BOXING

February 1 – Army v London Select (Croydon).

CANOEING

February 4-8 – Wild water trial (Sanquhar); 9-10 – Inter-Services wild water racing championships (Sanquhar).

FOOTBALL

February 4 – Army U23 v Oxford University (Aldershot); 6 – Army women v Guernsey (Guernsey); 12 – Army v Metropolitan Police (Imber Court); 13 – Army women v Barnet (Aldershot); 17 – Army youth v Royal Navy (Portsmouth); 20 – Army v Sussex (Aldershot); 23 – Army v Sussex (Sussex); 26 – Army v Royal Navy (Aldershot).

HOCKEY

February 5 – Army veterans v Nordics (Aldershot); 10 – Army veterans v Warlocks (Aldershot); 20 – Army U23 v RMAS (Sandhurst); 27 – Army seniors v Civil Service police (Portsmouth).

RACKETS

February 6-8 – Combined Services championships (Queen's Club).

REAL TENNIS

February 6-8 – Combined Services championships (Queen's Club).

ROWING

February 23 – Reading head of the river (Reading).

RUGBY LEAGUE

February 2 – Challenge Cup first round.

RUGBY UNION

February 6 – Army v Cambridge University (Cambridge); Army A v Cambridge City (Cambridge); 11 – Army veterans v RMAS (Aldershot); 20 – Army U20 v Hampshire (Aldershot).

SHOOTING

February 15-18 – British airgun championships (Bisley).

SQUASH

February 4 – Combined Services U25 and women v Hampshire (Portsmouth); 13 – Army v Cambridge University (Cambridge); 5-7 – Inter-Services championships (Portsmouth).

TRIATHLON

February 9 – Army modern triathlon championships (Sandhurst); 23-24 – Army Triathlon Association training weekend (Aldershot).

WINTER SPORTS

February 2-9 – Inter-Services ski and snowboard championships (France); 18-24 – Army bobsleigh, luge and skeleton championships (Norway).

■ Got a date for the diary? Email details to fixtures@soldiermagazine.co.uk

Taking loss on the chin

Beaten finalist takes first Army defeat in his stride

Report: Stephen Tyler

Picture: Graeme Main

RISING star Shaun Hardy has vowed to come back better than ever in time for this year's Combined Services championships after suffering his first Army defeat at the Amateur Boxing Association of England novice finals.

Sig Hardy (R Signals) was rattled by some particularly heavy blows during the opening exchanges of his class A bout with Spennymoor's Keith Jones and ended up on the wrong end of a 9-5 points decision.

The defeat at Bethnal Green was Hardy's first in 16 bouts, but despite his obvious disappointment the Middlesbrough southpaw said the experience of fighting Jones will help make him a more polished performer.

"I'm not going to make any excuses, I lost to the better boxer on the day," he told *SoldierSport*. "His style caught me unaware because it was so unorthodox. He had his head down and was throwing punches like overarm cricket swings whereas I like to stay back and pick my shots.

"I haven't ever faced that before and I have never really been hurt in any of my previous fights. When he caught me I wobbled a bit and didn't have the experience to overcome it. I looked more like I was trying to survive the fight rather than going on the attack."

Since tasting his first competitive loss in Army colours, Cyprus-based Hardy has thrown himself back into full-time training under the tutelage of coaching team WO2 Chris Bessey (RLC) and Sgt Darren Dugan (PWRR).

Despite first trying his hand at boxing at the age of 11, it was only in his late teens that the signaller started training seriously and he classes the current Army set-up as the best he has worked with to date.

The results of his hard work manifested themselves in the form of 11 successful fights in the opening 11

months of last year, with only the loss to Jones blotting his copybook.

And with even Jones admitting that Hardy, of the Joint Services Signal Unit, was the toughest opponent he has faced, the future looks bright for the Army man.

"I was glad that I managed to take the fight to points and he told me afterwards it was the hardest fight he has had," continued Hardy. "It's been a very positive year for me and it has definitely helped my development to have had 12 fights in as many months.

"We have a lot of good boxers and we are looking forward to the Combined Services. It has been getting closer and closer each year so it's going to be a challenge, but we are all confident.

"It helps to be training with these guys full time because we are always learning from each other and getting more and more experience."

"I'm not going to make any excuses, I lost to the better boxer on the day,"

Coach Dugan, himself a veteran of the Army team throughout the 1990s, added that the manner of Hardy's ABA defeat shows that he has a promising future in the sport.

"It was tough for him because he was up against an aggressive, unorthodox boxer who was swinging heavy punches," he explained.

"He caught him flush early on and although Shaun didn't manage to get himself back into it, he dug in well and did himself proud."

With Army team alumni such as Ross "The Boss" Burkinshaw and Carl Johannesson making great strides in their professional boxing careers, Hardy could be forgiven for picturing his own name at the top of a big-money bill.

Luckily for Dugan and Bessey, the 22-year-old is keeping his feet on the ground and concentrating on improving his game in an Army team gunning for a 25th consecutive Combined Services victory over the Royal Navy.

"I'm in it for the enjoyment and as soon as that stops it will be time to look elsewhere," he said. "Your heart has to be in it to be competitive and I'm determined to bounce back." ■



Pragmatic pugilist: Sig Shaun Hardy (R Signals) has hit the gym with a vengeance to ensure he bounces back with style from a brave defeat at the ABA finals

Paddy's power

Super-fit Doyle makes new assault on world bests

FORMER paratrooper Paddy Doyle pushed his endurance record breaking to the limit by setting four new world bests in one day.

Taking part in the Guinness World Records Day, Doyle was cheered on by a 150-strong crowd at Birmingham's Stamina boxing gym as he broke three existing records and set a new one.

He got off to a good start by performing 1,940 back-of-hand push-ups in one hour, smashing Canadian Doug Pruden's previous best of 1,781.

Hungarian Attila Horvarth was next to lose his record after Doyle upped the world best for circuit training squats in 60 minutes to 4,708.

A total of 5,750 full contact roundhouse martial arts kicks gave the ex-Army man his third record of the day, but he still had to find the strength to become the first person to complete the world strength fitness test.

Starting with a ten-mile speed march carrying a 56lb backpack, Doyle then completed a 63-mile cycle, 367 back-of-hand push-ups, 633 squats and 830 full contact roundhouse martial arts kicks in seven hours to claim his fourth and final world record.

Doyle has now broken 152 world records for strength, speed, stamina and martial arts. ■

MASSEY TABLES

MASSEY TROPHY – DIV 1

	P	W	D	L	GD	Pts
Infantry	5	5	0	0	12	15
RE	5	4	0	1	14	12
R Sigs	7	4	0	3	6	12
RA	6	4	0	2	-1	12
RLC	7	2	0	5	-5	6
REME	6	1	1	4	-7	4
APTC	6	0	1	5	-19	1

MASSEY TROPHY – DIV 2

	P	W	D	L	GD	Pts
AGC	4	2	1	1	11	7
Int Corps	3	2	1	0	2	7
AAC	3	1	1	1	0	4
AMS	4	0	2	2	-9	2
RAC	2	0	1	1	-4	1

Postal strike

The regular feature in which we ask soldiers for their views on a hot topic

We asked troops at FOB Keenan if the Army's positive profile with the British public had filtered through to Afghanistan's front line

LCpl Andy Fleming, Coldm Gds

There is definitely an increase in support when I look at the number of parcels and letters we have been getting from home.

I didn't get anything like this when I was in Iraq and it's good to see. The support isn't just from our families, it's from businesses and people just wishing us well.



Gdsm Stuart Allan, Coldm Gds

I haven't been back home but there has been a lot of support from my friends and family, and even from people I don't know. I have spent a fair amount of time writing back to them to let them know that it makes a big difference to us. They keep sending parcels packed with useful stuff and letters telling us a bit about themselves.



LCpl Shakey Marks, Coldm Gds

I have been on leave and went in to B&Q to get some wood cut up. They usually cut it into five pieces and then you have to pay for the rest, but when I said that I was in the Army the guy in the shop said he would cut it all for free.



Gdsm Richard Payne, Coldm Gds

I have been getting parcels from family and friends but also from the parents of some of the guys in the regiment and even from random people. My mum works in a

care home and a lot of the old people there have been really supportive. It's my first tour so I have nothing to compare it to, but I definitely have no complaints about how well we are being looked after.



Cpl Bob Sleigh, RE

In Iraq we didn't feel appreciated. I'm not sure why that was, but it's completely different out here. We have had a lot of welfare packages coming through and people are writing messages thanking us for what we are doing. It's definitely nice to be appreciated and it boosts everyone's morale.



Dmr Ben Thorpe, Coldm Gds

I think everyone is really happy with how well we have been treated with the welfare parcels from home, especially over Christmas. It has been the best that I have ever seen it. I was in Iraq three years ago and we didn't get a thing through. It's really good for morale, but that is quite high anyway because the welfare out here is very good.



LCpl Chris Constantine, Coldm Gds

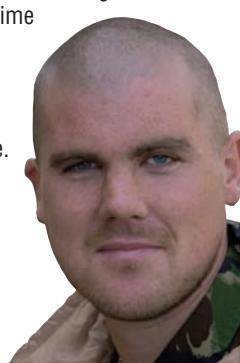
So many people have taken the time to send us stuff. It's a great boost to morale to think that there are so many people thinking of us. We

have been getting all sorts of stuff, but whether it's shower gel or letters it's all useful. We have a parade in Windsor when we get home and I'm looking forward to that.



LSgt Philip Smith, Coldm Gds

I've been really impressed with the amount of welfare and Christmas stuff we have had sent through. It seems like every time the mail comes in we have even more parcels and packages from people back home. There are often ten parcels per platoon and we're getting toiletries, crisps, food – all sorts.



LCpl Ryan Clarkson, Coldm Gds

When I went to Iraq it wasn't anything like this, we didn't receive any parcels at all. We got a lot of parcels over the Christmas period so I think that could be a factor. Everyone is living next to one another here so we keep each others' morale high, but receiving parcels is always welcome.



Interviews: Stephen Tyler Pictures: Graeme Main

Coming up . . . in SOLDIER

We take a tour of the field hospital providing front-line forces with first-class support at Camp Bastion and meet the troops honing the fighting prowess of the Afghan National Army


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Similar to the above model but with a black finish blade.

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Black SB253BK £62.99


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Black SB260BK £59.99


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