

SOLDIER

MAGAZINE OF THE BRITISH ARMY

FLASHES OF GENIUS

Winning shots from this year's
Army Film and Photographic
Competition



**SPINELINE
COMPETITION**
GORSHKOV, LAMAN,
STIRTON, YONGQING

Inside: The results in full »





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ARMY
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CONTENTS



FEATURES

COVER
STORY

- 31 Soldiers who just click**
Photographers shine in awards season
- 39 The reel deal**
The pioneers of combat camerawork
- 44 War stories**
Reporters reflect on Gulf conflict
- 51 A new frontier**
Armoured Corps embraces esports

REGULARS

- 7 The Informer**
Top stories from across the Service
- 20 Need to Know**
Essential tips for today's personnel
- 55 Talkback**
Ruminations from the ranks
- 58 Bullet Points**
Troops' intelligence assets
- 63 Reviews**
Kit, movies, books and games to fill your downtime
- 74 Final Word**
Top tips for the perfect picture

SOLDIERSPORT

- 70 Rugby league**
Reds miss out on cup repeat
- 71 Cricket**
Plans take shape for summer season
- 72 Rugby league**
Simpson set for world stage
- 73 Rugby union**
Roberts made to wait for debut test

“They are professional and totally understand the need to capture this moment in time”

Soldiers that just click – p31



39



44



51



70

Freezing a moment



WITH no awards ceremony for this year's Army Film and Photographic Competition, *Soldier* has instead been given

the honour of announcing the winners and runners-up on page 38.

Congratulations to all those who took part.

As I hope our front cover – selected from hundreds of entries – shows, there are few more exciting subjects to capture on camera right now than British soldiers.

With Covid-19 both dominating and restricting much of what the Service does, this might sound unlikely.

However, as the photographers explain, it is not military activities themselves which inspire – rather the personnel undertaking them.

And if any proof were needed of how historically significant these powerful images can become, check out our feature on page 39 where we discover the stunning legacy of Army photography pioneers.

Keen to get snapping yourself? You could do a lot worse than read our top tips on page 74.

Enjoy the issue.

Sarah Goldthorpe • Editor

Where to find *Soldier*

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Picture: Graeme Main



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'We are tackling family concerns'

MOVES to address the issues raised in a report on Armed Forces families are already under way, the government has insisted.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said measures including accommodation upgrades and free childcare had already been rolled out.

But he claimed the findings of the *Living in Our Shoes* review would also be examined in the soon-to-be-refreshed Armed Forces families strategy.

The MoD-sanctioned report into the needs of military families was led by MP and ex-Royal Regiment of Fusiliers officer Andrew Selous.

It saw troops of all ranks and their spouses – plus leaders of Forces charities – interviewed over 18 months, with more than 100 recommendations to improve support.

Housing remains a top concern, with calls for "urgent continued significant investment" in poor quality accommodation. The document stresses that repair requests must be dealt with rapidly by contractor Amey, and occupants should be given flexibility to call local firms if there are delays to critical work such as a central heating.

Recommendations for education improvements are also flagged.

The review suggests that schools receiving the Service pupil premium – extra cash given to promote the

welfare of military children – should be more accountable on how it is spent.

It also calls for a survey of childcare needs in base areas, with affordable nurseries encouraged.

Speaking after the release of the report, Selous said: "We have moved a lot as a country to look after veterans much better than we did – we need to do the same thing for Forces families. And while they are sometimes invisible, they are indispensable for a strong defence."

Wallace added that the Armed Forces families strategy – due to be published in the summer – would further help partners and children of soldiers.

"We will shortly be introducing new legislation to strengthen the Armed Forces Covenant and make the recognition and care of Service families a national priority," he said.

Read the full report on gov.uk



“They are indispensable for a strong defence”

>> Latest round-up of the Army Covid-19 effort, page 10

GLOBAL SITREP

Picture: SSgt Bryan Myhr, US Air National Guard

1. USA

WATCHING WASHINGTON

A ROYAL Signals Reservist provided support to the security operation for the inauguration of US President Joe Biden last month.

Maj Keiron Francis got the mission of a lifetime with the National Guard's 56 Stryker Brigade Combat Team thanks to a new scheme designed to keep valued Reserve personnel in the British Army fold, even when their civilian career sends them abroad.

The foreign military Reserve exchange programme is run with the USA, Australia and Canada and allows soldiers to serve as reservists with each other's militaries.

Maj Francis (shown above in a US Humvee), who is a sales director in the defence industry, deployed to Washington

DC along with 20,000 National Guard troops, providing IT networks and communications support.

"We had to live in a Covid bubble at headquarters but it was a very interesting and complex operation to be involved in," the officer told *Soldier*.



2. FALKLAND ISLANDS

TROOPS ON POINT

SOLDIERS from the Roulement Infantry Company have been keeping core skills sharp in the demanding terrain of the South Atlantic.

The personnel, drawn from both the Scots and Grenadier Guards, rehearsed missions involving air, land and seaborne assets during Exercise Cape Bayonet.

Having embarked on HMS Forth earlier in the training package, the infantry later assaulted mock enemy positions with the Falkland Islands Defence Force.

Using their knowledge of the terrain, the local soldiers carried out reconnaissance before the guards staged a robust dawn attack.

Officer commanding, Maj James Taylor (Gren Gds), explained: "The lessons we have learnt will stand us in good stead for future operations."



3. SOMALIA

FORCE GENERATION

BRITISH infantry have clocked up a milestone in assisting African counterparts.

Troops from 2nd Battalion, The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment have now trained 500 Somali troops in a programme to help them maintain stability in their home country.

The goal was marked as the latest personnel completed the package – which includes patrolling, marksmanship and counter-IED skills – at their Baidoa base.

The 113 African soldiers were also provided with new equipment and uniforms to face down threats from extremists and criminals more effectively.

Trainers aim to keep up momentum this year by instructing a new Somali company every eight weeks.

4. ESTONIA

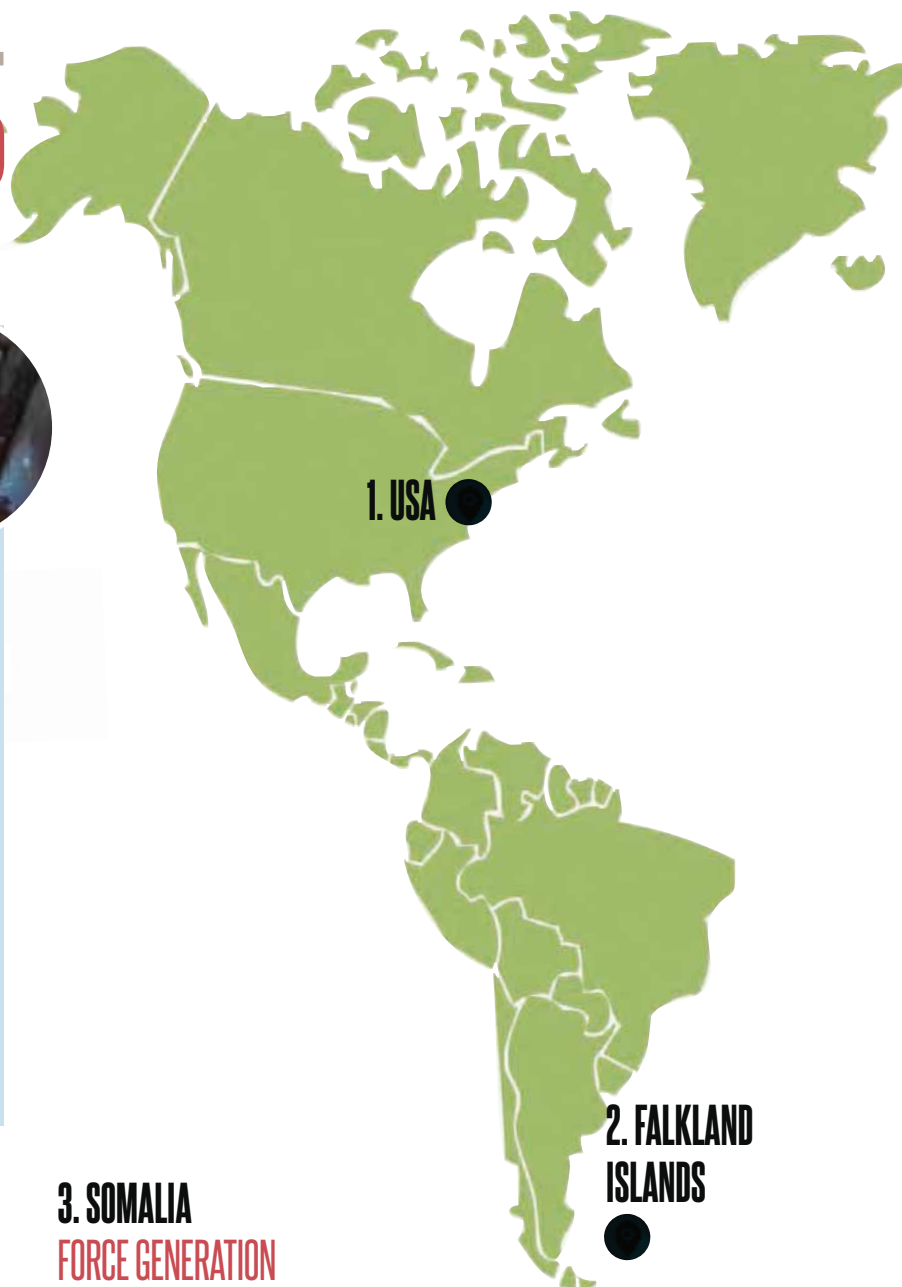
SUB-ZERO DRILLS

THE 5 Rifles-led Nato enhanced forward presence battlegroup and the Estonian Defence Force were gearing up for their annual winter camp as this issue went to press.

With snow on the ground and the mercury dipping below zero, the training looks set to be a stern test of their cold weather warfighting capability and readiness.



Picture: Graeme Main





IN NUMBERS

720

Members of the 1 Mercian Battlegroup embarking on a combined arms live-firing exercise on Sennelager Training Area this month in preparation for their forthcoming stint in Estonia

INTELLIGENCE FOR THE ATLAS?

Brief the team now:



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7. GIBRALTAR

VACCINATION STATIONS

SOLDIERS assisting at the sharp end of the Covid pandemic have been ensuring that jabs against the virus can be offered in short order beyond the UK mainland.

The personnel – from the Royal Gibraltar Regiment – were ready to take delivery as a Royal Air Force A400M flew in a batch of Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine

The consignment of 6,000 shots was kept at a temperature of -70 degrees Celsius in transit and taken for storage at St Bernard's Hospital.

The inoculation programme started quickly – prioritising front-line workers and vulnerable residents of the British territory.

6. PAKISTAN

VANQUISHING 'THE BEAST'

FORMER Queen's Gurkha Engineer and climbing ace Nirmal "Nims" Purja has led the first successful ascent of K2 in winter.

At 8,611m, the technically difficult peak is the second highest in the world and had never been conquered at this time of year.

Purja headed up one of two all-Nepalese teams – ten climbers in total – who made it to the top. Writing on social media, he described the feat, which he completed without supplementary oxygen, as a "beast of a challenge".

"The whole team waited ten metres below to form a group then stepped onto the summit together whilst singing our national anthem," he said. "We are proud to have been a part of history for humankind."

Purja made headlines in 2019 when he scaled all 14 of the world's peaks higher than 8,000 metres in a record six months and six days.



Pictures: Waqas Anees and Nimsdai Purja

5. BOSNIA

BRITS QUIT EUFOR

THE British military commitment to the European Union-led deployment in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been wound up in the wake of Brexit.

A flag lowering ceremony at Camp Butmir, Sarajevo marked the end of the UK's contribution to Op Althea – and 16 years of being part of Eufor.

The MoD said Britain remained committed to helping maintain stability in the Balkans and troops in the region had been

redeployed under Nato command. In particular, members of the The Royal Lancers (Queen Elizabeth's Own), who had recently arrived

in theatre, have been moved to neighbouring Kosovo, a spokesman confirmed.

Maj Gen Reinhard Trischak, Commander Eufor, praised the "unwavering commitment" of the UK to the Bosnian people.

"It is with sadness that we see the departure of their personnel," he said.



Picture: Steve Dock

NORTH WEST REAL TEST

■ COMMUNITY testing in the North West is continuing at pace with soldiers now on the ground in Greater Manchester, having been deployed in Lancashire since December.

Some 550 troops from the Coldstream Guards, The Royal Lancers and 1st Battalion, The Rifles are working alongside local authority staff across each of Manchester's ten boroughs (pictured below right).

As this issue went to press almost 10,000 tests had been carried out. In neighbouring Lancashire 171 personnel from the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers and Royal Logistic Corps have tested more than 21,000 people.

Commander Joint Medical Command North West, Col Russel Miller – whose Preston-based headquarters is overseeing the effort – said both programmes were taking lessons from the pilot conducted in Liverpool late last year, including targeting key workers and the vulnerable.

"The model has proved highly effective, identifying outbreaks of asymptomatic cases and therefore containing the spread," he explained. "The soldiers are also training civilian replacement workforces that will enable the programmes to be sustained without the need for ongoing direct military support."

'THEY'D MAKE FANTASTIC SOLDIERS'

■ "REOPENING the ExCel is one of the greatest things I've ever done in the Army," said Lt Col Peter Hale (RAMC, below), who led the 22 Field Hospital team at London's Nightingale ExCel Hospital.

"To have the honour to help our own country through the pandemic at a time of greatest need has given me and my team a huge sense of satisfaction."

His contingent received an NHS Make a Difference Award for their efforts. However, the officer admitted that the enormity of the task had also been daunting.

"Thankfully, as military medics it's in our DNA to tackle tough problems," he added. "We were blessed by having in our NHS colleagues some of the most hardworking, dedicated, passionate and professional people I have ever had the pleasure to work with."

"They'd make fantastic soldiers."



THE COVID FIGHT CONTINUES...

■ Combat medics help treat London patients

■ 22 Field Hospital and Royal Engineers reopen Nightingale hospital

■ Soldiers test thousands in North West

■ Co-responders step up once again



Pictures: Matt Allen, MoD



EXCEL EFFORT

■ LONDON'S Nightingale ExCel Hospital has reopened thanks in part to 22 Field Hospital and the Royal Engineers (see left).

The troops worked round the clock from Boxing Day to get the facility ready to receive patients.

The 60-bed centre, which can increase capacity to more than 300 if needed, is used to relieve pressure on medical services in the capital, where infection rates remain high.



MILITARY support to Covid-19



measures in London has been stepped up, with 350 additional personnel deployed to hospitals across the capital.

As this issue went to press some 200 medics from units around the country and 150 general duties troops from 1st Battalion, The Royal Anglian Regiment were assisting Royal London, Kings College, St George's, the Royal Free and Hammersmith hospitals.

Combat medical technicians (CMTs) were set to fill patient-facing roles, with the rest allocated to support tasks as needed to free up health service staff for front-line work.

The officer in charge of the effort, Maj Phil Lenthall (R Anglian), said the soldiers began working shoulder-to-shoulder with civilian counterparts, including in critical care, after a few days of induction training.

"NHS staff on intensive care wards usually work one-to-one with patients, but the number of casualties has seen that ratio stretched" he explained. "Having CMTs by their side, even in non-clinical roles, is already saving lives."

"The NHS staff have also been allocating our junior soldiers tasks such as making phone calls, moving patients around and talking to those who are sick but can't have family there."

"The reception has been fantastic. A bit like on a battlefield, knowing someone else has your back makes a real difference."

He added: "Soldiers will be experiencing things they're not used to so we are stressing the importance of teamwork and will check in with them regularly. They are pleased to be involved and really feel like they are giving something back."



Picture: Graeme Main

Co-responder comeback

A GROUP of volunteers who use off-duty hours to assist ambulance crews have again been pressed into full-time action amid the second Covid spike.

Maj Emma Allen (R Signals, pictured above) confirmed she had reasserted her role as officer commanding military co-responders as this issue was going to press.

She is fronting a team of 25 tri-Service personnel – around half of them from the Army – providing support to South Central Ambulance Service staff.

Her husband James – a Royal Artillery officer – is also again among the number.

Maj Allen, who was recently awarded the MBE for her work during the first coronavirus wave, said the latest tasking was due to run until mid-March.

They are helping to cover a wide

SOUTH ENGLAND

area including Surrey, Kent and Sussex.

She told *Soldier*: “We were stood down as a team in summer 2020 but all of us kept up our usual off-duty role as volunteers through the remainder of the year.

“We have managed to reconvene the team for full-time work rapidly.

“Everyone is now committed to the job and we are looking forward to being involved.”

Under normal circumstances, co-responder crews work during evening shifts. They all receive medical training and some undergo blue light driving instruction.

But Maj Allen’s suggestion that personnel could work full-time during the first pandemic was rapidly taken up and proved highly successful.

While admitting the role had been “physically, mentally and emotionally draining”, she said it had been hugely rewarding to support NHS colleagues.

JOAN'S BIRTHDAY JAB



■ A SECOND World War veteran has celebrated her 97th birthday in style by becoming the first ever Royal Star and Garter resident to receive a Covid-19 vaccine.

Joan Sprigg, who served in the Auxiliary Territorial Service, was given the jab at the charity’s Solihull home last month and hailed the moment as the best present she could have wished for.

All 50 residents – plus staff members – were given the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccination, with their counterparts at locations in Surbiton and High Wycombe next in line.

“We are looking forward to being involved”

The vaccine tasking >>
page 13

WIN
A £100 big shop
at TESCO



LAST month’s clues would not have pulled the wool over the eyes of French military history experts.

Influenced by our feature on the multinational Exercise Wessex Storm, (Simon) Murray, (Jean) Brette, (Ante) Gotovina and (Akihiko) Saito are all notable veterans of the French Army’s 2e Regiment Etranger de Parachutistes.

This month, we have teamed up with the UK’s largest supermarket chain Tesco ([tesco.com](https://www.tesco.com)) to offer one lucky reader a £100 gift card to spend in store.

To be in with a chance of winning tell us what links the clues on the spine of this month’s magazine. Answers – including daytime phone number – to comps@soldiermagazine.co.uk by February 28.



Picture: Parsons Media

SPINE LINE COMPETITION

MUSIC FOR MORALE

■ MUSICIANS from the Household Division bands are sharing free tunes with the country in a bid to boost morale during lockdown.

More than 100 tracks are now available to download on householddivision.org.uk/scm

Click on the “free download music” tab to access the state ceremonial music.

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

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Troops call the shots

THE Royal Scots Dragoon Guards are playing a key role in combating Covid north of the border – helping to set up dozens of vaccination centres.

Around 100 personnel had begun work on 80 facilities as this issue went to press.

Their efforts are ensuring front-line NHS staff are free to administer 900,000 vaccine doses in Scotland.

Largely drawn from the Leuchars-based dragoons and underpinned by members of the Royal Army Medical Corps, the troops are organised into teams tasked with establishing car parks, patient recording systems and vaccine transport.

Lt Tom Brindley-Slater (Scots

SCOTLAND

DG), who has been among those leading the effort, said: "As we speak, they are cracking on – Covid-19 has affected all of us and our job is an essential component."

With most major vaccination hubs already identified, the soldiers have also been helping to find buildings for smaller facilities.

Lt Brindley-Slater said the work was rewarding.

"I was involved in tasks at the London 2012 Olympics and this has some similarities," he added.

The Army is being assisted by a command and control effort in Stirling, where 20 Armed Forces personnel are based. Some 32 military planners are also backing a government team.



WALES

FOLLOWING an intensive effort in 2020, Joint Military Command (JMC) Wales is continuing to play a pivotal role in the fight against coronavirus.

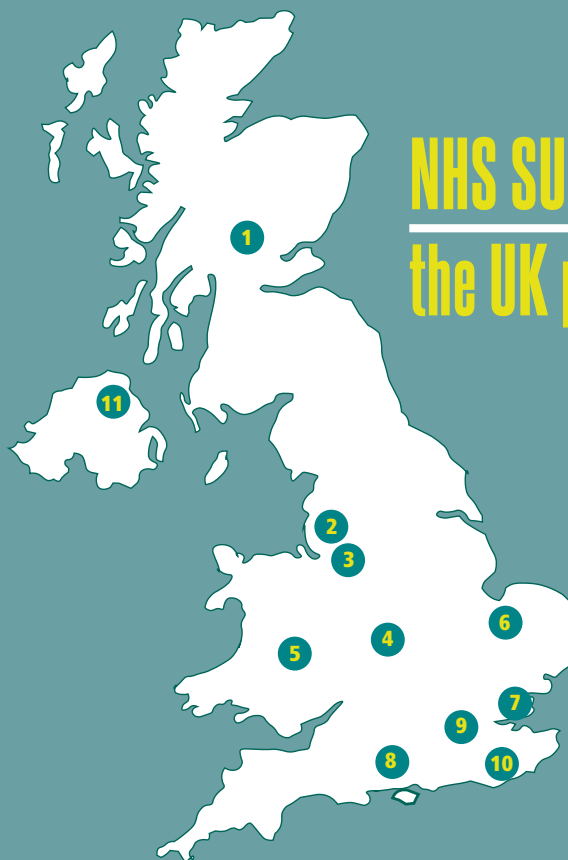
Based at Brecon, the organisation deployed 70 Royal Air Force personnel and 14 Army combat medical technicians to bolster the NHS in Wales as part of a vaccination support force.

They have been working at 26

different locations, with their efforts supplemented by eight headquarters staff – taking the total number to 92.

In addition, the JMC has contributed 69 trained ambulance drivers – all soldiers from 9 Regiment, Royal Logistic Corps – who have been operating alongside the Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust.

"These deployments follow on from the recent involvement in a whole town testing pilot in Merthyr Tydfil, which saw more than 170 personnel help set up testing centres across the valley in coordination with the local council," said Commander JMC Wales, Brig Andrew Dawes.



NHS SUPPORT the UK picture

1. SCOTLAND

- Around 100 Royal Scots Dragoon Guards and Royal Army Medical Corps personnel
- 32 UK military planners working in support of the Scottish Government and health boards

Division's logistic support brigades supporting South East Coast Ambulance Service

2. LANCASHIRE

- 320 personnel in total supporting community testing
- Led by 2 Close Support Battalion, REME HQ, plus four chefs, one media officer, a general duties medical officer and two combat medical technicians

3. GREATER MANCHESTER

- Around 950 troops including The Royal Lancers, Coldstream Guards and The Rifles, earmarked for community testing, with 550 deployed at the time of writing
- These include six chefs, four combat medical technicians and a general duties medical officer

4. MIDLANDS

- 1 Signal Regiment HQ providing command and control function
- 1 Signals Regiment squadron providing non-clinical tasks once trained by NHS staff
- 117 combat medical technicians supporting 12 hospitals

5. WALES

- Around 120 soldiers assisting ambulance service and vaccine support until late March

6. EAST ENGLAND

- 57 combat medical technicians working at Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital and Cambridge University Hospital

7. MID AND SOUTH ESSEX

- 28 combat medical technicians and health care advisers from 3 (UK) Division and 16 Air Assault Brigade supporting the NHS

8. SOUTH ENGLAND

- 15 Service personnel who volunteer as military co-responders deployed to bolster ambulance teams until late March
- 108 drivers and ten officers from 1 (UK)

9. LONDON

- 150 troops from 1st Battalion, The Royal Anglian Regiment on general duties
- 192 combat medical technicians supporting five London hospitals
- Nine personnel from 22 Field Hospital, Specialist Team Royal Engineers and 8 Engineer Brigade supporting Nightingale ExCel

10. KENT

- Some 320 troops led by 35 Engineer Regiment (EOD) HQ doing community testing
- 22 combat medical technicians supporting Kent Medway Hospital and other front-line facilities in the region

11. NORTHERN IRELAND

- 100 combat medical technicians and 34 drivers from 38 (Irish) Brigade and The Rifles supporting Department of Health for Northern Ireland

NATIONAL-LEVEL SUPPORT

- **National vaccine roll-out:** HQ 101 Logistic Brigade providing planning support for national delivery of Covid-19 vaccine

- **NHS England national vaccination teams:** 192 combat medical technicians, plus 36 doctors, nurses and pharmacists, supporting vaccine quick reaction force. At the time of writing 68 of those were deployed with 21 Armed Forces teams working across all NHS England regions. Remainder held at 24 hours' notice to move

- **Department of Health and Social Care national community testing:** HQ 102 Logistic Brigade providing planning support for mass testing around the UK

- **Schools testing:** Requirement to continue until end of February. At the time of writing around 450 Army personnel working around England in support of Department of Education



Ground view

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

AS I TYPE my second column of 2021, concern is mounting over a second Covid wave, troops are squarely back on the front line of supporting the NHS and I have a new appreciation of the sacrifices that so many are making.

In early January I had been en route to a work job when I was informed I'd been in contact with somebody who had tested positive for coronavirus. I came home, went upstairs into the spare room and shut the door.

At the time of writing I am still here in self-isolation – day eight of ten to be precise. My wife is leaving meals outside and I have my own space for washing. While I'm still working and can watch TV, this is about the limit of my world.

The experience has really opened my eyes to all the things I've taken for granted.

I'm used, for example, to doing PT first thing in the morning, which is clearly out of the question now. My family cannot come near me, which has been all the harder as my son has just had an emergency operation.

I love cycling too, but can't even use the turbo trainer because it is in a different

room. Put simply, everything bar the interior of these four walls is off limits.

Our soldiers – like other members of the public who have been exposed to Covid or had symptoms – have had to endure the same period of quarantine. It isn't easy at all, and places demands on our mental and physical wellbeing.

However, it is important to do the right thing and ensure we play our part in stopping the wider spread. As well as self-isolation, it is critical to update the Covid reporting tool on Defence Connect whenever our situation changes.

Throwing myself into work has been my way of dealing with this – I'm still attending meetings and have a number of projects under way. The weekend has so far been the hardest part, although it is great that rugby is on TV.

Yes, it is tough. But there is help out there if you are struggling mentally. Op Smart is the port of call, and you can find out more on Defence Connect.

I would also ask junior commanders to ensure their troops are aware of the initiative as I'm still encountering people who don't know about it. Let's make sure we look after each other.

“It places demands on our mental wellbeing”

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL



Q What's your most prized creature comfort in isolation?

A My MTP-themed slippers – required because the window is always open



Gurkhas on queue

IT HAS been a huge privilege to see soldiers once again stepping up to support the civilian authorities as we battle this new wave of Covid.

Shortly before isolating, I visited Dover to see troops from 1st Battalion, The Royal Gurkha Rifles, as they helped out with testing those heading for France.

The scenes that greeted me were extraordinary, with queues (above) stretching miles. The new strain of coronavirus meant those crossing the Channel had to be screened first and it fell

on the soldiers to help.

The troops – a number of Reservists among them – endured austere as well as cold midwinter conditions, while being away from their families for long periods.

But their hard work was vital in helping to unlock Europe and keep trade moving.

I spoke to several police officers on the ground who were grateful for the assistance and impressed with the way the personnel conducted themselves.

Congratulations on a job well done.

■ I HAVE recently written about my exploits with those in the Army's esports community – and I'd like to see more of them in the coming months.

Although I have never been into this scene, it is clear that many new recruits are members of the gaming cadre and using the *Discord* app to communicate with each other.

Any opportunity for me to talk to troops is gold dust and connecting with this group is important. They are part of the wide ranging dynamic we have in the Army.

I'm up for esports – keep me posted.





Troops catch the bug

THE Army has purchased 30 bug drones that can be used to spy on targets up to two kilometres away on a single charge.

Developed with BAE Systems, the UAVTEK kit weighs just 196g – about the same as a smartphone.

It is small enough to be held in the hand, but can beam footage back to ground troops with a high definition camera that could soon have infrared capability too.

Its can also fly in strong winds of more than 50mph.

The device was the only small unmanned aerial vehicle able to cope with such gusty conditions during the last Army Warfighting Experiment, an event which explores emerging

military technologies.

It is the latest addition to a fleet of around 90 drones that have been tested by the Infantry Trials and Development Unit and are now being trialled by front-line Army units.

These include 1st Battalion, The Royal Irish Regiment; 2nd Battalion, The Royal Anglian Regiment and two specialised infantry units – 4th Battalion, The Rifles and 2nd Battalion, The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment.

Among other things, the troops will look at the potential for the platform to carry cameras or explosive devices.

Other drones being assessed by the team include the FLIR Black Hornet 3, DefendTex D40 and Tomahawk Robotics SparrowHawk.



SUPPORT FOR TARP TEST

■ VETERAN John Watson-Allison has launched the "Under a Tarp" challenge to highlight the issues facing homeless people during the winter months.

The initiative runs until the end of March and requires participants to build their own outdoor tarpaulin shelters and then spend the night in the structure while sleeping on a cardboard bed.

And the former warrant officer, who served in the Intelligence Corps and Royal Engineers during a 24-year Army career, is calling on serving and ex-personnel to showcase their shelter building skills and spread the message.

"We often talk about helping the homeless, but this is a truly immersive experience," Watson-Allison said. "It's about moving beyond our comfort zones to understand what it's really like to be sleeping rough on the streets."

Participants are urged to set up a Just Giving page and raise money for their chosen homeless charities, while charting their experience on social media using #UnderaTarpChallenge

For details visit underatarp.co.uk



COOKHOUSE COST CREEPS UP



...but it's due to an increase in food prices

■ DAILY food charges have been pushed up by 0.9 per cent because of inflation.

An agreement with the Armed Forces pay review body means the figure must be increased whenever food costs rise by more than two per cent – that figure was 2.9 per cent in the last financial quarter.

The Army says the change has been implemented so catering providers can maintain minimum food quality standards.

It means the new cost for the daily core meal in the UK – excluding VAT – is now £5.61, up from £5.29.

However, this price does not include VAT, extra messing charges or any local taxes, so the exact amount that soldiers have to pay will vary according to location.

More information on the changes is available in JSP 456, volumes two and four.

NEW CHARGES (ENTITLED TROOPS): BREKKIE £1.40 (up 8p) - MAIN MEAL £2.30 (up 13p) - THIRD MEAL £1.91 (up 11p)



HONOURS FOR THE ARMY

■ THIS year's New Year Honours list contained a number of Army recipients.

Lt Gen Tyrone Urch (pictured), Commander Home Command and Standing Joint Commander (UK), is to be knighted.

He oversaw the construction of the Nightingale hospitals.

A CBE was awarded to Brig Elizabeth Faithfull-Davies, Commander 102 Logistic Brigade, who has been in charge of setting up military testing centres during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Chief Nursing Officer, Col Alison McCourt, and Commander 101 Logistic Brigade, Brig Phillip Prosser, were also honoured with CBEs.

Among those awarded OBEs were Gavin Edgerley-Harris, director of the Gurkha Museum, and Maj (Retd) Robert Cross, chairman of the North Midlands branch of the Gurkha Welfare Trust.

EX-RESERVIST JAILED

■ A FORMER soldier has been jailed for four years for terrorism offences after emailing sensitive military information to several major international organisations.

Matthew Conroy, 25, from Shepherd's Bush in west London, sent six confidential Army documents that had the potential to be used for "terrorist intent".

Conroy was discharged from the Army in early 2020 for poor performance during initial training. He had joined from the Reserves, where he served with the Adjutant General's Corps attached to The Royal Lancers.

Commander Richard Smith, head of the Metropolitan Police's Counter Terrorism Command, said: "There is no doubt the data Conroy emailed out had the potential to put the safety and security of military personnel at increased risk."

"Today's sentence should make it clear there are very serious consequences for anyone who chooses to do this sort of thing."

“We take fewer pictures but better ones”



Focusing on a glorious past

THREE military enthusiasts dedicated to the work of wartime snappers have marked their 20th anniversary.

Former professional photographer Jeff Ball, along with keen amateurs Gary Hughes and Dutchman Gijs de Klerk, form the Army Film and Photographic Unit (AFPU) Living History Group.

Armed with 1940s-era cameras and film roll, they travel to Second World War battlefields to capture vintage-style footage of fellow re-enactor outfit Monty's Men.

Hughes (pictured above left) said the trio enjoy combining their love of photography with history.

"I used to be part of a Royal Artillery re-enactment group and realised I spent a lot of time looking at old photos researching uniforms and kit without really thinking about who took the pictures," he explained.

"We use the same gear they did – Zeiss-Ikon Super Ikontas – with wet process film. There are only 11 shots on a roll, so we have to think very carefully about what we shoot. We take fewer pictures, but better ones."

The group's collection also includes a still-working cine camera used during the Normandy landings by AFPU photographer Sgt Vic Watkins, who was

later killed.

A commemorative book of their work has now been produced to mark their 20th year in operation.

For information follow them on Facebook or visit afpu44.co.uk

● The Reel Deal – p39

Back from the dead

■ JUST to reassure anyone who knows or has served with former Parachute Regiment colonel Ron Back – his death has been greatly exaggerated.

He is alive and well despite the obituary for him that appeared in a newsletter from the Airborne Network, a not-for-profit group that supports Parachute Regiment charities.

Mr Back, 84, who served in the Army for 38 years, told *The Telegraph*: "I wasn't angry, but instead thought it was rather amusing."

"It's not something everybody gets to do; read their own obituary. The details printed about me were correct – apart from the obvious."

His wife Patricia received a number of messages mentioning the obituary.

He added: "It was a bit of a Mark Twain moment... I've spoken to the editor, who has apologised."



Picture: Cpl Adrian Harlen, RLC

The King's Troop during training

Horses spooked by careless car horn

SIX personnel from The King's Troop, Royal Horse Artillery, were injured – none seriously – after their horses bolted during a run out in Charlton Park, south-east London.

It is understood the animals were spooked by a motorist sounding a car horn close behind them.

The unit, which is based at Woolwich Barracks and performs ceremonial duties at state occasions, regularly uses the park. In 2017 the same location saw an RHA soldier break her neck

while trying to stop a gun carriage and runaway horses (she made a full recovery and later returned to duty).

Eyewitnesses called for an ambulance after seeing one rider fall and the horses run across the road, where they jumped a small wall and then the boundary fence at the front of Charlton House.

All the animals were recovered safely and paramedics were on the scene for about an hour treating personnel.

An air ambulance arrived but left without taking a patient.

CORPS OF ARMY MUSIC PLAYS TO ROYAL TUNE

■ THE Corps of Army Music has struck a resounding chord with the Queen after it was confirmed a royal title has been bestowed on the outfit.

The announcement was marked with a pre-lockdown, socially distanced parade at the organisation's Kneller Hall home.

The Countess of Wessex – the corps' colonel-in-chief – attended the event along with Prince

Edward, where members of the new Royal Corps of Army Music delivered tunes from the Service's Colchester band and a Household Division fanfare.

Maj Lauren Petritz-Watts, director of

music at the Essex-based ensemble, believes the new title represents a milestone in the history of military music.

"It ensures we are fit for the future," the officer added.



Picture: Steve Dock



Picture: Cpl Rebecca Brown, RLC

A FEMALE TWO-STAR FIRST

■ A SENIOR Servicewoman has made Army history by becoming the first female to lead at two-star level.

Maj Gen Sharon Nesmith has taken over as general officer commanding the Army Recruiting and Initial Training Command replacing Maj Gen Chris Bell.

The role will see her manage a workforce of some 6,000 troops and civilians, with an annual budget of more than £200 million.

Every year the organisation delivers training to 35,000 Regular and Reserve personnel across 280 courses.

Maj Gen Nesmith, who joined the Army in 1992, said she was delighted to be appointed to the position.

"I am proud to be leading the command responsible for developing excellence in our soldiers and officers," she added.

The second ever female major general – Maj Gen Nesmith worked her way up through the Royal Corps of Signals before becoming director personnel in March 2019.

“
We are fit for
the future
”



Picture: Cpl Nicholas Egan, RAF

HUNGRY HAULIERS FED

■ TROOPS from 36 Engineer Regiment helped supply food parcels to people in need over the Christmas holiday period.

The personnel were taking part in Operation Rose to support the Covid-19 testing of truck drivers parked up in Kent while waiting to cross the English Channel.

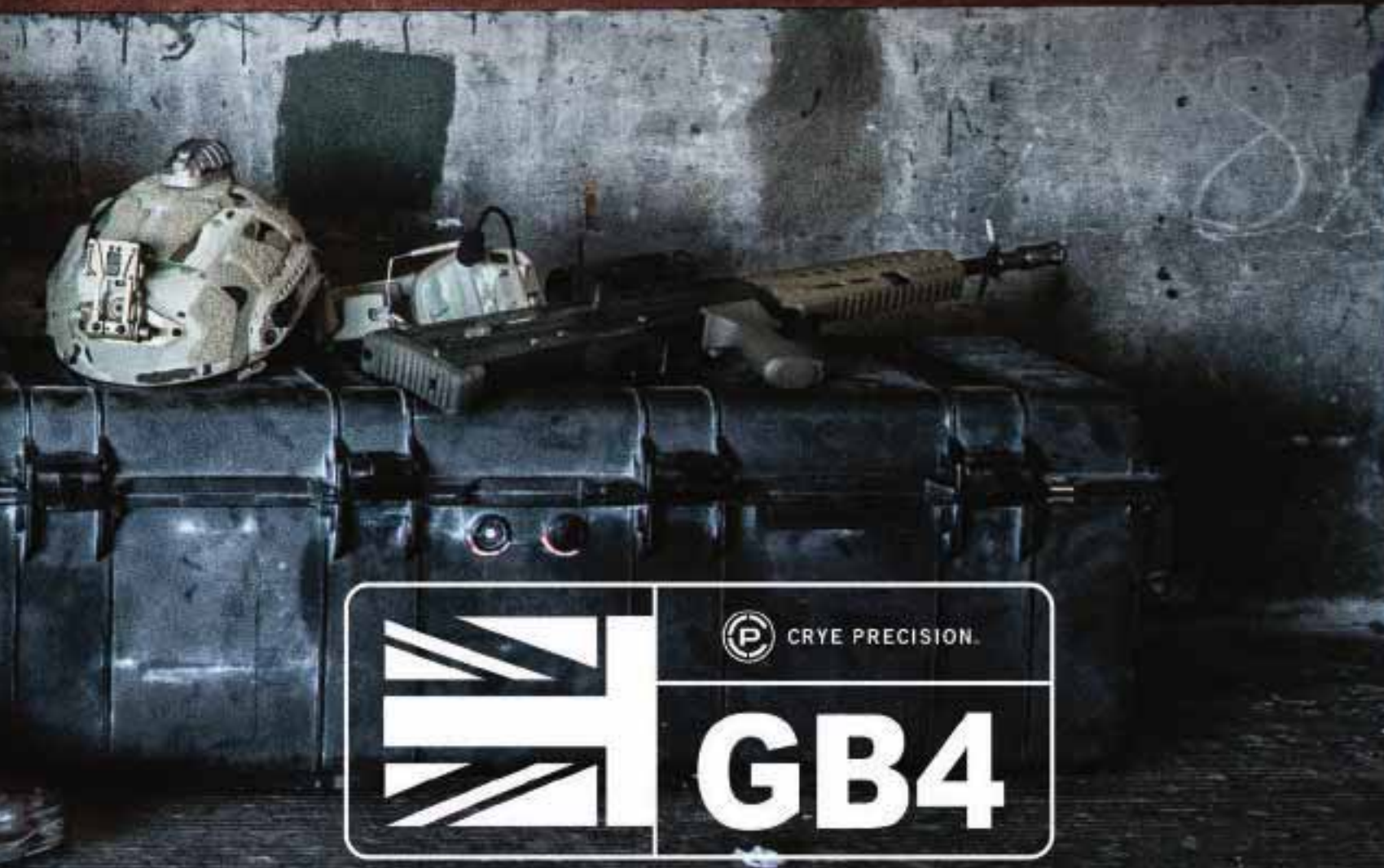
In order to prevent surplus provisions going to waste, the soldiers worked with the Salvation Army and Coastguard to get items to parents, the homeless, food banks and even zoos in the local area.

LEVEL PEAKS



GB4 Combat Shirt £199.99 - GB4 Combat Pant £279.99 - knee pads sold separately - prices correct at time of printing.

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

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“You deserve help”

Here's what Sgt Lee Fomes (R Camus) wants people to know about anxiety and depression...

“

WHEN I saw a recruiting poster for Army musicians in Aldershot town centre in 1994, the prospect of going to war seemed remote.

But nine years later I found myself on the front line in Iraq, where my band was deployed as a chemical decontamination team, ready to react if Saddam Hussein used his weapons of mass destruction.

Having seen videos of chemical attack victims, we knew what the effects would be.

Not only that, but the fear when you get your boots on the ground is intense – especially when you realise there are people out there actually trying to kill you.

Fortunately, we weren't called out. But the stress and uncertainty of the three-month tour left me unable to sleep and ultimately, I believe, sparked my long-running struggle with anxiety and depression.

At my worst I wanted to end my life and was hospitalised twice, but for the last two years I have been on the road to recovery.



Your career isn't over

Ending up on a psychiatric ward is quite a shock. I remember thinking 'how did I get here' and 'the Army won't want me back'. But after two weeks of rest and a change in meds I slowly improved and to my absolute surprise, work rang and said they needed me back. All of my bosses have been so supportive.

But you can't rush it

I went back too soon and, probably because I felt like I had to perform, I had another breakdown the following year. The depression was constant and the anxiety had ramped up five-fold. This time work said 'we're better with you, but we can do without you', and that lifted a massive weight off my shoulders. So occupational health started me off with one day a week, gradually increasing it over four months. That was two years ago. The Army have been utterly amazing throughout.

Overall health is as important as medication

After my second breakdown my psychiatric nurse started me off on probiotics, which boost the bacteria in your digestive tract. The theory is that your gut health can massively affect your brain. I also started taking vitamin B12 and fish oil and I cut out all gluten. I'm not saying the homeopathic approach is an alternative to conventional drugs, but in tandem it helped me, and the balance of good days to bad started to go in the right direction.

When it comes to friends, it's quality not quantity

Hundreds of mates on Facebook doesn't mean anything – most of them aren't going to help you out. I had a set of four friends who always made time for me and would meet me for coffee. It's so important to talk. I didn't think they would understand at first, but they were fantastic. My wife has also been a tower of strength.

There's not always a cause

I believe Iraq was the trigger for me, but my doctors aren't exactly sure. Whatever the reason, I couldn't understand why this was happening to me when other people had seen a lot more on operations.

You're not wasting people's time

If you went to a hospital with a broken leg and someone else turned up with two broken legs, you wouldn't say, 'my problem is only half as bad, I'll just go home'. You would still have to fix it. Comparing yourself to others is only going stop you getting the help you deserve.

When it comes to mental health, the Army has it right

I honestly can't fault it. If I had been on civvy street when this happened, it could have taken six months to see a consultant and things might have got so bad that I wouldn't be here. That's why I want to share my story. People need to know that if they're struggling the Service will support them.



Profile

Name: Sgt Lee Fomes, R Camus

Age: 46

Military service: Joined the Army in 1994, serving with the Band of the Royal Engineers for 17 years, before a posting to the Band of the Welsh Guards in 2012

Deployments: Operational tour of Iraq in 2003. Has also played music around the world, including Canada, Cyprus and South Korea

Musical instrument: Trombone and vocals

Career highlights: Playing on stage with Robbie Williams during the Diamond Jubilee concert and recording at Abbey Road studios

Favourite tune: Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture*

Online dating

Don't become the target of a romance scam this Valentine's Day, warns a cyber specialist

😘 XXX

▶ WITH lockdown limiting our ability to meet up, more people are turning to the digital sphere to meet that special someone.

But according to LCpl Ryan Walker, a member of 13 Signal Regiment's cyber protection team, this provides scammers and criminals with a rich pool of victims.

Here is his advice for avoiding heartbreak and keeping your money safe...



Look out for

- **Catfishing** – This is when a person pretends to be someone else on dating sites and social media to lure their victim into a relationship or extract money
- **Blackmail, harassment and sextortion** – Once they have their hands on personal or sensitive information or intimate photos, attackers can use it against you, often by threatening to reveal them publicly



dangers



How to protect yourself

The usual advice about choosing strong passwords, keeping software up to date and being wary of giving out personal information applies. But there are a few other steps you should take...

- Familiarise yourself with the **privacy settings** on any app or website so you know who can view your profile
- Use well known **reputable dating services**. Smaller ones are more vulnerable to hackers
- Be **very wary of sharing intimate videos or pictures** or getting lured into sexual acts. Once the media is created and sent, there could be a record of it online forever
- **Do not open links** from someone you have only just started to chat with as these could be malicious
- **Never transfer money or financial information** like credit card numbers or bank account details
- **Avoid speaking about your home address, financial circumstances or job.** Don't post pictures of yourself in uniform and turn off geotagging on your devices
- **Check the person is genuine** by looking up their name, profile picture or any other information they have provided. You can use Google's reverse image search or Tin Eye to check if any photos are legitimate. These search engines will show where the picture originated from and where it has been used. If it appears in lots of random places, there's a good chance you're dealing with a scammer
- **Trust your instincts.** If you think there's something not quite right then cut your losses, sever all contact with the person and accept there are plenty more fish in sea

Warning signs your "match" might be a scam...

Be on the alert for

- **Generic profiles** that are short on detail, don't have many friends or followers and show a lack of activity
- Frequent **spelling mistakes**
- **Timelines full of spam** or shared links between similar profiles
- **Too-fit-to-be-true photos** or use of stock images
- **Lots of personal questions** but

avoiding answering any themselves

- **Refusals to meet.** The natural progression after establishing a bond is to see each other in person, when lockdown allows. But a scammer will likely cancel plans at the last minute, feign financial problems or pretend they are working abroad or away and then try and con you into lending them the travel fare
- **Requests for money.** This is usually the end game for most criminals. After gaining your trust, they'll start telling you about their money woes in the hope that you offer to help them out

Still Unsure?

- Further guidance on social media use can be found at army.mod.uk/digital-communications/social-media-guidance
- Security breaches should be reported to the Army's warning, advice and reporting point via armywarp-mailbox@mod.gov.uk or 01264 886804



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Briefing basics

Take the stress out of public speaking

► **STANDING** up and talking in front of others is an unavoidable part of Army life, even at a relatively junior level.

It may not be something everyone looks forward to, but according to retired lieutenant general Peter Pearson – author of *Public Speaking: Like a Military Operation* – mastering the skill is key if you want to get promoted ahead of your peers.

These are his top five tips for delivering an effective briefing...

1 Remember the seven Ps

The old saying “prior preparation and planning prevents piss-poor performance” is undoubtedly true. And it matters just as much for public speaking as it does for military ops. Prepare well and your talk will go well – whether that’s a speech, vote of thanks, interview, pitch or lesson.

2 Begin with a simple estimate...

... as you would for any mission. Keep things easy by analysing three Ps this time: the people (your audience), the place (where you are going to give your speech) and the pitch (the content of your talk). When you have given each some good thought, you should end up with the best option for getting your points over and an outline plan for the order in which you will present them.

3 Treat it like a three-phase op

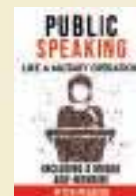
The basic scheme of manoeuvre for all public speaking is a beginning, a middle and an end. The beginning covers your ice-breaker to get your audience onside and interested. It’s also your scene-setter to give them a feel for the whole talk. The middle is the meat of your speech – the main action of your operation. Here you get your messages across, preferably using stories that bring them to life. Finish with a quick summary, perhaps a joke and a call to action – to get your listeners to do something.

4 Harness your adrenaline

Some nerves are good, like those an athlete feels before an event or a soldier preparing for an exercise. But too many can see you clam up or freeze. So you have to learn to control them. The more you do something, the more confident you’ll get – so practise, practise, practise.

5 Have a back-up plan

Keep notes handy to help if your mind goes blank. If you are better at images, use emojis or photos – whatever will jog your memory. I’ve developed my own aide-memoire, which you can find in my book, to take you through the whole process of preparing, getting the structure right and producing speaking notes.



● *Public Speaking: Like a Military Operation* is out now in paperback and Kindle editions

Peter Pearson was a Gurkha officer for 35 years, rising to the rank of lieutenant general. His senior appointments included a stint as commandant of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst



Unstoppable

From an insurgent attack to two devastating health diagnoses, military training helped this veteran take on everything life has thrown at her

► **ARMY mental health nurse turned para-athlete Mary Wilson (ex-QARANC) endured several close calls in the Service – including a hit-and-run by a suspected Taliban fighter – before her career was cut short by multiple sclerosis (MS).**

Here, the 56-year-old former staff sergeant explains how she has coped with it all, and gone on to triumph on the sporting stage...

“

IT WAS during a posting to Northern Ireland in 2004 that I knew something was wrong – I was dropping things and

couldn't coordinate properly.

I was sent for an MRI scan and to be told it was MS was awful because I had nursed people with the condition who were in wheelchairs, bedridden or in vegetative states.

In the first few moments of receiving such news you naturally fear the worst, but I was only 40 and I asked myself, did I want to be that person?

A few days later I went for a 10km run and decided this was one more thing that wasn't going to beat me.

Years before, as a newly qualified nurse in Hong Kong, I had been badly injured defending a doctor who was assaulted on a hospital ward. The attacker gave me a right kicking. My injuries were so severe I was flown back to the Royal London where I had to have a hysterectomy and a stoma bag fitted.

At 29 I had been the oldest recruit in training and just wanted to stay in the

military, so I was fortunate to later have the operation reversed, allowing my career to continue and to deploy on tours of Belize, Bosnia and Kosovo.

Even after my MS diagnosis I was determined to go to Afghanistan and lead the field mental health team.

Some people said that I wouldn't be able to go, but that just made me even more determined.

I focused on staying fit to get through the pre-deployment training, although I needed special authorisation to take a pistol because muscle weakness prevented me from using the SA80.

The tour was the hardest thing I've ever done, but I really enjoyed it – it's what I trained for and I actually think having MS made me a bigger person with more humility and tolerance.

The austere environment and climate were hard to cope with, but I also ended up in hospital again – this time when a suspected insurgent drove into me with his vehicle.

I had been walking to the bathroom in the middle of the night and the driver put

their foot down and knocked me over.

Initially I thought I just had a road rash injury, but in the shower a couple of days later I noticed it was infected and this turned into sepsis.

Luckily after a few days of treatment I was back in work.

Sadly, eight years after my initial MS diagnosis in 2012, I was medically discharged and struggled to come to terms with an uncertain future.

I was in a black hole – I'd lost my colleagues and career and realised I was just a number and nothing special. I couldn't see any way out of it.

But hope came in the form of an email from organisers of the Warrior Games – a two-week long American sports competition for wounded and injured veterans in Colorado.

It gave me a goal to work towards that I desperately needed and marked the start of a new chapter.

Seeing what other injured Service personnel could achieve was just incredible – I got goosebumps watching someone without legs swimming.

Being able to compete and be part of something like that was a chance to show others that people with disabilities aren't useless and it made me cry tears of pride.

The following year I was selected to captain the Field Athletics Team at Prince Harry's Invictus Games and I came home with several bronze and gold awards.

My training began at 0600 every day for a whole year so to win a gold for swimming was absolutely mind-blowing.

When it was over I joined a local sports club and was chosen to represent Scotland in the para-badminton category – something I've done 23 times now.

However, I desperately needed funding to continue competing at this level. I applied to about 200 companies before the charity Path to Success stepped in and offered me sponsorship.

Their support has provided me with coaching, physio and a dietitian, but it's not just financial support – it's psychological as well.

They have been like a family, particularly through the pandemic and since my recent diagnosis with a rare form of throat cancer. I feel blessed to have been chosen by them.

I am still hoping to be selected for the GB Para Badminton Team in the delayed Tokyo 2020 Paralympics, although

that may depend on my treatment and recovery plan.

Everyone has their own mountain to climb whether that's getting up and dressed in the morning or winning the world championships – I believe anybody can do anything they set their mind to.

The training you get in the Army and the military is unique – they break you down and build you back up to be resilient and determined.

That's taught me not to let anything stop me. ■ ”

“
I decided it
wasn't going
to beat me
”

Mary's medals

● **Para athletics:**

2014 Invictus Games

1 gold, 3 bronze

2015 Warrior Games

3 gold, 1 silver, 3 bronze

2015 Cerebral Palsy Sport and Recreation Association World Games

2 gold

● **Badminton:**

2019 Scottish Disability Sport Badminton Cup

2019 Four Nations Disability Badminton Cup

2019 UK Para Badminton Championships

Plaque – gold in the singles and mixed doubles



● She

was also named **Scottish Disability Senior Sportsperson of the Year 2020** and holds certificates from the **2014 Sports Personality of the Year Awards** and the **2016 Soldiering on Awards**

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Booze-free BONUS

7 signs your month off the sauce has improved your health

► IF you've made it to the end of Dry January despite the stress and boredom of a third national lockdown, congratulations. It's well known that less alcohol is good news for your waistline, health and wallet.

By now you should also be experiencing a raft of other benefits that might convince you to stick with sobriety into February and beyond...

A peachy complexion

The dehydration and inflammation caused by alcohol can lead to premature ageing. Not only does it reduce your levels of antidiuretic hormone, which regulates water retention, but it increases histamine, resulting in broken capillaries and facial redness. A few weeks off the booze should result in your skin looking clearer, with fewer breakouts, smaller pores and less dandruff

A calmer tummy

If you normally suffer with bloating, wind and diarrhoea or constipation, you've probably noticed a reduction in symptoms over the course of the month. That's because alcohol

irritates the gastrointestinal tract. If acid reflux – or heartburn – is a regular problem, that should have lessened too. Relief all round

A happier liver

Okay, so you won't notice this directly, but a month without grog gives your liver a break and allows it to focus on all the other stuff it has to process. Research has found that four weeks without a drink can substantially reduce liver "stiffness" – an early sign of diseases such as cirrhosis – and lower fat around the organ by up to 15 per cent

Fewer sniffles

Booze suppresses your body's immune system, so cutting back should make you less likely to succumb to every little cold going around. And even if you do come down with something, your recovery time will be reduced

A better memory

It's not just blackouts and post-binge "hangxiety" you're sparing yourself by quitting drinking. Booze slows down nerves in a part of the brain called the hippocampus, which can cause short- and long-term memory loss. After a month off, you might find you can retain information for longer, are less forgetful and better able to focus

Random dreams

Some people experience vivid dreams after ditching booze – a sign of rapid eye movement (REM) sleep. This is good because REM sleep is an important part of the sleep cycle that helps us feel properly rested. But it is suppressed when we drink. That's why we wake up feeling exhausted even after eight hours of shut-eye. Alcohol is also linked to insomnia and is likely to make us need the loo several times a night

Becoming a "lightweight"

This, too, is a good sign as it shows that our tolerance to alcohol has decreased. Booze increases feelings of relaxation and euphoria, but over time we need to drink more and more to achieve that state, which can lead to dependency. Finding that one drink goes to your head is therefore a positive indication that your body has adjusted to your reduced intake

IN NUMBERS



4,320

calories you saved during January if you used to drink six pints a week



£72

money saved based on the same beer consumption



NEED SUPPORT?

● Visit drinkaware.co.uk or alcoholchange.org.uk

You can also reach out to the military support network 4 Alpha on 4-alpha.co.uk or via 4alphaarmy@gmail.com

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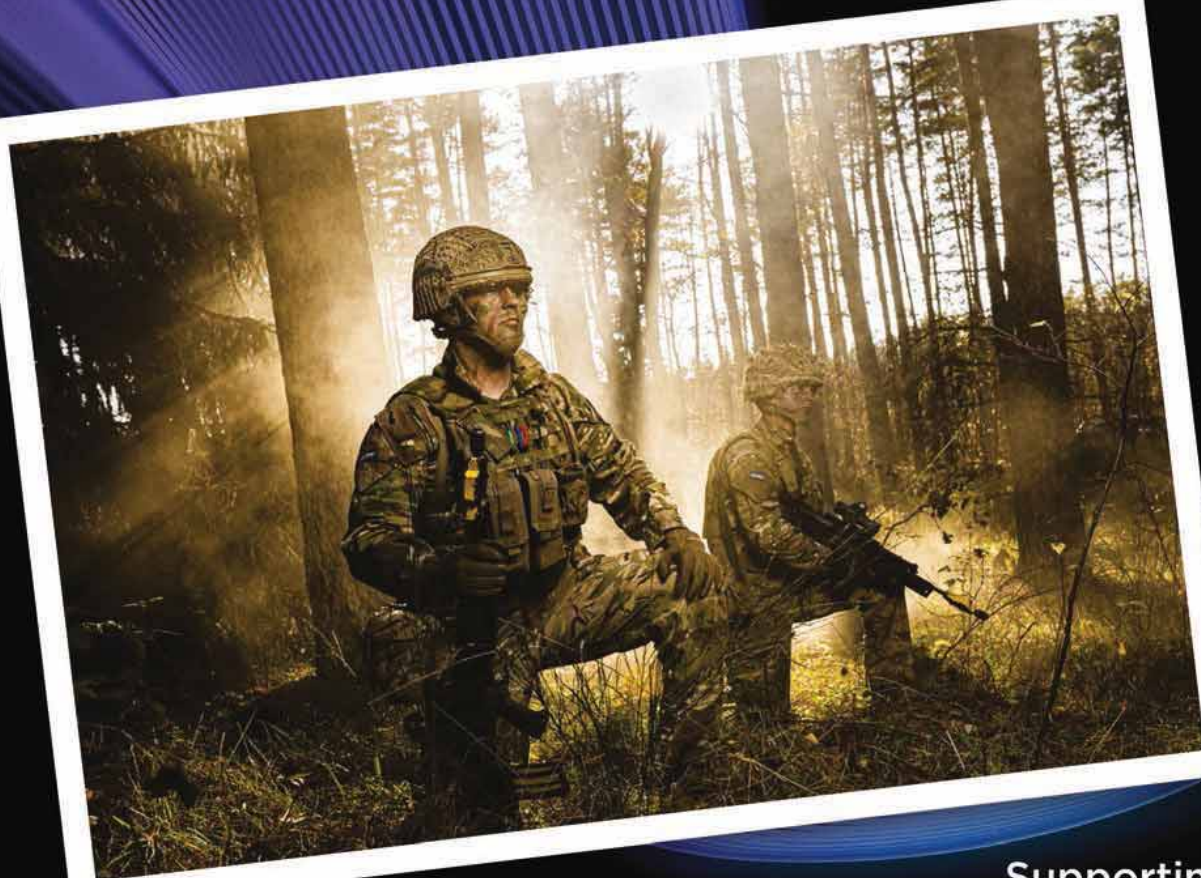


Image taken by Cpl Nick Johns - Best overall image winner 2019

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SOLDIERS WHO JUST CLICK

A global pandemic hasn't deterred Service snappers from capturing striking images of the military at work over the past 12 months. Here, *Soldier* catches up with the stars of this year's Army Film and Photographic Competition...

WHEN it comes to photography the word "amateur" can be misleading, according to the man who heads up the trade in the British Army.

"We expect good images from our professionals, but amateurs have a really important role too," Command Master Photographer, WO1 Dan Harmer (RLC, pictured inset right), explains.

"They are used in various operational roles, which is often what builds up their interest.

"Some of the amateur stuff in this year's competition has been outstanding."

What begins with a few snaps in a light recce role can end with a soldier discovering a new pastime and going on to conquer this well-known annual contest.

But WO1 Harmer says it is public engagement and the cataloguing of history which make such efforts so important. »



Not just the winning:
This image from Army photographer Sgt Ben Maher (RLC) was a strong contender

THE WINNERS - PAGE 39 »

“ There is some real talent ”

» “In 30 years’ time people will still be looking at these images and videos,” he adds.

“Photography is a small trade in the British Army – there are only 42 of us in total – so we can’t get everywhere and cover everything.”

The Serviceman was joined on this year’s judging panel by *Soldier* chief photographer Graeme Main (pictured inset right) and civilian professional Glyn Dewis, whose work can be found adorning the cover of our November 2019 issue.

And there was no shortage of good material for the team to wade through.

“Obviously 2020 was a challenge for all photographers because of the restrictions,” WO1 Harmer continues.

“But in general there was a very high standard.



LSgt Chris Morgan, WG



Cpl Danny Houghton, RLC

Cpl Danny Houghton, RLC



“From different cap badges across the Army there is some real talent and that’s great to see.”

Video entries were especially notable this year – with Photographer of the Year Cpl Ben Beckett (RLC, pictured above) awarded the title for his efforts capturing The Royal Dragoon Guards on exercise in Belize. The same video scooped him the winning title in the “professional long video” category.

“When I found out I was pretty surprised,” he tells *Soldier*.

“But it’s a nice bit of recognition.

“Video is a great medium that can capture an audience for slightly longer than stills.

“It’s something you can put a bit more time and creativity into.”

WO1 Harmer paid tribute to the determination of Cpl Beckett and his colleagues over recent months.

“In the last year our photographers have either contracted Covid-19 themselves or known someone who has suffered with it and/or passed away,” he said. “But, as always, they adapted to the challenges and provided an important requirement.

“They are professional and totally understand the need to capture this moment in time.

“In that way, the last year has been as important as any operation we have covered in the previous 20.”

No prize-giving ceremony took place, in line with ongoing lockdown restrictions. »



Capt Sam Davies, LD



Cpl Adam Wakefield, RLC

IN NUMBERS

98 individuals
entered this year’s
competition

946 photos
and **116** videos
were submitted in total



Sgt Donald Todd, RLC

A word with the winners (and runners-up)...



Rfn Connor Eggett, Rifles

Winner: **Amateur Soldiering** and **Best Overall**

“This image, *Stay Low*, wasn't posed, it was literally taken on the fly as the guys moved through during an NCO cadre for 5th Battalion, The Rifles on Dartmoor Training Area. I was taking time out because I'd picked up an injury, so I grabbed my camera to get some shots for our social media channels. Photography is a lifelong hobby of mine. I can't even remember taking this one, to be honest, as I'd been cutting about all day and ended up with around 1,200 images. I haven't entered the Army Film and Photographic Competition before because I never believed my pictures were good enough, but when I returned from this cadre I thought why not submit a few and see what happens.”



Sgt Tom Evans, RLC

Runner-up: **Best Overall**

“The idea for *Controlled Aggression* came to me last year when I was out on an urban ops exercise with the Gurkhas. I took a similar looking image during the serial but wasn't happy with it due to poor light. During the pandemic we haven't had that many opportunities to shoot green stuff so I decided to recreate the picture in the studio at Army HQ, where I could control the conditions. I like taking dark, shadowy images and wanted something dramatic that looked like it was from a graphic novel. I'm pleased with the result. This competition is great for making you think outside the box.”



▲ **LSgt Steve Duncombe, R Camus**

Runner-up: **Amateur Soldiering**

“This shot was inspired by one of my photographic heroes, Vladimir Rys. He is an expert at using different techniques when capturing dynamic sports such as F1. This Warrior vehicle, taking part in an exercise on Salisbury Plain, was actually moving across the bridge at a leisurely pace. I was several hundred metres away and used a 1/15 shutter speed, which is relatively slow, to create the illusion that it was travelling faster, adding a sense of drama to the shot. That was a technique I picked up from studying Vladimir’s work.”



Cpl Nathan Tanuku, RLC

Winner: **Professional Portfolio**



“I was looking to portray the experiences and emotions that soldiers go through in their job. I’ve been in these sorts of dark places myself – I served with The Parachute Regiment for 12 years before becoming an Army photographer in 2019. I wanted to convey the feeling of risk, uncertainty and the sensation of what it’s like to operate in potentially dangerous and unknown territory. I tried the images in colour at first but then found they looked even more intense when I switched to black and white, especially the dawn attack scenes where the morning light is streaming in.”

»



Cpl Danny Houghton, RLC

Winner: **Online** Runner-up:
Professional Portfolio

“ My portfolio contained a couple of bucket-list moments. Standing on the tailgate of a C-130 is something I’ve always wanted to do and it was only by chance the opportunity came up for me on Exercise Joint Endeavour in Ukraine. Obviously, I was belted up so I couldn’t fall out of the aircraft but the result of that – *Airborne 01* (top)– actually wasn’t an overly technical shot. Once in position, all I needed to do was find a happy medium with the exposure as the aircraft’s interior was very dark while the outside was extremely bright. The Apache landing at Stanta in *Airborne 05* (above right) was another standout image for me – the downwash and power of the thing is unbelievable, and once it’s that low you can’t move. I set myself up for a wide-angle shot and prayed the technician would turn and look my way at the right moment. He did. ”



Bdr Murray Kerr, RA

Winner: **Amateur Portfolio**

“ I’m lucky enough to be a Reservist attached to Sandhurst as a photographer and most of the images in my entry came from Exercise Dynamic Victory, the validation exercise for officer training. I’m particularly proud of *Low Winter Sun* (below) because I made the cadets stand stock-still and waited for the beautiful evening light to be just right. I’ve been fortunate enough to learn my trade with some brilliant Army photographers such as WO2 Rupert Frere (RLC) and Mark Owens, who works for 51st Infantry Brigade in Scotland. His creativity is amazing and the way he engages with his subjects to get them to come to life in pictures is always inspirational. ”





LSgt Chris Morgan, WG

Runner-up: **Amateur Portfolio**

“My selection came from various exercises the Welsh Guards have taken part in over the past 12 months. I was really pleased with *Moments Before Insertion* (above), where the young guardsman is looking right into the lens. When that happens it really engages the person looking at the picture and I also think his expression conveys the tension in the air as they wait before heading into a full-on assault. Generating standout shots is very challenging.”





The winners in full..

Professional categories

Portfolio

(five images submitted as a body of work)

Cpl Nathan Tanuku, RLC

Runner-up:

Cpl Danny Houghton, RLC

Short Video

(less than 60 seconds)

Cpl Becky Brown, RLC

(pictured above)

Runner-up:

Sgt Donald Todd, RLC

Long Video

(more than 60 seconds)

Cpl Ben Beckett, RLC

Runner-up:

Cpl Ben Beckett, RLC

Edited Video

(judging overall editing skills)

Cpl Sam Jenkins, RLC

Runner-up:

Sgt Obi Igbo, RLC

Amateur categories

Portrait

(refreshing takes on human portraits)

Dr Samuel Potter, civvy

Runner-up:

Cpl Adam Wakefield, RLC

Soldiering

(illustration of real-world operations or training)

Rfn Connor Eggett, Rifles

Runner-up:

LSgt Steve Duncombe, R Camus

Portfolio

(four images submitted as a body of work)

Bdr Murray Kerr, RA

Runner-up:

LSgt Chris Morgan, WG

Video

(filmed using phone, camera or any other device)

Capt Sam Davies, LD

Runner-up:

Lt Will Addison, LD

Special categories

Online

(selected by a public online vote)

Cpl Danny Houghton, RLC

Best Overall

(selected from all entries)

Rfn Connor Eggett, Rifles

Runner-up:

Sgt Tom Evans, RLC



Photographer of the Year

Cpl Ben Beckett, RLC

And our cover favourites...

HE may have been pipped to the amateur portfolio prize, but LSgt Chris Morgan (WG) was a winner for us. One image from his collection, *I Need a Good Bath*, shows a soldier on the platoon sergeants' battle course in Brecon and it gave our front cover just the visual impact required.

The inset images we used that are not described in the previous pages include *Get Swabbing*, a picture of an RAMC medic by amateur portrait winner Dr Samuel Potter, and *Readiness* (far left), from



one of the British Army's most experienced and capable professional photographers, Sgt Jamie Hart (RLC).



Report: Georgina Coupe

THE REEL DEAL

How pioneers of military photography and film created an extraordinary legacy

“I DON’T think anyone really understood the importance of what we did at the time,” reflects veteran Paul Clark, one of only four remaining members of the Army’s Film and Photographic Unit (AFPU).

“The results were quite extraordinary considering the equipment we had – it was basic, and the battlefield conditions made things much harder.”

In today’s Army, plentiful photography on operations is

something of a given. But the responsibility of documenting British forces during the Second World War lay with less than 400 men – many of whom were captured, injured and killed.

In sharp contrast to the well-funded and successful German propaganda machine that conscripted journalists and cameramen, the UK equivalent was hastily established in October 1941 under the command of Lt Col Hugh Stewart (RA) from the remnants of a poorly organised Army film unit. »

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» Civilian photographers and cameramen recruited from Fleet Street and other Service trades underwent rigorous battle photography training at the AFPU's Pinewood Studios before shipping out to all corners of the world. And once there, the extreme temperatures and dust proved as dangerous for delicate camera equipment as the enemy's bombs and bullets were for its operators.

"I originally wanted to be in the Royal Air Force but I was conscripted into the Army as a photographer and trained on cine film," explains Clark (below right), a former sergeant who served in the Far East and Vienna following Japan's surrender.

"The training we had was great and we were taught how to make a good story in just one minute of film using five different shots."

With cine film spools only producing one minute of footage and rolls of photographic film producing around 11 still images, the men were taught to change rolls using darkroom bags under fire.

They relied heavily on despatch drivers to relay precious imagery from the front line back to the War Office for censorship, before it finally appeared on newsreels and in newspapers.

Wartime unit diaries illustrate the difficulties these soldiers faced, with vehicles breaking down, cameras constantly being repaired and having to lorry-hop and beg lifts around battlefields.

"They were quite exceptional men who achieved incredible things," says Hilary Roberts, senior curator of photography at the Imperial War Museum, whose 40-year career has been dedicated to saving the AFPU's photographic legacy.

"The photographers ran all the same risks the troops did, and many were killed or died from sickness.

"Cameramen were taken prisoner and in some cases even managed to escape. Some were wounded multiple times and others suffered from what was known as battle shock – although at the time it was said that they needed a bit of a rest."

Photographers took part in daring commando raids and airborne missions with elite forces including the Chindits and the Long-Range Desert Group, in countries as far afield as Burma, Syria, Palestine and Iraq – often operating in advance of the front line and behind enemy positions.

And sub-units set up in Cairo, Tunisia, Europe and the Far East gave access to some of the bloodiest British battles of the war.

The AFPU's Oscar-winning documentary *Desert Victory* depicted the 8th Army's close-combat fighting and tank battles leading to Rommel's defeat in the Second Battle of El Alamein – and this marked a successful turning point for the outfit.

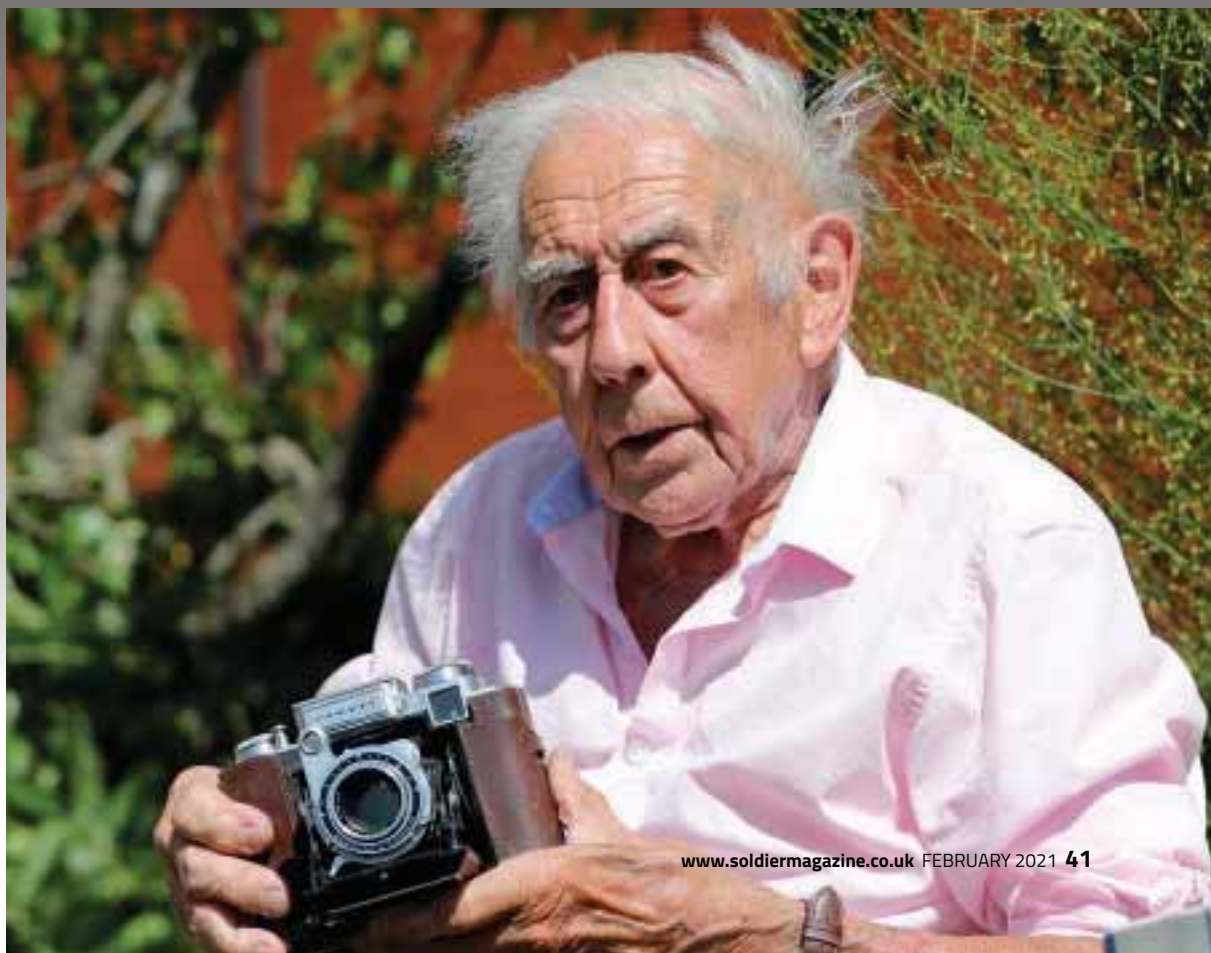
It paved the way for the integration of cameramen into future operations by commanders who had been slow to embrace the propaganda benefits of combat photography.

They documented the Tunisian campaign and Allied seaborne invasion of Sicily, accompanying the advance through Italy that was hampered by foul weather and ferocious fighting. »



▲ LRDG patrol in North Africa, 1942.
Picture by Lt A Graham

► Veteran Paul Clark, one of only four remaining members of the Army's Film and Photographic Unit





Sgt George Laws. Picture: Giles Penfold



The Burma campaign, 1941-45

» At Normandy, they were embedded with the first wave of assault troops on the D-Day beach landings. Their compilation of film and stills would later be used as the basis for Steven Spielberg's blockbuster *Saving Private Ryan* and part of the Royal Mail's D-Day anniversary stamp collection.

Carrying passes signed by President Eisenhower that gave them access to all areas, they followed the Allied forces as they pushed through Europe and onto the discovery of the horrors of Nazi concentration camps.

"Their images of Bergen-Belsen were some of the most important of the war," Roberts continues.

"Field Marshal Montgomery's orders that these images should receive maximum publicity paved the way for the future release of uncensored images and were used to provide evidence of war crimes, forcing members of the hostile German population to acknowledge what had gone on."

With peace declared in Europe, the cameramen began the return to successful civilian careers in film and television but the war continued in the Far East for a small section of the AFPU tasked with documenting the hard-fought Burma campaign.

"Because there was peace in Europe, the war was considered over," continues Clark, who was training on a photography course when news came through of Japan's capitulation.

The surrender signalled a change of pace so they would no longer be required to carry weapons or helmets specifically adapted for the battlefield.

"There weren't many photographers covering the fighting in the Far East until quite late in the day – partly because the nature of the campaign made it harder to cover and partly because it was so far away," Clark adds.

"But, fortunately, South East Asia Commander, Admiral Louis Mountbatten, knew the value of pictures and he pushed for the coverage to be extended, ensuring the British Army's exploits were captured on film."

With attention turning to the monumental task of liberating Japanese-held territories, prison camps and returning huge



The Burma campaign, 1941-45



Image taken by Sgt Jimmy Mapham on Sword Beach while under fire during the D-Day landings



Sgt Basil Wishart films Indian troops crossing a river near Meiktila, Burma, in 1945

“ The traits that we were taught all those years ago are still relevant today ”



The Chindits



quantities of equipment and troops back to the UK, the remaining cameramen continued to collect film, images, audio recordings and detailed captions or “dope” sheets that today form one of the world’s largest accessible records of the Second World War.

Some 75 years later, and despite the lack of recognition the men received for their service and sacrifice, the legacy of the unit – which lost more than a fifth of its members – lives on. Methods used then continue to inspire today’s military photographers who, as the annual Army Film and Photographic Competition (pages 31-38) demonstrates, are still producing a large and important body of work highlighting the huge range of capabilities of the Service’s men and women.

“The traits that we were taught all those years ago are still relevant today,” concludes Clark.

“You need a good brief, to be able to look after yourself, have key observation skills and be alert and ready for uncontrolled action.

“And it gives me a great deal of satisfaction to know that images taken all those years ago were so meaningful and of such high value.

“They helped restore public confidence with what the British Forces and their Allies were doing at the time.

“Without them there wouldn’t be the record we have today of Britain’s wartime contribution.” ■



WAR STORIES

Three decades after the Gulf conflict, the media revolution it spawned continues to impact on ops



IT WAS a nerve-shredding move at breakneck speed – a night-time dash across the Saudi desert in pursuit of coalition soldiers advancing on Iraqi positions.

Even with years of conflict reporting under her belt, BBC correspondent Kate Adie was shocked by the rapidity of the attack; her senses hit by a cacophony of shouting and engine drone as she was driven into the darkness.

“My team and I were thundering along in our vehicle, trying to keep up with the troops,” the veteran journalist said as she recalled the last hours of the 1991 Gulf War. “At one point I looked out of a window and saw an American M1 Abrams main battle tank that was level with us.

“We had crossed checkpoints and were a long way forward with the British armour just up ahead – later we heard the hellish noise of artillery firing.”

Miles out of sight, Iraqi personnel were in disarray with vast numbers being overrun. Just six months earlier these troops – at the orders of their president Saddam Hussein – had attacked and occupied neighbouring Kuwait.

“

We had crossed
checkpoints and were
a long way forward

”

Now facing the full military might of a resolute international community, the tide had turned overnight. Disorientated survivors streamed back to their homeland under contact. A ceasefire would be declared just days later.

Three decades have passed since the first night of the assault, but the Gulf War remains etched on Adie's memory. With satellite technology allowing events to be reported in real-time, it was the first conflict of a global information age.

The war's legacy also resonates dangerously into the present day as the comms revolution continues apace. The social media era is now bringing fresh challenges, not least the proliferation of news – real and fake.

Back in August 1990, however, it was the multiplying of satellite TV dishes on rooftops and the first channels dedicated solely to 24/7 current affairs that heralded the start of the changes. It was against this backdrop that pictures of Saddam's tanks rumbling into Kuwait were beamed swiftly into households.

Although ill-feeling between the two states was well known in the Middle East, the invasion came as a surprise to the western powers. Concern mounted that the dictator might next turn his attention on Saudi Arabia – giving him control of vast oil reserves and the ability to blackmail the world.

As the kingdom's rulers appealed for help in defending their borders, America and the UK soon obliged – deploying personnel under Operation Desert Shield.

More than 30 countries later joined the military build up, forming the largest coalition seen since the Second World War. In a move sanctioned by the UN, Saddam was given a deadline of mid-January to withdraw his troops.

Meanwhile, with journalists also descending on the region in droves, armed forces media ops professionals needed to establish new protocols for in-theatre press. A pool system for accredited journalists was set up, giving commanders a level of control over movements and access to installations.

David Loyn – who was then covering the Gulf War as part of the BBC Foreign Affairs desk – said the nature of the environment played to the military. Reporters needed the assistance of troops to move around the area of operations.

“Throughout the conflict the press were managed very skilfully,” he continued. “The UK's last war before the Gulf had been the Falklands back in 1982, when the Ministry of Defence allowed correspondents on ships.

“The journalists needed military assistance in the Middle East as much as in the South Atlantic because the desert was almost as impenetrable as the sea.” **»**



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Picture: Mike Weston



» This was a point not lost on Adie – who called the Saudi wilderness her home for several months. Her team were living and covering stories on troops from 7th Armoured Brigade as they prepared for operations.

“The experience is probably best described as camping with attitude,” the reporter, who presents the BBC Radio Four show *From Our Own Correspondent*, said with a smile. “A number of colleagues from the print and broadcast worlds were there too and we had a good sense of comradeship.

“While we were unprepared and scared, the soldiers were wonderful hosts and gave us training in a number of different disciplines including basic first aid.

“These skills were actually so valuable that they later helped to save the lives of some of the reporters who were deployed to cover the war in Bosnia.”

Lt Col Tim Purbrick – who served in the Gulf War as a captain with the 17/21st Lancers – said Adie and BBC colleague Martin Bell were well received.

“We literally spent six months in the desert living out of our Challenger tanks,” he recalled. “Life was very basic but we did occasionally manage forays back into a camp where they had showers, as well as a swimming pool.

“The journalists were escorted around by media ops people as they did their stories and we managed to get them quite a way forward onto the front lines.”

The officer – who is now a Reservist with the Royal Lancers and has headed up the Media Ops Group (Volunteers) in his 34-year career – said the reporters had responded to the access with good stories. “We also learned lessons from media handling, which we went on to apply during later operations” he continued.



The relationship between media and military was, however, less friendly elsewhere in theatre, where hotels were being used to house vast numbers of personnel.

“There was no military accommodation when we arrived in the September, so members of our squadron were put up in the Bahrain Marriott,” said John Nichol – then a Tornado GR1 navigator with the Royal Air Force.

“As a result we didn’t see a great deal of our Armed Forces colleagues – but the media were living in the same hotel and this gave us some problems. It was just a unique situation that nobody had experienced.”

The uneasy relationship continued while Nichol – who later became a prisoner of war after his aircraft was hit by ground fire during a mission over Iraq – was pressed into action when January saw air strikes begin.

With Operation Desert Storm in progress, regular press conferences covered a month of devastating attacks. Weapon-mounted footage of strikes against targets including bridges and power stations, as well as military bases and airfields, were shown for the first time to the correspondents.

The burgeoning coverage suddenly became far leaner, however, when ground troops advanced in late February. Adie and her team were among the few journalists on the battlefield amid an American imposed news blackout. The campaign would famously only last for 100 hours before a ceasefire.

“Early on we did manage to get a piece to London before we had to move on,” she recalled. “But it was only when daylight arrived that we saw the full extent of what had happened – when we were flying in a helicopter over the desert.

“The whole area was strewn with abandoned vehicles, some still burning,” she added. “And then there was the scene on the highway from Basra to Kuwait. »

Picture: MoD





“There were wrecks of cars and buses full of bodies and everyday items the Iraqis had looted – it was one of those awful, pathetic sights of war.”

It was a lasting image of a conflict played out in the spotlight of TV cameras, but which was ultimately concluded rapidly and out of the gaze of journalists. Only the aftermath was left to tell the story of the conflict's final hours.

But the media revolution was just beginning. As the internet began to gain ground in the years ahead, the reporting of future conflicts in the likes of the Balkans and elsewhere would see coverage reach new and growing audiences.

Loyn – who has recently worked as strategic communications adviser to the Office of the Afghan President – believes the revolution is still in its early stages. The ability of a military to dictate a narrative – as it had done successfully in the Gulf 30 years ago – is now far harder to achieve.

“If you go to the main ops room in Kabul now, you will find people on laptops responsible for monitoring social media around the clock,” he concluded. “Everything happens so quickly – and life is still continuing to change.” ■

FACT FILE: Saddam Hussein

A dictator whose regime had a reputation for brutality, Saddam Hussein rose to power in 1979.

Having already instigated war against neighbouring Iran during the 1980s, in which chemical weapons were used, his government had longstanding issues with the Kuwaiti leadership over rights to oil drilling.

Although his troops were ousted following the 1990 invasion, he remained Iraqi leader and subsequent years saw the international

community in a constant stand-off with his regime.

Breaches of the conditions laid down after the Gulf War, which included regular weapons inspections, often led to bouts of diplomatic wrangling and sometimes military action.

Following the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, Saddam was deposed and captured by American troops the following year.

Along with other politicians from his administration, he was executed in 2006 after a trial by Iraqi authorities.





“
We literally spent six
months in the desert living
out of our Challenger tanks
”



Picture: Trinity Mirror/Mirrorpix/Alamy Stock Photo

▲ Kate Adie

Age: 75

Current role: Presenter, Radio 4 *From Our Own Correspondent*

Past positions held:

Numerous, including BBC chief news reporter

Experience: Includes Northern Ireland, the Gulf, Balkans, Iraq

David Loyn

Age: 66

Current role: Research fellow and comms adviser

Past positions held:

Numerous, including BBC international development correspondent

Reporting experience:

Includes Iraq, Afghanistan

▼ Lt Col Tim Purbrick

Age: 56

Commissioned into:

17/21st Lancers

Years of service: 34

Current Role: CO, Cultural Property Protection Unit

Operational

Experience: Gulf War, Balkans, Iraq, Afghanistan





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"I'm fascinated by Second World War aviation."



A NEW FRONTIER

Royal Armoured Corps embraces esports world as evolution continues

SINCE its creation in 1939, the Royal Armoured Corps has been an ever-evolving formation. Initially, the focus was on the mechanisation of cavalry and yeomanry units during the Second World War and then, in the Cold War era, its attention shifted to tank developments.

More recently, personnel have taken on the Challenger 2 life extension programme and they now find themselves at the forefront of the digital age with the roll-out of the Ajax armoured fighting vehicle.

So when the esports scene started to gather pace in Army circles the corps was quick to embrace its mantra of evolution and get on board.

Formed a year ago, the RAC now boasts the fastest growing gaming community in the Service with more than 220 troops testing their skills through titles such as *Call of Duty* and *War Thunder* on a daily basis.

"It's all about creating opportunities for us to show off the talents of RAC personnel," Maj Noel Claydon-Swales (LD), the officer who was initially asked to lead on the project, told *Soldier*. »

“This is a different way of socialising”

» “To play these games you have to be an agile thinker and many of our soldiers’ skill sets are ideally suited to this, such as teamwork and management.

“It helps that a lot of these titles are military and fighting based. Mounted and dismounted close combat is what the RAC does and as recce troops we think and communicate quickly.

“In many ways it is not an activity we would traditionally engage with, but esports is what the average 20-year-old does – for soldiers of that generation it is the norm.

“I genuinely think it is brilliant. From the outside you would think they are just locking themselves away in their rooms at the end of the day and not communicating or socialising with each other at all.

“But this is a different way of socialising and they are in there talking to their friends – they are just not sat next to each other in the pub as they do it.”

With little, if any, experience of the esports realm to his name, Maj Claydon-Swales was quick to recruit a subject matter expert who would be able to create the platform for personnel to flourish.

Step forward Sgt Lawrence Cox (RTR, pictured below), the RAC’s esports corps manager.

The 31-year-old grew up with games such as *Goldeneye* on the Nintendo 64 and as an avid *War Thunder* player he was the ideal candidate to move things forward.

“There was a push from the RAC for like-minded people to get together and form a corps team,” the NCO, who has served for 13 years, explained.

“It grew from there and we had no idea how many soldiers were playing within the regiments.

“When I started this there was a stigma that it is nerdy, but gaming is good fun and I’ve always enjoyed it. This has given people the chance to stand up and say, ‘I play esports’.

“It is amazing how many personnel within the RAC and Army are participating.”

The coronavirus outbreak was a key contributor in the discipline’s rapid growth and, with traditional Army pursuits such as football, rugby union and boxing all shelved during the first lockdown, the simple act of firing up a console and joining an online session offered a welcome escape from the stark reality of everyday life.

The RAC conducts its activity via Discord, an instant messaging and digital distribution platform that is designed for creating communities.

Here, members can communicate securely via voice and video calls, send text messages, share media files and form private chat groups.

“I never knew that Discord even existed,” Sgt Cox said. “It is like a social media app. You can get friends together on a screen, share photos and create voice channels – there are so many possibilities.

“*War Thunder* is one of the biggest games we play, and I’d say 90 per cent of the squadrons have their own Discords. It has been a massive help.

“In terms of popularity, I think we would have eventually grown to the scale we’re now at, but Covid-19 has speeded things



Big three

The games leading the RAC’s charge

Call of Duty: Black Ops Cold War

A first-person shooter set during the Cold War, the campaign mode follows operative Russell Adler and his mission



to stop a Soviet extremist group. However, the multiplayer option forms the playground for personnel as it offers 6v6 and 12v12 online battles, among other options.



up. Soldiers couldn't get out on the football or rugby pitches – this was the only thing they could do that was Covid compliant.”

While providing some much-needed respite, the world of esports also fosters a host of skills that are transferable to the day job.

Teamwork and communication are obvious examples, but the range of benefits are not just generated from the on-screen action.

Sgt Cox said: “*Call of Duty*, for example, requires pre-planning and tactics.

“There’s also a lot of admin involved. Training schedules and fixtures have to be organised, but it is not an OC or sergeant major who is doing that. It is private soldiers, troopers and lance corporals; they are developing leadership skills through esports.

“The RAC is always looking towards the future and for us that will undoubtedly be autonomous vehicles, UAVs and unmanned tanks.

“If we can start developing the skills whereby soldiers are able to process a lot of information being thrown at them on a screen from the comfort of their base, it will be a natural progression when such technology comes to the fore.

“Eventually, this will become our job. We will take a seat in a hangar, enter a code and suddenly be operating the systems of a tank that has no crew and drive it forward.”

As well as offering a welcome haven for serving personnel, the esports world may also serve as a potential recruiting tool for future RAC troops.

Corps fixtures are shown live on the streaming platform Twitch – which is accessed by millions of fans around the world – and Army adverts are broadcast between games to highlight career opportunities in the military.

“We are reaching an audience of 16- to 24-year-olds who are engaged in this,” Sgt Cox explained. “They are tech savvy and can work with complex systems, which are the skills we are looking to recruit.

“They are also used to working in teams and are familiar with tactics, so they have the blocks we can build on.”

With staying at home forming the new norm as the battle with coronavirus wages on, the RAC is sure to add even more players to its esports ranks in the coming months.

And with the gaming world offering a platform to sharpen potential skills of the future, the corps’ proud history of evolution looks set to continue. ■

War Thunder

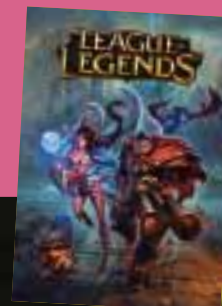
A vehicle-based combat multiplayer, this title gives players the pick of an infinite arsenal of military hardware from across the generations. Platforms range from pre-First World War



naval vessels to tanks and aircraft from the Iraq War and beyond, with an emphasis on the Second World War, Vietnam and the Cold War. That said, smaller militaries and less prominent conflicts also pack a mighty punch.

League of Legends

One of the biggest esports in the world, this online strategy game sees two teams of five battle it out as they occupy and defend their part of a map. Each of the ten players



controls a character, known as a champion, with unique abilities and differing styles of play. During a match, champions collect experience points to gain levels and purchase items in order to defeat the opposing team.

Player profiles

RAC gamers offer an insight into a flourishing scene

● Tpr Sam Dungey

Cap badge: RTR

Age: 25

Length of service: Seven years

Army experience: Includes exercises in Oman, Iceland and Batus

Game of choice: *Call of Duty*

Motivations for getting involved:

"I played games when I was younger but my interest really started to grow when I joined the Army, mainly due to the social side of it as there are so many different chat options. A friend of mine told me about it during lockdown last year and that's when I got involved. We were on standby to support the Covid relief effort and it has spread like wildfire since then – a lot of people were surprised by the opportunities that are available."

Thoughts on the RAC esports set-up:

"We play every day – it is massively competitive. I'm now captain of the Royal Tank Regiment's *Call of Duty* team, as well as the Royal Armoured Corps' B team. With Covid this is pretty much the only way we can play sports. Sport has always been a massive part of the Army offer and this adds to that. I think it is only going to get bigger and, as more people join the fold, we'll set up more and more leagues."

Benefits for the day job: "It has really helped my leadership skills. I've had to do a lot of things to help support teams during the Lions League (Inter-Corps) season – I've arranged trials, held practice sessions and have organised training for the regiments within our corps. That can only hold me in good stead when it comes to promotion."

Hopes for 2021: "The RAC is one of the only corps to have an A and B team in the first division of the *Call of Duty* Lions League and we want to take the top two spots."



● LCpl Stephen Dunbar

Cap badge: RTR

Age: 28

Length of service: Seven years

Army experience: Includes exercises in Oman and Batus

Game of choice: *Call of Duty*

Motivations for getting involved:

"I have played *Call of Duty* competitively in the past. One Wednesday sports parade I jokingly said I was going to do esports and then, when I saw the Army was setting something up, I put my name forward. Because of my background I was asked to help organise the RAC scene. I assumed that there would be a lot of old-school opinions about this not being a sport and that it would not happen. But it has been mentioned as a possible Olympic event and it is now being taken a lot more seriously."

Thoughts on the RAC esports set-up:

"We only started at the beginning of last year but the RAC has quickly proved that it has a good team across various games – and you can suggest titles to play if they are not already there. We have 222 serving soldiers and Reservists in our Discord and I am surprised by how quickly it became that popular."

Benefits for the day job: "*Call of Duty* is all about teamwork and communication, which has an obvious crossover. It is also important in terms of mental health. During lockdown I could go on the Discord and play

games from there; if I didn't have that I would have been bored out of my mind. It's all free, you just go in a chat and ask if anyone is playing or wants to."

Hopes for 2021: "In 2020 we were the underdogs but managed to finish third in the *Call of Duty* Lions League, so this year I think there is a possibility we could win it. Word is starting to get out. I recently represented the Army in the *Call of Duty* Endowment Bowl, competing against US military teams. You could see how far ahead of us they are – this is massive over there and they have people who play almost full-time. In comparison, we are doing our day jobs and playing in the evening. Now it is all about proving the concept works, whether that's from a mental health aspect or the competitive side, so people can see it is worthwhile."



Get involved:

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or **twitchtv**.
royalarmouredcorps



‘Time to be treated equally’

THE response in the December 2020 issue to the letter regarding the disparity between the ages that officers and soldiers have to end their service – 60 and 55 respectively – was concerning to say the least.

Explaining away the extra time allowed to officers as being down to a reflection of the arduous nature of service simply does not wash.

It is obviously age discrimination and needs challenging.

There are many individuals aged 55 and

over who can do their respective jobs with ease in any environment.

And there are many younger than that who cannot do so and still serve in both the Regular Army and the Reserve.

I cannot see the problem with all personnel being treated equally – or is there an institutional belief within the officer corps that they are somehow better than the rest of us?

This situation needs reviewing otherwise there will be a challenge in the courts.

– Name and address supplied

A STRAIGHTFORWARD ARGUMENT FOR BEARDS

● I READ with interest the letter featured in the December issue about beards being worn by soldiers in the Army.

What was striking was that the reply didn’t give an argument, it just reiterated that the policy was set and there were no plans for it to change.

There was no reasoning or explanation given. For me the argument should be really simple.

Me: “I’d like to have a beard at work.”

Army: “Well, we can’t think of a reason why you shouldn’t have one – do you promise to shave it off if you find yourself in a CBRN environment?”

Me: “Thank you very much. Of course I’ll shave it off in those circumstances, I’m not an idiot.”

It really is that straightforward and, if in doubt, apply the Service test and ask whether facial hair impacts the

operational effectiveness of the unit.

Clearly it’s a ridiculous question and well done to those who can do it with a straight face.

The beards worn by our Greek allies and the long hair sported by Dutch colleagues don’t either.

It really is time the Army moved on.

– Name and address supplied

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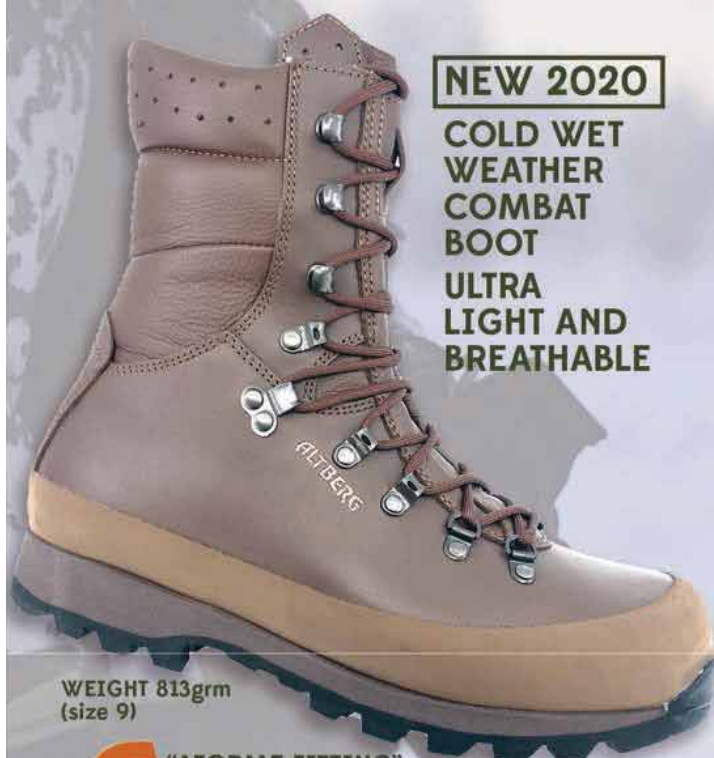
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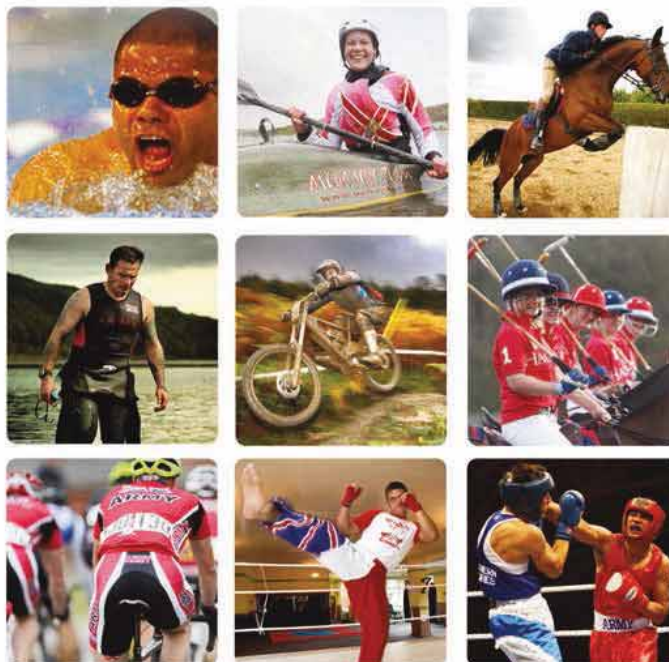


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ARMY

THAT'S RANK

● WHAT is the reasoning behind Modnet email address displays only showing substantive rank?

I have recently been promoted but due to my terms and conditions of service will hold acting rank until I retire in three years' time.

As a result, most of my email traffic consists of an explanation of my situation and the vagaries of the Modnet system. – **Lt Col Martin Shakespeare, AGC (SPS)**

Capt Alex Orme, Customer Manager at Defence Digital, replies: Historically there have not been automatic updates to the ranks associated with Modnet accounts so corresponding email addresses do not show substantive or temporary promotions.

At the end of 2020 an informal manual system was introduced to address the issue of acting rank, which is outlined in **JSP 441 Updating Rank or Grade on Person Unique Identifier**, which contains a section that covers temporary and acting ranks.

Changing the position associated with the account is achieved by emailing atlas-puidteam@mod.uk and requesting the alteration be made in the relevant places to deliver the desired result.

This usually requires changes to the display name in the active directory, the display name of the user's primary role and job title.

There is a team in Defence Digital that is currently working on a longer-term solution to improve this situation.



Picture: Graeme Main

“It was discussed and shot down”



Picture: Graeme Main

Reservists enjoy cash lift

WILL Reservists continue to be paid for indirectly supervised physical training sessions they conduct in their own time after the Covid-19 crisis is over?

This proposal was discussed and shot down before the pandemic but has become a reality in the current climate.

I'm also interested in whether or not the MoD would pay for, or contribute towards, Reservists' civilian gym memberships. – **Name and address suppressed**

Lt Col Mark Dornan, Personnel Directorate, Field Army Headquarters, replies: The policy on payment to Reservists for indirectly supervised physical training is outlined in **ABN 054/2020**, though

this is not new policy.

This ABN is unrelated to any Covid-19 measures and will continue to endure beyond the current crisis.

Commanding officers are empowered to utilise, at their discretion, the extant policy freedoms to pay Army Reserve personnel for indirectly supervised physical training – though all sessions must be compliant with the Army physical training system, the lone soldier physical training programme and agreed in advance with unit PTIs.

As to the question concerning gym fees, there is no intent for the MoD to fund these for Reservists (or Regulars). They are able to conduct the lone soldier programme without the need to access a gym.

Help to Buy unhelpfully slow

FORCES Help to Buy (FHTB) is an excellent scheme and I was delighted when my initial approval for funds came back in a single day.

However, the system starts to struggle when it comes to the personal information note, which is required by a mortgage lender and also a solicitor as proof of deposit.

This is currently posted to the individual's unit address and, as a result, can take up to ten days to turn around.

I called the Joint Personnel Administration Centre (JPAC) to ask for a PDF version to email over to me in order to speed things up but was told that the existing policy is not to send the note in this form.

I asked why this was and they said there was no specified reason.

Can the rule be changed for those applying in future? This would result in

a two- or three-day process and keep the momentum high during the early phases of home buying. – **Maj Mark Conlin, RLC**

Robert Piper, of the MoD's Accommodation Policy Team, responds: I am pleased that, overall, you've had a positive experience using the FHTB scheme.

Your suggestion to send the note electronically rather than by post is a good one, and I'm pleased to tell you that we are looking to make this change to the process. However, this will require an amendment to HR systems that will take time.

In the meantime, FHTB applicants who want their note sent electronically can make a special request by contacting the JPAC's enquiry centre.

BULLET POINTS

Bite-sized data to keep you in the know



CAREERS

Baseline UK is an innovative resettlement service tailored for the needs of Service personnel and veterans. The company offers free membership to those with a military background. Benefit from a professional network, hints, tips and training. For more details visit baselineuk.org

Veterans into Logistics CIC is a not-for-profit organisation based in Greater Manchester dedicated to training and supporting ex-military personnel for new careers within the transport and logistics industry. It recently received a £10,000 grant from the National Lottery Community Fund to continue its work. Visit veteransintologistics.org.uk

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

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

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



SEARCHLINE

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

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

The Air Training Corps, now part of the Royal Air Force Air Cadets, is celebrating its 80th anniversary this year. To help mark the occasion, they would like to identify those who were cadets when the formation launched in 1941 and interview them to capture early memories. Email al.munns@btinternet.com

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

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

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



DIRECTORY

ABF The Soldiers' Charity:
020 7901 8900;
soldierscharity.org

Armed Forces Buddhist Society:
Chaplain 020 7414 3411;
afbs-uk.org

Armed Forces Christian Union:
01793 783123;
afcu.org.uk

Armed Forces Muslim Association:
Chaplain 020 7414 3252;
afma.org.uk

Armed Services Advice Project:
0808 800 1007;
adviceasap.org.uk

Army Families Federation:
01264 382324;
mil 94391 2324;
aff.org.uk

Army LGBT Forum:
armylgbt.org.uk;
chair@armylgbt.org.uk

Army Libraries:
01252 340094

Army Ornithological Society:
armybirding.org.uk

Army Welfare Service:
01904 882053;
army.mod.uk/welfare-support

Big White Wall, now Togetherall:
togetherall.com

Blesma, The Limbless Veterans:
020 8590 1124;
blesma.org

Blind Veterans UK:
(formerly St Dunstan's)
020 7723 5021;
blindveterans.org.uk

Care After Combat:
careaftercombat.org

Career Transition Partnership:
020 7469 6661

Children's Education Advisory Service:
01980 618244;
dcyp-ceas-enquiries@mod.uk

Combat Stress:
24-hour mental health helpline for Service personnel and their families
0800 323 4444;
combatstress.org.uk

Erskine:
0141 814 4569;
erskiner.org.uk

Family Escort Service:
020 7463 9249

Felix Fund – the bomb disposal charity:
07713 752901;
felixfund.org.uk

Forcesline:
UK – 0800 731 4880;
Germany – 0800 1827 395;
Cyprus – 080 91065;
Falklands – #6111;
from operational theatres –
Paradigm Services *201; from
anywhere in the world (CSL operator

will call back) – 0044 1980 630854

Forces Pension Society:
020 7820 9988
forcespensionsocietys.org

Help for Heroes:
0845 673 1760 or
01980 846 459;
helpforheroes.org.uk

Heroes Welcome:
heroeswelcome.co.uk

HighGround:
highground-uk.org.uk
07951 495 272

Humanist, Atheist and Non-religious in Defence network:
defencehumanists.org.uk

Joint Service Housing Advice Office:
01252 787574

Medal Office:
94561 3600 or
0141 224 3600

Mutual Support (multiple sclerosis group):
mutual-support.org.uk

National Gulf Veterans' and Families' Association Office:
24-hour helpline 0845 257 4853;
ngvfa.org.uk

Poppyscotland:
0131 557 2782;
poppyscotland.org.uk

Regular Forces' Employment Association:
0121 236 0058;
rfea.org.uk

Remount: 01451 850 341;
remount.net

Royal British Legion:
0808 802 8080;
britishlegion.org.uk

Royal British Legion Scotland:
0131 550 1583;
legionscotland.org.uk

RBL Industries Vocational Assessment Centre:
01622 795900;
rbli.co.uk

Scottish Veterans' Residences:
0131 556 0091;
svronline.org

Single Persons Accommodation Centre for the Ex-Services:

01748 833797;
spaces.org.uk

SSAFA: 0845 1300 975;
ssafa.org.uk

Stoll:
020 7385 2110;
stoll.org.uk

The Not Forgotten Association:
020 7730 2400;
nfassociation.org

The Poppy Factory:
020 8940 3305;
poppyfactory.org

The Royal Star and Garter Homes:
020 8481 7676;
starandgarter.org

The Veterans Charity:
01753 653772;
info@veteranscharity.org.uk

Troop Aid:
0121 711 7215 or 07734 384260;

troopaid@icloud.com;
troopaid.info

uk4u Thanks!:
01798 812081;
uk4u.org

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

WVRS: 02920 232 668



ROADSHOWS

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

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

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TEN details have been changed in this picture of a Parachute Regiment soldier conducting tactical training on Salisbury Plain as part of Exercise Wessex Storm 2020.

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hac-recruiting-mailbox@mod.gov.uk or call 020 7448 0703.

The next SR Patrol Course for Reservists runs from March to November 2021.

If you are a Regular soldier interested in pursuing a career as a Special Observer, contact 4/73 (Sphinx) Special Observation Post Battery:

5RA-473BTY-Recruiting@mod.gov.uk or call 01748 875639.



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the ideal first big bike

➤ I HAVE ridden every new Triumph made in the last 15 years and it's hard to remember a time when they made a bad bike.

To be honest, it's difficult to put my finger on an occasion when they even made a mediocre machine.

The Speed Triple, Rocket 3, Scrambler 1200, Tiger – and everything else I can think of – all proved to be not just great motorcycles but fantastic sellers.

Rather than looking up the performance food chain with this 2021 Trident, Triumph has targeted the bustling middleweight sector.

The aim was to build the perfect first "big bike" and I think they've pretty much hit the nail on the head.



P65

MOVIES

P66

BOOKS

P67

GAMES



» The engine is a 660cc triple that produces 80bhp and is an unstressed unit that doesn't demand massive revs to get the best from it. So those new to riding such machines won't have to chase high numbers to have fun.

The chassis is also fantastic and it's clear that the 2021 Trident has evolved by using British riders on British roads.

It's still widely accepted that Japanese motorcycles are developed by test riders that are smaller than the average biker in the UK, so shocks can be a bit soft and front ends a little wayward on models that sit in the budget end of the market.

But that is not the case here and this Triumph could swallow another 20bhp with no problem, while still feeling completely composed everywhere else.

There's traction control and two basic riding modes to choose from – rain and road.

It's simple stuff, again with one eye on the wallet and the other on the fact that if you're new to this field you don't want to be baffled by too many choices in terms of power settings, maps and other attention-sapping demands.

Suspension is basic and non-adjustable at the front, but it's also quality kit from Showa so the performance is strong.

The same goes for the brakes. Sliding two piston calipers by Nissin might look underwhelming but out on the road they've got you covered.

If you're looking for your first big bike, one that will teach you about carrying corner speed at the same time as making a sweet sound and looking good, the 2021 Triumph Trident is the place to park your bum. ■

● www.triumphmotorcycles.co.uk

VERDICT:

A triumphant tick in the box for the 2021 Trident

★★★★★

REVIEW: JOHN HOGAN, CIVVY



PICK OF THE MONTH:

MUSCLE

Arthouse tale of toxic masculinity

► FROM writer-director **Gerard Johnson**, this is a gritty insight into male machismo and organised crime and its controlling, coercive hold over vulnerable people.

Cavan Clerkin (*The Capture*, *The Last Kingdom*) stars as Simon, a recently separated telesalesman whose job and life are getting him down.

In a bid to make a change he joins a bodybuilding gym, where alpha male tough guy Terry (**Craig Fairbrass** – *Rise of the Foot Soldier*, *EastEnders*) takes him under his wing.

Or so it seems. Before long Terry has moved into Simon's home and turned it into a house of ill repute, complete with drug-fuelled sex parties, which – viewer discretion advised – are explicitly portrayed in gruesome detail.

Clerkin, who bulks up impressively throughout the film, convincingly plays a man whose life is spiralling out of control, while Fairbrass is menacing as his sinister, psychopathic tormenter.

Shot in black and white, the monochrome pallet reflects the bleakness of the story.

I found the film slow for large stretches, but brutally vivid in others.

This is certainly one for fans of the British gangster genre – albeit with a different take. ■

VERDICT:

A graphic deep dive into the seedy underbelly of bodybuilding

★★★★★

REVIEW: CPL SCOTT ROBERTS, RIFLES



● *Muscle* is out on Blu-Ray and DVD on February 1

Q&A

Muscle star Craig Fairbrass tells *Soldier* more about the flick

This film is a bit different to your usual fare – what interested you about it?

It was my first chance to do a complex role with a little bit of gravitas to it. I was drawn to it because it was so dark and when I read the script I thought 'I'd kill to play this part' and it ended up working really well. The reviews have been really complimentary.

How did you go about preparing to play Terry physically?

If anything, I tried to lose a little bit of shape. I'm naturally a big bloke – I'm 6ft 3in and I've trained since I was 15. But we purposefully went for the non-steroid physique. Cav (Clerkin) went away for four months, training every day and eating 10,000 calories and it changed him completely. He looked like a little bulldog and that's the look we wanted – like a mini-me.

How about getting into the right place mentally?

It gave me sleepless nights thinking how I could capture the nuances and make Terry that skilled manipulator without forcing it. I met so many men,

growing up, who have that passive-aggressive personality. I've trained in hundreds of gyms all around the world and when I was in my early twenties you'd always get these random fellas – predominantly doormen or bouncers – who were larger than life, very domineering, overpowering people, the type who talk at you not to you, just odd. So that was what I wanted to nail.

What do you think the film says about toxic masculinity?

As far as Terry goes – it's all a facade. He is so mixed up, sexually. For him, it's body armour and I think there are a lot of guys like that out there. The reason I went to the gym myself is because I was bullied as a kid. It's a jungle out there and you look for something that can keep you safe. There is always

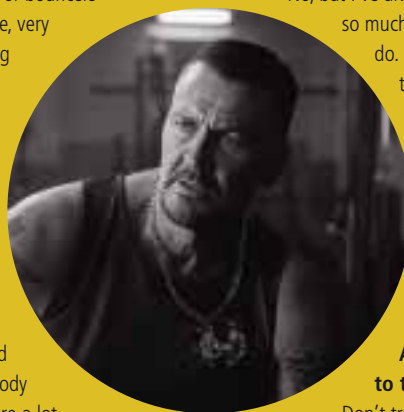
someone treading on your toes and you have to deal with it.

Do you have any Army connections?

No, but I've always been fascinated by it and I have so much respect for what the Armed Forces do. It's a tough life, it really is and I think there's something you get from being in the military that sets you apart. There's a lot more to it than running through mud and climbing up walls and doing the fitness. When you watch them in war zones it's terrifying and it takes a special kind of person to do that.

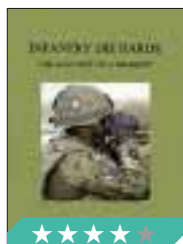
Anything else you want viewers to take from the film?

Don't trust anyone at the gym! No, but genuinely, I don't think these places are everything they've cracked up to be – these days everyone obsesses over it. However, if anyone does get the chance, then please watch *Muscle* – it's a quality film.



BOOKS

BOOK RELEASES



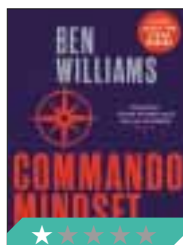
Infantry Die Hards

by Patrick Crowley

WRITTEN by a former commanding officer of one of the many antecedent units of the Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment, this interesting title explores the beginnings of the outfit, which coincided with the founding of the regular British Army. After an informative section on the origins

of the infantry, subsequent chapters detail historic battle honours of "the Tigers", from Tangier in the 1660s to modern day Afghanistan and most wars in between. It's a very heavy book in weight, but well written so easily read, revealing the history of a great British regiment.

Andy Kay, ex-RS



Commando Mindset

by Ben Williams

BILLED as a self-help book for the modern times, I had high hopes for this title. By following the author's three-step plan – based on "Commando philosophy" – you can allegedly pull yourself out of a rut. What you actually get is the same old regurgitated advice on overcoming your fears and

setting goals, mixed in with some first-hand stories from Afghanistan that apparently set the Royal Marines mindset apart from the rest. Realistically, it could be a Para mindset, or a Rifles mindset – though probably not a Mercian mindset – however the only mindset you'll need by the end is one that enables you to put the book down and never pick it up again.

Cpl Scott Roberts, Rifles



A Question of Time

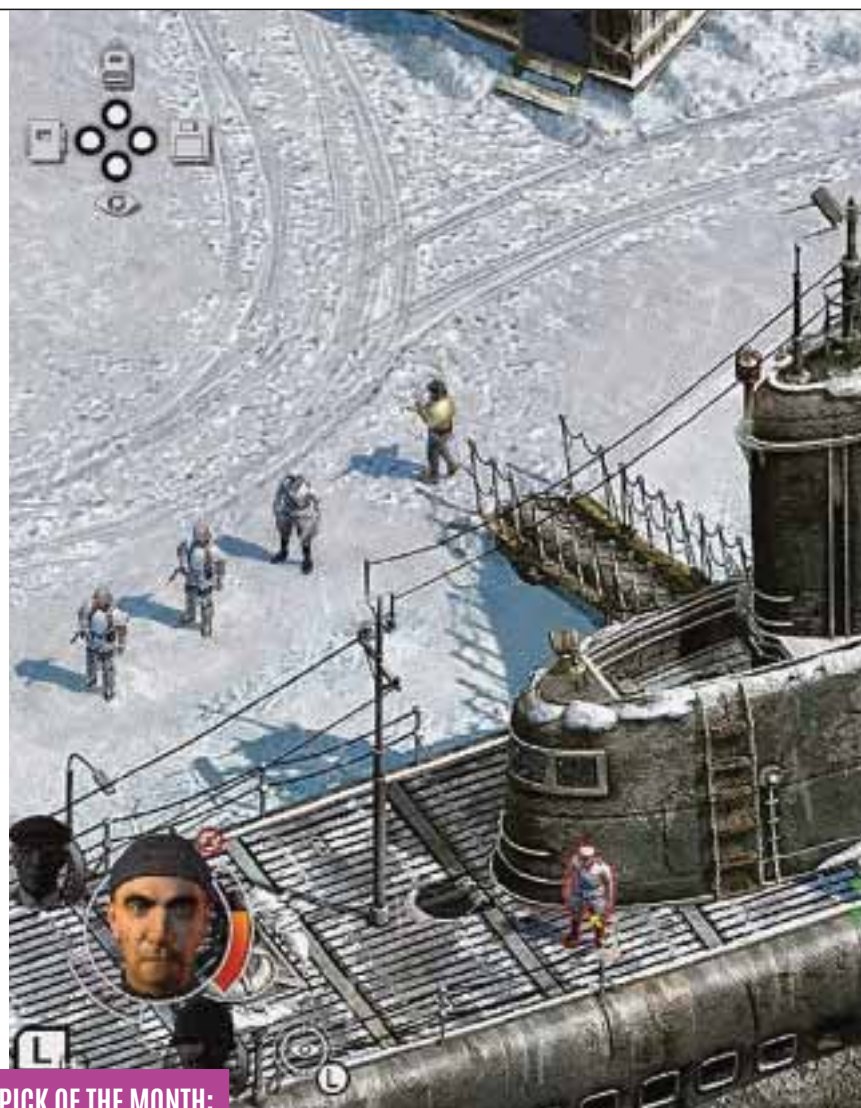
by James Stejskal

MAJOR General Fischer is the head of the foreign section of the East German intelligence department. For years he has acted as a double agent, handing over information to the CIA. But finding himself under suspicion, he tells the Americans he

wants to defect. Master Sergeant Kim Becker is tasked with covertly bringing him out from under the noses of the GDR authorities. Set in 1979 in a divided Berlin, this is the first instalment of a series, and one which I thoroughly enjoyed. It is a good read – action-packed and evoking the atmosphere of the times.

Andy Kay, ex-RS

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PICK OF THE MONTH:

COMMANDOS 2: HD REMASTER

Saboteurs return for retro bow

➤ WHEN Stephen Spielberg's movie masterpiece *Saving Private Ryan* first screened 23 years ago it heralded a renewed public interest in the Second World War.

Having been a less discussed topic for years, the film spawned a host of books, documentaries and TV dramas as a new generation delved into the 1939-45 era. But the film's most profound impact was arguably on the emerging video games industry.

Coinciding with a more powerful breed of PCs and consoles, a proliferation of titles based around the conflict appeared in quick succession. And it was against this backdrop that the *Commandos* series was released – the second instalment of which has now been reworked for Switch.

Best described as a real-time, squad-based





tactical outing, the handheld incarnation of the *Men of Courage* title retains the original plot, with players leading an elite group of troops charged with sabotaging the Nazi war machine.

Each cadre member has skills, ranging from the honourable pursuits of engineering to common-or-garden thievery, for use in an increasingly tough mission line-up. All sorties require stealth – those trying to go toe-to-toe with the German troops will find themselves shredded in short order.

Viewed from above, Allied soldiers are moved around the battlespace via a point-and-click interface, with tasks such as picking up objects, cutting through barbed wire and arming weapons dealt with via drop-down menus.

The Switch reboot of a title now some 20 years old, has been noticeably spruced up. Meanwhile, the command interface has also required a rework, adapting the mouse-based interface used on the PC for the console's thumbsticks.

With this reviewer crusty enough to remember *Commandos* the first time around, *Soldier* was naturally curious to see if the revamp was up to the cut. But we can report mixed feelings – for despite

managing to capture the spirit of the original outing, *HD Remaster* is impeded by clunky controls and a ferocious difficulty level.

In short, the change of interface significantly impedes the game's fluidity, with the constant, tedious thumbstick battle adding to an already tough experience.

Moves requiring split second timing are made harder by having to find precise button combinations, and often prove fatal for the hapless Allied troops involved.

Astonishingly, there is also no use at all of Nintendo's touch screen capability, which could have made all the difference.

The control issues are compounded by the near-suicidal struggle players face with an enemy that is as hard as nails from the outset.

The early loss of soldiers – and their associated skills – can mean the need for frequent, hair-pulling restarts.

Misgivings aside, those willing to fight through the frustration will discover a half-decent strategic challenge, albeit one that is overpriced at £25.

Despite being of its era – the real-time strategy genre has moved on considerably in the past two decades – the *Commandos* concept retains its integrity and should be a good candidate to pack in your kit and play on the move.

Just wait until it is in the bargain bin before parting with your cash. ■

VERDICT:

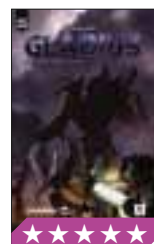
Control issues detract from the fun

★★★★★

REVIEW: CLIFF CASWELL, *SOLDIER*

GAMES

GAMES RELEASES



**Warhammer 40,000
Gladius: Craftworld
Aeldari**
For PC

CONTINUING their support for the acclaimed *Gladius Relics of War* title, strategy gurus

Slitherine and Proxy Studios have released another faction to this tactical turn-based outing. This time it is the Aeldari – known as Eldar to older fans – who take their place in the *Warhammer 40,000* conflict care of the latest downloadable content. Replete with powerful tech, units and abilities, the troops are more than a match for the opposition. The striking art direction also makes the newcomers stand out – keeping the original game fresh some two years after release.

David McDougall, civvy



Cobra Kai
For Switch, PS4, Xbox
One

WITH more than a passing reference to the beat 'em up titles of the 1990s, this tie-in with the Netflix series is an unashamed arcade actioner.

Players can either fight for Cobra Kai or Miyagi-Do in classic side-scrolling style, with the retro action delivered with the slickness expected of a current generation console. Recently released on the Switch after an outing on PlayStation and Xbox, this is a classic casual gaming experience as addictive as past coin-op classics.

WO1 Al Brewer, RLC

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SOLDIER SPORT



REASON TO CELEBRATE >>

HAVING seen last year's calendar decimated by the coronavirus outbreak, the Army Cricket Union is planning for a normal season in 2021 – including a return to Lord's for the Inter-Services Twenty20 Championships. Read more about the fixtures to come on page 71...



CUP QUEST CANCELLED AS COVID GRIP CONTINUES

REWIND 12 months and the Army men's rugby league team were in the midst of a historic run in the Challenge Cup.

Victories over Oulton Raiders (pictured), Skirlaugh and Ince Rose Bridge saw the Reds progress to the tournament's fourth round for the first time, before their hopes were finally extinguished by Championship outfit Rochdale Hornets.

But thoughts of a repeat performance in 2021 have been cruelly dashed by the continuing coronavirus crisis, with organisers announcing that amateur sides will not have the opportunity to test themselves in the prestigious knockout competition this season.

"It is a real shame," Maj Peter Batley (RE), Army Rugby League's community secretary, told *SoldierSport*.

"That was the last time we played before the Covid-19 outbreak, and the women only

managed to play their first-round match before that tournament was cancelled.

"We've lost a lot of rugby since then, including the Lawson Cup and Inter-Services."

Despite the setback, those charged with running the military game are now busily preparing for a return to action once restrictions start to ease.

"Everyone involved with Army Rugby League is living in hope," Batley added.

"We had a full season planned for last year but that kept getting knocked back before it was eventually cancelled.

"We have everything in place for a whole campaign in 2021, starting in April and concluding with the Inter-Services in September and October.

"The feeling is one of hope, but we also understand it might not yet happen.

"If that's the case, we know it will be for the right reasons."



**"WE'RE
ALL
LIVING
IN
HOPE"**

The enforced absence also means that new head coach WO2 Mike Thompson (RE) is still waiting to take charge of his first game – despite being in post since early last year.

In the meantime, players at corps level and above have been maintaining their fitness in a bid to hit the ground running when the green light comes.

"Various strength and conditioning coaches have pushed out different programmes," Batley explained.

"For example, the Royal Engineers have really focused on activities such as Warrior Fitness and Crossfit.

"The players are competing with each other via social media and are driving themselves onwards, so they are as prepared for the season as they can be.

"They cannot do any contact training, but in terms of their gym work they are looking strong and ready.

"They are frustrated and disappointed, and can't wait to get back on the field of play."

While the men will miss out on Challenge Cup action this year a decision has yet to be made on the possible make-up of the women's competition.

As Challenge Shield winners in 2019, Batley is hopeful the Reds will be included on the list of elite teams that can take part.

"At the moment, the women's game is very much the jewel in the Army Rugby League crown," the officer added.

"The emergence of the Super League means our players have the chance to perform at the highest level.

"We already have four soldiers signed to clubs – LCpl Elychia Watson (AGC (SPS)) being the latest after she joined Huddersfield Giants.

"And when rugby league resumes, I'm sure even more will get picked up."

The sport has been dealt a further blow with the news that this year's Defence World Cup has been indefinitely postponed due to the pandemic, meaning personnel will not be able to represent the UK Armed Forces in the showpiece event.

Stay in touch with all developments in the game by following @ArmyRugbyLeague on Twitter. ■



CRICKET IN NUMBERS

DATE, IN SEPTEMBER, FOR THE FORCES T20 AT LORD'S

20

INTER-SERVICES CONTESTS PLANNED FOR THE COMING SEASON

5

ROUNDS IN THE INTER-CORPS POWER CUP AHEAD OF THE FINAL IN SEPTEMBER

7

ARMY TEAMS SET FOR ACTION – MEN, WOMEN, DEV XI, LIONS AND MASTERS

5

FIXTURES FOR THE WOMEN – INCLUDING THE CORPS SIXES IN MAY

12



DATE SET FOR LORD'S RETURN

AFTER missing out on the opportunity to defend their title last season, the Army's cricketers are set to return to Lord's in September for the annual Inter-Services Twenty20 Championships.

The coronavirus outbreak saw all Forces competitions scrapped last year, but plans are now in place for a full programme in 2021 – the pinnacle of which will see the Reds square off against their rivals at the home of cricket.

The showdown has been shifted from its usual May/June slot due to fixture congestion at the iconic venue – however, Lt Col (Retd) Mike Thornley, secretary of the Army Cricket Union, believes this may work in the competition's favour.

"We were happy with that proposal as the later we leave it the more chance we have of running a normal event," he told *SoldierSport*.

"There's always a possibility

that Lord's will say we cannot play but at this stage it is brilliant that we have got something to look forward to."

Thornley said the women's equivalent competition will be switched to Arundel to make up for the disappointment of missing out last season and revealed a fixture list running from May to September is now nearing completion.

However, he was keen to stress the green light to play is dependent on any future government guidelines, as well as approval from the Army.

"We managed to get around ten games in last summer which, compared to some Service sports, was pretty good," he added.

"We are optimistic that we can get back to a normal season, starting with the Inter-Corps competitions.

"It is better to have plans in place and then cancel or reschedule, rather than having nothing and then scramble around for a game." ■

LEAGUE OF HIS OWN

HAVING got into the sport as a way of helping his transition to civvy street, veteran James Simpson is relishing the opportunity of representing his country at this year's Rugby League World Cup.

The showcase will see the men's, women's and wheelchair formats share the same stage for the first time and the double amputee is hoping home advantage can propel his team to glory.

Simpson was injured in Afghanistan 11 years ago, when he stepped on a pressure-plate IED and lost both legs above the knee in the resulting blast.

The 34-year-old, who served with The Yorkshire Regiment and then 4/73 (Sphinx) Special Observation Post Battery, Royal Artillery, underwent a lengthy recovery period and it was during his rehabilitation at Headley Court that sport emerged as a potential path.

"Thirty of us were involved in the closing ceremony for the London Paralympics," he told *SoldierSport*.

"I saw a couple of wheelchair events and at that point I realised I had to get involved in some kind of team activity again.

"I was due to leave the Army the following year and move home to Leeds. I went to see a Leeds Rhinos game, discovered they had a wheelchair team, asked a few questions and started playing in 2013.

"I wanted to push myself, compete and find some of the same challenges I had in the Army."

While the determination to succeed was firmly in place, Simpson soon discovered a significant barrier that needed to be overcome.

"At Headley Court we prided ourselves on using prosthetics, not wheelchairs – I was adamant I would not have one," he explained.

"So, when I started playing, I couldn't even push myself around. I was 23 when I got injured and found myself up against 15- or 16-year-olds who have been in wheelchairs pretty much all their lives. They were whizzing round and smashing me all over the pitch.

"The good thing is the fact the rules are exactly the same, so once you get used to the wheelchair it becomes second nature – people instantly get it."

The military mindset helped Simpson quickly get to grips with the sport and he made his England debut in 2014. He now has more than 20 caps to his name.

As well as hopefully starring on the pitch the former soldier will play an important role in the build-up after he was named as a World Cup ambassador.

"It has been amazing and is an opportunity I never thought I'd get," he added. "I've been working with people like former Leeds Rhinos captain Kevin Sinfield and it has given the wheelchair game a real boost.

"It's all about pushing the World Cup and growing the sport at grass roots level.

"We went to Australia in 2019 and smashed them. France are the current holders, but we are probably the favourites. I think it will all come down to the little things we do in preparation and, hopefully, the home advantage will work in our favour." ■





ROBERTS' WAIT EXTENDED BY CANCELLATION CALL

H EAD coach Capt Mal Roberts (RLC) is facing an additional wait for his first game in charge of the Army men's rugby union team following news that this year's Inter-Services Championships have been cancelled.

The former fullback, who was capped 26 times for the Reds, was handed the sport's top job in May 2020 but has yet to work with his players due to the continuing Covid-19 crisis.

A joint statement from all three Services said the move to shelve the 2021 competition was made with the fluid nature of the pandemic, as well as player welfare, firmly in mind.

It also added that a lengthy lead-in time would be needed to bring personnel up to the fitness levels demanded for the showpiece event.

Roberts (pictured right) told *SoldierSport* the correct decision has been made and is now hoping he can get his first squad together later in the year.

"There just isn't enough time or space in the calendar to make this happen," he explained.

"From a rugby union perspective it is very frustrating, but health is paramount.

"Sport is something that is nice to do, however, it's not as important as keeping people safe and well."

The officer had big plans for his debut season, but they quickly fell by the wayside due to the constantly changing coronavirus picture.

"I was keen to get Army rugby back on," he added. "I've got a new coaching team with different ways of doing things.

"We were going to revamp the way we play, although not completely as a lot of good work has been done in the past, and the players were chomping at the bit."

Instead, the coaching staff have been staging online fitness sessions and Roberts introduced a regional testing system before new lockdown restrictions drew



**"I WAS
KEEN
TO GET
ARMY
RUGBY
BACK
ON"**

a halt to proceedings.

He has also been making monthly calls to individuals to see how they are coping physically and mentally in such trying times.

"It is difficult as you can only train for so long without having a game to aim for," the ten-time Inter-Services champion said.

"Some have had injuries and niggles, so this has given them the chance to recover and get back to full fitness.

"They are quite upbeat. We've got guys who are still playing in the Premiership and that keeps the others going.

"When rugby finally resumes we'll be looking to arrange more fixtures with top-end Championship sides as it will give our players greater exposure to the people who can pitch them up for such clubs.

"There are no easy routes to the Premiership, so if we can give them the opportunity to enhance their reputations we will do that." ■



Remember that light is your best friend and can make your pictures stand out. Use it in the mornings and evenings when it comes in at a shallow angle to help give your images a sense of depth.

Cpl Nathan Tanuku, RLC



The Army has loads of ally assets like tanks, trucks and helicopters that are usually easy to photograph, but try focusing on the people who operate them. The men and women working the machines are the most important elements of the whole operation and they are certainly where the most interesting stories can be found.

Bdr Murray Kerr, RA



Photograph what you enjoy and once you do that you'll get obsessed – and obsession is what has pushed my skills way beyond the level they were at the start of my career.

Cpl Danny Houghton, RLC



My tip would be to get close. There's a quote by the famous war photographer, Robert Capa, that says: "If your photos aren't good enough, you're not close enough." That's so clever – it focuses attention on what you want people to see, and gets rid of distractions. Great photos are often very simple.

Sgt Tom Evans, RLC

Whether you're using a digital camera or smartphone, experiment with interesting angles – try low down on the ground as well as high up. Look for a perspective that isn't from the everyday.

Cpl Becky Brown, RLC

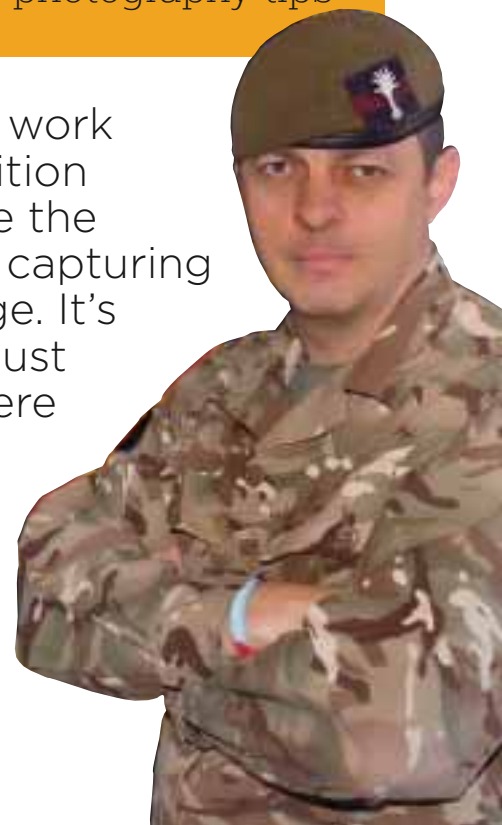


Essentials revealed

We asked Service snappers to share their top photography tips

Put in the hard work to get to a position where you have the best chance of capturing that great image. It's all too easy to just stand somewhere comfortable and hope the moment comes to you.

LSgt Chris Morgan, WG





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