

MAGAZINE OF THE BRITISH ARMY

SOLDIER

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BRIGHT FUTURE

Basra thrives as Op Telic troops close in on ultimate goal

CHRISTMAS CHEERS

Festive tidings from Britain's celebrity ranks

CHAPTER AND VERSE

Ordinary soldier's extraordinary autobiography



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ARMY



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*On behalf of everyone at the Army Benevolent Fund,
have a very happy Christmas.*



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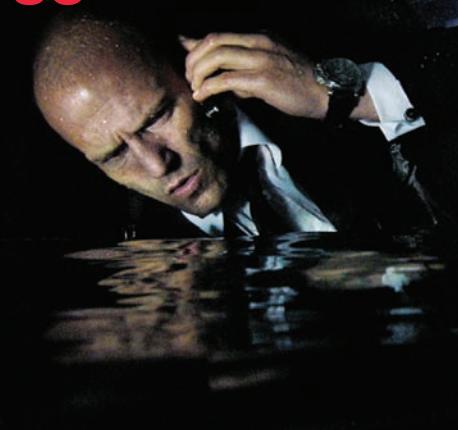
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Cover picture (left): LCpl Mohammed Seru (1 RRF) guards a helicopter landing site in southern Iraq. Picture: Stephen Tyler

Background image: Fusiliers stop for a map check during a counter-indirect fire patrol in Basra. Picture: Cpl Rob Knight RLC

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Parsons House, Ordnance Road,
Aldershot, Hampshire GU11 2DU.

ALL ENQUIRIES: TEL 01252 347353
(Aid Mil 94222 2353)
Fax: 01252 347358 (2358)
Email: mail@soldiermagazine.co.uk

Website: www.soldiermagazine.co.uk

Managing Editor: Andy Simms

EDITORIAL

Editor:

Stephen Tyler 01252 347356 (2356)
styler@soldiermagazine.co.uk

News Editor:

Cliff Caswell 01252 340753 (5753)
ccaswell@soldiermagazine.co.uk

Assistant Editors:

Heidi Mines 01252 340462 (5462)
hmines@soldiermagazine.co.uk
Samantha Chapman 01252 347362 (2362)
schapman@soldiermagazine.co.uk

Editorial Assistant:

Doreen Cadwallader 01252 347360 (2360)
dcadwallader@soldiermagazine.co.uk

DESIGN

Art Editor:

Tudor Morgan 01252 347169 (2169)
tmorgan@soldiermagazine.co.uk

Graphic Designers:

Chris Sell 01252 355080 (8080)
csell@soldiermagazine.co.uk

Kath Lee 01252 347361 (2361)
klee@soldiermagazine.co.uk

PHOTOGRAPHY

Chief Photographer:

Mike Weston 01252 347357 (2357)
mweston@soldiermagazine.co.uk

Photographers:

Graeme Main 01252 347357 (2357)
gmain@soldiermagazine.co.uk
Steve Dock 01252 347357 (2357)
sdock@soldiermagazine.co.uk

MARKETING and ADVERTISING

Business Manager:

Andy Clarkson 01252 347351 (2351)
aclarkson@soldiermagazine.co.uk

Advertising:

Heather Shekyls 01252 347352 (2352)
hshekyls@soldiermagazine.co.uk

Subscriptions:

Stephen King 01252 347353 (2353)
sking@soldiermagazine.co.uk

Distribution:

Patricia Lamport 01252 347354 (2354)
plamport@soldiermagazine.co.uk

ARCHIVE

Archivist/Information Manager:

Ruth Kusionowicz 01252 355056 (8056)
rkusionowicz@soldiermagazine.co.uk



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"Just stopped off for a beard trim . . . all very friendly . . . Basra much quieter this year . . . no problems so far."

● Basra city life – Pages 22-25

Delivering peace

WITH Christmas fast approaching, Britain's public is collectively filling in its gift wish list ready to bestow its festive demands on family and friends.

Credit crunch or not, the retail bells are ringing as the latest must-have items fly off the shelves in the run up to December 25.

Troops on operations may not have been able to join the throngs of shoppers clogging the nation's high streets this winter, but their work has helped provide a gift more valuable than anything found in Harrods.

Take Basra for example. Earlier this year, Iraq's second-largest city was a desolate shell ruled by militias where ordinary residents spent every day living in fear of being shot or blown up.

Now the southern settlement is speeding along the road to recovery with Iraqi security forces taking the lead.

British Military Transition Teams have spent Operation Telic 12 working tirelessly to transform the Iraqi Army's 14th Division into a finely-tuned unit and the results speak for themselves (Pages 19-21).

Areas that once took an entire battlegroup to reach are now thriving in unprecedented safety as the city embraces life without the threat of explosions and small arms fire (Pages 22-25).

For those living and working on the Contingency Operating Base during previous Christmases, the most-requested gift was an end to the rocket attacks that rained down on the airfield on a daily basis.

Rotund North Pole-dweller Santa was

unable to deliver that particular present from his own sack, so British troops took it upon themselves to stamp out the indirect fire.

Whether they took the fight to the insurgents by ground patrol (Pages 33-35) or by assault boat along the Shatt-Al-Arab waterway (Pages 37-39), the 1st Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers and the 9th/12th Royal Lancers have all but stopped the incoming munitions.

Back in Britain, Christmas is a good time to remember the nation's homeless, including former Service personnel.

Luckily for them, charity Veterans Aid makes sure that people who have fallen on hard times after leaving the Armed Forces are given a helping hand (Pages 45-47).

Celebrities have also voiced their support for the sterling work being done by the troops serving overseas (Pages 49-51).

Here at *Soldier* HQ, we have decided to sulk over Christmas after our one wish – to see Laura "The Voice" White win *The X Factor* – was sabotaged by a scandalous decision from pesky Irishman Louis Walsh.

Looks like we'll have to make do with festive greetings from the delightful northerner and her fellow finalists in this month's vox pop (Page 98).

Wherever you find yourself on December 25, take heart in the fact that the job you are doing is yielding obvious results and is truly appreciated by everyone back home.

Merry Christmas and a very prosperous new year. ■



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Picture: Stephen Tyler

New dawn: Soldiers from the Iraqi Army's 14th Division have benefited from the professional mentoring work carried out by Britain's 7th Armoured Brigade

Op Telic triumph

Commander reflects on successful six-month tour for Desert Rats in southern Iraq

THE commander of 7th Armoured Brigade has praised his troops for "transforming" Iraqi Army capability during their latest Telic tour.

Speaking to *Soldier* from the Contingency Operating Base (COB) at Basra, Brig Sandy Storrie said the Germany-based brigade's work, particularly in developing the Military Transition Team (MiTT) concept throughout the city, had allowed the Iraqis to make giant strides towards self-sufficiency.

"It's been a good tour and we have made more progress than I would have thought possible," he said. "The success is the Iraqi Army's. It is them who have resolved the situation in Basra, but I don't think they could have done it so effectively without our support."

"The soldiers have done a fantastic job and I would describe the effect they have had on the Iraqis as transformational."

Brig Storrie also paid tribute to the Desert Rats for carrying out their vital work in often uncomfortable conditions.

Temperatures soared above 50C dur-

ing the summer and many of the MiTT teams were living and working in very basic conditions until new bases were built by the Royal Engineers.

"They initially had to put up with some very difficult conditions downtown when they were living alongside the Iraqi Army," he said. "As it's turned out, I think we have achieved everything I hoped we would and more."

After a comprehensive training package during which 7th Armoured Brigade prepared for the possibility of having to re-enter Basra city centre using force, the soldiers were asked to fulfil a variety of roles including establishing and running MiTTs and building new bases for the Iraqi security forces.

They have also been instrumental in cutting indirect fire attacks on the COB, which suffered just four incidents in the final three months of the tour.

But despite the successes, Brig Storrie emphasised that there was further progress to be made to ensure the Iraqi Army can stand on its own two feet.

"I think we are handing over a work in progress," he said. "A lot of the military tasks are substantially complete but there is still work to do to provide the Iraqi Army's 14th Division with the enabling capabilities it needs and to make it resilient so that it is self-sustaining in the future."

Although no decision has been made about the future of Britain's involvement in Iraq, Brig Storrie said the progress his men had made has put the incoming 20th Armoured Brigade in a strong position to further improve the capability of the Iraqi Army.

"The PM has already said there will be a fundamental change of mission next year and even in our time we have seen that mission change from direct support to being one of advising, mentoring and training," he said. "That process will continue and accelerate and we're working through what that might mean in terms of force levels and timings."

● **Basra city life – Pages 22-25**

Gurkhas killed in Helmand actions

Accomplished sniper and experienced soldier fall during Taliban attacks

RESOLUTE soldiers serving with 2nd Battalion, The Royal Gurkha Rifles have been mourning the loss of two colleagues killed within days of each other in Afghanistan.

Rfn Yubraj Rai and CSgt Krishnabahadur Dura were both based in the Musa Qala district of Helmand province when they died in separate operations.

Rfn Rai was shot while taking part in a joint International Security Assistance Force and Afghan National Security Force move against enemy fighters on November 4.

CSgt Dura, who had been leading a highly-effective sniper platoon, was killed 11 days later when the Warrior armoured vehicle he was travelling in was caught in an IED blast.

Described as a "cornerstone" of his company, Rfn Rai was recognised for his professionalism, commitment and soldiering skills. The 28-year-old, from the Khotang District of eastern Nepal, joined the Army in 1999 and had already



● Rfn Rai



● CSgt Dura

completed a tour of Afghanistan as well as serving on operations in Iraq, Sierra Leone and the Balkans.

CSgt Dura, who was 36 and married with two daughters, was an experienced soldier who joined the Army in 1992 and had passed the All Arms Parachute Selection course.

Rated as one of the Army's best snipers, the senior NCO from the Lamjung district of western Nepal, was highly respected by soldiers under his command and superior officers alike.

Lt Col Chris Darby, commanding officer of 2 RGR, said that both men would be missed.

Of Rfn Rai he said: "Big and highly experienced, he was one of the cornerstones of his company and known throughout the battalion for his presence, drive and ability.

"Brave, strong, hard and noble, he epitomised all that makes the Gurkhas the best."

Turning to CSgt Dura, the CO added: "He was a consummate professional, having deployed as the master sniper in command of a platoon that he had trained himself.

"CSgt Dura's snipers were, and continue to be, one of my most potent capabilities and their strengths are due almost entirely to his own ability as a soldier, a leader and commander.

"I am extremely proud to have known this bold and noble man and will miss him. He will not be forgotten," Lt Col Darby said.

IN BRIEF

● MUSICIANS from The Royal Scots Dragoon Guards achieved a notable first after recording their latest album in an operational theatre.

The soldiers, on tour in Iraq, played tunes including *Abide with Me*, *In Flanders Fields* and *Dawning of the Day* for their new CD, *Spirit of the Glen: Journey*, which was due for release as this issue went to press.

The troops braved the threat of rocket attacks during the recording sessions in a tent at the Contingency Operating Base and one piper even suffered heat stroke in the searing summer temperatures.

● PRIME Minister Gordon Brown took time out of a busy schedule in the Middle East to drop in on personnel supporting Op Telic.

The PM was given a warm welcome in Qatar, where he paid tribute to the professionalism and courage of everyone backing operations to bring peace to Iraq. He said British Forces were valued around the world.

I-Ball has thousand yard stare

INSURGENTS could find themselves bowled over on the battlefield when a new piece of hi-tech equipment is rolled-out to front-line British soldiers.

The I-Ball, which is now in development after being submitted to the MoD's Competition of Ideas, gives troops a sphere-shaped camera that can be thrown in the combat zone or fired into action from a grenade launcher.

It provides 360-degree video coverage, even while it is in flight, and has been designed to give personnel valuable information on who, or what, they could be facing further down the line.

MoD chiefs are confident that the ball could have a range of applications, including being fitted to armour and unmanned aerial vehicles, as it is robust and capable of withstanding extreme temperatures.

Edinburgh-based firm Dreampact is developing the kit and directors recently showed the I-Ball to officials at the Defence Technology and Innovation Centre (DTIC) in Shrivenham, Wiltshire.

Company spokesman Paul Thompson

said: "We are delighted that the idea was taken up by the MoD as we could not have developed it without their assistance.

"Although it is in its very early stages we are very excited about the technology's potential to help troops to be better prepared for battle.

"It is fantastic that the MoD is working with a small company like us to develop future capabilities."

Senior military technology chiefs were also enthusiastic about the possibilities offered by I-Ball.

Prof Andrew Baird, director of the DTIC, was confident that the kit could allow troops to deal with difficult situations on the modern battlefield.

He said: "It is an exciting new development that has very significant potential across a range of military equipment and operational scenarios, particularly in difficult urban operations.

"The initial development of I-Ball has been successful and shows great promise. We are considering what further development is possible."



Picture: Sgt Gustav Olgatli, US Army

Tanks for the ammo: Crews from The Royal Scots Dragoon Guards managed to shoot through a 15-year allocation of shells on a single exercise in Basra

Fired up for action

Outgoing soldiers mark the end of Telic tour with a firework spectacular

LIFE was a blast for troops serving in southern Iraq when they fired off a 15-year allocation of live Challenger 2 ammunition.

Soldiers from The Royal Scots Dragoon Guards let loose during the special exercise, discharging around 200 rounds in an impressive display of power.

The ammo, which was coming to the end of its service life, was due to be disposed of by the Explosive Ordnance Group. But Maj Roger Macmillan, commanding the regiment's C squadron, thought that it would be put to better use in training.

He felt some impromptu manoeuvres would be a valuable opportunity for the Fallingbostel-based troops as they came to the end of a successful six-month tour with 7th Armoured Brigade.

Normally each squadron would only get nine of the high explosive rounds, used in anger against bunkers and armoured vehicles, that were fired during the exercise near Basra.

The officer commanding admitted: "This was just too good an opportunity for us to miss.

"This range day offered great value to the taxpayer as it allowed for valuable

training to take place using rounds that would otherwise have been destroyed.

"It also gave members of my squadron an excellent chance to train with live, high-explosive ammunition."

Iraqis living nearby had been warned about the Dragoons' exercise well in advance, and soldiers taking part found

the manoeuvres both valuable and enjoyable, said Maj Macmillan. He added: "It was a very rare opportunity for the young gunners who normally would not get to fire much of this ammunition during their Army careers.

"We had nearly 15 years' allotment so we were privileged."

Herrick to get more armour

DEFENCE Secretary John Hutton has announced the preferred bidders for three new classes of support trucks to give troops the edge in Afghanistan.

The 400 newcomers will carry essential supplies such as water and ammunition during patrols as part of a wider 700-strong vehicle package announced by Mr Hutton in October.

Husky, which is based on the International MXT-MVA made by Navistar Defence, will carry out support roles in areas the Mastiff cannot be used and will have utility, ambulance and command variants.

Coyote will back up fast and agile Jackal patrols in the badlands of southern Afghanistan and is based on the same platform

as the 6x6 vehicle made by Devon-based company Supacat.

Wolfhound features more protection than its stablemates with the underpinnings of the Force Protection Inc Cougar 6x6.

It will provide support to Mastiff patrols in high-threat areas and has a robust level of mine protection.

Speaking after announcing the trio of new arrivals, Mr Hutton said he was confident the vehicles would provide soldiers with a further weapon in the battle against the Taliban.

He added: "Wolfhound, Husky and Coyote will give troops in Afghanistan the extra bite they need. I look forward to the vehicles arriving in the new year."

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

Minister squares up to retention question

CONCERN is mounting over officer retention rates for some areas of the Army, Armed Forces Minister Bob Ainsworth has admitted.

Responding to a question from fellow MP Christopher Fraser, Mr Ainsworth said that while there had been "no sudden outflow of personnel" over the past decade, there were fears that exit rates were too high for some key roles.

Figures show that 1,490 officers resigned over the past year, nearly a quarter more than in 2005-06.

The minister added: "A wide range of measures are in place to improve retention, including career management, improvement to conditions of service and commitment bonuses."

Under contact: Attacks against troops in Afghanistan's Helmand province have dropped significantly this year, according to latest figures.

Defence Secretary John Hutton told fellow MPs in the Commons that there had been 1,475 engagements between soldiers from the International Security Assistance Force and insurgent fighters as of October. There were just over 2,200 contacts in 2007.

Funding beached: The MoD has no plans to help veterans return to Normandy for the 65th anniversary of the D-Day invasion next year.

Replying to a question from MP David Davis, Veterans' Minister Kevan Jones said only 25th, 50th, 60th and centenary events received sponsorship from the department.

He added: "Significant funding was made available to mark the 60th anniversary of the Normandy landings in 2004."

Wheels turning: Nearly 50 extra Mastiff and 30 more Jackal vehicles are being made available to help support soldiers' training, MPs have been told. Quentin Davis, Minister for Defence Equipment and Support, said the kit would be introduced over the course of the next few months.

Snatches are still required

Armed Forces chief defends use of Land Rovers

THE much-maligned Snatch Land Rover still has an important part to play in military operations, according to the Chief of the Defence Staff.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup said a vehicle "with the size and capability" of the Snatch was still in demand by commanders in operational areas.

But he hinted that he was concerned about the Land Rover's vulnerabilities and pledged that he would keep a "close eye" on how it was being deployed.

ACM Stirrup was speaking after reports in the media suggested that a senior British officer had resigned in disgust after four of his soldiers died in an attack on one of the vehicles.

The officer, who had served in Afghanistan, had been quoted as blaming a "chronic under investment" in equipment for their deaths.

But the Chief of the Defence Staff told the BBC's Sunday morning *Andrew Marr Show*: "I speak to commanders and they tell me unequivocally that they need a vehicle of both the size and manoeuvrability of the Snatch to conduct their missions.

"We want a vehicle that has better protection and that is exactly what we have been developing. We have vehicles in

theatre now that have better protection and they are being used but, of course, they are not all arriving at once."

The Chief of the Defence Staff said he would "never second guess the decisions of people on the ground" who were aware of the threats and knew the tools they needed for the job.

As reported in *Under Big Ben* (November), Armed Forces Minister Bob Ainsworth has confirmed to the Commons that experts are looking closely at the Snatch to see if it can be upgraded with better armour.

An enhanced version of the Land Rover, codenamed Vixen, is also currently being used in Afghanistan.

The vehicle has modifications to the running gear, chassis and engine, and boasts increased payload space to take on extra equipment and troops.

Despite the criticism of the armoured Land Rover, which was first used in Northern Ireland, ACM Stirrup was adamant that soldiers serving in Iraq and Afghanistan had the resources they needed to do the job.

"If you go and speak to people on the ground, you will find that the overwhelming view is that the kit they have in theatre is very good," he added.

Paras home after tough tour

BATTLE-hardened soldiers from 2nd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment have returned home to their base in Colchester after completing a gruelling six-month tour of southern Afghanistan.

In searing heat and tough conditions, the troops were involved in a near-continuous engagement with Taliban fighters on the front line of the battle to bring stability to Helmand province.

The battalion paraded through their home town beneath a flypast from two Apache helicopters before an hour-long church service provided an opportunity to reflect on the lives of 15 soldiers from the battle-group who were killed during the tour.

Lt Col Joe O'Sullivan, CO of 2 Para, praised his soldiers for their professionalism during the fighting. He said: "We have returned home after the most demanding operational tour for many years.

"All ranks have served their country with

distinction, but our first duty is to honour the men of 2 Para battlegroup who gave their lives serving in northern Helmand over the summer."

During their demanding tour as part of 16 Air Assault Brigade, 2 Para occupied five Forward Operating Bases (FOBs) in some of the most notorious and dangerous parts of southern Afghanistan.

FOB Gibraltar, a remote outpost near Gereshk, was the scene of some of the fiercest fighting.

The men of C Company who manned the base were, on average, 23 years old. Five died in action, 14 were seriously injured and another 30 were wounded with the FOB being attacked 36 times in just four months. The Taliban took heavy casualties with around 150 confirmed dead.

Suicide bombers were also a major threat in the region, killing three soldiers from 2 Para in a single day in June.



Picture: Steve Dolk

Target acquired: Sharpshooters were set to take delivery of the final batch of new Army sniper rifles as this issue went to press. The last consignment of the L115A3 weapon (pictured) will soon be passed to troops having been handed over to Defence Equipment and Support. The rifle, which has a range of up to 1,100 metres, was purchased under a £3.7 million deal with Portsmouth-based firm Accuracy International and is already proven in Afghanistan.

Herrick on track

Campaign could be the century's 'defining war', claims Secretary of State

TERRORIST attacks on the UK mainland are being prevented because of the international community's intervention in Afghanistan, the Defence Secretary has said.

Addressing the Institute of Strategic Studies, John Hutton maintained the mission against the Taliban and Al Qaeda had saved lives.

He added: "The First and Second World Wars were the defining conflicts of the last century – it may be that Afghanistan will be the defining conflict of this century. It strikes at the heart of our interests and the preservation of the values we hold dear."

"If we hadn't gone into southern Afghanistan in 2006 the Taliban would now control southern Helmand and Kandahar. There are students of history today that tell us that those who control Kandahar have often controlled Kabul."

"So I am absolutely clear that our commitment is first and foremost about national security."

Mr Hutton was adamant that terrorist

leaders would have had more freedom to launch further attacks had action not been taken in the wake of 9/11.

He accepted that the battle in Afghanistan would continue to be tough, but he

said: "In Helmand we are still learning how to realise our objectives."

"However I am confident that we are putting in place the people and capabilities that can lead to success."

Royal's Army career uplifted

PRINCE Harry is hoping to swap his rifle for the controls of a state-of-the-art helicopter after volunteering for selection with the Army Air Corps.

The Household Cavalry lieutenant was due to start a four-week assessment course at Middle Wallop, Hampshire as this issue went to press, which will determine whether or not he can fly.

The current pass rate is just 50 per cent, but if he makes the grade the third-in-line to the throne will start his training in the new year.

Lt Wales would serve his tour with the AAC as a member of his parent regiment, The Blues and Royals.

A statement from Clarence House said: "Prince Harry has chosen to seek selection with the AAC now because he has completed his tour of duty as a troop leader with the Household Cavalry at Windsor."

"Such a move is quite common for young officers at this stage in their Army career."

The flying training would last for up to two-and-a-half years depending on the aircraft type – whether an Apache gunship, Lynx or Gazelle.

If he goes for the attack helicopter he must first master the other two aircraft, then take part in an 18-month Apache course and 16 weeks of survival and resistance to interrogation training.

● COMMANDER-in-Chief Land Forces Gen Sir David Richards was the special guest at an Armed Forces celebration of the Islamic festival Eid-ul-Fitr.

The event, held in honour of senior Muslim officer Lt Col Alan Parvez who recently retired after four decades of service, was attended by a number of VIPs and colleagues.

Lt Col Parvez finished his military career as commanding officer of Defence and Equipment Support at Andover.

● A GROUP of Army wives have bared all for a calendar to raise money for Armed Forces charities.

The Garrison Girls calendar features soldiers' and officers' wives of all ages and hopes to raise thousands for Help for Heroes and Combat Stress.

Sarah Bennett Thurston, who dreamt up the project, said raising money for charities was a way for the wives to give something back.

She added: "Help for Heroes and Combat Stress play an incredibly important role in providing our troops with vital care and support.

"We all worry in case one day our families need their help, so it's reassuring to know they are there."

● CENTENARY celebrations for the Territorial Army have ended following 12 months of events across the country.

This year marked 100 years since the TA was formed and the anniversary was celebrated with a programme of activities ranging from a Salamanca Band concert in Plymouth to a reception at the British Consulate in Istanbul, Turkey.

The programme culminated with the Festival of Remembrance on November 9 at the Royal Albert Hall where TA members and their families attended a service to remember the fallen.

● YOUNG children whose fathers go away on active duty have been given a helping hand with a new picture book.

Written by Gerry Waters, *My Daddy is a Soldier* uses simple language and photos to show youngsters how troops go away and return from operational deployments overseas.

Proceeds from sales are being donated to the Afghan Appeal Fund. Charity president Lady Caroline Richards said the book was "fabulous". See www.mydaddyisasoldier.co.uk

● WEBMASTERS with publishing rights to the Army's old public facing website must make sure their old content is deleted or redirected in preparation of an imminent switchover.

Military internet chiefs have warned that the old site is being archived and switched off on January 9 following the launch of ArmyWeb.

Home at last

Black Rats quit Germany for new super garrison

THOUSANDS of soldiers have been settling into their new UK home after taking part in the British Army's biggest relocation move for more than two decades.

Some 2,000 troops from The Royal Dragoon Guards set up shop in Catterick, North Yorkshire, after ending their 30-year association with Osnabrück in northern Germany.

The soldiers, the final contingent of the incoming 4th Mechanized Brigade, the Black Rats, arrived at a garrison transformed by a £330 million refurbishment package, which boasts accommodation with en-suite rooms.

The personnel were welcomed back to the UK by Defence Under-Secretary Kevan Jones who later said the MoD remained committed to improving accommodation for troops.

Mr Jones added: "There has been a legacy of under-funding in Armed Forces housing. There is no quick fix but the evidence of progress speaks for itself.

"These new facilities are one way of expressing gratitude to the brigade for almost three decades of service in Germany and, recently, an exemplary tour in southern Iraq.

"Our troops dedicate themselves to serving their country and, in return for that, they deserve nothing short of first-class accommodation and facilities."

The minister's sentiments were shared

by brigade commander Brig Julian Free, who said that his soldiers were delighted to come back to the newly upgraded Catterick garrison.

Brig Free added: "For a large part of the brigade coming to Yorkshire has been a return to our spiritual home.

"Our single soldiers have been thrilled to arrive back to newly completed en-suite bedrooms, which along with the other new facilities we are very grateful to see."

As the soldiers settled into their new base, work to transform Catterick into a super garrison has been continuing, with further moves to improve facilities on the cards in the coming year.

A new junior ranks' mess, which is to be completed in 2009, is the next project on the list while significant improvements are also being made to the area's transport infrastructure.

In addition, a huge regeneration of the town centre is scheduled to begin in 2010, which will include a sports centre for soldiers and civilians.

As previously reported in *Soldier*, the MoD has been focused on improving living conditions for personnel around the country for the past six years.

The department has rolled out 26,000 new bed spaces as part of the Single Living Accommodation Modernisation scheme and several other parallel projects since 2002.

Seafaring soldiers sailing ahead

THE Prince of Wales has joined senior officers in praising a group of young soldiers for their determination and commitment after they sailed around the world on a daring expedition.

Addressing some of the 200 troops who took part in the Leadership Through The Atlantic (LTTA) initiative during an event at The Old Naval College in Greenwich, Prince Charles commended their skill and spirit of adventure.

Over the course of a year the nautical novices on the yacht *Discoverer* sailed the breadth of the globe, around the Antarctic, Arctic and the tropics, starting and finishing in Gosport, Hampshire.

One of the Service's largest adventurous training projects, LTAA was designed to develop leadership and motivational skills before soldiers deploy on ops in areas such as Iraq and Afghanistan.

Expedition secretary, WO2 John Crompton (QDG) said personnel had been pushed to the limit.

He added: "The soldiers who participated have only just finished Phase 2 training. We took the top two per cent of those we expect to lead in their Army careers."

Groups of up to 16 soldiers at a time were taken from their comfort zones and lived in the confined space of a 67-foot yacht for three weeks at a time.

WO2 Crompton said: "The lads would have to get up and change a sail in a force ten gale at 0200 in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, and that certainly helps with character building."

Injured Service personnel, such as Pte Lionel O'Connor (2 R Anglian) who has been undergoing rehabilitation at Headley Court, also took on the nautical challenge.

The 23-year-old South African-born soldier said: "I lost my leg in an explosion in Iraq in 2006, since then I have been working on my rehabilitation."

"More injured personnel should do adventurous training like this – everyone is really motivated."



Picture: Syco Entertainment

Record deal: *The X Factor* song *Hero* has flown to the top of the charts and is on course to become the decade's fastest selling charity track. Performed by the talent show's finalists, the cover of Mariah Carey's 1993 hit sold well over 313,000 copies in its first week. As *Soldier* went to press, it had been at number one for nearly a month. Support has even reached Parliamentary level, with Chancellor Alistair Darling pledging that the VAT made on sales will be waived for the charity, while high profile customers have included Prime Minister Gordon Brown, who bought his wife a copy for her 45th birthday.

Theatre of cuisine

Latest operational cookbook provides inspiration for enterprising chefs

BATTLING Army chefs have a new weapon in their armoury to combat the monotony of field rations.

For those moments when the creative flow congeals and refuses to spread, an innovative cookbook created by culinary wizards from across the Services is now being issued to kitchens.

Launched at the Combined Services Culinary Challenge in Esher, Surrey, *Ten Man ORP Recipe Ideas* is filled with tried-and-tested meal inspirations using ration pack food from kitchens around the world.

Supported by top chef Gordon Ramsay, who went to Afghanistan two years ago and wrote the foreword for the culinary oracle, the book also caters for a range of dietary requirements.

Lt Cdr Neil Horwood (Royal Navy) of Defence Equipment and Support said: "The book is not here to address a gap or shortfall in any way – the food is as good as it's always been."

"It is for young soldiers firing mortar rounds one minute and then coming into the kitchen to face 150 hungry blokes."

There's always going to be a moment when they want to find something different to cook and can't think of anything. We just wanted to provide a bit of inspiration."

The book contains recipes such as tasty chili beef burritos, exotic Indian fish balls, Italian meatballs with pasta

and garlic and soya burgers in floured rolls served with salsa sauce.

It is designed to show how versatile a ten-man ration pack can be. Each recipe tells the chef which menu box contains the ingredients necessary for the meal.

The book has been released for chefs in time for Christmas.

Festive thanks from the front line

SOLDIERS serving in Afghanistan can take their pick when it comes to Christmas cards thanks to a Yorkshire pensioner and a group of enthusiastic volunteers.

Pat Predeth, together with friends from the Pontefract community, has made more than 3,000 cards since September for troops on ops to send to loved ones back in the UK.

The 72-year-old said she wanted to give something back to the soldiers fighting on the front line after she was moved by a TV documentary earlier this year.

The former dog groomer from Gomersal

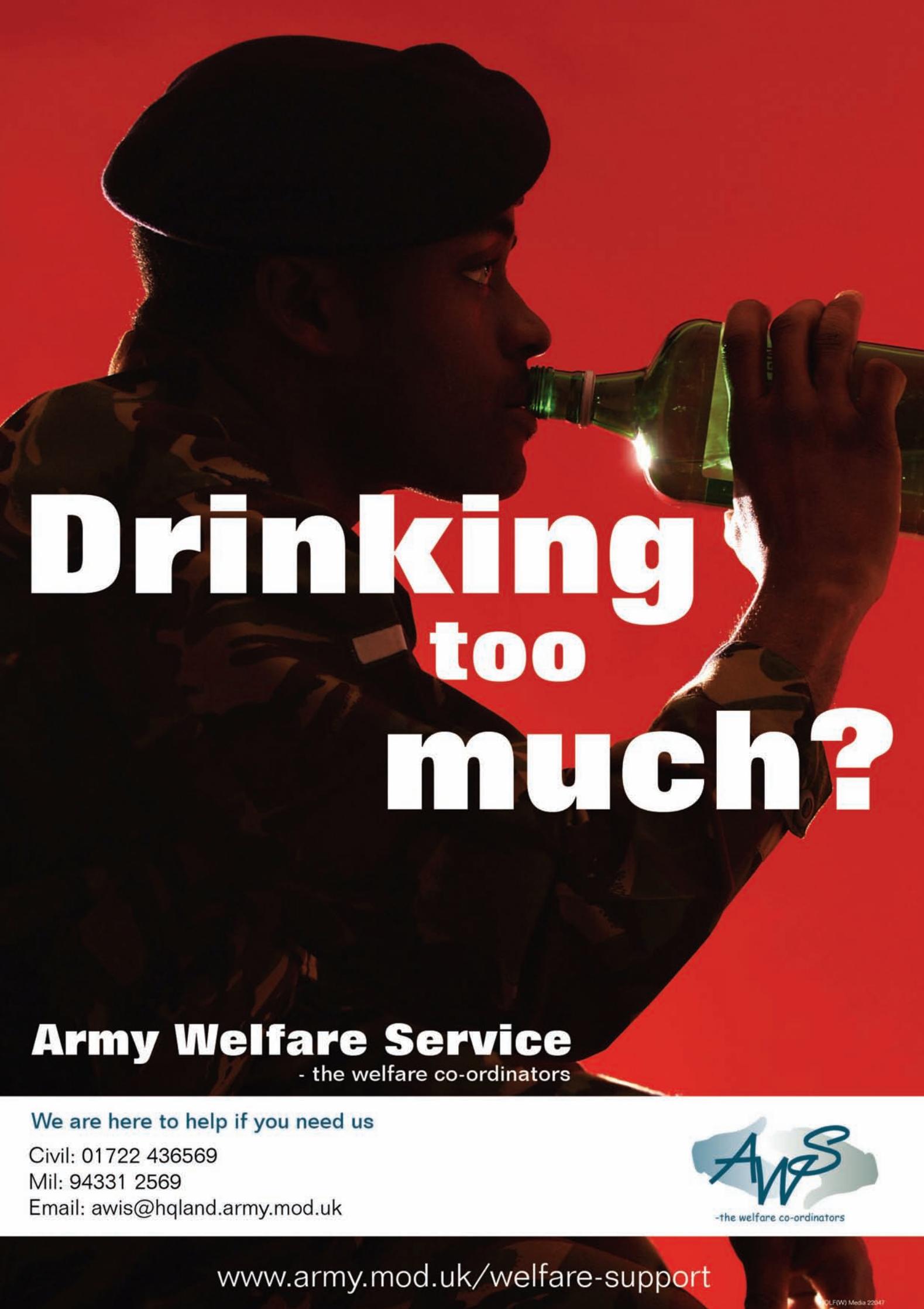
placed posters in local shops to round up more card makers for the cause.

She said: "I wanted to do something to support our boys – I back the troops."

"It takes me about half-an-hour to make each card and I produce 20 to 30 a week."

Pat enlisted the help of WO2 Curt Vines (4 Para) who has been making sure the cards reach soldiers in theatre. The NCO said he was delighted to be of assistance.

WO2 Vines added: "When Pat contacted me I couldn't believe how many cards had been made. There are box loads and I know that the lads appreciate them."



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Picture: Graeme Main

Beating the retreat: *Soldier's* Cliff Caswell flees amid a baying mob as the action heats up during a riot control exercise for Sandhurst cadets on the Longmoor Training Area. The News Editor volunteered to face would-be officers learning to deal with violent urban flare ups during the final stages of their commissioning course at the Royal Military Academy. Find out whether Caswell made the grade in the first of a new feature series starting next month.

Staying on alert

Personnel urged to seek help if they suspect any psychological problems

CONCERNED personnel who believe they are suffering from a mental health problem should seek help as soon as possible, senior medical experts have reiterated.

Doctors are worried that some soldiers are still not admitting they may be unwell because of the stigma associated with psychological issues. This is despite

the MoD beefing up the available mental health help and the introduction of the Trauma Risk Management peer support scheme in the Army.

Latest MoD figures reveal that 868 personnel were diagnosed with a mental disorder in the final quarter of last year.

But health professionals stressed that almost all of those found to be suffering

were able to continue their military careers after being treated.

The MoD claims the findings are consistent with three earlier reports.

Speaking at a press conference in Whitehall, Dr Ian Palmer, an expert at London's St Thomas's Hospital, said personnel who believe that they are suffering should make sure they come forward for an immediate check up.

Dr Palmer, who is also a visiting professor of military psychiatry at London's King's College, emphasised that individuals could put their complete trust and confidence in the professionals.

He was supported by Surgeon Commander Neil Greenberg, a senior lecturer of military psychiatry, who said that only a small number of problems were confirmed as being Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), an illness that figures show is extremely rare.

He said: "PTSD is a psychiatric disorder and, to make a specific diagnosis, the condition has to actually impair your day-to-day function.

"In some cases, stigma prevents people asking for help, even though there is plenty available."

Break for bereaved children

YOUNGSTERS whose parents have been killed while serving in the Armed Forces are being given the chance to take part in a scheme to help them share experiences with others.

The Family Activity Break (FAB) initiative allows children and teenagers aged up to 19 to spend a week away with companions who have been through similar trauma.

Senior NCOs are now being sought to help with the initiative, set up by the MoD and backed by the Army and Royal Air Force Widows Associations.

Project officer Maj Belinda Forsythe

(RMP) said FAB would offer vital support as well as allowing children to have fun and make new friendships.

She said: "The idea came about because it was felt that the youngsters are a unique group of people who need support.

"The children in particular will have strong ties with the military and often they will want to continue to be a part of it."

FAB will run week-long activity courses in Whitby and Cornwall from August. Activities on offer include abseiling and canoeing. For more information, contact belinda.forsythe926@mod.uk

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Picture: Graeme Delaune

Preparing to defend: Cadets from Victoria College in Jersey don their gas masks during a simulated attack on their replica front-line trenches near St Helier

Digging in deep

Youngsters fix bayonets as they step back in time to the Western Front

ALIVING memorial to soldiers who fought in the First World War has been unveiled in Jersey to commemorate the 90th anniversary of the end of the conflict.

A replica front-line trench complex is now established near the island's capital St Helier to remember the thousands of volunteers who went into battle on the Western Front.

And a group of youngsters from near-

by Victoria College brought the unique project to life when they lived in the trench for three days to gain an appreciation of the terrible conditions of daily life during the war.

The Combined Cadet Force volunteers relived and endured combat zone hardships that were commonplace for soldiers of the time.

Parting with their watches, mobile phones and MP3 players they donned

Great War uniforms and armed themselves with bayonets and rifles.

The experience culminated with a move over the top, when the ten cadets marched to the capital's cenotaph.

The trench project was the brainchild of Jersey-based historians Peter Tabb and Howard Baker, who wanted to give the young people a lasting image of the First World War.

Baker said: "Initially the idea was met with disinterest – understandable as the Nazi occupation of the Channel Islands in the Second World War overshadowed what had happened before."

But the youngsters were hugely enthusiastic. Cadet Cpl Scott Livingstone told *Soldier* he had enjoyed being part of a unique project.

He said: "The trenches let us experience what life must have been like for soldiers during the First World War and now we will appreciate it more as we have seen something of the conditions."

The Channel Islands are believed to have suffered the highest casualty rate per head of population compared to the rest of the British territories during the First World War. Nearly 6,500 men from Jersey alone volunteered to fight during the four-year campaign.

Profitable pose helps heroes

THE phrase point and click took on a whole new meaning for 24 Armed Forces personnel when they posed for the camera to raise cash for less fortunate colleagues.

Twelve men and 12 women from all three Services took part in a glamorous photo-shoot alongside supercars, motorbikes, guitars and helicopters for the 2009 calendar in aid of Help for Heroes.

Devised and shot by Capt Danny McDermid (RLC), the calendar is available to buy from the charity's website.

Capt McDermid said: "I'm an amateur photographer and my wife and I came up with this idea.

"We asked for volunteers and got an amazing response. Each of the pictures tells a different story and we wanted the guys to pose at play and at work. For the girls we went for supercars, bikes and high fashion as well as their day jobs.

"It was great fun – everyone really enjoyed it and are very proud that they are able to do their bit for Help For Heroes.

"We are now looking for volunteers to take a batch and sell them to their units – this would save people on postage and also get the word out that these are available."

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Training day: Maj Bev Allen (2 R Anglian), officer commanding 51 Brigade MiTT, leads a joint British and Iraqi patrol through downtown Basra

Picture: Stephen Tyler

Report: Stephen Tyler
Pictures: Cpl Rob Knight RLC

WEARING soft hats and smiles, Basra's native soldiers' relaxed air as they patrol the city's streets serves as a tangible example of the upturn in security in southern Iraq.

Operating in areas that less than a year ago would have taken several hundred men to take and hold, the Iraqis are making giant strides in convincing Basaris that they are a force for good.

Central to that shift in opinion has been the implementation of the MiTT (Military Transition Team) system by coalition troops. Already widely used by the US Army in Baghdad and by the Brits – in the form of OMLTs (Operational Mentor and Liaison Teams) – in Afghanistan, the concept is helping indigenous soldiers take charge of their country's destiny.

By allying a MiTT team to individual battalions of the Iraqi Army's 14th Division, the British enable the Basra-based soldiers to take the lead in establishing and maintaining security across the city.

Maj Conrad Turpin (Scots DG), the man in charge of monitoring the transition project, explained that the principle behind successful mitting is to take a back seat and allow the Iraqis to empower themselves by taking charge of everything from training programmes to operations.

"Training is a very small part of mitting," he said. "It's more about living alongside the Iraqi Army and providing support as and when they need it. We are not here to be overseers and instructors, we are here to enable them to succeed.

"Ultimately our aim is to grow and develop the 14th Division to the point where they are

able to cope without us and act fully on their own. Our first job out here was to learn from them what they do and how they do it because we are not trying to impose the British way onto them. It's Iraqi-led and we have to ensure that they succeed. If they don't, the populace won't support them and they will have lost Basra."

The success of mitting is clear to see in and around Basra's southern suburbs.
Deep

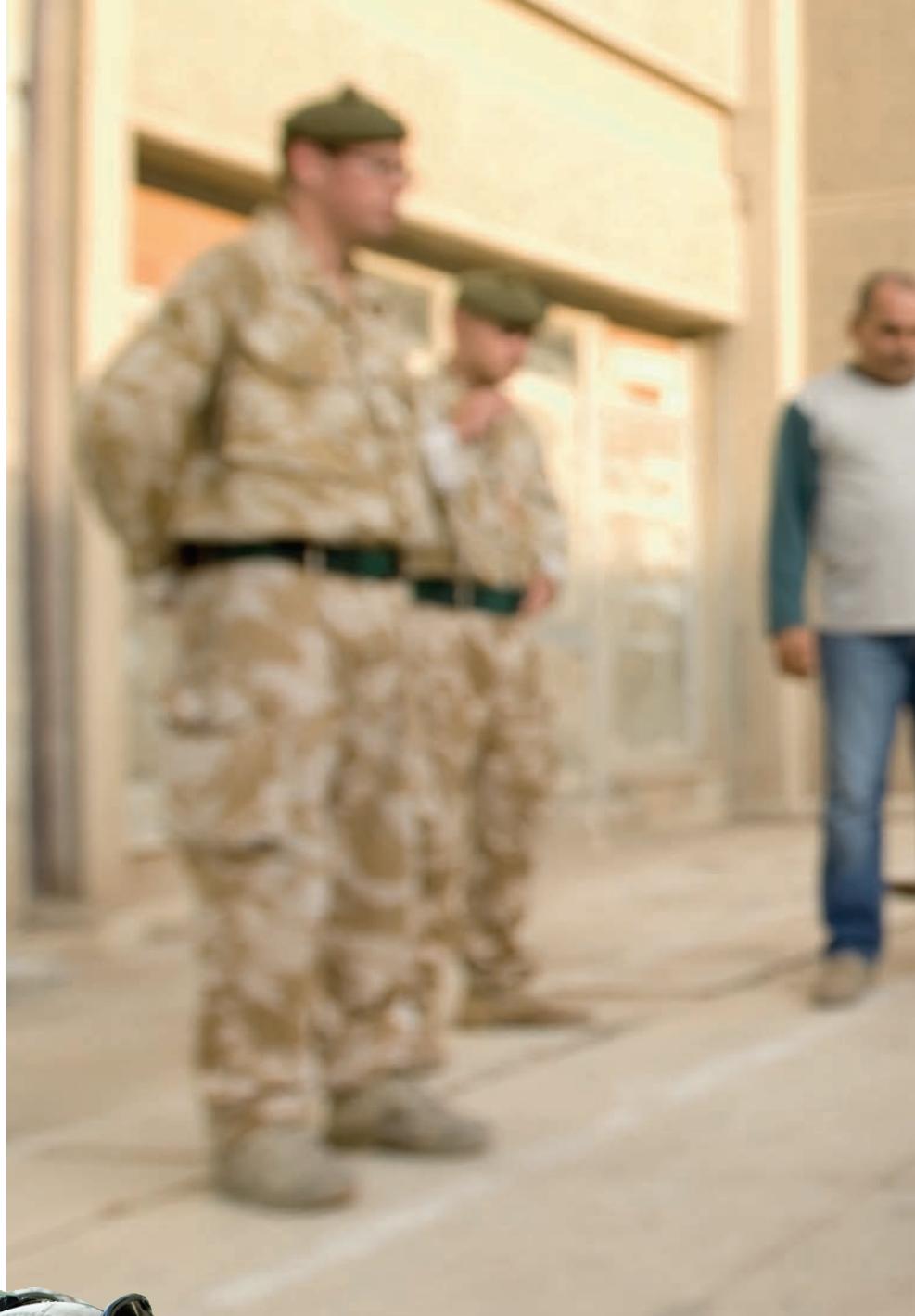
in territory once ruled by trigger-happy militiamen sits a bombed-out hotel that now serves as the base for a company of 50 Brigade Iraqi troops.

From their adopted home – which was a Jaish Al Mahdi stronghold less than a year ago – the soldiers carry out patrols and conduct training under a MiTT relationship with the 4th Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Scotland.

Maj Toby Christie, officer commanding, was quick to dispel any notions that the Iraqis were anything other than well-trained soldiers dedicated to securing a peaceful future for their country.

"There seems to be an impression that they are a bunch of boy scouts, but they are not," he told *Soldier* from 4 Scots' Telic home, a naval base near the Shatt-al-Arab waterway. "They are professional and capable and in Operation Charge of the Knights they fought through the city like a bunch of devils."

Further evidence of the inroads mitting is making in the peace





Keen learners: Troops from the Iraqi Army's 50 Brigade receive search and detention training from the 4 Scots MiTT team

process is not hard to find. The palpable sense of danger that engulfed Basra just half-a-year ago has lifted and the locals are returning to some semblance of normality in their day-to-day lives.

Perhaps inevitably for a city that has known little other than firefights and explosions in its recent history, the streets and buildings bear the scars of battle. But with the damage comes the need for regeneration and the demand for repairs and for new equipment has given the Iraqis another chance to win favour with the population.

MiTT teams visit neighbourhoods within their areas to look for improvements that need to be made and are then able to apply for coalition cash to get the work done.

Local labour and material is used wherever possible and the resulting boost to both the communities and the economy is helping to turn even more hearts and minds

round to the Army's way of thinking.

"We have helped with Iraqi-identified support projects like improving sewerage and drainage to win influence in the communities," continued Maj Christie. "That has enabled them to learn from the process and carry out their own

influence operations. It's exhausting and hard work and frustrations arise because of the cultural and language barrier, but it's been a challenge that has provided clear results after six months."

From a base in the heart of Basra, soldiers from the 2nd Battalion, The Royal Anglian Regiment and 9th/12th Royal Lancers have also been impressed with the increasing ability of their Iraqi counterparts.

During a dawn patrol which took troops past curious crowds of children making their way to school in unprecedented safety, Maj Bev Allen (2 R Anglian) told *Soldier* he was pleasantly surprised with

the professionalism of the 1st Battalion, 51 Brigade Iraqi troops working in his MiTT.

"For me, the perception before I came was that we would be dealing with an amateur army who were not capable of operating successfully on their own," he said. "I'm glad to say that myth has been blown out of the water."

"We have done a lot of influence work and I think the Iraqis are more than capable of taking things forward. It has been a very good tour."

The infectious faith in Iraq's soldiers is spreading across the south of the country largely thanks to the support and guidance of the MiTT teams.

And although the Iraqi Army still has some way to go before it is ready to assume full control of Basra, Maj Christie said the MiTT system has helped the Middle Eastern soldiers inch closer than ever before.

"It's still not a bed of roses and it would be mad to suggest it is," he concluded. "But things are moving fast and the city is certainly very optimistic." ■



BASRA city life

New-found peace helps southern Iraqis to begin living without fear

Report: Stephen Tyler
Pictures: Cpl Rob Knight RLC

AMID the growing appreciation of the Army's work in Afghanistan, there are still those who hold lingering doubts about the validity of its mission in Iraq.

Since its inception in 2003, Op Telic has divided opinion between people who saw it as an unjustified invasion in the pursuit of oil and those who viewed the British presence in the Middle East as a glimmer of hope for an embattled people living under a tyrannical regime.

The UK public may ultimately never reach agreement over which perspective rings true, but for Baswari barber Jasam Bakel (pictured left) there is only one conclusion to draw. Sitting in his uncle's well-appointed shop in downtown Al Maqil in the north of the city, the 19-year-old's broad smile shines as a beacon of hope on the face of a teenager who has known little other than the horrors of a city run by lawless militias.

"We were not happy with life before the Iraqi Army came here," he told *Soldier*. "We had a lot of problems because the militia would come in and shoot our barbers. Every two or three weeks they would come back and kill another one. Now we don't live with that fear and people are very happy."

The unlucky barbers' collective crime, explained Jasam, was to cut

their customers' hair in western styles. A cursory glance at the trendy spikes adorning the heads of young men in and around Al Maqil's crowded market stalls suggested that they are now free to style themselves as they desire.

Much had been made in *Soldier*'s pre-visit briefings of the freedom being enjoyed across Basra since the Iraqi Army's 14th Division stormed into town to clear out the militias in Operation Charge of the Knights in March, but it was hard to believe that order had effectively been restored to a city that had become synonymous with terror.

Walking past shops packed with produce and obviously doing enough business to turn a profit, however, it became increasingly easy to believe the hype. The respect and gratitude that residents feel for the Iraqi Army for pushing the militia out of their districts, streets and even homes was palpable as Lt Col Ali Al Maliki, commanding officer of 50 Brigade, 14th Division, was enthusiastically greeted by almost everyone he encountered.

"Before Charge of the Knights it was very hard for people in the city," said Lt Col Maliki. "Now they are starting to live their lives again because they trust us."

"Last year it was tough and dangerous because the militias would strike anywhere. Now there is less fear and everywhere is quieter. They [the civilians] are happy and are willing to give us information. >>



"Militias used to use houses in the city to fire mortars, but that has stopped. The people are happy because their buildings aren't being used like that any more and they now have stable homes for their children and for their wives and husbands."

Standing at a packed street-side tea shop that just months ago was forced to close because of constant attacks from militiamen wielding small arms, 53-year-old customer Fakier described the difference between his life then and now as "incredible".

"Now it is safe and secure and people feel like they can come out on the streets again," he added. "When the militias were here it was very dangerous for us, but now we are happy because the military are here. They offer us protection and if we have any problems they come and help."

The positive effect on business in this small corner of Basra is vibrantly

demonstrated by the many stalls piled high with colourful fruit. During the height of the troubles in the city stall-holders struggled to stock anything other than that which they could grow themselves.

Now that trade routes have been reopened, produce is being brought in from far and wide and Al Maqil – which is rated as amber on the coalition's traffic light-scale of the resident's feelings towards the Iraqi Army – is flourishing.

"We have a lot of different fruits now," one trader, Fada (37), said. "Before it was not possible to get them to us but now people feel safe to deliver them. Business is still growing because people do not have the wages to buy much at the moment, but it is safer and there is hope for us."

'Now it is safe and secure and people feel like they can come out on the streets again'

The trust afforded to Iraq's Army is not shared with its police. Many Baswaris grew cynical of a force they believed to be internally corrupt and at least partly responsible for allowing the militias to gain – and maintain – control.

Although it will take time for the city to regain faith in its law-keepers, Lt Col Al Maliki believes it is an inevitability and will represent the next major step towards overcoming Basra's troubled times and starting a fresh chapter in the city's rich history.

"We have vehicle checkpoints around the city, but the only reason they are still there is because the civilians do not trust the police," he said. "It is not possible for the militias to come back even if we do remove those checkpoints, but that mistrust could make





things get a little unrestful.

"It will never get as bad as it was again and I have no doubt that it will not be long before we remove the checkpoints completely."

To suggest Basra has returned to functioning as any other peaceful city in the region would be to grossly underestimate the amount of work the Iraqi Army has ahead of it in keeping the militias out and the public happy.

But for every person able to wear their hair how they want, to run a business without fear of being shot dead in cold blood or to feel like they can have a normal present and an even brighter future, every step along the road to recovery is a blessing.

"At this time my business is running very well," tea shop and restaurant owner Mohamed Abid revealed shortly after making a round of drinks on the house for British and Iraqi troops and even offering up a free lunch. "The militias would come in and take whatever they wanted, whenever they wanted. We could do nothing about it.

"As soon as the military arrived things changed from bad to good. They are better for me now than they ever have been. We feel free again and because of that life is good." ■

Far left, Hearts and minds: Discussing possible building projects with the headteacher of a girls' school

Left, Open for business: Capt Richard Givens (4 Scots) browses a thriving fruit stall in Al Maqil market



Positive outlook: Tea shop and restaurant owner Mohamed Abid's business is able to turn a profit thanks to Army action against the militias in Basra. Picture: Stephen Tyler

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Building bridges

**Sappers' hard work behind the scenes
plays important part in Basra peace**



Report: Stephen Tyler
Pictures: Cpl Rob Knight RLC

DURING a Rugby Sevens tournament held on the baked sand of Basra's Contingency Operating Base (COB), a team of sappers had the opposition half-beaten before even taking to the pitch.

The engineers' advantage had nothing to do with a fearsome playing reputation. Instead, the other teams' trepidation stemmed from the over-sized muscles bursting through the skin-tight fabric of the engineers' compression shirts.

Looking every bit like they had skipped the work part of their Telic 12 tour in favour of a three-month hammering of Op Massive, the big guns of troops from the Joint Force Engineering Group were in fact crafted in the increasingly safe streets of Basra, where they had been putting in long hours to deliver a series of coalition and Iraqi Security Force bases.

And despite undergoing a hectic tour with little downtime, the sappers were pleased to have had the opportunity to put their skills to the test after initially thinking they would be spending six months doing force protection work around the COB.

"We had to hit the ground running," explained Capt Toby Rider, adjutant of 32 Engineer Regiment. "Back in March we thought we would be building Stonehenge [the concrete and sandbag barriers encasing bedspaces to protect against insurgent rocket attacks], but then

Operation Charge of the Knights happened and that changed everything."

With sections of Basra immeasurably safer after the Iraqi-led operation to drive the militias from the city, the engineers were able to push out into new territory and begin building forward operating bases (FOBs) for the Iraqi forces.

Tasked with creating functional and secure homes for their counterparts, the sappers were shocked to find litter-strewn buildings where soldiers slept on any patch of dirty ground they could find.

The most pressing task was constructing a secure perimeter around the new camps and it was this job more than any other that allowed the sappers to demonstrate their admirable work ethic. Grafting for as much as 17 hours a day for up to a week-and-a-half at a time, the engineers filled hundreds of bags of Hesco Bastion with sand to provide rocket-proof outer walls.

Fundamental facilities including toilets, washrooms and burn pits were added before the regiment's skilled artisans set about building, plastering and painting the camps' structures. Replacing the often lethally-wired electrical systems was also required to bring the facilities in line with UK health and safety requirements.

Cpl Kieran Day told *Soldier* that he had enjoyed playing his part in securing a solid foundation for the Iraqi Army's 14th Division around the city despite the amount of effort involved.

"Some of the sites needed a lot of work just to get them ready before we could even start building," said Cpl Day. "No-one expected that we would be as busy as

we have been, but we haven't complained. We worked long hours, but when you are on task you don't really notice because you are being productive and that makes the time go a lot quicker.

"We are out here in an engineering capacity and the amount of work

has been a bit of a challenge for some of the younger guys who haven't experienced it before. Usually I would be in an ops room so I'm happy to have had the chance to get out on the ground and put the hours in."

In addition to the 15 FOBs dotted throughout the city, the sappers have also constructed two joint operational centres – one at the former Shatt Al Arab Hotel and the other at Camp Wessam near Shaibah – to house representatives of each of Iraq's security forces in the same compound.

With many Baswaris still dubious of the police, the Iraqis hope that housing the force in the same barracks as the military

It's been a fast and furious tour, but we have had a can-do attitude and have done whatever it takes to make things work



and training them together will weed out any unscrupulous officers and restore the civilian agency's reputation among the local population.

As well as improving the capability of UK troops, the work being done throughout Basra has also provided Iraq's military engineers with the chance to hone skills they have learnt during British-led courses at the Divisional Training Centre (DTC) south of the city (see Page 31).

Lt Col Charlie Thackway, commanding officer of 32 Engr Regt, explained that the coalition has also helped by purchasing new equipment for artisans including carpenters and electricians.

"We have been taking a section of engineers to work alongside us in the city," he added. "That shows the Iraqis that their army has capable engineers and has brought them on quicker.

"They have developed to the stage where we will still need to mentor them, but as time goes on we will be able to gradually take steps back a little each time. I'm sure that in six months we won't need to be there for them to do the job."

Despite having to graft for long hours in heat exceeding 50 degrees during the hottest part of the summer, British engineers can reflect on a job well done on Telic 12.

The infrastructure they have left behind has enabled the Iraqi Army to



continue its rapid improvement and the sappers' skills and enthusiasm have instilled a positive feeling throughout Basra.

"When the engineers turn up it's smiles all round," concluded Cpl Day. "It's been a fast and furious tour, but we have had a can-do attitude and have done whatever it takes to make things work." ■

Above from left, Bridging the gap: Troops from 32 Engr Regt replace a damaged foot bridge over a sewage-filled stream in downtown Basra

Friendly force: Sappers hand out gifts including school bags and Iraqi flags to local children





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Training days

Commando units head for the top of the class at Shaibah learning centre

Report: Stephen Tyler
Picture: Cpl Rob Knight RLC

WITH its dilapidated roads flanked by crumbling buildings, Shaibah airfield feels like something from a bygone era.

Structures dating from 1920 give the former Royal Air Force base near Zubair, to the south west of Basra, a definite air of decay.

But a closer look at the brick shells reveals a remarkably different story. The insides of several of the buildings have been adapted to be used for training Iraqi Army troops. ISO container villages provide soldiers with the chance to practice urban assaults, while the old air control tower is now used for commando unit training.

The base – now known as the divisional training centre (DTC) for the Iraqi Army's 14th Division – is playing a fundamental part in the ultimate mission to provide Iraq with a fully-capable home-grown army.

"None of the units in the city are sustainable without a properly functioning DTC," Maj Simon Worthy (2 R Anglian), told *Soldier*. "We are here to do anything that is required to move this location towards self-sufficiency and create a successful legacy."

Although British troops – working under The Scots Dragoon Guards Battlegroup – currently run the majority of training programmes, their focus has been on training the Iraqis to be able to take the lead themselves.

Potential teachers are selected from within the Iraqi ranks and more than 30 had been recommended for the job just five months into Op Telic 12.

As well as infantry training, British troops have also been bringing the Iraqis up to speed in everything from engineering to combat medical skills.

The results speak for themselves. New trainers flourished after being given the task of running an open day for Iraqi media in October and Maj Worthy was confident when asked whether their performance suggested they would ultimately be able to take over their own training regime.

"Absolutely," he said. "They are already doing it and at the training day we were able to stand back and watch them.

'The difference we have seen in five months is dramatic and we are moving towards an enduring training legacy'

"They work with enthusiasm and that gets the right reaction from the soldiers they are training. Our role has been to identify the right people then take a step back and monitor and mentor them where appropriate."

In addition to the new training areas, the DTC has benefited from massive investment in its living facilities and the 2,500-man accommodation block currently being built will be the largest in Iraq.

A separate camp for the commando units will follow next year and troops at Shaibah will also have access to a new set of ranges built by Iraqi engineers working under the guidance of British sappers.

The commando training exercise that *Soldier* witnessed being run by WO2 Tony Ronaldson (4 Scots), highlighted the growing ability of the Iraqi troops.

Although WO2 Ronaldson instructed the soldiers through an interpreter, the Iraqi's commanding officer had his own input and was able to advise his troops on their tactics as they stormed the control tower.

Maj Worthy believed that although his last Telic tour in 2005 included 50 search and detention operations, his time on Telic 12 will ultimately have a longer-lasting effect.

"The guys realise that they are the future," he concluded. "The difference we have seen in just five months is dramatic and we are starting to create an enduring training legacy."

"We are moving towards leaving a capable Iraqi Army and that has been our mission." ■



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Fire fighters

Fusiliers clamp down on shoot-and-scoot rocketmen targeting Britain's main base in Basra



Report: Stephen Tyler
Picture: Cpl Rob Knight RLC

THE monotonous drone of Basra Contingency Operating Base's (COB) indirect fire (IDF) alarm holds an unwelcome place in the memories of individuals deployed on Operation Telic.

Tour after tour has been remembered as much for the amount of times soldiers had to hit the deck and scramble for body armour following the sounding of the siren as for any other reason.

But as the southern Iraqi city's streets embrace their new-found safety, the IDF alarm has been called into action on an increasingly infrequent basis.

Key to the relative silence has been the swift and decisive action taken against the few militiamen still foolish enough to launch rocket strikes against coalition bases in the wake of Operation Charge of the Knights.

Using a range of assets, British troops have dominated the ground in and around Basra to ensure that there is no place to hide for would-be attackers. Much of the work has fallen to soldiers from the 1st Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers who have made up the lion's share of 7th Armoured Brigade's strike battlegroup.

Soldier joined one of the fusiliers' patrols to the north of the city in and around neighbourhoods that have been used to hide massive weapons caches in the past.

Navigation station: Lt Simon Walker checks his position during a counter-IDF patrol through a rural area to the north of Basra



As platoon commander Lt Simon Walker quizzed residents about whether they had noticed any militia activity in their area, LCpl Mohammed Seru described Telic 12 as much less kinetic than he had expected.

"It has been a quiet tour for us, but that is not a bad thing. It shows that things are getting better for Basra," he said. "We expected to be going out and patrolling maybe three or four times each day as we have done in the past, but that has not happened."

In their capacity as the strike battlegroup, 1 RRF had expected to be called into action on a daily basis to provide armoured support to the Military Transition Teams (MiTTs) in central Basra.

Those plans were shelved after the Iraqi Army's move into the city allowed peace to prosper and the battle-ready infantrymen have had to adapt to a new set of challenges.

In addition to conducting patrols in the areas surrounding the city, troops from the battlegroup have also been tasked with manning a forward operating base near the Iranian border and providing force protection at the sangars and gates around the COB.

Their role may have changed, but commanding officer Lt Col Paul Nanson told *Soldier* that his troops have had a successful tour after arriving in Iraq primed for any eventuality.

It has been a quiet tour for us. It shows that things are getting better

"There was initially a bit of frustration from my blokes because they did some excellent training at Hohenfels [a US Army training facility in Germany] and came here fully expecting to kick some doors in," he said. "However, they understand the reason they are not getting to do that is

because the Iraqi Army is increasingly capable.

"We have had to improve our flexibility, especially in getting around because the tanks don't go out and the Warriors are being used less and less, but we always knew we would be given opportunities across the whole spectrum."

With armoured vehicle moves now being kept to a minimum around the city, the fusiliers have been relying on helicopters to get to and from patrol areas.

Although their professionalism is as robust as ever, the troops *Soldier* accompanied on patrol faced an entirely different challenge to that presented to them during their last Telic tour in 2005.

The threat of contacts, whether in the form of IEDs or small arms fire, has all but dissipated and soldiers are now tasked with rummaging for weapons caches, conducting vehicle searches and seeking information.

None of the cars stopped by the fusiliers at the patrol checkpoints were found to have any suspicious contents and the drivers seemed

largely unperturbed at the slight delay to their journeys.

Curious villagers approached the soldiers to strike up friendly conversations in broken English, but for Lt Walker and his men the entire evening passed without any real incidents of note.

"These patrols are important for us as we can get the guys on the ground along with medics and a dog handler," he said. "It gives us a presence and an opportunity to meet people and ask for information."

As much as the well-trained infantrymen that make up the strike battlegroup may have liked to put their skills to the test during their latest operational tour, the change in direction the Army has been able to make in the Middle East is nothing short of amazing.

And every time a patrol heads outside the COB and encounters little more than warm greetings, Lt Col Nanson believes another move has been made towards the completion of Britain's ultimate mission in Iraq.

"This is my third Telic and when we arrived we knew what we wanted to achieve – a more secure Basra that we were able to hand over to the Iraqi 14th Division," he explained.

"Touching wood, the MiTTs are doing a fantastic job downtown and we are not getting rocket attacks anymore."

"As far as I'm concerned, when we leave we can do so with a sense of satisfaction. People in Basra were sick of the militias and there is now a clear air of optimism." ■



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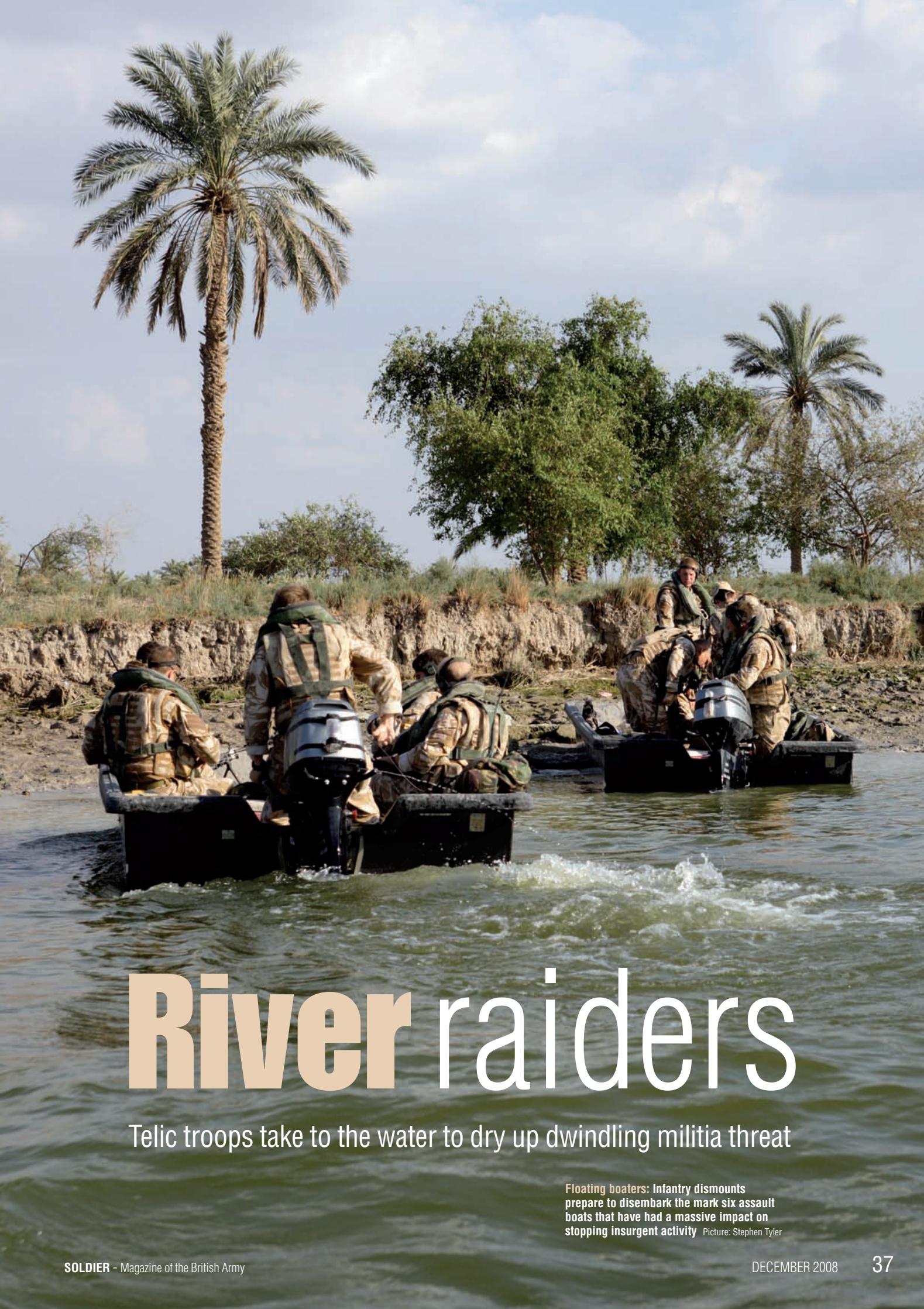
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River raiders

Telic troops take to the water to dry up dwindling militia threat

Floating boaters: Infantry dismounts prepare to disembark the mark six assault boats that have had a massive impact on stopping insurgent activity Picture: Stephen Tyler



Report: Stephen Tyler
Picture: Cpl Rob Knight RLC

HIDDEN among the reeds and tall grass lining the Shatt-Al-Arab waterway to the north of Basra, Iraqi insurgents thought they had the perfect location to launch rocket attacks at the Contingency Operating Base (COB).

Facing a losing battle against the superior firepower of the armoured vehicles they encountered in the city centre, the militiamen changed tactics and unleashed wave after wave of aerial bombardments from their marshy hideouts.

The attacks peaked in 2007 at more than 15 each day, unfortunately claiming coalition casualties along the way. But while they were partially hidden from the advances of Challenger Two tanks, the enemy fighters had not banked on the Army unleashing its strength via the water.

Using flat-bottomed mark six assault boats, troops have been dominating the waterways around Leaf Island – the area most commonly used as a firing point by

insurgents – and have all but stopped the threat of indirect fire (IDF).

The basic vessels, manned by an 11-strong troop of sappers from 32 Engineer Regiment, have been delivering dismounted soldiers from 9th/12th Royal Lancers and the 1st Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers to previously hard-to-reach locations.

And the results speak for themselves. Since setting up a forward operating base (FOB) on the banks of the Shatt-Al-Arab three months ago, the COB has suffered just one rocket attack which originated from the city.

"We needed to be able to get out onto the ground and dominate the waterways quickly," explained WO2 James Rickett (9/12 L) during a break from patrols at the newest waterside location, FOB Oxford. "We have been in two FOBs which have been glorified hides with very low-level living conditions, but that has allowed us to have the effect we needed to have.

"The waterways are now our main focus. Dominating them means we can stop any lethal aid, interact with the local population to get intelligence and also get the Iraqi Army involved in the area.

"Touch wood, it's been very successful. As with everything else it's another part of a larger puzzle, but I like to think we have had a big effect because the IDF has reduced."

The deployment of the assault boats does not mark the first use of Basra's waterways on Op Telic. Bigger craft including the combat support boat and rigid raider have been deployed to police the larger channels found in and around the city centre.

Because both vessels feature prominent hulls which would have struggled to negotiate the shallower, narrower stretches of water around Leaf Island, the sappers were asked to bring the smaller mark six assault boat to theatre.

With its flat bottom, simple operation and

‘We needed to be able to get out onto the ground and dominate the waterways quickly’



low profile, the craft has been a revelation in helping to deliver troops to previously unchartered areas.

“Using them allows us to get the dismounts into areas that would otherwise have been out of reach,” troop commander Lt Andy Bostock (32 Engr Regt) told *Soldier*. “They are also more covert than having helicopters bombing in and out of the area.

“We used to do 36-hour stints on the water before returning to the COB, but since the construction of the FOBs they have been out longer and have had a massive impact in stopping IDF.”

The Lancers, who have been accompanied on patrols by 1 RRF snipers as well as search dogs, had the chance to highlight the effectiveness of the boats during the heat of the summer.

While out on patrol, the soldiers were about to sit down for a cup of tea with Leaf Island residents when a message over the radio warned of an imminent rocket attack from a nearby location.

Using the boats to reach the area, a troop led by Sgt Jason Mawhinney (9/12

L) discovered the deadly munition with the timer still attached.

The explosive ordnance disposal team was called and three more rockets were found and destroyed, further showcasing the value of having easy access to the island.

“There is no way we would have been able to get there in time if it wasn’t for the boats,” said Sgt Mawhinney, adding that the operation took place in temperatures of up to 56C and 85 per cent humidity, causing seven soldiers to go down with heat exhaustion. “They got us to the point of origin quickly and provided an outer cordon as well.”

As big an impact as the boats have made on stopping the movement of lethal aid, they have also allowed the British Army to engage with previously untouched waterside communities.

Projects to build everything from football pitches to health centres have ingratiated the water-borne soldiers with the population, many of whom wave enthusiastically from the banks as the boats pass by. And by stopping the militia from using Leaf Island as a firing point, the soldiers have also helped

local fishermen boost their business.

“They are very happy with us because they can actually fish at night now,” explained 2nd Lt George McCrea (32 Engr Regt). “Before they had people telling them to move on because it wasn’t safe and they would have to pack up by 1800.”

“Now they can have lights on their boats after dark and stay out until the early hours of the morning.”

The use of boats on a day-to-day basis has been something of a culture shock for soldiers used to providing an armoured infantry capability.

But with rocket attacks fast becoming a distant memory and Basra’s rural population enjoying a freedom impossible to imagine when the militias had free reign over the marshes, the Lancers are happy to have utilised their versatility.

“We have been well out of role considering the fact that we are normally formation reconnaissance,” said WO2 Rickett. “But the success we have had here highlights the strength of the Army – we can turn our hands to anything.” ■

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FINAL. CHAPTER

Veteran soldier Capt Doug Beattie
bows out on the battlefield
which played host to his Military
Cross-winning actions

Interview: Cliff Caswell
Picture: Sgt Will Craig, RLC

Twas a mission that was supposed to take no longer than 48 hours. Exactly five years to the day after the 9/11 attacks against the USA forced the international community to strike back at the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, British troops were moving to wrestle a key town back from a resurgent enemy.

But for veteran soldier Capt Doug Beattie, of the 1st Battalion, The Royal Irish Regiment, September 11, 2006 would live with him forever. Far from the two-day battle commanders had predicted, the mission to snatch back Garmisir would turn into a fortnight-long struggle for survival.

"A small British force was embedded with the Afghan National Army, and we were fighting pretty much toe-to-toe with the enemy," the 43-year-old officer recalled. "Obviously I'm no spring chicken – by then I'd been in the Army for 25 years – but I had never seen anything like those 14 days.

"When I think about it now, I remember the men standing shoulder-to-shoulder with me, many from the Territorial Army. They were superb soldiers to fight alongside. I would go through it all over again with them."

The engagement at Garmisir was brutal and cost the lives of more than ten Afghan troops. Employed as a liaison officer, Capt Beattie was not meant to be in the thick of battle but was forced to lead the attack himself when his inexperienced counterparts proved reluctant to fight.

Awarded the coveted Military Cross for his bravery in combat, the officer's citation paid tribute to his actions and highlighted his key role in the operation's eventual success. And he has now put pen to paper about his three decades of military experience in his autobiography, *An Ordinary Soldier*.

But in an interview at Forward Operating Base Hero – where Capt Beattie has been based on his latest and final tour of Helmand – he admitted he had reluctantly signed up for the Army at the age of 16 to follow in the footsteps of his father and two brothers. His career began with a spell guarding notorious Nazi war criminal Rudolph Hess

at Spandau Prison before taking him to Africa, the Balkans and Iraq.

A former RSM to CO-turned-author Col Tim Collins, he started writing his book in anticipation that the 2006 Herrick tour would be his last. But he was persuaded to deploy to Afghanistan for a final time

as it was about to be printed.

"I had returned from Helmand province in January 2007 and I had been due to leave the Army six months later," he recalled. "Back then I was having great difficulty in explaining to people what I had been doing, and thought that a good way to tell them would be to write about it.

"In addition, I thought it would be interesting for others to read about what is asked of the Army. The public often hear the senior officers' perspective but they don't necessarily get the view of the British soldier."

Capt Beattie's account certainly does not pull any punches about the realities of life and death on the front lines of Helmand, where he has been continuing to mentor the Afghan National Army.

Having experienced the heady mixture of unease, fear and exhilaration during daily battles with the Taliban as a veteran soldier, he is full of admiration for young comrades willing to put their lives on the line.

"Your nerves are on edge the whole time, and you notice the effects of combat on those around you. You have feelings of trepidation and fear too but the moment the engagement with the enemy starts, they leave completely.

"You immediately go into your professional mode, and I wanted to show others what it is like to be a soldier and to bring the experience to life."

Despite encountering ferocious combat in the near-daily battles he fought with the Taliban, Capt Beattie said he would remember Afghanistan fondly and was convinced that the Nato operation there remains entirely justified.

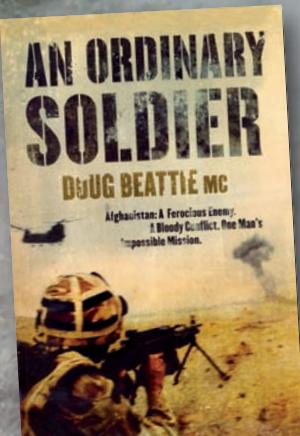
He was also full of praise for the Afghan people, who had endured near-perpetual war for decades but remained both generous and hospitable.

Capt Beattie added: "The landscapes in Afghanistan are incredible too – I've patrolled in cornfields where the crops are 12 feet high, in open desert where the sand is like moon dust and around mountains that spring up from nowhere. The soldiers who are out in that environment are doing an incredible job in bringing peace and prosperity. Helmand is a far better place than when I was there in 2006 and the lives lost have not been lost in vain."

As for the future, Capt Beattie admitted he would miss the Army, but accepted that the time had now come to leave his old life behind.

"The Royal Irish Regiment has always had such identity, and I have a huge loyalty to it, which is why I agreed to go back to Afghanistan," added Capt Beattie. "But I'm serving with a young ranger whose father I knew 23 years ago."

"I joined as a basic soldier at the age of 16 and wouldn't have believed what I would be doing, especially as I should be sitting at a desk now. It's been hard work in Afghanistan, but everyone has been absolutely fantastic." ■



Doug Beattie – MY ARMY

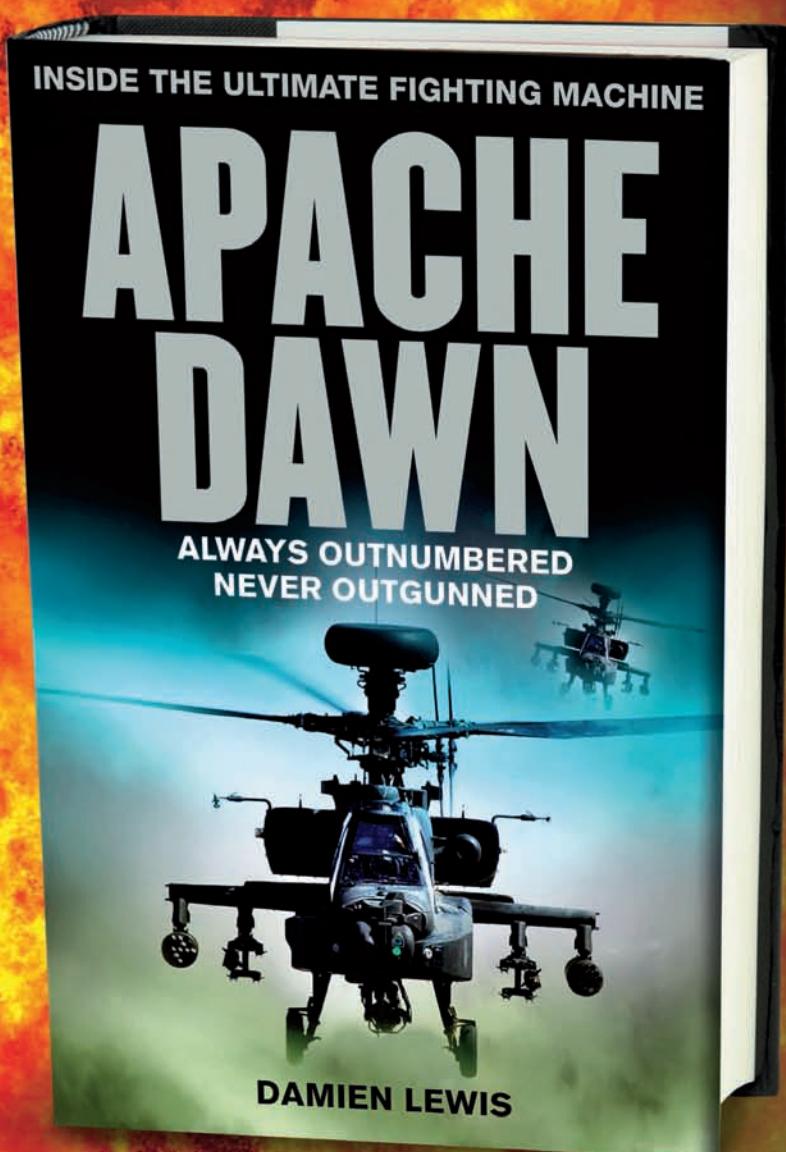
An Ordinary Soldier by Doug Beattie
MC, published in hardback by Simon & Schuster, is available now priced at £16.99



No ordinary men: Soldiers conduct operations against Taliban fighters in southern Afghanistan. Capt Doug Beattie has now completed two Op Herrick tours

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Soldiering on: Chris Latham, who served with The Queen's Lancashire Regiment, has his life back on track thanks to the help of Veterans Aid

Picture: Graeme Main

Unseen heroes

Veterans reflect on their lives as down-and-outs on the streets of London



Report: Heidi Mines
Picture: Graeme Main

LYING on the carpeted floor, a former soldier placed his feet firmly against the locked door to guard against would-be intruders as he contemplated whether his decision to seek shelter was the right one.

After all, Chris Latham had spent about three years living in a tree in St James's Park and had become wise to the nightly games of cat and mouse played by drunken revellers seeking a tramp to kick.

The former Queen's Lancashire Regiment infantryman had put his military skills to good use to avoid trouble and hide his scant possessions, but years of living rough had caused his spirits to wane.

But a volunteer in a soup kitchen heard of Chris's career in uniform and pointed him in the direction of Veterans Aid (VA), a charity dedicated to helping homeless ex-Servicemen and women.

"I came down to London as I had just come out of a relationship that broke up because I was a serious drinker," 45-year-old Chris told *Soldier* at VA's New Belvedere House hostel in East London.

"I turned round and I thought I'm not going to put anyone else through that, this is my problem and I have to sort it out my way.

"When I first came to Veterans Aid, Phil Rogers [the charity's alcohol adviser] worked out I was drinking between 18 and 24 cans of lager a day. The first thing I



would do each morning was drink two or three cans to settle my nerves."

When *Soldier* met Chris he had not had a drop of alcohol for almost a month and explained this was thanks to the hostel's manager Pat O'Connor, whose kindness and compassion mixed with a stark warning had helped him to put down the booze.

"I look back now and it doesn't quite seem real. When I first arrived I kept myself to myself for more than a month," he said.

"It took me seven weeks to sleep in a bed and I used to sleep with my feet against the door even though it was my room and had a door that locked."

Dr Hugh Milroy, the charity's chief executive, insists that a lot of information about homeless veterans is unfounded. Contrary to popular belief, only six per cent of the homeless community is made up of male and female veterans of all ranks and ages.

"There are many misconceptions out there," said the former Royal Air Force wing commander. "Most people who come to the centre are not in rags, they are trying to look like everyone else on the street."

"Some people just need some new shoes or clothes and some just want a cup of tea, a bacon roll and a chat."

Milroy explained that VA uses a holistic approach, with therapeutic massages among the methods used to give individuals back their dignity.

"Our motto is 'action this day' and we

work on the provision of dignity when the poor have no choices," he added.

New Belvedere House's 57 beds are full almost every night and VA houses more than 150 people in temporary accommodation around London until it can find them somewhere more permanent.

"I don't need huge warehouses for human beings," said Milroy, explaining why VA is not planning to provide more hostels. "We are here to rebuild connections and assist where it is needed."

The charity, which received 2,500 calls last year and provided around 20,000 nights of accommodation, will help any homeless veteran who possesses a Service number, regardless of how long they have served.

Individuals are encouraged to visit a drop-in centre near Victoria station where they can chat through their situation with experienced advisers who are either ex-homeless veterans themselves or ex-military personnel.

Michael Hallam served for almost 18 years in the Royal Navy before leaving to work in civvy street. He had a home, a car and a successful business before suffering a nervous breakdown and finding himself barely surviving on the streets of London.

"When I was on the street initially I failed, even though during my Navy career I was a tri-Service expedition leader so I was very good at survival."

"The overwhelming emotions for me were embarrassment and humility. It was the most amazing experience to find out how wonderful so many people are," said the 50-year-old who is now living at New Belvedere House.

Sad tales of former military men and women who have fallen on hard times are abound at VA. One homeless ex-soldier had been surviving on the streets of London quite happily until someone took his false leg which he had removed while washing at a public toilet sink. Another found herself a job but could not bear to tell her new employers that she was sleeping rough.

For Michael Hallam and his good friend Chris Latham their journeys have not been easy, but they commend the dedicated staff at both VA's headquarters and hostel for their unending support.

"If someone finds themselves in the situation many of us have, I would say don't be embarrassed to ask for help," added Hallam. "At some stage we all need a helping hand." ■

‘We are here to rebuild connections and assist where it is needed’

with experienced advisers who are either ex-homeless veterans themselves or ex-military personnel.

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Range of fuel economy figures for the Land Rover range (l/100km): urban 30.6 (9.2) - 12.4 (22.8), extra urban 45.5 (6.2) - 23.1 (12.2), combined 37.7 (7.5) - 17.8 (15.9). CO₂ emissions 194 - 376g/km.

Christmas cheers

Head of the British Army leads festive tribute to the 'high quality men and women' serving our nation

AS the end of 2008 approaches it is important to take a moment to reflect on what has been achieved over the last 12 months.

The high tempo of operations has continued to test not only our determination, stamina and resolve but those of our families who support us so whole-heartedly.

We must also remember those who we have lost or have been injured and their families who are now having to deal with the consequences. Their sacrifices will never be forgotten.

At this time of year, my thoughts are particularly with those deployed on operations and their families. The Army has borne the brunt of the country's contribution in Iraq and can take pride in what it has achieved; our job there is very nearly done and Basra is a better place now than it was in 2003.

In Afghanistan, we have continued to make good progress, albeit at a cost. I remain convinced that we can – and must – succeed, but it will be a long haul and will demand your continued professionalism and perseverance.

This year has also seen the centenary of the Territorial Army, which has been celebrated across the country in a series of well supported events. I would like to thank those who continue to serve alongside us both at home and on operations. I am extremely grateful for your dedication.

I am acutely aware that the nation is asking a lot of you and wherever I visit I am constantly struck by the resolve that you show.

I am also impressed by the

overwhelming show of public support for the Army. Be it on homecoming parades, offers of invitations to events or attendance at military shows, your efforts are being recognised.

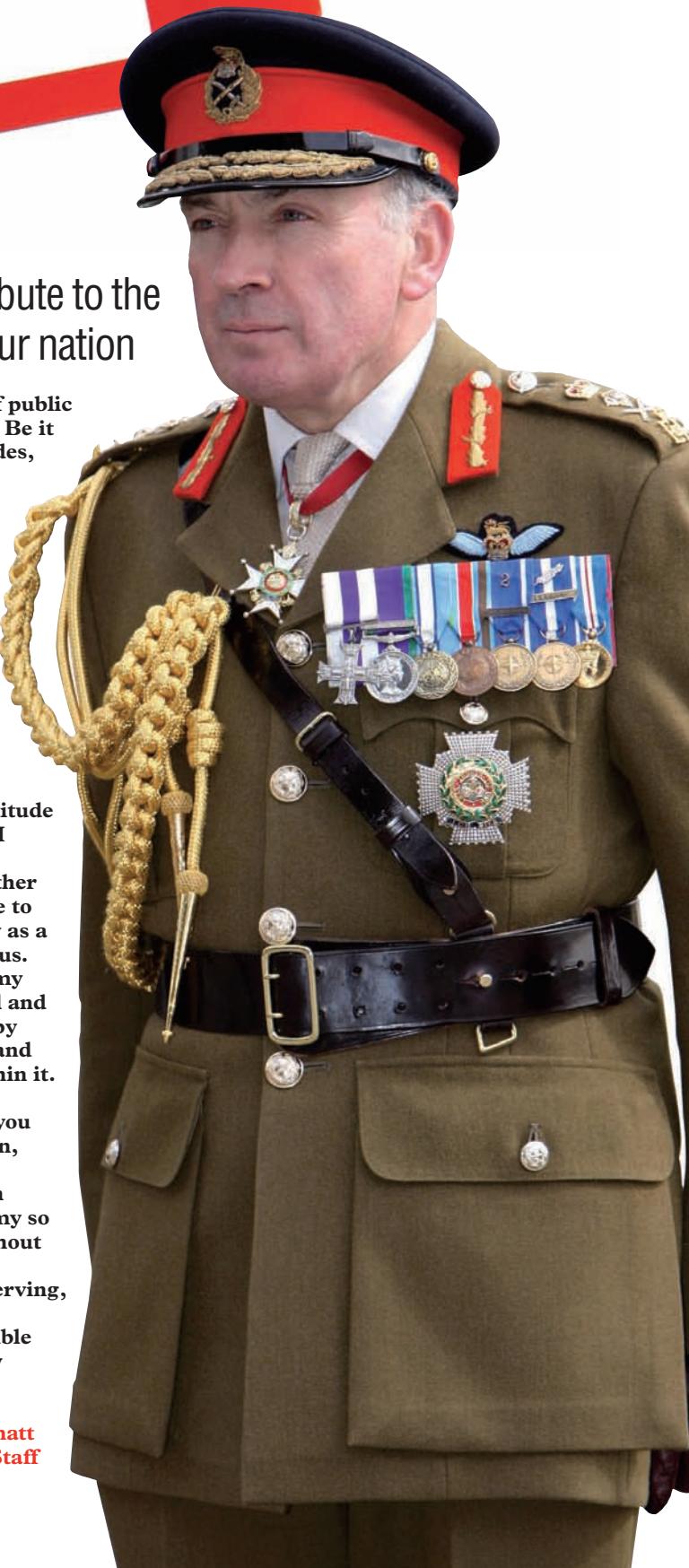
The publication of the Service Personnel Command Paper in July was also a welcome step in the right direction to demonstrate the Government's commitment and gratitude to the Armed Forces. I now want to take that support one stage further by encouraging people to recommend the Army as a career and by joining us.

During 2008 the Army has continued to excel and this is made possible by the high quality men and women who serve within it.

May I take this opportunity to thank you for your determination, courage, loyalty and professionalism which makes the British Army so well respected throughout the world.

Wherever you are serving, I wish you and your families the best possible Christmas, and a very good 2009.

**Gen Sir Richard Dannatt
Chief of the General Staff**





I send you my very best wishes, but I have no words of advice to give you. You don't need it. My time on operations with you over these past few years tell me that.

In both Iraq and Afghanistan, I have seen how you carry out your tasks and I am in no doubt that you are the most professional army that our country has ever seen. You have the guts, the determination, and most of all the experience, which is beginning to be recognised throughout the world.

I hope you will take comfort in the fact that slowly and surely, there are growing numbers of Britons and Americans back home who are beginning to recognise your skill and your bravery. They are finally getting it. And there are fewer and fewer who want to criticise you. Attitudes are changing, and I truly believe in 2009 you will start to receive fully the respect you deserve.

Be safe,
Andy McNab



I hope you all have a very merry Christmas and I thank God that it's you there and not me! I love the troops and we are all thinking about you. I'm glad that the work we have done with the British Forces Foundation has helped you get the respect you deserve.

Jim Davidson

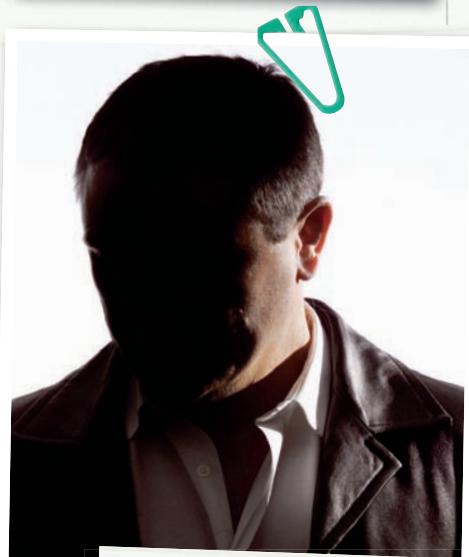


To all the men and women out there who are fighting for what is right and true,

You are an inspiration to me. Your unending courage and dedication are a shining light. My thoughts are with you and your families during these hard times that you have apart.

I can only imagine how much you must miss your families. I missed my family every day while on The X Factor and that's only a TV show, I wasn't risking my life. Good luck and God speed.

Daniel Evans



Hey,

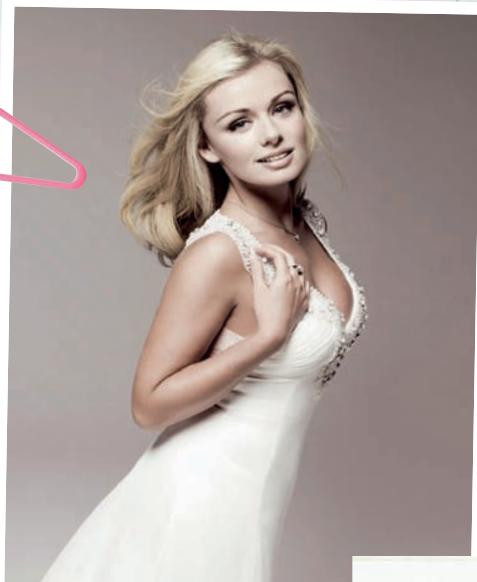
Firstly, I would like to wish you all a safe and very happy Christmas. I also wanted to let you know that we are all thinking of you and your families – especially at this time of year.

Your courage, determination and bravery never ceases to astound me and I am truly honoured to be involved with charities like Help for Heroes. Sending you lots of love and kisses,

Peta Todd

xxx





Hi everyone,

Just wanted to write a little note to say I'll be thinking of you over this festive period and to wish you all a very merry Christmas and a happy new year!

Some of my best memories are of the times I've spent coming out to sing to you all over Christmas and I hope I get to see you in 2009!

Stay well, stay safe and see you soon,

Lots of love,

Katherine Jenkins

xxx



At the time of writing the England squad are training and preparing for four matches in the Investec Challenge.

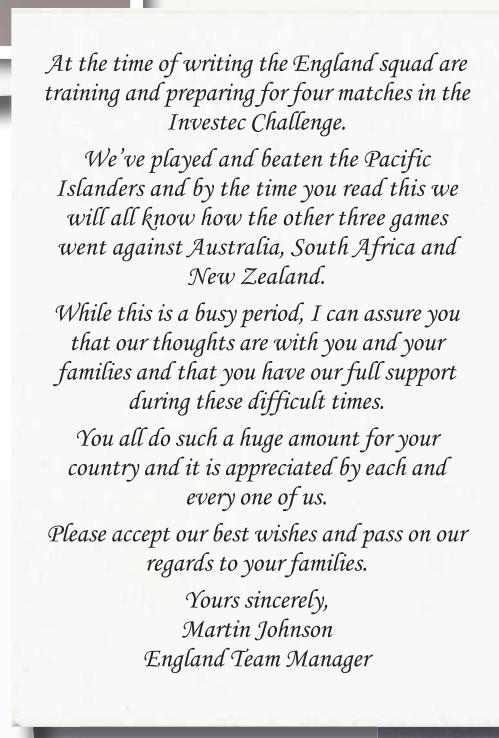
We've played and beaten the Pacific Islanders and by the time you read this we will all know how the other three games went against Australia, South Africa and New Zealand.

While this is a busy period, I can assure you that our thoughts are with you and your families and that you have our full support during these difficult times.

You all do such a huge amount for your country and it is appreciated by each and every one of us.

Please accept our best wishes and pass on our regards to your families.

*Yours sincerely,
Martin Johnson
England Team Manager*



To all of the soldiers away from home this Christmas,

Keep up the great job you are doing and I hope you will all be home safe very soon.

I know that each and every one of you is doing great work as I have friends serving in Afghanistan. I was also put through a military boot camp myself not very long ago, and have had a small taste of what you are going through. I have great respect for you all.

Love Gemma Atkinson

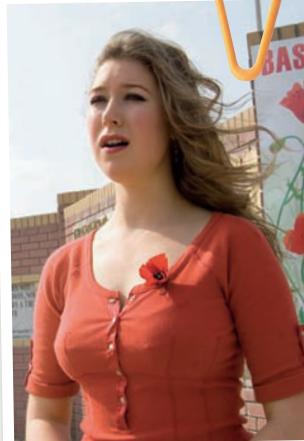


Since visiting Basra to launch this year's Poppy Appeal I've been lucky enough to witness first-hand what a truly amazing job you all do.

I am completely in awe of your bravery and courage.

Wherever you are in the world I'd like to wish you a happy Christmas and hope you can get home soon to visit your friends and families.

*With love,
Hayley Westenra x*





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Official Government Environmental Data. Fuel consumption figures mpg (litres/100km) and CO₂ emissions (g/km). Zafira Design 1.9CDTi 16v (150PS) auto: Urban – 28.8 (9.8), Extra-urban – 49.6 (5.7), Combined – 39.2 (7.2). CO₂ emissions from 194g/km.



London's CALLING

Capital city reservists gear up for
return to Afghanistan's front line

Report: Heidi Mines
Pictures: Mike Weston

OPERATIONS in Iraq and Afghanistan have gone a long way to finally putting the Territorial Army's "weekend warrior" reputation to bed.

With a continuous stream of Reservists happily volunteering themselves for front-line duties, the part-time soldier is rightly held in increasingly high regard.

But with their greater exposure at the sharp end, the need for TA troops to take on more operationally-minded training packages has become paramount.

As one of the most-deployed volunteer Infantry units over the past five years, The London Regiment has led the way in organising theatre-specific exercises for its soldiers and leapt at the chance to travel to Georgia earlier this year to train alongside the country's own army.

However, on the eve of the unit's departure in August, the former Soviet state became embroiled in a real war as Russian and Georgian forces clashed in South Ossetia and the Londoners found themselves in need of a new training ground. Their salvation came in the familiar wet, Welsh hills of Brecon.

"We looked for an overseas exercise to give soldiers a different challenge, to

experience a different terrain and to work alongside another army," explained Lt Col Brian Fahy, commanding officer of the Londons. "But due to the political situation we just could not go in.

"In my opinion we got a much better training package in Sennybridge because the current demands of theatre have made close-quarter combat training a necessity. The forested and wooded areas Brecon provides are perfect for that."

Soldier joined the infantrymen during the second week of their fortnight-long exercise and it became clear that their up-close-and-personal fighting skills had been honed long before arriving in Wales.

As veterans of Operation Herrick 7, the tight-knit team had taken on the Taliban in the treacherous green zone around Helmand's Upper Gereshk Valley.

"I hope that we will be able to expand on our role in Afghanistan," said Lt Col Fahy in reference to the force protection work the regiment provided in theatre. "That is why we train for all eventualities, including close-quarter combat.

"It's a requirement for us to support the

Army and we need to step up to the plate and show that we are good value for money."

Originally deployed on Op Herrick 7 as the force protection element for Camp Bastion, several of the regiment joined other Reserve and Regular soldiers to form Somme Company and headed to the green zone.

"We spent a lot of time in the Upper Gereshk Valley with 2 Mercian and it was the most intense fighting I have ever experienced," said WO2 Rob Denman, a 41-year-old prison governor from Wandsworth.

"Every soldier from my platoon ended up going through the green zone at some stage during the tour."

With a high chance of putting their skills into practice on operations, it is easy to see why the city boys represent an attractive proposition for TA troops.

Boasting a mix of youth and experience from a range of civilian backgrounds, the TA unit has a Gurkha bus driver and an 18-year-old student among its ranks.

But although the draw of operations is enough for some recruits, the prospect of escaping an otherwise boring life in the big

‘We need to step up to the plate and show that we are good value for money’



smoke was the most compelling reason for others when it came to signing up.

"I became a TA soldier to show that as a young guy in London you don't just have to be on the street. You could be doing something decent," said 20-year-old Catford resident Pte Delroy David. "Being a soldier brings self-respect and motivation and if I am asked to deploy on Op Herrick and put my training to good use then I will."

Comprising four companies – two English, one Scottish and one Irish – the London Regiment has tucked two tours of Iraq and one of Afghanistan under its belt in the last five years.

Lt Col Fahy said he is determined that his troops maintain their credibility by being able to integrate seamlessly with their Regular counterparts on ops.

Tales of Territorial bravery from the front line suggest that is the case across the volunteer ranks and WO2 Denman hopes the facts will win over any remaining doubters.

"Gone are the part-timer jokes," he told *Soldier* as he led his platoon through the heart of Brecon's rain-drenched terrain. "Incoming fire can hit anyone on the front line. You don't just get shot at on weekends." ■

Londoners:
One of the
most deployed
infantry units
prove their
mettle on the
hills of Brecon



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

Caught red-handed sending out the wrong [hand] signals

I'VE been a reader of *Soldier* for many years, but couldn't help having a laugh at your magazine for making a "spelling" mistake in November's feature on deafness (Sense of Freedom).

You are probably the laughing stock of the deaf community after signing "halping hand" instead of "helping hand" using British Sign Language (BSL).

You're not helping to build bridges between the deaf and hearing communities

by making such a simple mistake.

Maybe next



PRIZE LETTER . . .

time you want to use BSL in *Soldier* you should take notice of what you sign instead of winging it. — Jen, Edinburgh.

The editor writes: It's a fair cop — we've been caught red-handed and a little red-faced. While we apologise for any offence



we may have unwittingly caused and take no pleasure from such an error, rest assured our intentions behind the article, which was written in support of the British Army's deaf community, were wholly honourable.



PS . . .

I READ your article on the "Buy the Boys a Beer" campaign (October) with some interest as it is something that we, The Yorkshire Regiment, have been doing since the spring.

Cropton Brewery, near Pickering, offered to brew us a

real bottled ale,

and Yorkshire

Warrior is

now enjoying

its second

run and is

slipping

down very

nicely. A

percentage

of the

profits from

the sale of

the ale go to

the regimental

benevolent trust

and so far more than

£3,000 has been raised. It is hoped

that the beer will shortly be taken up by one of the big supermarkets. Priced at £18.00 for 12 x 500ml bottles,

you can order Yorkshire Warrior by calling 01751 417330 or visiting www.croptonbrewery.com — Lt Col (Retd)

O'Kelly, The Yorkshire Regiment.



Overpayment objection

I'M writing in response to your article on "Allowance apologies" (September).

As one of the unfortunate victims of the latest JPA sham of operational allowance overpayment, I don't think the excuse that "out of date data caused several problems within the system" is sufficient.

While I understand that the money needs to be paid back, I am appalled that it has taken so long for the payments to be noticed — in my case four months after returning from operations.

I don't feel the necessity to micro-manage my finances and did not receive any pay statements showing a possible error until January 2008, having returned from operations in August 2007.

JPA is a managed system and requires input to operate it. As with a weapon system for an infantry soldier, someone is responsible for mistakes made with it. So, who in this case is responsible?

Will the victims of this staff and personnel support debacle get to thank the individuals responsible? I doubt it.

Finally, how does the Service Personnel and Veterans Agency (SPVA) intend to recoup monies paid to those who have now left the Army having received this unintentional bonus?

If the answer is that it cannot, are those still in uniform being targeted under a damage limitation farce? — Name and address supplied.

Lt Col Donald Watt, SPVA (C), responds: You received two payments of operational allowance. The first payment was made in August 2007 and the second in September 2007, effectively doubling your salary for those months.

I too regret that it took so long to identify the erroneous payment, especially as pay statements are available online through JPA and ArmyNet. Had you queried these large payments with your unit HR staff, they could have investigated the issue for you and recognised that in their haste to ensure prompt payment they had entered the entitlement twice.

The payroll programme has since been amended to prevent the occurrence of duplicate or overlapping payments either as a result of out of date data held or duplicate entries by unit HR staff.

In answer to your final point, mechanisms exist to recover overpayments in a non-punitive manner made to those who have left the Armed Forces as well as to pay amounts owed to them.

Crippled by CSA payment hike

I AM writing to draw attention to a problem that I imagine is not uncommon among those serving in the Forces.

For years I've been paying maintenance at £400 a month and, having recently bought a house, asked the Child Support Agency (CSA) to review my payments. They did and reduced my monthly payments to £192. My ex-wife subsequently complained about the sudden drop and, as a result, my case was reviewed again only for the payment to be raised to a whopping £700.

I was promoted to sergeant in August 2006 and at the time of writing I am serving in Canada as temporary staff in support of Exercise Med Man. I phoned CSA to find out

the reason for the massive increase and they explained that it was because I was being paid more (due to overseas allowances). It seems to me that soldiers are subject to a harsher system than our counterparts in civvy street. We dedicate our lives to serving the crown and in return we get money taken from source and can't do anything about it. – *Name and address supplied.*

Col Marian Lauder, assistant director Military Services SPVA, replies: I can only assure the soldier that when approached by the CSA, SPVA's JPA deductions team supplies only the basic pay details – including tax and National Insurance (NI)

deductions – for the month requested. If an individual receives any special pay then this is also confirmed. They do not supply information on any overseas allowances.

When the CSA requests that a deduction from earnings is put in place, the agency calculates the individual's MDR (minimum drawing rate), which is basic pay minus tax and NI, divided by two. Providing the amount requested by the CSA does not breach the MDR, the deduction is implemented. We are not privy to how an individual's child support payments are calculated and if anyone has a dispute over the amount in force they should query it with their CSA office.

Cash for cubbyholes

CAN anyone shed some light on the rules and regulations regarding billing someone for losing a key?

I'm currently serving at Andover and have just been informed that, to keep my Service-supplied locker, I must pay a £20 deposit for the key. This strikes me as odd, as in 20 years of service this is the first time I have been asked to do so. What's next – will I have to leave a deposit the next time I sign a weapon out of the armoury?

I have looked through various JSPs and the only reference I can find to recovering money for lost keys is to raise a P1954. There is nothing about taking a deposit.

If the charge is now policy, how is the money collected and accounted for, and what safeguards are in place to prevent fraud? – *Name and address supplied.*

Lt Col Phillip Everitt, CO Andover Support Unit, responds: It would be ideal if these lockers were Service-supplied and provided to all those married personnel that live off site, but that is not the case.

In Andover we are lucky to have 96 lockers to support the 1,500 individuals on site. A deposit is asked for because of



"A credit crunching £20? – no thanks. I went and got a key cut down the road for just £3 instead."

the number of personnel that either lose their keys or leave the site without handing them back. Lost keys were costing the system money and preventing others from using the locker facilities.

It is far easier to collect a £20 deposit – set at the cost of a locksmith fitting a replacement lock – than go through the time consuming process of raising a P1954. The system of asking for a deposit is also carried out at other sites fortunate to have lockers.

PS . . .

I'M writing in support of the 3 Para captain who raised the issue of the disparity in allowances available to Regular and Reserve personnel on ops, "One Army concept, but two sets of rules" (October).

I'm a NRPS [Non-Regular Permanent Staff] soldier serving in Northern Ireland and am amazed that some Regular members of our unit on ops appear to be missing out when compared to those in the TA.

In his reply, Brig Gordon referred to the separate terms and conditions of service, which I understand. However, remuneration for expenditure incurred as a result of operations should, I believe, be common to all especially in respect of pay, X-factor, operational allowance and other payments such as Longer Separation Allowance.

I must admit I would feel very aggrieved if I was still a Regular soldier and had to deploy on operations knowing that those serving alongside me from the Reserves and TA were being treated in a more favourable way financially. – WO2 (SQMS) R Vickers, RAWO.

PS . . .

IN these times of credit crunches and with soldiers under so much pressure, I thought I'd write with some positive news and to say thank you.

As a former member of 7 Para RHA and regular reader of *Soldier*, I replied to a pen pal advert in 2001 and met a lovely lady called Debbie. We were married in September, with Debbie wearing a maroon dress to match the colour of The Parachute Regiment's berets. – Andy Pickering.

Counting the cost of cohabiting

I'VE been posted on an 11-month avionic upgraders course and moved from my privately-owned home (which I share with my unmarried partner) back into single living accommodation.

When trying to apply for Get You Home (GYH) allowance I was told that the Army would not financially support me in meeting the costs of travelling back to my own property because I am not married.

It seems to me that the single soldier is once again getting a raw deal. I am now paying for a mortgage, council tax

and utility bills in addition to my single accommodation and food charges.

Surely there is an allowance to help ease the burden on Service personnel in my situation. – Cpl C Ryan, SEAE.

Brig Mike Griffiths, DPS(A), writes: Provided that you own the property and it is not let, then you should be entitled to GYH (Travel). Your personal status category is irrelevant. By the time you read this, your Admin Office should have been in touch to confirm your entitlement.

'Move with the times MoD'

WHY does the MoD continually discriminate against Forces personnel who decide to live abroad on completion of their service?

My main gripe relates to allowances. My family lives in a property some 8,000km away from my current posting and yet I am only entitled to the lowest rate of Get You Home (GYH) allowance, which I understand is a form of Longer Separation Allowance (LSA).

But I lose this allowance when my unit decides to stand down for a bank holiday or a leave pass is added to JPA, whereas those with families living in the UK continue to receive the allowance even when on leave.

Equally as frustrating is the entitlement to resettlement. Only those Service personnel returning to the UK are entitled to a six-month resettlement period.

I know that it is my choice to settle my family abroad but I shouldn't be penalised because of this. With more and more people emigrating, the difference in allowances is unfair. – Name and address supplied.

Brig Mike Griffiths, DPS(A), replies:
LSA came into effect for the Army in



"You may feel short-changed but at least you're spared from going home every night to a nagging wife and screaming kids."

April 2007 and replaced a number of old benefits, including Married Unaccompanied Service Allowance.

If you are separated in the same theatre as your family then you will receive GYH (Travel), which is intended to reduce the

impact of separation from your family by assisting with the cost of travel.

If you are Voluntary Separated in a different theatre from your family then you will receive LSA Level 1 (currently £6.38 per day); this is to compensate you for being separated, not to assist with your travel. You lose LSA level 1 on the first day of any leave because, in most cases, you have the opportunity to be reunited with your family.

The logic behind the different allowances is that you have a far higher chance of visiting your family if you are in the same theatre; these are two separate allowances with different intents so you cannot compare them directly.

There is a basic principle that throughout your career the UK remains your "home base". You were recruited in the UK and the MoD will return you there at the end of your service. If you choose to live elsewhere then that is a matter of personal choice. This is not a corporate cop-out but a sensible decision to target our limited funds at those areas where we have a responsibility to the Service person.

PS . . .

HAVING served eight years, will I benefit when the new rules for payouts kick in? – Name and address supplied.

Brig Mike Griffiths, DPS(A), responds: **Details of the revised Commitment Bonus (CB) Scheme were published in DIN 01-192. The new scheme is only applicable to those with four years' reckonable service or less on April 1, 2009. Those with more than four years will not benefit, but will remain entitled to any bonus payments available under their existing CB scheme.**

Absence of confidentiality

I'M an SNCO who recently had cause to redress the confidential report I received from a previous unit. I did so because it was littered with inaccurate information and, as I was also serving outside my mainstream corps, I had not received a comment from a high-ranking officer of my own corps.

The first step in the process was to write a letter to the CO highlighting the errors. The letter was duly sent, but imagine my surprise when 35 days later I received the exact same letter back. Not only had it been completely ignored, but it had been sent to my previous work department in the internal

mail for all to see. Are all redresses treated with this level of contempt and disrespect? – Name and address supplied.

Lt Col Tony Burgin, SO1 R Signals Soldiers APC, writes: On investigation this appears to be a case of the unit concerned making a simple, yet very important clerical error, due in part to a high operational tempo and a concurrent changeover of personnel.

On receipt of this information Royal Signals Wing prompted the unit on its responsibilities and generated fresh impetus into the process.

Mess debate rumbles on

WHY do Queen's Regulations state that living-out members in the Officers' Mess only pay 25 per cent of that paid by their living-in counterparts? And why is the Officers' Mess entitled to 12 official functions compared with the six given to the WOs' and Sgts' Mess? – Name and address supplied.

Brig Mike Griffiths, DPS(A), says: As reported in September's *Soldier*, work is ongoing on this issue. For the benefit of the reader, the regulations state that a living-in officer's subs can be no more than ten days pay per year with a liver-out therefore paying two and a quarter days pay. For

SNCOS the maximum subs for a liver-in is four days pay and two days for a liver-out (although slightly different rules apply for The Household Division). There is some disparity with the other Services and I'm not sure that the regulations reflect the reality of Pay As You Dine, hence the review.

Regarding the number of functions, these are laid down in JSP 465. Historically WOs' and Sgts' Messes received no official functions, but were granted up to six in 1994 and this was reconfirmed in 2007. The main reason for the difference is that the Officers' Mess is usually required to carry out more official hosting of external dignitaries.

PS . . .

AS a former soldier I view with dismay what appears to be a growing trend of troops parading in public dressed in combat uniforms.

I recently watched a regiment exercising its freedom of a city dressed in temperate climate combat, and this was not an isolated incident. Surely soldiers are still issued with a No2 uniform.

You don't see the Navy or the RAF on parade in overalls. Parading in combat, our troops look more like they're part of some Third World dictatorship than soldiers of the finest army in the world. – R Nixon, Plymouth.

Official Government Environment Test Data. Fuel consumption figures mpg (litres/100km) and CO₂ emissions: New Saab 9-3 Saloon TTiD: Urban 37.7 (7.5), Extra Urban 62.8 (4.5), Combined 50.4 (5.6). CO₂ emissions (g/km) 149 g/km.

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Unicom server switch sorrow

SINCE the switch over to a central server at Worthy Down I have had nothing but heartache and frustration trying to use Unicom. And having spoken to many of my G4 colleagues, both in Germany and the UK, I know I am not alone.

The server is slow, the system crashes at least two to three times a day and retrieving information can take anything up to 20 minutes. And as for the print jobs – one task took more than 24 hours to complete!

The Unicom help desk isn't much better. I've had instances where my fault report was closed without me being notified and of not being phoned back after being assured that I would be.

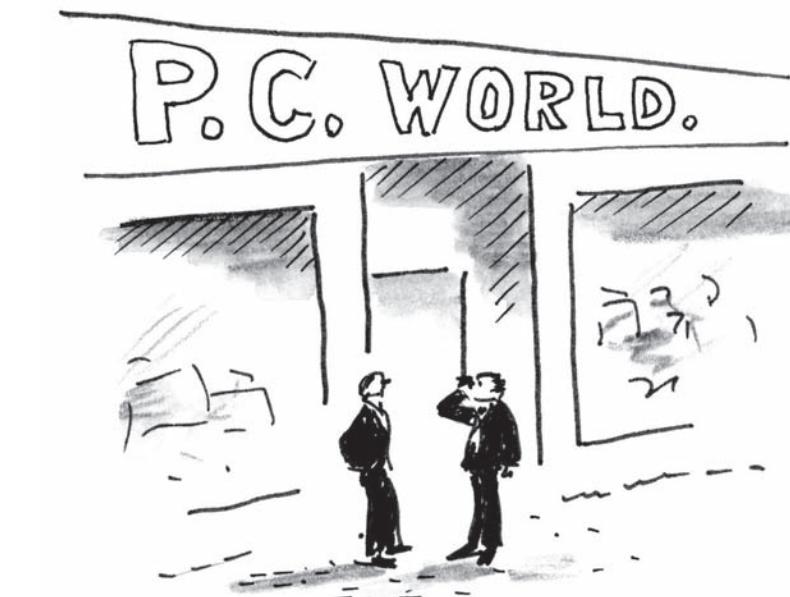
What happened to the old adage "if it ain't broke don't fix it"? I'm sure there are advantages to going to a central server, but we on the coalface are getting extremely frustrated. No doubt Unisoft and their so-called "project managers" have been paid a handsome amount for a system that in my eyes is a step backwards. We have no updates on fixes and are totally in the dark as to when this system will work properly.

It's yet another case of the troops being given something shoddy knowing that we'll work around it. Can someone please let the G4 accounting world know what's going on?

– LAD REME Sgt, Germany.

Col Paul Eaton, AD Army Information Systems, responds: The roll-out of Unicom's central server has not gone as smoothly as Headquarters Land Forces (HQLF) would have liked and I can well understand your frustration, having personally visited users on the ground.

When HQLF took the decision to press ahead with a central server it was done against a background of extensive and successful system testing and user trialling, but it was always recognised that an undertaking of this scale could not be fully trialled beforehand and that there was a likelihood of issues arising in the early days. However the problems have been more



"Stand by all staff, Perkins – there's been another crash at central server."

widespread and persistent than expected.

Despite that, it is important to remember the benefits that a central server will bring: it relieves units of the burden of maintaining servers; it is fully DII/F compliant; it will save the Army around £500,000 per year; and critically it will give us a single view of the Army's equipment assets for the first time – something especially important for systems like Bowman.

Turning to your specific points. Firstly, one of the servers proved to be unstable on roll-out, causing frequent crashes. That has now been rectified.

Secondly, there was a major problem with user access caused by a combination of sheer numbers and unduly rigorous password checks. Action was taken early on by Information System Security (ISS) to waive temporarily the need to renew passwords, and software changes have also been made that should improve accessibility.

Thirdly, printing. Some printer files corrupted during the changeover to central server and in addition many users tried to use obsolete printers despite instructions issued by the chain of command. User guidance and software upgrades are reducing this problem rapidly.

Finally, an undermanned help desk service was overwhelmed by the unexpectedly high number of calls.

In summary, the teams involved understand the frustrations on the ground, have made much progress on the issues you raise, but are aware that there is more to be done.

I would encourage you to continue to make use of the ISS help desk – as it is the only way they know if there is a problem – and to monitor their website, <http://defenceintranet.diiweb.r.mil.uk/DefenceIntranet/Teams/BrowseTeamCategories/Orgbased/Unicom.htm>, for updates.

PS...

IS there any news on when the Joint Services Job Evaluation Team (JSJET) will release their results for military clerks? We've been waiting six years for a review and as an Army clerk it is hard not to feel undervalued when our Navy counterparts are on a higher rate of pay. – Cpl C John, KRH, Tidworth.

Brig Mike Griffiths, DPS(A), replies: I am afraid that you must have patience. My staff, and those from Director Staff and Personnel Support (A), are working in conjunction with JSJET to finalise the results. This is an important piece of work and it needs to be done correctly.

Promotion not academic

I HAVE an engineering degree and am now a Phase 2 soldier (vehicle mechanic) in the REME and would like to know whether the Army recognises and promotes troops who already have professional qualifications.

What is the message to those soldiers who are keen to study for a degree yet also wish to complete a full 22 years of service? – Cfn L Mahendradas, SEME, Bordon.

Lt Col David Edmondson, DEME SO1 Rec & Pers, writes: The REME does not recognise prior education and professional qualifications and has a proven procedure in place to fast-track soldiers through their trade training. Fast-tracking is dependent upon prior qualifications being supported by appropriate results on the technical selection test, common foundation module and basic skills test.

There are currently a number of soldiers in the training pipeline being fast-tracked. Promotion is based on the recognition of leadership qualities, which are tested as soldiers progress through the ranks. Success in the academic arena does not necessarily equate to success in the leadership arena. It is therefore inconsistent to recognise academic ability with promotion.



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Our backyard was like Belize

AS the wife of a soldier currently serving in Afghanistan I would like your readers to be aware of the shocking treatment I was subjected to by both Defence Estates (DE) and Modern Housing Solutions (MHS) on moving into a new quarter.

Sadly, it was taken over by proxy and on arrival I opened the door to find the hallway carpet ripped, the kitchen grubby and no running water.

Moving upstairs I found that both the stair and hallway carpets were torn; the bath was filthy; the bedroom carpets stained; burn marks on the window sills and not a single curtain hung. To make matters worse my garden and patio were fit only for jungle warfare training.

The standards at both DE and MHS appear to be sadly lacking, which is astounding as these organisations are employed by the MoD in support roles to Service families. I do not wish any other family to have to go through this. – Name and address supplied.

Jon Scoles, director of communications, Modern Housing Solutions, responds: After a thorough investigation, I can confirm that the following took place.

Before the writer moved into her property at the end of August, MHS carried out cleaning (including the deep-cleaning of the carpet), grounds maintenance and full external and internal redecoration to the property.

We can also confirm that the property was signed off by DE as meeting the move-



"We tried it for a week but the conditions were disgraceful – I don't know how humans put up with it."

in standard and was accepted by proxy at the end of August.

Following the property being taken over, two MHS and DE representatives met the correspondent when she arrived at the house two days later.

As a result of this, further cleaning works were requested and temporary repairs for the carpets were raised. We have received sign off by DE to replace the carpets and are now waiting for an installation date to be agreed.

As a result of the inconvenience and distress caused to the soldier's wife, one of our liaison officers apologised and presented her with flowers as a gesture of goodwill. Our liaison officer's direct contact details were left in case the family had any further concerns.

As this issue was also logged as a complaint by the occupant, the help desk has since been in contact to ensure that outstanding issues have been resolved to her satisfaction.

Royal Artillery Reservist gunning for pay equality

UBIQUE, the motto of the Royal Regiment of Artillery, which translates as "everywhere", has been hard-earned over many years.

Among those stationed in Malaya during the Emergency (1949-1957) were 26 Field Regiment, who were used in an Infantry role to great effect. Many lost their lives on jungle patrols but gave as good an account as the full-time Infantry, and continue to do so to this day.

In recent times gunners have carried out Infantry duties in Northern Ireland, Kosovo, Bosnia, Iraq and southern Afghanistan.

As a Regular Reservist (RA) I have completed seven operational tours – each attached to Infantry units. Had I been a former Infantry soldier, I would have been on the higher pay level (which they well deserve). However, as a former gunner I was always paid at the lower level, despite doing the same job as my Infantry

colleagues. Can this be fair? – Name and address supplied.

Brig Mike Griffiths, DPS(A), writes: I often get letters from soldiers re-roled for specific tours and serving alongside people doing the same job but paid more. Your Trade-for-Pay relates to your trade over your entire career, not just what you do for a six- or eight-month period. Admittedly your case is an extreme example of what can happen.

For most soldiers re-rolling out of trade is a temporary blip from which they then return to their original trade.

I can't give you a more detailed answer without knowing your rank and trade, but if your trade was "Gnr AS90" then your pay banding would be identical to the Infantry at Pte, Sgt and SSgt level. Can I also take this opportunity to scotch a myth – Infantry privates are paid in the lower pay band.

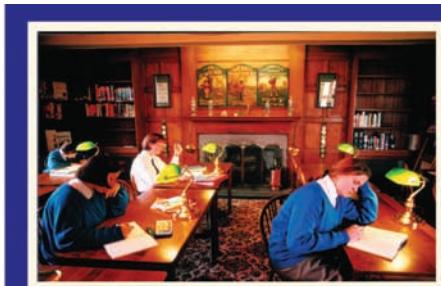
PS . . .

I RECENTLY stumbled across your magazine online and was astonished by the resentment of some of your correspondents towards commemorative medals.

I'm an ex-seafarer who took part in the Spithead Review in 1977 and did not get a Silver Jubilee Medal (although we did get a free pint from Her Majesty).

People who served in the Cold War era would have gladly gone on active service if required, so I see nothing wrong in them purchasing and wearing commemorative medals if they wish to do so. Those who served during this time are no lesser men and women than those serving today.

Why can't the MoD issue Service medals to all serving and past military personnel? I treasure my Veterans Badge but if the MoD can stretch to the expense of a badge, why not a medal? – Paul Stephenson, County Offaly, Ireland.



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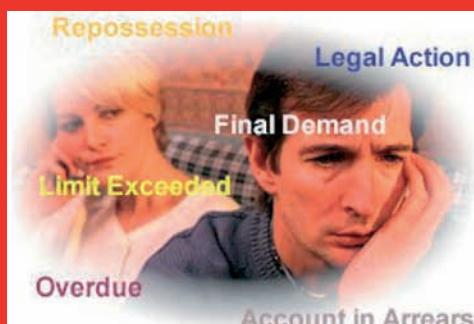


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Media take the merry out of Xmas

AS I sat down to write this month's column I read that another Serviceman had been killed in Afghanistan – another soldier who has paid the ultimate price and another family who now has a long and painful journey ahead of them.

November was the month when the nation remembered the fallen, and this year the Royal British Legion sold more poppies than ever before. And while this is a positive demonstration of support for the Armed Forces, it also serves as a reminder that soldiers are still being killed in action – a situation that is likely to continue with repeated calls for an increase in troop numbers in Afghanistan.

And for every soldier in theatre, there is a family at home who spend anxious months waiting for their loved one to return. As families we are immensely proud of our soldiers and support them in their careers, often following them around the world.

But I sense that the strain on families is increasing – a negative trend not

helped by the media's reporting of life on the front line.

In recent weeks there has yet again been newspaper talk of inadequate and insufficient equipment for soldiers in the field. The media's decision to take this tack – rather than focus on the recent huge investment in kit – exposes families to just one side of the story, a side which only adds to the worry.

I had first-hand experience of this negative reporting when I was interviewed by a local radio station on why the Army community lives on patches.

The interviewer struggled to understand that families need this social support and implied that we choose to live separately from our civilian community for other reasons. For me, this attitude underlined the importance of the patch and the regimental system – unless you are living it, you cannot understand the nuances and challenges of Army family life.

'Families are exposed to just one side of the story, a side which only adds to the worry'

It is understandable, but perhaps regrettable, that the "wives' club" is not the gel that it once was.

However, living in a community of people who have a shared experience is something that we should all seek to protect.

It is also important that our families are offered as much stability as possible in this otherwise turbulent lifestyle, be that the robustness of the system that moves us about or the various allowances that are in place to minimise the disadvantages of following the drum – such as the Continuity of Education Allowance.

So again I was disappointed to see a tabloid headline proclaiming "soldiers' families furious over £100m perks for top brass". The newspaper in question had misreported the purpose of this allowance, implying that it paid for private education for officers' children rather than enabling all Service children to benefit from stable schooling.

No wonder the public is confused. One minute they are being told there is not enough money left for kit and the next they're told that the top brass receive expensive perks.

But for the families these stories have a more profound effect; they worry about the impact of insufficient equipment, live with the challenges of Service life, and then read that important allowances are being questioned by ill-informed media.

Instead of media stories adding to the load, it would be refreshing to have stories that lifted a few straws off the camel's back for a change. ■



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

MANAGE YOUR MONEY

Credit Action President Keith Tondeur will be pleased to answer, in confidence, specific questions addressed to the Editor.



Festive funding

CHRISTMAS is always costly and, credit crunch or not, few will have saved up enough ready cash to bankroll the winter break.

But with lenders reacting to the financial

downturn by playing Scrooge, finding someone else to fund festivities may prove difficult unless your credit file is in check.

If you need to tempt lenders beneath the mistletoe, consider the following points:

- Do you have any old and unused credit or store cards? If you do, close them as a lender may be reluctant to lend to you if they think you already have unused sources of credit.
- Make sure you have your name on the electoral roll so that you appear to have a stable lifestyle with a permanent home address. If you are being posted regularly consider using the address of a close family member.
- Shop around. It is well worth making

one investment in a "heavyweight" weekend newspaper as they print comparison tables for loans that could, over time, literally save you hundreds of pounds.

- You will probably need some paperwork in place such as payslips and bank statements to show the lender. Dependent on where you are serving, this may prove difficult so try and get this in place asap.

- If you do need to borrow this Christmas, make sure going on a spending diet is among your New Year's resolutions.

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TEN details have been changed on this photograph from the *Soldier* picture library of the Panther command and liaison vehicle on Salisbury Plain.

Circle the differences in the left-hand image and send the whole panel to **HOAY 805, Soldier, Ordnance Road, Aldershot, Hampshire GU11 2DU** by December 31.

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 February issue.

Name: (Give initials and rank or title)

Address:

October competition: First correct entry drawn at random and winner of the £100 prize was **Atpr Savage, QM(A) Dept, 9 AAC, Dishforth Airfield**. Runners-up **M Smith, DII IPT, MoD Copenacre** and **Cpl G Lynch, UKJSU, Naples** each win a £25 gift voucher.

The ten differences were: flag on mast; direction sign on stone; King Harold's spur; belt; ankle strapping; white beard; monk's tassel; spear; dragon's tooth; sword hilt.



BASRA Bob – the unwitting subject of October's caption competition (picture below right) – is leading something of a charmed existence at the moment.

Not only was he the lone survivor of Gordy's recent MoD reshuffle, but, much to the shock of the rank and file here at *Soldier* HQ, the Armed Forces Minister also emerged relatively unscathed from his Freeze Frame debut.

Indeed, Army catering proved to be a far more popular target for *Soldier*'s seasoned satirists. The culinary critique was led by Mr W Baker of Grantham, who wins a copy of Deryck Howell's *Target Mussolini* for serving up: "What are you complaining about? It's cheaper than Pay As You Dine and it's hot."

Among the other rat pack rebels were Ian Goodwin-Reeves, 150 Recovery Company REME, who suggested "Bob began to realise why the package holiday had been



Picture: PO (Phot) Dave Husbands

Failing miserably to lift a half-filled bergen, The Hutch began to appreciate the considerable weight of responsibility that came with his new role of Defence Secretary

WIN A BOOK: Write your own caption for the photo above and send it to us by December 31. The best, in our opinion, will win a copy of *Charge!*, Justin Pollard's cornucopia of military blunders.

so cheap and Mr P Clarke who penned "**I got the butterscotch pudding last time I visited, why me?**".

Of a similar flavour were LCpl Tate's "**Mmmmm, now . . . mmmm . . . I know why they call it sticky . . . mmmm . . . toffee pudding**" and "**I find it hard to believe that Gordon Ramsay had a hand in this!**" from Keith Chapman in Glasgow.

Whether our readers extend the same goodwill to the new kid on the COB, Defence Secretary John "The Hutch" Hutton, remains to be seen.



Picture: LA Jannine B Hartmann

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www.army.mod.uk/welfare-support/family/default.aspx

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Army Benevolent Fund: 0845 241 4820

Army Welfare Information Service: 01722 436569; www.army.mod.uk/soldierwelfare/supportagencies/aws

Army Families Federation: 01980 615525

British Limbless Ex-Service Men's Association: 0208 590 1124; www.blesma.org

Career Transition Partnership: 0207 766 8020

Children's Education Advisory Service: 01980 618244; enquiries.ceas@gtnet.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) 0044 1980 630854. Lines open 1030-2230 (UK) every day.

Ex-Services Mental Welfare Society: 01372 841600; www.combatstress.com

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Forces Pension Society: 0207 820 9988

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, 01803 311527; 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

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Searchline

A researcher is trying to track down any former members of **2 GHQ Liaison Regiment (Phantom)** who served in Italy during WW2. Family members could help by supplying copies of photographs, personal accounts or private diaries that might have been left to them that concern this regiment. The objective is to reconstruct a fuller account of what it was like to serve with Phantom in Italy. Contact Asher Pirt on 01304 362571, by post at 35 Balfour Road, Walmer, Deal, Kent CT14 7HY or email pirt2004@yahoo.co.uk

Two ladies are putting together a cookery book to raise funds for Help for Heroes. They would like troops to send recipes of the meal that they most look forward to when they are away from home. Send to Janette Cornish & Coral Moore, 4 Nevil Road, Wellington, Shropshire TF1 3DE.

Peter Cardwell is looking for a 1953 football photograph of **No 55 Training Regiment RA**, based in Tonfanau, North Wales. The football team won the Western Command Soccer Cup in 1953. **Winston Davies** was one of the players in the photograph. Does anyone have a copy? Contact Peter Cardwell, 6 Jenkins Crescent, Trimsaran, Nr Kidwelly, Carmarthenshire SA17 4DB.

Karl-Gustav Fredriksson was a Swedish UK soldier based in Cyprus from Apr 1977 to Aug 1977. He is trying to locate two British soldiers who were based in Nicosia at that time. The two men were from Liverpool and one of them was called **Scouse Werring**. Email Karl-Gustav at kellefredriksson@brikks.com or write to Karl-Gustav (089 Kallegustav) Fredriksson, Liebackskroken 3A, 25658 Helsingborg, Sweden.

Does anyone remember the tunes played at the Tattoo in Dortmund in 1948? Ex Gunner **Noel Pugh** was one of the soldiers taking part, he is also trying to trace two gunners, **Rushmore** from East Anglia and **Collins** from Bournemouth. Please email npugh@roadrunner.com

David Hughes (Wheelchair Charlie), an ex-soldier, is asking Servicemen and women and Army units to donate a cap badge for the tiger, the mascot of the Gurkha Veterans. If you can help, please send the cap badge to David at 5 Annesley Avenue, Layton, Blackpool, Lancs FY3 7JD.

Is there any soldier serving on operations who would like to adopt a **granny**? I know that some soldiers have little or no family who can write to them or send them parcels. I would be more than happy to write or email regularly and send the occasional home-made cake. Email Olwen Loud at olmloud@gmail.com or write to Mrs O Loud, Mandela House, Holden Grove, Daventry, Northamptonshire NN11 9EW.

Infantry Junior Leaders Battalion Association is planning to dedicate a memorial to the unit in Cae Glas Park, Oswestry, the unit's spiritual home. The association is in the process of organising a parade and formal dinner to mark the occasion. The memorial ceremony is planned to take place over the weekend of June 6 and 7 next year.

meeting at Rugby Club, Park Hill Camp, Oswestry. If you were at IJLB during the 1950s, 60s and 70s and you wish to take part, then the Association can be contacted via its website at www.ijlb.co.uk or by writing to the secretary, Ken Nicol, at 44 Cefn Road, Wrexham LL13 9NH.

Julie (known as Ruby) Page is trying to locate an ex-soldier, **Gary Moreland**, now a civil servant from the Aldershot area. Last made contact in 2007 as a pen pal. Please contact Julie by email at neverletgoangel@yahoo.co.uk

Defence diary

Until further notice: Helmand: The Soldiers' Story – 16 Air Assault Brigade exhibition. National Army Museum, London. Tel: 0207 730 0717.

Currently showing: World on Fire Exhibition at the National Army Museum, London. Tel: 0207 730 0717.

Until January 2009: Frightful First World War Exhibition at the Imperial War Museum North, Manchester. Dates at www.iwm.org.uk/north

Until March 2009: Stranger in the House, Imperial War Museum North, Manchester. Go to www.iwm.org.uk/north for details.

December 1-19: Lest We Forget – The Exhibition at the Royal Air Force Museum, London. Admission free.

December 11: Musical Extravaganza by the Band of the Royal Marines, The Assembly Rooms, Edinburgh. Call 0131 550 1559 for tickets.

Reunions

Downside School CCF Centenary Parade: May 22, 23 and 24, 2009. Open to all OGs and families. Details WO1 R Nicholas on 01761 235163 or email rnickolas@downside.co.uk

723 (CS) Kings Sqn RM: 1959-60, 50 years reunion. To be held in late spring 2009. Details from Taff Prichard on 02920 790322.

East Midlands UOTC: Centenary in 2009 with events planned for spring and late summer. Write for information giving details of when served, a brief resume and contact details to TA Centre Broadgate, Beeston, Nottingham NG9 2HF or email emuotc@btconnect.com

Competitions

Fracture PS3: Ms Jayne Weale, Hereford; Maj S Taylor, Strensall; M Stone, London; Cpl R Wilcock, Chilwell; Sgt M Aplin, BFPO 52.

Answer: San Francisco.

HOAY 803: ATPr Savage, 9 AAC, Dishforth Airfield; M Smith, MoD Copenacre; Cpl G Lynch, UKJSU, Naples.

SOLDIER - Magazine of the British Army



Picture: Sgt Mick Howard (RLC)

Red route: Sgt Mick Howard's photo of a shopper getting an unexpected treat from the rehearsing Coldstream Guards on her walk through Windsor Great Park

Life through the lens

Striking images showcase photographic talent at Army picture contest

PICTURES spoke a thousand words as some of the Army's top hotshots were honoured at the Service's annual photographic competition.

Amateur and professional snappers entered images from across the military spectrum, including Operations Herrick and Telic as well as sporting shots, at the 2008 Army Photographic Competition.

Sgt Mick Howard (RLC) of the Defence College of Aeronautical Engineering was the event's big winner after his portfolio earned him the professional photographer of the year award.

The experienced man behind the lens celebrated further success in the open portfolio, digital award and military portrait image categories.

Speaking to *Soldier* after the awards

ceremony at Cosford, the 40-year-old senior NCO said: "It is always a great honour as I know that the Army photographic trade is fantastic and therefore there is always stiff competition," adding that he had been "in the right place at the right time" to catch his favourite image.

"The picture that I think is the most eye-catching is the one with a woman walking with her shopping while the Coldstream Guards rehearse in Windsor Great Park.

"When she realised they were rehearsing she quickly stepped out of the way, but one of the soldiers encouraged her to continue her walk."

WO1 Fiona Stapley, Land Forces master photographer, said that the increasing profile of the competition

reflects the amount of coverage Service photographers are able to give the Army in civilian media.

"Photography is becoming more and more of an important role, especially with current operations where the quality of the work is mirrored by the number of agencies that use combat camera teams' work," she added.

"Our people are able to get to the front line on ops and that is all part of their job. This enables people at home to see exactly what is going on."

The winning images will remain on display at the National Army Museum as part of a permanent exhibition.

● See www.soldiermagazine.co.uk for a full list of the competition winners

Roadshow dates

THE Army Presentation Team wants to hear from members of the public who would like a personal invitation to attend its dynamic roadshow, which begins with a reception, is followed by a presentation and questions-and-answers

session and finishes with a finger buffet. Military personnel will answer all your questions about the British Army. Call 01276 417000 or email your name and address to apt.mod@btinternet.com

January: 13, Macclesfield; 14, Bolton; 15, Manchester; 27, Penzance; 28, Plymouth; 29, Blandford. **February:** 17, Richmond; 18, Scunthorpe; 19, Castleford.

Appointments

Maj Gen: W H Moore, late RA, to be Deputy Commanding General Multi Nation Corps, Iraq, in March 09; R L Barrons, late RA, to be Chief of Staff, Allied Command Europe, Rapid Reaction Corps, in April 09.

PEN PALS

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Or visit **Soldier Magazine** online at www.soldiermagazine.co.uk

Email: hshekyls@soldiermagazine.co.uk

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Jo (23), 5,7", slim blonde, friendly and outgoing. Enjoys running, going to the gym, generally keeping fit, love the outdoors and motorbikes. Likes meeting new people and socialising. Seeks male pen pals, 23-33. P096

Witty and described mad by her friends (in a good way), 5.9", blonde with blue eyes. Looking for pen pals, 23-35 for laughter and to brighten up each others' day. Come on, what are you waiting for, do it now, she could change your life. Enjoys spending time with her friends, meeting new people and listening to music. P097

Petite blonde, 5, 5", with green eyes and a quirky sense of humour. Learning to ride her 125cc motorbike, enjoys films, socialising, live music, festivals, particularly the IOW Festival. Bubbly person who's been like a rolling stone through life, gathering no moss with some unusual life experiences, looking to make new friends for life. P098

Shy Paediatric nurse aged 37 with brown hair and blue eyes. GSOH, very genuine, honest and caring. Enjoys reading, cross-stitch, the theatre, the cinema, listening to music, pen pal, travelling and shopping. She does not participate in sports, but loves being a spectator. Seeking non smoking male pen pals who make her laugh, 36-40. P099

Single 24 year old and would like someone to write to, to keep the boredom at bay in the evenings. A Science teacher in a smallish rural school, a bit of a country bumpkin at heart. Enjoys the outdoors, mainly roaming the countryside with her dog, going to the pub with friends, the cinema, watching DVDs and always willing to try new hobbies. Seeking pen pals who like good old fashioned snail mail, any age group. P100

Sarah, soon to be 33, a blonde, 5,10" in heels. Civil servant by day who dabbles in amateur dramatics in her spare time. Seeks anyone with an intriguing tale to tell for genuine correspondence, any age group. P101

Dave, (mid 50s), sell by date not up yet. Enjoys the countryside, animals and is a very genuine bloke seeking like minded hirsute male pen pals. Genuine replies only please, 25-45. P102

Shaz (43), 5, 10", slim build with short black hair. Enjoys pubs, the cinema, travel, walking, motor sports and more. Seeking soldiers to write to, all letters will be answered, 24-44. P103

PEN PAL REPLIES:

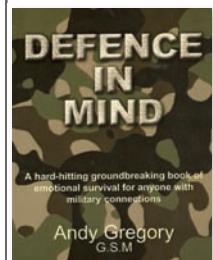
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- * The box number must be clearly written in the top left corner of all your replies.
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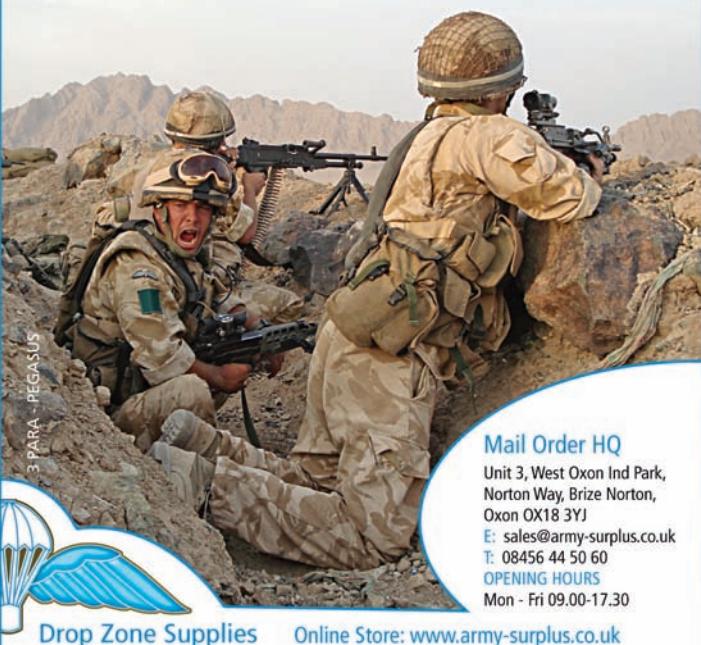
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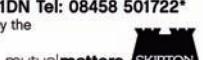
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REVIEWS

LARA'S BACK

Ultimate action girl Croft returns to her tomb raiding roots

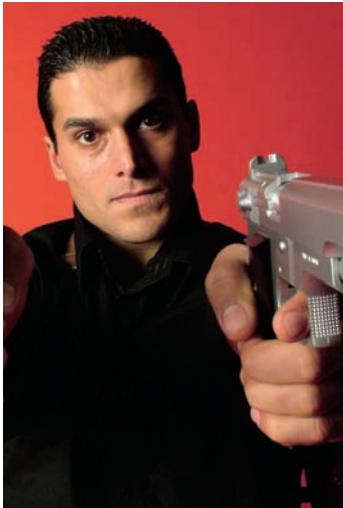
FIGHT CLUB

On set with Transporter 3's cool Croatian Silvio Simac

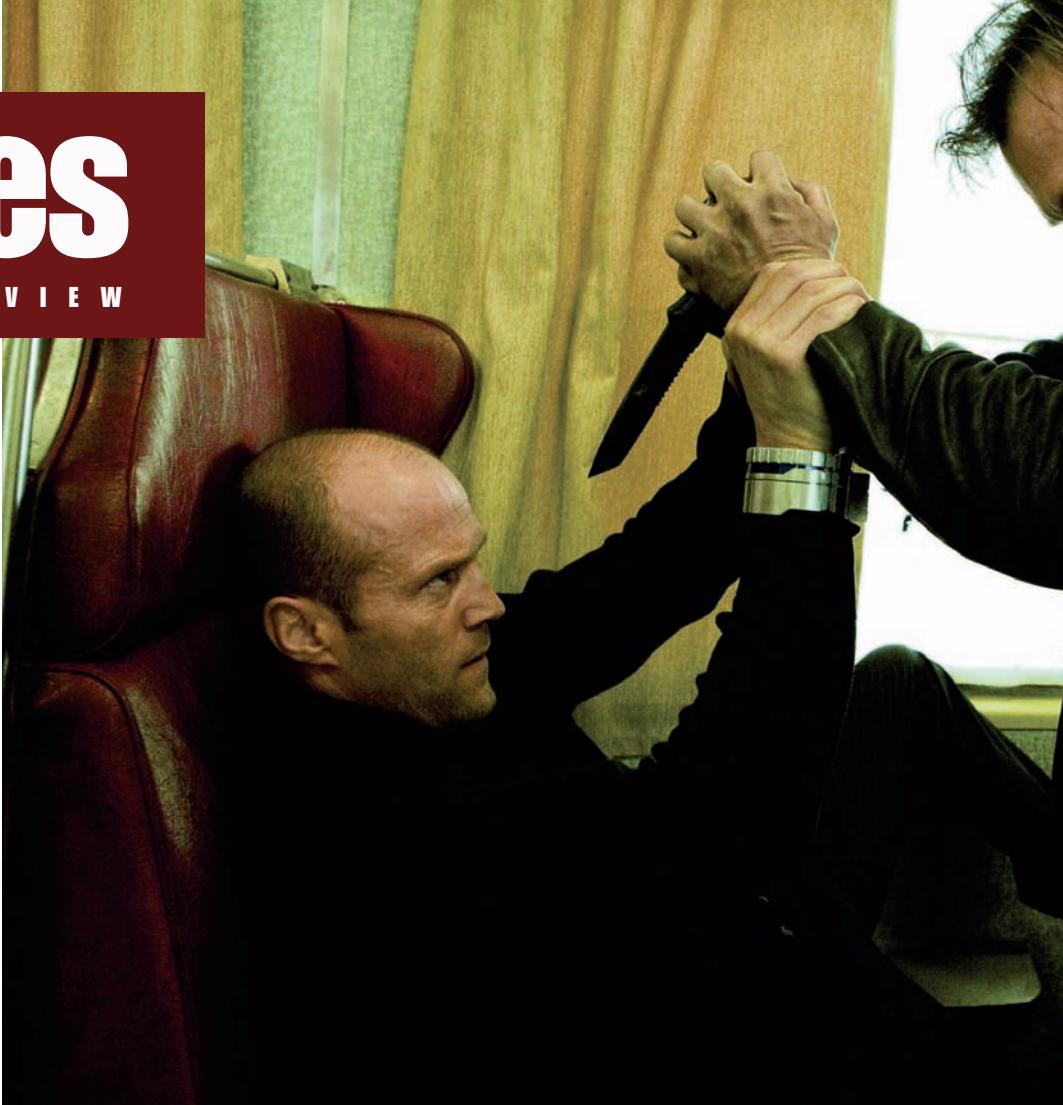
BARKING MAD

Canine capers in former-soldier's debut publication





Plenty of brawn and brains: Action man Silvio Simac packs a lot of muscle into his martial arts film roles and takes on Jason Statham in *Transporter 3*, released in UK cinemas on December 5



Fighting stance

Champ martial artist Silvio Simac takes knockout role in *Transporter 3*

Interview: Samantha Chapman

FIGHTING with martial arts guru Jet Li, having bones broken by Jason Statham and trading blows in the ring with Lennox Lewis must be a painful way to earn a living.

Yet for taekwondo world champion and Hollywood action man Silvio Simac, it's a privileged and hard-fought-for way of life.

As an ardent fan of the *Transporter* series of films, in which British actor Jason Statham confirmed his global fame, Simac leapt at the chance of a role in the third high speed instalment.

Playing the villainous Mighty Joe – the baddie's right-hand henchman – Simac put his muscles through a workout against Statham's lead character in a high octane fight sequence in the film's opening scenes.

"Jason plays a getaway driver called Frank who is now retired from his life of crime and Mighty Joe is sent to ask him to do one last job," the 34-year-

old tough guy told *Soldier*. "When I get to his house, Jason's character says he doesn't want to do the job and we get into a fight where he leaves me with a broken finger.

"I then chase after him and try to get him to change his mind but he refuses. When I take that message back to my boss he is pretty annoyed and shoots me in the head."

The hugely successful action films revolve around Frank Martin, a man who transports packages of any description for gangs – no questions asked. Of course, it always goes wrong and Martin ends up fighting his way out of seemingly impossible situations.

Croatian-born Simac was in Paris for two weeks to shoot his part. He described the French production company as efficient but secretive.

"It was the first time I've been given just my scenes instead of the whole script," he said. "They were terrified that the story was going to be leaked to the press."

Simac and Statham's fight scene was sequenced by Hong Kong director and choreographer Corey Yuen of *Lethal Weapon 4* and *Romeo Must Die* fame.

"I thought it was going to be quite hard for Jason," admitted Simac. "I have been doing martial arts for 22 years and he'd never done any, so I was surprised when he picked it all up really quickly. Jason's a nice guy, very approachable. He swears an awful lot though. Luckily most people there were French or Chinese so most of it got lost in translation."

The mix of languages from the French production crew, Chinese stuntmen and English-speaking actors caused inevitable frustration on set.

"It was difficult because each one would be saying something different. There were so many languages and translations it could be confusing."

Yet Simac emphasised how he enjoyed his time immensely after adding another notch to his rapidly expanding film experience.



He has used his powerful body to his advantage for silver screen roles in *Dead or Alive* and *Unleashed*.

The latter marked an important moment when he met Chinese martial arts celebrity Jet Li and encountered a spiritual side of the notoriously disciplined actor.

"Jet Li was fantastic to work with," he enthused. "Our dressing rooms were next door to each other and I walked past a few times and would catch him praying and chanting to himself quite loudly. I had to fight the urge to laugh because it was a bit strange but he's very into his Buddhism. In fact he inspired me to take up meditation, which I have done over the past few years so that I can focus on whatever challenge I'm taking on."

Through his appreciation of focus and discipline, and having taught troops at the Military Corrective Training Centre in Colchester, Simac has a strong affinity for the British Army.

"Teaching them was fantastic," said the taekwondo champ. "They were like sponges – very keen to learn. I felt like they got something out of it which was rewarding. I support what those guys do. They go out to places like Afghanistan and they do what is asked of them day after day. They command a lot of respect from me." ■



Eden Lake, out to own on DVD from January 5

SHOCKING. Decidedly intense sequences will have you in some discomfort. For those with a moral compass, be prepared for some staggering scenes and remember it's only a movie. Director **James Watkins** highlights some of the more extreme, albeit speculative, elements of gang culture. What starts as a romantic trip for Steve and Jenny to the idyllic *Eden Lake* soon turns sour when some truly unruly teenagers steal their belongings. A brutal attack ensues when Steve retaliates. Unpredictable? Yes. Watchable? You tell me.

WO2 Andy Draper, AGC



The Broken, in cinemas from January 16

IF you break a mirror in this film you won't live long enough to have seven years' bad luck. Writer-director **Sean Ellis** (*Cashback*) has produced a slick horror flick with a double dose of **Lena Headey** (*The Sarah Connor Chronicles*). Emotionless clones spring from the shards of broken mirrors, offing the originals with gruesome panache. Ten out of ten for the shock factor but it's a pity Ellis borrowed so heavily from masterpieces such as the 1956 *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*. A promising plotline melts into cheesy clichés.



Elite Squad, out to own on DVD from January 19

WHEN Brazil's police encounter a problem they cannot handle, they call for the *Elite Squad*. These sadistic thugs shoot first and ask questions later, literally. And when they do ask questions, it's done with a plastic bag over the suspect's head. Yet they are presented as heroes and although they are undoubtedly courageous, you have to question whether what they do is any sort of solution to Brazil's problems. Undeniably exciting in places, the film is profoundly depressing unless your politics are somewhere to the right of Mussolini.

Daniel King, MoD



Somers Town, out to own on DVD from January 12

THE plot follows two young lads who are alienated by the society in which they live. One is a Polish immigrant whose father is a heavy drinker, the other a homeless runaway from Nottingham. They become friends when they meet by chance in a cafe and their relationship grows. Shot mostly in black and white, the film has a bit of an art house feel. Unfortunately, the scripting is poor and the actors are not believable. The film doesn't really go anywhere and it's almost impossible to empathise with the characters. One to miss.

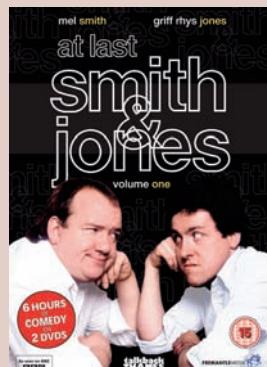
Cpl Dan Jones, Int Corps



Donkey Punch, out to own on DVD now

WHEN one of seven revellers dies in a freak accident on board a luxury yacht, how far will the survivors go to hide the truth? The bizarre plot, centred around a drug-fuelled party, has some amusing moments, including a rude boy engineer who thinks he is **Ali G**. As events turn foul and dispositions alter to the extreme, everyone seems far too eager to kill. **Oliver Blackburn's** low budget *Dead Calm* for British sun worshippers may entertain those seeking a pre-holiday horror flick.

Lcpl Paul Thomas, Int Corps



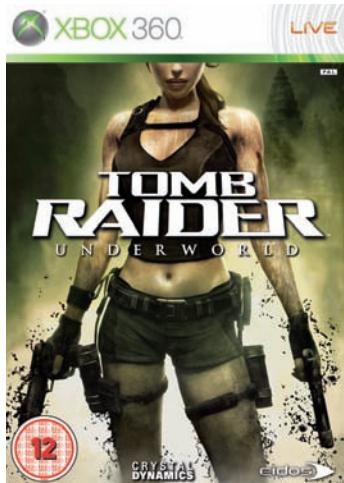
At Last Smith and Jones, out to own on DVD now

THIS two-disc set compiling the best moments from *Alas Smith and Jones* is pretty lame stuff. The sketches feature all the worst comedy stereotypes of their time: Nazis, skinheads, vicars, newsreaders and spies. There are the occasional flashes of originality such as a **Mike Leigh** pastiche, and the special features are worth watching, including four mini-plays from the 1989 series *In Small Doses* which showcase the duo's acting talents. But it's hard to recommend buying this set on that basis alone unless you are a diehard fan.

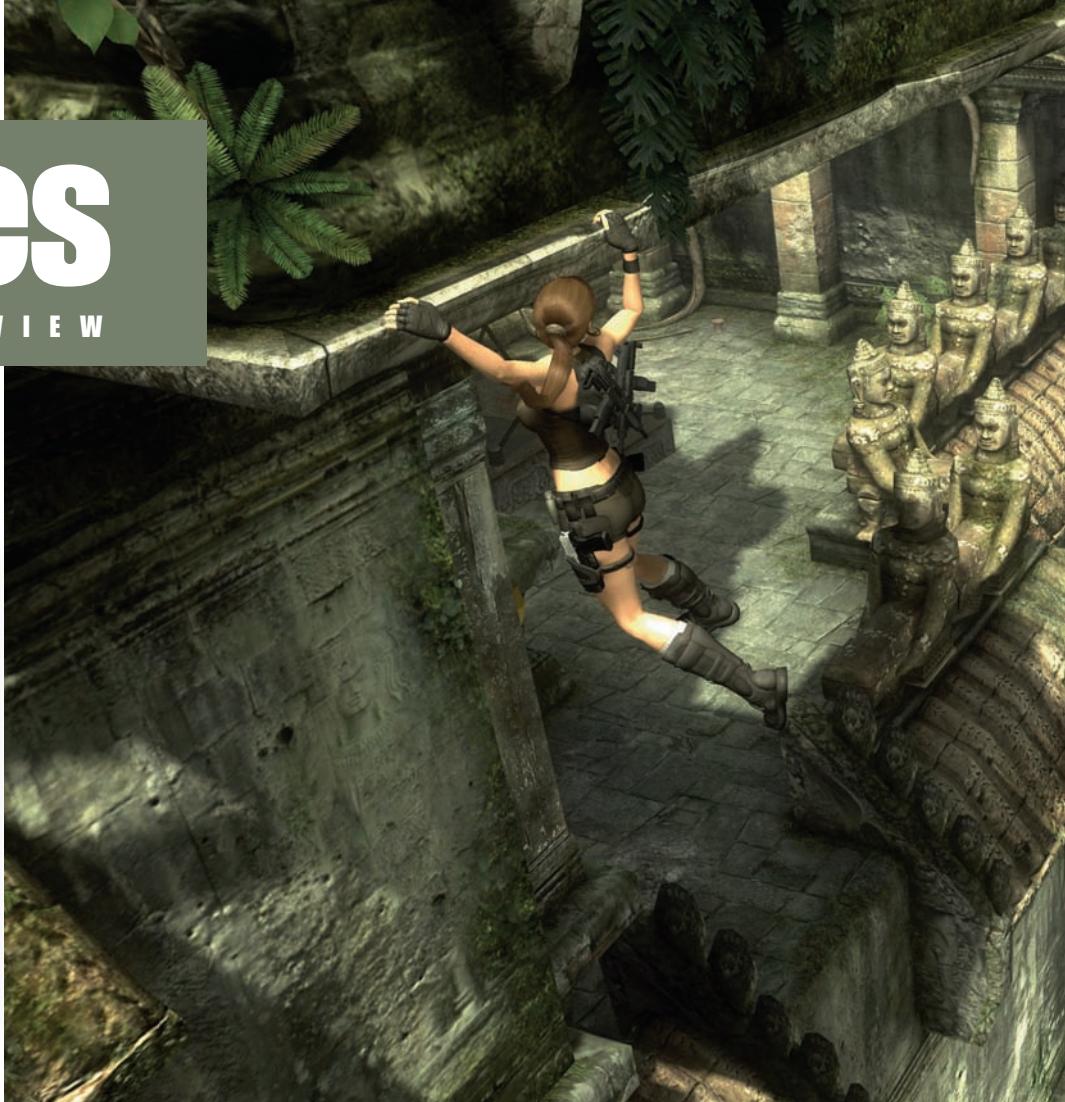
Daniel King, MoD

Games

DECEMBER REVIEW



Lovely Lara: *Tomb Raider Underworld* builds on one of the most successful video game series of the last decade



Delving deeper

Sexy sprite faces her most perilous quest ever in an all-new adventure

Preview: Samantha Chapman

VIRTUAL pin-up girl Lara Croft is donning her shorts and vest once again in an all new gun-toting adventure that takes place around – and beneath – the globe.

The eighth game in the multi-format series, *Underworld* is the third of the titles to be developed by Crystal Dynamics, who created the previous games *Legend* and *Anniversary*.

The studio has been credited for breathing new life into the series that, along with *Quake* and *Super Mario 64*, laid the foundations for modern three-dimensional gaming when it first arrived 12 years ago.

And from the previous *Soldier* sampled on Xbox 360, the Crystal Dynamics team have not disappointed with their latest efforts, delivering a credible offering with richly detailed locations and atmospheric music.

Taking Lara on a journey across the world, the story begins with a mini-level

where she is trapped inside her burning Croft Manor home and the player must negotiate her past precarious beams and collapsing walls.

“We wanted to grab people quickly with an unexpected environment,” explained Crystal Dynamics creative director Eric Lindstrom. “It’s basically a training section of the game before it starts for real.

“When you get underway, you find that Lara has received information on an ancient city that needs to be explored. The environments are much larger now. We wanted them to be more open to allow more exploration on the player’s part. There are lots of areas where we have experimented and added new objects which players must discover how to use in order to solve the problems they encounter.

“*Tomb Raider* is about aspirations, discovery, danger and the feeling you get when exploring new places. We spent a lot of time making sure we encapsulated that experience.”

As the adventure unfolds, Lara comes into contact with some mythical objects which make her the focus of attention from unsavoury characters and land her in deeper trouble.

Thankfully, the action girl’s skill set has dramatically improved since her last outing, with 1,700 different moves in her repertoire. She is also a more intuitive character to control – by dropping an arm while clinging to a rock face she indicates that there is another ledge to leap onto. She pushes aside bushes with one or two hands depending on whether she’s carrying a gun and a new weather system dramatically changes the environment. If it is raining she could easily slip from a ledge, making life more dangerous.

However, Lara has the edge with state-of-the-art gear, including a device that emits a pulse to build a virtual map of the surrounding landscape. She also has a multi-purpose grapple – a claw-like tool with a cable designed for climbing and manipulating objects.



Alongside Lara's trademark pistols is a tranquilliser gun, which is perfect for the ferocious Thai tigers that only relent after being shot continually in the face. For adrenalin junkies, an all-terrain bike provides a dash of testosterone with its ability to handle glaciers and jungle floors.

"People always ask me how much of *Tomb Raider* is combat versus puzzles versus exploration and it's hard to answer with *Underworld*, because we engineered it so all three of the elements fit together," said Lindstrom.

"It can be whatever you want. You can find combat or concentrate on the puzzles. We wanted to give adventurers a lot to compete in."

There is certainly something for everyone. If you get stuck on the puzzles there are task bars to call on for hints that are useful if you simply want to find the next creature to blast away.

With Lara's new acrobatic abilities and all manner of foreign objects and spaces to challenge the grey matter, *Underworld* offers a slick gaming experience.

In the wake of a plethora of first-person shooters out this Christmas, this should excite those who want to exercise their brains as well as hosing down any bad guys who stray into their sights. ■



Guitar Hero: World Tour, Xbox 360

SOLDIER had heard the hype about *Guitar Hero* but had never played the game until now. And we are proud to announce that we have been well and truly converted by the outstanding *World Tour*. Would-be axemen can now play bass and lead on special Xbox-friendly instruments, while drummers can work up a sweat with the custom kit. Players have to follow a colour coded fretboard to stay on time and in tune and are booted off stage if they stray. With bands including Metallica contributing to the playlist, this is a must for console metalheads.

Maj Neil Powell, AGC



Brothers in Arms: Double Time, Wii

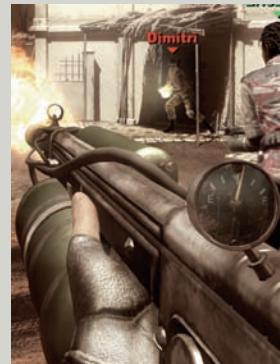
RELEASED to coincide with the launch of the latest *Brothers in Arms* instalment, the two previous games in the series have been remastered for the Nintendo Wii. *The Road to Hill 30* and *Earned in Blood* were both outstanding titles in their original Xbox format and have stood the test of time exceptionally well. Players can now use the Wii-Mote to issue commands, throw grenades and engage in combat. *Brothers in Arms* is a fantastic trilogy, with historical and emotional depth. And in a market awash with Second World War titles, that is no mean feat.



Golden Axe, Xbox 360

DECENT graphics and an endless supply of gore will not be enough to save this highly mediocre title from the bargain buckets of games shops in a few months. The gameplay alternates between tortuous complexity and mundane key bashing, the level design is old fashioned and dull, the story is less than engaging and the characters are reminiscent of the games from a previous decade. *Golden Axe* is unlikely to appeal to many hardened gamers of today and within ten minutes of playing this title it is easy to see why this is the case.

Maj Neil Powell, AGC



Far Cry 2, Xbox 360

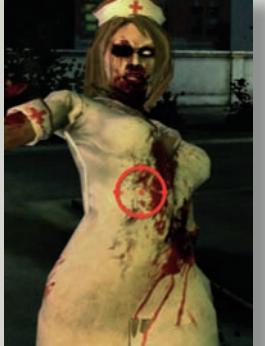
FAR Cry quickly achieved cult status when it appeared on the Xbox three years ago. The story of an ex-marine who achieves feral powers while marooned on a Pacific island was the best first-person shooter of the time. The sequel, which is set in sub-Saharan Africa, is an altogether different affair with no supernatural element, although it is still visually stunning. Players are this time placed in a sprawling, open-world environment and charged with hunting down a ruthless arms dealer. *Far Cry 2* is a sound game but suffers from some long and tedious periods of player inactivity.



Dead Space, Xbox 360, PS3 & PC

I SAMPLED the PC version of *Dead Space* and, while it is clearly yet another console import, it is an entirely credible offering, set off by some enhanced visuals. Set in a creepy, deep space environment reminiscent of the *Alien* films, players can employ strategy to dismember their opponents but must be prepared for some shocking moments along the way. For those familiar with *Gears of War* this terrific, atmospheric offering will bring tears of joy, but for those hardcore *Call of Duty* players, be aware that this is not a straight actioner.

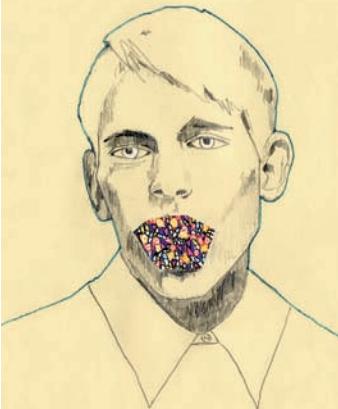
WO2 Andy Draper, AGC



House of the Dead Overkill, Wii

AFTER two of the original *House of the Dead* arcade games were converted to the Wii earlier in the year, Sega has given *Soldier* an early look at the first title in the series to be written especially for the console. And if the previews are anything to go by, it looks to be a definite winner. As in the original coin-op games, players must take up their trusty sidearm and take down an army of zombies. New features in *Overkill* include a refreshed cast of characters plus additional weapons, including a machine gun, to dispense with the undead. *Overkill* is set to be released in early 2009.

FOALS ANTIDOTES



Pony club: Yannis Philippakis races his herd of Jack Bevan, Edwin Congreve, Jimmy Smith and Walter Gervers to the winning post with debut album and *Soldier* reviewer favourite *Antidotes*



Thoroughbreds

Foals hit winning stride galloping their fast tracks to the top of the charts

Interview: Karen Thomas

BEING odds-on favourite to lead the field of British breakthrough acts this year has not fazed the slightly leftfield Foals with their new breed of "weird pop" music.

The band's live gigs grabbed the attention of local radio stations and national airplay of single *Cassius* placed them on the winners' podium. Their debut album, *Antidotes*, leapt out of the starting gate and raced to number three in the charts.

Headed up by lead vocalist Yannis Philippakis, the fivesome are revelling in the attention. BBC Radio 1 DJ Jo Whiley invited the Oxford lads into her exclusive *Live Lounge*. *Later With Jools Holland* snapped them up for a hot TV spot, as did *Never Mind The Buzzcocks*.

"In terms of playing it has been more intense than it's ever been. We've noticed a different kind of scrutiny. The shows are busier now because there's bigger exposure so more people

are hearing about us, which is great," Philippakis told *Soldier*, as he described the band's sound that has been labelled post-punk dance.

"It's just weird pop music that tries to not be pop music. We try and make it accessible and it isn't just being some avant garde cult band but, at the same time, we try to bring in different influences. It's largely because we have small attention spans. I call it attention deficiency music."

Born in the summer of 2006, Foals are a hybrid of friends from school and university. Philippakis joined forces with childhood buddy Jack Bevan and fellow Oxford University dropout Edwin Congreve. School mates Jimmy Smith and Walter Gervers split from their band to make the five Foals.

The influences on their new brand of music range from Talking Heads to Nirvana with some techno thrown into the mix. And just as the musicians and their stylised sound fell into place, so did the snappy name.

"A friend came up with it and we just liked the word because there's something naive about it. It doesn't really give away what the band sounds like. And my second name means 'little friend' in Greek so it seemed like fate."

Philippakis attributed their solidity under the new pressures of heightened fame to the long history of friendship and shared ideals. Having stuck together as either the class geeks or the naughty boys, the lads were never part of the school cool set. And the mischief continues when on tour.

"Our priority is making music because we enjoy playing instruments together and having fun. Touring is like a school trip gone wrong without anyone in charge. We're just totally disorganised and we're pretty immature. We don't really like to go to bed early and so things happen," the lead singer and guitarist laughed, admitting that Foals could be trouble.

"I don't want to drink herbal tea and it would be easy to just sit in and watch



films but I think it's better to go out and do something in the cities and experience the sangria."

Foals sampled the local delights of the USA, Japan and Canada before they returned to their homeland for the summer festival season. Lapping up the limelight at Reading, Leeds and the Isle of Wight, they put the winning seal on their bid to be Britain's hottest music tip this year.

"If you're at a certain stage in terms of how well you're known, festivals are the kind of things that can really help. If you play to a busy tent it's the equivalent of two or three weeks' worth of touring for a young band. In terms of the exposure you get, it's amazing.

"I'm not a big fan of festivals and I never really went to any, but for a band I think they're really fun and they challenge you to play to a bigger audience."

As more punters put their money on the hot-to-trot ponies, a huge fan base is gathering momentum. *Soldier* reviewer Sgt Charlie Lloyd has already placed his bet on Foals being first past the post.

With *Antidotes* set as the soundtrack to some frenzied partying and explosive live performances, the fivesome are sure to stretch their comfortable lead on the 2009 new band racetrack. ■

Reviewers' choice – pick of 2008 and 2009



Rage Against the Machine (live)

THE live music circuits had another huge year with many great bands performing in front of crowds ranging from a couple of hundred to a couple of hundred thousand, and 2008 saw some amazing rock acts. **Rage Against the Machine** and **Metallica** both stole the show at this year's Reading and Leeds festivals and the **Foo Fighters** sold out two nights at Wembley Stadium, accommodating the legendary Jimmy Page and John Paul Jones. Next year promises to be just as grand with the return of **AC/DC** and what we hope will be an inevitable reunion tour from **Led Zeppelin**. **Cpl Ray Kalaker, RETDU (B)**



Foals (live)

FIRST a well-deserved mention for **The Verve** and **The Last Shadow Puppets** who released excellent albums, *Forth* and *The Age of the Understatement*, this year. Best of 2008 for me, though, was **Foals**. This band's debut album *Antidotes* had elements of ska, funk, punk, dance and much more, combining to make a unique sound. The rawness and energy of their live performances were stunning. One to listen out for next year is **Mongrel**, a hybrid of **Reverend and the Makers**, **Arctic Monkeys** and **Babyshambles** plus the newest talent from UK rap. The demos I have heard from their debut, due early 2009, are first-class. **Sgt Charlie Lloyd, RLC**



Beverley Craven (live)

MUSICALLY, 2009 will be the year of desperation with plenty of songs about how hard life is. Expect the likes of **Radiohead**, **Happy Mondays** and **Oasis** to whine about making ends meet. Having said that, I look forward to **Beverley Craven** releasing her new album, and hopefully taking her UK tour to some intimate venues that will complement her subtlety. I also hope **Underworld** see fit to get some more studio offerings out for sale and that we finally get a world tour from them. What about some new work from artists who have been quiet for a while? Maybe it's time for **Leftfield** to make a return. **Lt Jim Berry, 1 R Irish**



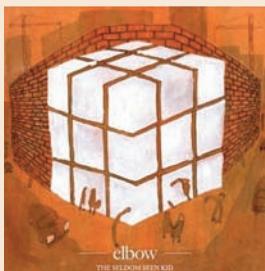
Black Ice (AC/DC)

AMY Winehouse finally had to "go to rehab" and we all sang "go, go, go" because 2008 had almost been characterised by the sheer lack of scandal in the music industry. But then how can you criticise a year in which the now-aging rockers **AC/DC** brought out a new album, *Black Ice*? The advancing years may be limiting the quantity (and the pace) of the Australian legends' music, but never the quality. Coupled with new album release *Only by the Night* from **Kings of Leon**, the last 12 months have been saved from utter obscurity and made into a classic. Here's hoping they cut *The X Factor* in 2009. **Cpl David Greaves, REME**



Dig Out Your Soul (Oasis)

IT has been a year of the old and the new. **Oasis** made a storming return to top form with their new album *Dig Out Your Soul*. A throwback to the heady days of Britpop and their debut album *Definitely Maybe*, it showcases the vocal talents and songwriting skills of the Gallagher brothers delivering a mix of punchy rock and roll and melodies. Young pretenders the **Ting Tings** heralded an exciting new musical direction. A terrific number one debut album, *We Started Nothing*, spawned some superb and catchy singles that lit up the charts and dancefloors nationwide. If 2008 is anything to go by, 2009 could be one of the best years for a long, long time. **SSgt Mo Morris, 3 LSR, RLC**



The Seldom Seen Kid (Elbow)

THIS year's highlight was without doubt **Elbow's** sonictacular *The Seldom Seen Kid*. Having only recently discovered this band, I was blown away by the amazing marriage of lyrical and melodic hooks. Flavours range from **Pink Floyd**-esque journeys into unknown worlds to the dreaminess of **Athlete**, to all out anthemic eruptions akin to early **Embrace** numbers. I can't wait for **Red Hot Chili Peppers** axeman John Frusciante's tenth solo effort *The Empyrean*, on which he has recruited band-mate Flea and the legendary **Smiths** guitarist Johnny Marr, which is set for release in January. **Cpl Tom Robinson, 151 Tpt Regt, RLC**



One man and his dog: Former red cap John Donoghue, above, and Barney, right, the star of *Shakespeare, My Butt!*



Forces' best friend

Soldier-turned-author lifts Christmas spirits with free copies of canine caper

Shakespeare, My Butt! by John Donoghue (www.marsupialelvis.com, paperback, £9.99).

Review: Samantha Chapman

A FREEWHEELING, meandering tale of a life less ordinary – *Shakespeare, My Butt!* does exactly what it says on the tin.

It doesn't pretend to be the next literary phenomenon but the author's generous use of observational humour makes it the perfect break from reality – a real page-turner where you never know quite what to expect.

Welsh-born former soldier and sailor John Donoghue is now a serving police officer and says he wrote the book to give his daughter Bethan, now 15, an insight into her father's life.

"I started writing about five years ago as I had a ten-year-old daughter who I thought would be impressed by having a dad who used to be in the Army and Navy," explained a rueful Donoghue.

"But it turns out that as I wasn't a pop star she wasn't interested. It was

my family and friends who encouraged me to get it published after reading it – and now it's on the 'must-read' list at Borders. I'm absolutely delighted."

The central theme of the book revolves around Donoghue buying a black Labrador puppy called Barney – who bizarrely has a missing toe – and training him with Bethan's studious help. His observations and madcap ideas make for an amusing read particularly when he lists the Ten Commandments for a dog, which he expects Barney to follow.

Random digressions of his life experiences include travelling around obscurely named towns in Britain – try Intercourse and Blubberhouses for size; his thoughts on the differences between Protestants and Catholics – one lives with guilt and the other in caravans; and a strange moment when some ants get humiliated.

Donoghue began his Army career with the Royal Anglians before transferring to join the Royal Military Police. "I was digging a ditch one day

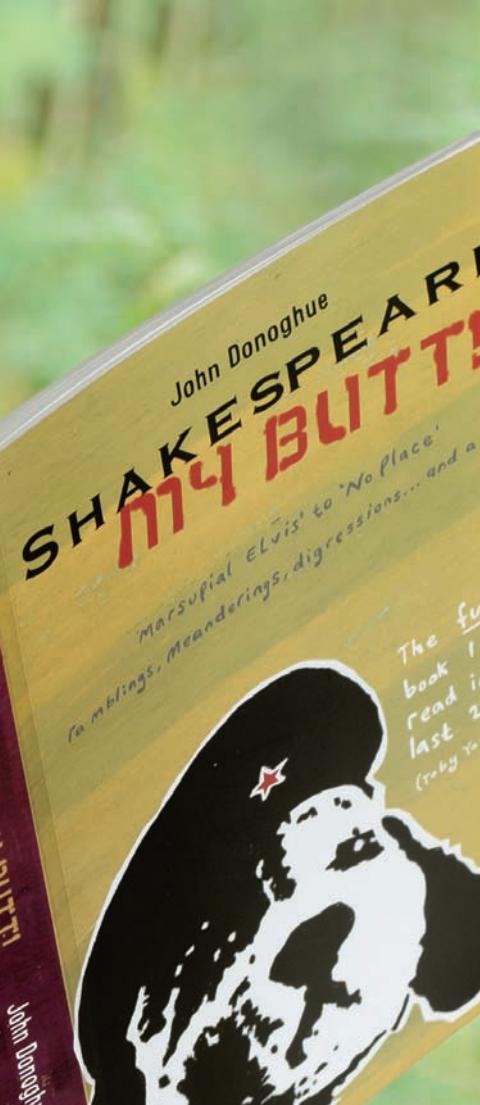
and saw a Land Rover roll past with a group of RMPs resting their elbows on the side," he said. "I immediately thought 'that's where I want to be'."

The ex-captain frequently refers back to his military days in the book and said the Armed Forces are still very much in his thoughts. "I served during the Cold War days and there was a lot of money spent on the Forces then. The barracks were always full with new recruits. It was a good time to be in the military. I have a lot of respect for everybody in the Forces. There are more deployments now than we ever experienced."

For the past two years Donoghue has donated 500 books to the military charity Support Our Soldiers (SOS), which distributes them to troops serving overseas during the festive season.

"Christmas is a difficult time for people to be away and I hope that the soldiers can find some enjoyment from reading the book. These charities are invaluable," he said.

"I was deployed over Christmas when there were tensions between



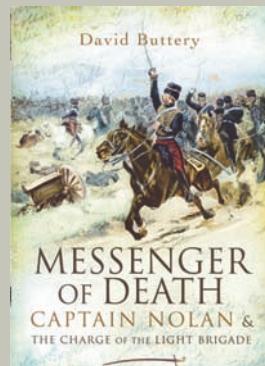
Iraq and Iran and there were no mobile phones then and we didn't receive any presents. My girlfriend at the time sent me a chocolate advent calendar which I received in February, by which time all the chocolate had melted and didn't taste so good."

Donoghue is also involved in a global phenomenon called book crossing – an online network of people who leave books lying in public places for other people to read. A label with a unique tracking number and the book crossing website address is stuck onto the cover and the finder is encouraged to read it and write a review before passing it along.

"It's a good way of recycling books and it's great to see what people think of your work," he explained. "There are around two million books registered. I've left books locally in Darlington and they've ended up in the States."

So how does Donoghue feel about people dipping into his life and thoughts, which are so clearly laid out for the baying public?

"At first it was quite odd," he said. "You're really opening yourself up and you don't know what people are going to think so it's a strange feeling. But everyone I know who's read it has enjoyed it so I'm very pleased with that." ■

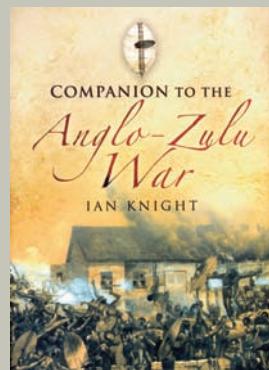


Messenger of Death

by David Buttery

CHRONICLING the life and career of Louis Nolan from childhood through to his death during the infamous Charge of The Light Brigade at Balaclava, *Messenger of Death* delves into the controversy which surrounded the captain's last fateful act. The book takes a refreshingly subjective look at Nolan avoiding the usual mud-slinging which normally goes hand-in-hand with the actions that sent the Light Brigade to its doom. Highly recommended for those who enjoy an impartial take on military history.

Cpl Dan Jones, Int Corps

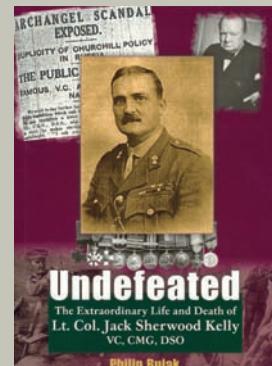


Companion to the Anglo-Zulu War

by Ian Knight

THE events of the Zulu War occupy a unique place in British Army history. Ian Knight is a leading authority on the campaigns conducted by both armies and with this title has compiled an extremely detailed and comprehensive reference book that encompasses every aspect of the short and bloody war. The book's chapters are well illustrated with clear maps and contemporary photographs. I have to say that this is much more than just a reference book; it is also a fascinating read.

Maj Mike Peters, AAC



Undefeated

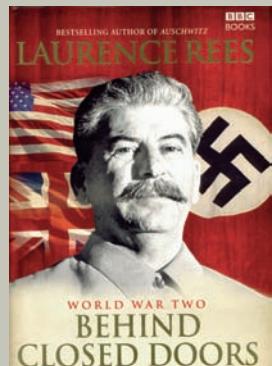
The Extraordinary Life and Death of Lt. Col. Jack Sherwood Kelly VC, CMG, DSO

Philip Bujak

by Philip Bujak

WHO was Lt Col Jack Sherwood Kelly? A little-known officer who had a less than impressive foray into politics on the back of a VC won at Cambrai in 1917, and an Army career in tatters following indiscret and indisciplined conduct over the White Russian issues of 1919. It doesn't seem much to write home about, let alone be the basis for a book, but the story of this giant of a man is captivating when told in Bujak's honest and incisive style. A must read for anyone remotely interested in the British military and its leaders.

Capt David Greaves, REME

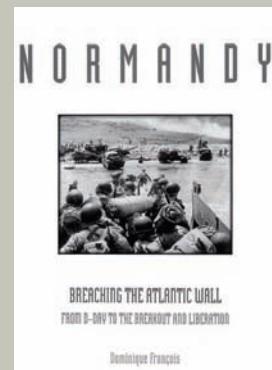


Behind Closed Doors

by Laurence Rees

IF you missed the TV series of the same name and have an interest in strategic relationships during the Second World War this book is a must. Aimed at a predominantly academic audience, the central message is that the Soviets were as morally flawed as the Nazis and that the Allies' cause was undermined by their association with them. While recognising that the choices for an alternate strategy were limited, Rees uses first-hand accounts to detail the murky relationship between Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill.

Maj Neil Powell, AGC

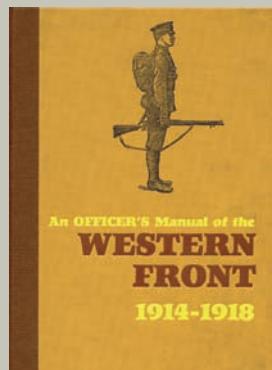


Normandy: Breaching the Atlantic Wall

by Dominique Francois

THE lavish beauty of this book cannot be overstated. Using rare and previously unseen photographs it tells the story of D-Day and the break out battles that followed. Although it is to be recommended to anyone with an interest in photographic history, potential purchasers should be aware of two slight flaws. Firstly, there is an over reliance on the US involvement in the campaign and, secondly, the written history is relatively weak. Nevertheless this is a truly magnificent book.

Maj Neil Powell, AGC



An Officer's Manual of the Western Front 1914-1918

by Dominique Francois

by Dr Stephen Bull

I GUARANTEE that this compilation of extracts from contemporary training manuals will change your perception of the British Army's tactics and training during the Great War. Everything from the employment of machine guns in the attack to battle PT games for troops in the trenches is covered in this handy pocket book. If you're planning a battlefield study, this is a rich source of information that will aid you in generating comparisons with today's tactics and technology.

Maj Mike Peters, AAC



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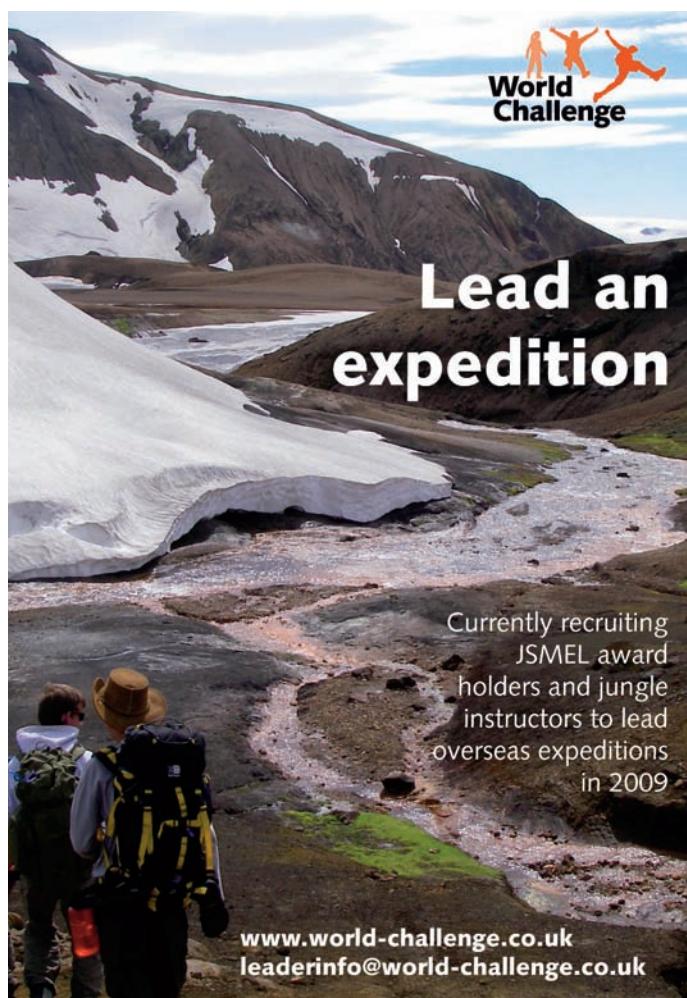
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SOLDIER REPORT

Young pretender: LCpl Kalem Hicks has made a big impression in his first season with the RLC enduro team

Picture: Graeme Main

FULL THROTTLE
High hopes for
RLC's enduro
protege Hicks





Young pretender

Rising star Hicks ensures bright future for evolving loggie enduro team

Interviews: Stephen Tyler
Picture: Graeme Main

WITH an unrivalled enduro racing pedigree, mercurial motorcyclist SSgt Jack Johns' upcoming retirement from competitive riding will rob Team RLC of its biggest talent.

The senior NCO finally steps out of the saddle in the new year after a career that has brought a haul of seven world enduro silver medals and scores more British and Services' titles as well as injuries to almost every part of his body.

Luckily for the loggies, the team has a young pretender revving his engine and ready to explode into

action on the big stage. LCpl Kalem Hicks has only been riding competitively for two years, but his flashes of biking brilliance have convinced Johns that the team is in good hands.

"The first time I saw him I knew he would be able to make the step up," Johns told *SoldierSport* during a Team RLC training session in Abingdon. "He reminds me of myself 10 or 15 years ago and he has everything about him to suggest he will get better and better.

"There's a way the body works on a bike. It's a fine art, but Hicks has the knack. There are still things that I'm doing that he is not confident at, but I've been doing them for years and years."

The foundations for Hicks' talent were put in place at the age of six when he and his father rode their bikes in the hills around his Pontypool home.

Although motocross became his passion, it was not until he joined the Army that Hicks made the step across into competitive racing after signing up for Team RLC.

Even a deployment on Op Herrick 8 couldn't dampen the young soldier's enthusiasm for biking and the Welshman displayed his dedication to enduro racing by arranging his rest and recuperation period to coincide with the Welsh two-day enduro.

The multi-stage, 300-mile event attracted 400 entrants, including a large Armed Forces contingent, and Hicks excelled to win the Best Service Clubman award.

"I went to Afghanistan so obviously couldn't ride, but I was training for P-Company so my fitness was good," he said. "When I came back I did some training and went straight into the competition. I was happy to come third in my class, but I would have been disappointed if I had finished any lower."

With an Army competition class title

already under his belt, Hicks is now concentrating on moving up the rankings in the clubman class in which he races.

Mechanical problems blighted his first competitive season in 2007, but Hicks is confident that a combination of better luck and Johns' stewardship will propel him to greater success.

"The first year did not go very well," said Hicks, who competes on a Yamaha YZ 125. "My bike blew up in one race, but it has been going better this season.

"My goal is to win the clubman class and then get into the Army team. Jack is helping me to progress by showing me the correct technical way to do things."

The rise and rise of Hicks reflects the general improvement of Team RLC.

Starting with just three riders, it has become a near-professional outfit with as much emphasis on the behind-the-scenes support as there is on the competitors.

‘The first time I saw him I knew he would make the step up’

Yamaha dealer Ride MX supplies the team's bikes and further sponsorship from energy drinks company H3O and digital video firm VeeCam, which provides riders with on-board cameras to record training

videos, highlights the stature of the Team RLC brand.

Great Britain MX1 Championship professional Ashley Thomas helps out at training sessions and LCpl Deborah Kerr (RLC), a successful enduro racer on the civilian circuit, has signed up as the team's first female rider.

Despite his impending competitive retirement, Johns intends to help continue pushing the loggies forward after he hangs up his helmet.

"I have been involved since 1993 and the professional image that we have built up since then is incredible," he said. "The guys realise that they are not just pushing a bike around a muddy field, they are actually part of a team."

● Team RLC are looking for new members with previous enduro experience. For more information, email teamrlcenduro@me.com



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Picture: Roger Thompson

On the rampage: Capt Mark Lee (AGC) watches as Pte Joe Kava (RLC) charges through the Baa-Baas defence during the Combined Services' 33-14 defeat

Raiders' revenge

Barbarians overcome Combined Services in Remembrance Day match

Report: Roger Thompson

A BARBARIANS squad featuring seven players with Six Nations or Rugby World Cup experience avenged their 2007 Remembrance Day match defeat with a 33-14 win over the Combined Services at Plymouth.

Three tries inside ten minutes showed that the most famous rugby club in the world were bent on achieving victory without sacrificing their reputation for stylish play.

Baa-Baas flanker Vasco Uva, who represented Portugal in the 2007 World Cup, touched down after four minutes. Royal Navy wing Josh Drauninui, currently with Exeter Chiefs, levelled the scores three minutes later, with both tries being converted. It was certainly a period of rapid fire among the backs, but up front the forwards gave extra power in the tackle and were uncompromising at the break-down.

Following a typical Baa-Baas second try, Drauninui's elusive running enabled fly half Matt Rhodes (RN) to touch down. Dave Pascoe (RN) converted

'We witnessed a game of missed opportunities'

from the most difficult of angles to reach 14 points each at the break.

After half time both packs decided to get on with the game. The Services' warrior classes were led onto the front foot by Army props LCpl Chris Budgen (R Welsh) and LCpl Melvyn Lewis (WG), probably one of the most underrated players on the circuit.

Hooker LCpl Matt Dwyer (WG), a new Army cap in 2008, made it clear he has the pedigree to excel at this level and beyond, while Capt Rob Scothern (AGC), the former Army flanker who replaced Dwyer in the second half, showed he had lost little of his enthusiasm and pace with a committed display.

In the back row Army skipper Capt Mark Lee (AGC) was having one of his best games in a Services' shirt and was a candidate for Man of the Match. Pte Joe Kava (RLC) plundered the Baa-Baas defence from number eight with some thumping runs from set pieces.

The final quarter saw both sides prosper on the back of bold decisions and quick hands. In a territorially-balanced game, the Baa-Baas managed

to position themselves to fire a couple of crucial silver bullets and Welsh international wing Chris Czekej (Cardiff Blues) created an outside arc from 50m to score near the corner.

At 21-14 down, the Services responded with all-out attack. Drauninui ran powerfully only for the move to flounder metres from the line. LCpl Maccu Koroiyadi (RE) launched into the Baa-Baas defence but he lacked the close support that was vital to get him across the line or recycle the ball.

The final result of 33-14 told a story of what might have been, a fact emphasised by Army coach WO2 Andy Price (WG).

"Excitement was important, but we witnessed a game of missed opportunities," he said. "We bombed chances when we could and should have turned the game in our favour."

Pte Apo Satala (R Scots) and Drauninui had to go looking for action while a couple of turnovers gifted the Baa-Baas two late tries.

Those who wore the Royal British Legion poppy gave a good account of themselves in a fine match played for an even better cause. ■

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Board games



Picture: Cpl Karl Anderson (REME)

EIGHT-FOOT waves provided a befitting battleground for 25 competitors at the 2008 Army Surf Championships at Penhale Corner, north Cornwall.

The challenging conditions provided some excellent riding opportunities and Sgt Al Hayes (Infantry) took full advantage to edge out Cpl Steve Goodson (KRH) and claim the bodyboarding title.

Fast and aggressive surfing from WO2 Dave Cox (APTC) earned the senior NCO bragging rights in the shortboard contest. A strong display from Cpl Paul O'Dwer (RE) earned the sapper second place.

And with the surf getting livelier by the minute, Cpl Tharren Lewis (PWRR) found a rip 100m along the beach to put in a title-winning performance, propelling him past SSgt Steve Webber (REME) who had led until the final few waves. ■

National guard

TWO Army boxers stepped on to the international stage as England lost to an experienced Wales team.

Cpl James Allen (16 Regt RA) was named as captain and was joined by LCpl Steve Turner (3 UK Div Sig Regt) at Glamorgan County Cricket Ground as the two nations squared off at senior level for the first time since 1976.

Allen fell behind early on in his 56kg bout with Andrew Selby after failing to avoid some of the Welshman's punches.

The military man rediscovered his form in the second period, catching Selby with some well-timed shots. Two powerful right hands from Allen in the third round forced Selby onto the back

foot, but the Army boxer paid for his slow start with a battling 17-12 loss.

The seventh bout pitted LCpl Turner against Welsh captain Lewis Rees in the 64kg category. Rees attacked from the front foot, but Turner (pictured right) landed some telling counter shots.

With his confidence rising, Turner settled into his stride and dished out combination shots to Rees's head and body to further stretch his lead.

The home boxer tried to recover in round three and scored a couple of points, but Turner was too far in front and the winning score of 20-6 highlighted the gulf in class between the two men on the night. ■



SPORT SHORTS

The Army netball team put an exotic cap on its 2007/08 season by travelling to St Lucia to compete in the prestigious Helen of the West tournament.

As well as taking on the cream of the Caribbean en route to a sixth-place finish, the Army squared up to the Royal Air Force in an enthralling end-to-end encounter that the aviators edged 39-37.

The squad is now building towards March's Inter-Services championships as it attempts to retain its 2008 title.

A PAIR of fitness-fanatic senior NCOs will be putting their muscles to the test by taking on a 24-hour gym challenge to raise money for Help for Heroes.

Sgt Danny Watson and Sgt Chris Gibbs will be doing seven pull-ups and seven dips every minute for 24 hours during the endurance test, which takes place at ATR Bassingbourn on December 11 and 12.

To sponsor the powerful pair, who had raised more than £1,000 by the end of November, visit www.justgiving.com/dannygibboaptc

ARMY athletes sprung into action to clinch five medals at the Great Britain Diving Federation winter master championships at Tunbridge Wells.

Gold medals were won by WO2 Dave Cox (APTC), Sgt Jim Marke (APTC), LCpl Rob Hunter (R Welsh) and Cfn Graham Lorimer (REME), while SSgt Amanda Prentice (RLC) claimed a silver.

The Service side has now been approached to compete in next year's Dutch Masters competition. ■



Picture: Mike Weston

Great escape: Bournemouth manager Jimmy Quinn has enlisted Army help in his bid to overturn the south coast club's 17-point League Two deduction

Cherries go green

Tough military training gets League Two club off to winning FA Cup start

AFC Bournemouth have turned to the military in their attempts to overcome a 17-point deficit in the Football League's basement division.

The south coast side joined Rotherham and Luton Town in negative figures after entering administration during the 2007/08 season in which they were relegated from League One.

New manager Jimmy Quinn spotted the need for team spirit immediately after joining the club one month into the new campaign and was quick to sign his squad up to a boot camp run by Army football team boss Maj Steve Jackson (R Signals) at ATR Pirbright.

The training camp paid immediate dividends as the Cherries won their next game, an FA Cup tie against League One side Bristol Rovers, by a solitary goal.

Assistant manager Jason Tindall told *SoldierSport*: "It was a fantastic experience. The time and effort that the Army put in for us was first-class and we have undoubtedly benefited from their help."

The Cherries, who included former infantryman Lee Bradbury among their number, were put through a series of command tasks before getting in some on-pitch training.

Maj Jackson said: "Getting them together to see what Army life is all about helped get rid of any fears."

Although Bournemouth followed up their FA Cup performance with a disappointing 3-0 defeat at Accrington Stanley, Tindall believes the club is heading in the right direction.

"If you plan an attack on the football pitch or in battle and somebody lets you down, that person is letting the whole team down," he said. "The principles are very similar. We have picked up a few good results and we are trying to keep that up by bringing everyone together to fight in the same corner." ■

World beaters

Rugby League squad conquers all Down Under

Report: Stephen Tyler

THE Combined Services Rugby League team defeated Australia in their own back yard to claim the 2008 Defence Forces World Cup title.

Great Britain, who included seven Army players in their 17-man squad, took an early lead against the home side at Sydney Football Stadium and saw off a late Australian charge to claim an historic 26-16 win.

Captained by Army stalwart Sgt Sean Fanning (RAMC), the squad joined the national wheelchair team in claiming overall glory at the championships, which were run in parallel with the Rugby League World Cup.

England Rugby Football League executive chairman

Richard Lewis praised both of the trophy-winning teams.

"On behalf of everyone at the RFL I would like to congratulate the England wheelchair and Great Britain Armed Forces teams on their fantastic achievements," he said.

"Both teams have done superbly well to travel out to Australia and win every game despite gruelling schedules.

"We are very proud of these players who have represented their countries with great distinction."

While the Great Britain first team flattered to deceive in the main tournament, losing to Australia and New Zealand in the group stages before crashing out to the Kiwis in the knockout rounds, the Armed Forces contingent looked strong throughout.

A fast-paced opening match against the highly-fancied New Zealand

These players have represented their countries with great distinction

Defence Force gave the Services squad a perfect start.

The 36-26 final score was eclipsed in the second encounter in which Great Britain thrashed a beleaguered Papua New Guinea 84-6.

A win for Australia against New Zealand allowed the Wallabies to move to the top of the table, but their time at the summit was short lived as Great Britain beat them 36-16.

A confidence-boosting 40-20 win over the Cook Islands sent Great Britain – including Army men Cpl Ceri Cummings (REME), LCpl Rob Kama (AGC), LCpl Moses Matau (RE), Sgt Dave Goddard (RE), LCpl Tim Tamani (REME) and Cpl Ben Taylor (REME) – into a final rematch against the Australians.

The Royal Air Force's Martin Wood kicked the game's first points from a penalty and soon added a try and conversion. Britain's opponents replied with a penalty of their own before another Wood penalty opened a four-point lead at half time.

Kama and Tamani both scored at the start of the second period to extend the lead to 20-4, but some scrappy defensive play allowed the Wallabies to reduce the deficit to just four points.

With time running out, Navy prop Jamie Goss barrelled over to make the game safe.

"We've had to play five games in just 12 days and the players have never been behind on the scoreboard," Great Britain coach Wayne O'Kell said after the final. "They're a credit to themselves, the British Armed Forces and their country." ■

SLOPE STYLE

THE Army's top snowboarders were limbering up to compete in the Service's annual championships as this issue went to press.

Austria's Stubai Glacier was set to host Exercise Snow Jack for the eleventh time as competitors aim to show off their skills in giant slalom, slope style, snowboarder X and parallel slalom disciplines.

Starting with training on Sunday, December 7, the competition runs until Friday, December 19 and Army Snowboarding Association chairman Lt Gen Graeme Lamb hopes a successful fortnight will cement the sport's growing reputation with adventure-mad military men and women.

"A fair number of officers and soldiers still do not consider snowboarding as a sport, but nothing could be further from the truth," he said.

"It takes commitment, dedication, training and courage. In my view, having both skied and bobsleighed, snowboarding is every bit the match of those two sports."

As well as vying for Army bragging rights, snowboarders in Austria have the added incentive of potentially earning a place in the team for next year's Inter-Services competition.

And with several new boarders expected to hit the slopes, Services snowboarding looks to be in fine health.

"I have met and boarded with young men and women just back from operational tours who have no interest in lying on some foreign beach," said Lamb, adding that snowboarding is a good way to cure sore muscles. "They are just keen to get up on the slopes and they simply love it. You need real guts to make your way down a hill course when there are three people aiming to knock you out of the way and only one person wins."

"This is a fast-growing and serious sport. We won both the male and female Inter-Services titles last time around against very capable opposition. Not many other sports can claim that." ■

Premier performance

FIJIAN powerhouse Pte Apo Satala (1 Scots) has made a strong start to his career with Guinness Premiership Rugby Union side Gloucester.

Since joining the west country club on a one-year contract in September after spending the 2007/08 season with relegated Leeds Carnegie, the Army man has had a big part to play in pushing the team up the table.

After making his debut as a substitute

for Peter Buxton in the 39-23 win over Newcastle on September 30, Satala forced his way into the starting line-up for the 24-19 victory against reigning champions London Wasps.

The 6ft 4in flanker got his first try in Gloucester's 25-20 win over Newport Gwent Dragons in October and was instrumental as the club climbed to fifth in the table after defeating Saracens 25-21.

Satala's form in English domestic

rugby's premier competition is no surprise after the forward's stand out performances throughout 2008.

After helping the Army overcome the Royal Navy to retain the Inter-Services title in May, Satala scored several tries as the Army finished in second place in the Middlesex Sevens competition at Twickenham in August. ■



Songs of praise

Television talent show hopefuls explain why soldiers have the real X Factor



Laura

It's been a pleasure performing and supporting the single. Words can't describe how brave you all are. I wish you all a merry Christmas and thank you for all you do. It was so nice meeting some of you and a real inspiration. All my love, Laura.



Diana

I really admire what you are doing. You are all such an inspiration and I'm so happy to be a part of it by releasing the single and trying to raise money to help people that have been injured. My thoughts go out to you and your families at Christmas time. Thank you for everything that you do.



Alexandra

I'm happy to be a part of the charity and I just want to say to all you guys that are out there fighting, thank you so much as we know that you have been through so much. I'm sending all my happy thoughts and positive energy to you guys through your hard times. Never give up because dreams always come true.



Ruth

I feel very proud of you all and you are all really brave. Keep strong as I understand how hard it can be to be away from family. Keep on doing what's right. You are true heroes.



JLS

It has been amazing to be part of such a fantastic project, helping Help for Heroes. I met a lot of soldiers who have been wounded in war. It was a humbling experience for me and the boys. It's a fantastic cause and I'm proud to be associated with it. You soldiers are amazing. I don't know how I would cope in your position but you guys are true role models. — Marvin

I just want to say to all the soldiers fighting out there, keep strong everyone, keep a positive frame of mind and the law of attraction will help you through. — Aston

It's a fantastic single supporting a fantastic cause and we feel nothing other than privileged to be part of it. It's amazing to see so many people who have been affected by conditions that we couldn't even dream of and still conduct their lives in such a carefree manner. We admire their bravery, we appreciate their skill and we wish them all the very best in the future. — JB

It was incredible to meet people who will sacrifice themselves for the freedom of others. I think it's a very bold and honourable thing to do as a human being and it's absolutely fantastic that we could have the opportunity to acknowledge their efforts by meeting some of the soldiers. The biggest thing I live by is "triumph after triumph" and these soldiers were all so upbeat and happy. We hugely appreciate what they have done. I hope they have the encouragement to go on knowing that people really care and appreciate what they are doing. — Oritse



Eoghan

People don't know or probably understand the things you go through so well done, you're amazing people.



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