

# SOLDIER

MAGAZINE OF THE BRITISH ARMY



## LEADING BY EXAMPLE

NCO Academy sets sights on next gen role models



SEPTEMBER 2025

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**SCAN ME**

OUR CONTRIBUTORS  
THIS MONTH...**BDR JACOB  
DAWSON, RHA**

DEPLOYED on Exercise Iron Storm on Salisbury Plain Training Area as part of a fire support team attached to the QRH battlegroup, he gives us his pros and cons of working with Ajax on **page 32**.

**WO2 GERWYN  
GRIFFITHS, RE**

THE army football legend tells us how the beautiful game played an important part in helping him deal with many of the biggest challenges he has faced in his life on **page 46**.

**OCDT LYDIA  
RIDGWAY, UOTC**

THE University of Salford student only joined her University Officer Training Regiment because her brother said she "wouldn't be able to cut it", but she tells us she has no regrets on **page 50**.

# Why we were given the silent treatment

I WAS fortunate enough to visit The Queen's Royal Hussars Battlegroup on Salisbury Plain for the report on Exercise Iron Storm in this edition (page 32).

A young officer drove me and chief photographer Graeme Main into the middle of a sun-scorched field. He checked his coordinates and declared: "We're here – they're waiting for you dead ahead".

We jumped out of the Ford Ranger and as our escort U-turned and left us in a cloud of dust we stared up the lonely track in puzzlement. There was no sign of life and, apart from the warbling of skylarks, no sound. No distant voices, no dull hum of generators, no engines ticking over. We'd been dropped in the wrong place, surely.

In the immediate vicinity there were, supposedly, dozens of personnel, a medical facility, a command post and numerous support vehicles.

We advanced slowly and eventually, when we were almost on top of it, the headquarters, or at least one element of it, became discernible. Admittedly, I'm a useless civvy with untrained eyes but the camouflage was definitely in a different league to what I'd seen before.

On closer inspection, there were other notable changes too. Anti-drone measures were everywhere, assets had been thoroughly dispersed and troops actively hugged any cover the terrain offered when they moved.

They were all signs of just how far the army has come in the push to modernise every aspect of its warfighting capabilities.

With kit, doctrine and TTPs experiencing radical overhauls at the moment, staying abreast of the changes won't be easy, but we'll do our best to bring you the all latest developments as and when they occur.

Steve Muncey • **Managing Editor**

'They were all signs of just how far the army has come'





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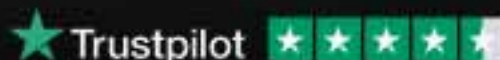


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# NCOs 'CRITICAL' TO SUCCESS

'Some have been sceptical but what CGS has asked for is completely achievable'

lance corporal to warrant officer – and they are our vehicle of change.

"As we hit September, there are less than 500 days left to Gen Sir Roly Walker's deadline and they have a critical part to play to make sure it is met.

"I know some have been sceptical, but what CGS has asked for is completely achievable.

"As I have said before, we need to focus on the people element, know our own part in all of this and make sure we are doing the basics well."

WO1 Miller repeated that all personnel must be proficient in the core skills of soldiering – shooting, moving, communicating and medicating – while leaders needed to ensure their subordinates upheld the highest standards.

The Army Sergeant Major praised recent work by the Sandhurst-based NCO Academy – including the champions initiative (see page 26) – to upskill leaders and foster professional development. These would help deliver more capable leaders.

But he warned that momentum needed to be maintained in a volatile world that would require capabilities to be continuously adapted as threats evolved.

"Gen Walker has already said he expects fighting power to be trebled by the end of the decade, but there will likely be more to come," WO1 Miller continued.

"If you look at the recent Strategic Defence Review, there is a mention of increasing effectiveness ten-fold by 2035, so we will all have to be prepared.

"It is important that commanders focus on making improvements that are in their control – our people being the most crucial element."

Picture: Graeme Main

**NON-COMMISSIONED officers must step up to the plate amid a looming deadline for the service to double its fighting power, the service's most senior soldier has said.**

Speaking as troops returned from summer leave, Army Sergeant Major WO1 John Miller called on this cohort of leaders to bolster their efforts to ensure personnel could meet the chief of the general staff's expectations by the end of next year.

He also revealed that he would be visiting units army-wide to ensure people are focused on the task in hand.

WO1 Miller said everyone needed to know how to develop their own role in a way that could make the service more effective. And he underscored that high standards at home would translate into more potent capability on ops.

He told *Soldier*: "There are some 55,000 NCOs in the army – those from the rank of

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1

## FALKLAND ISLANDS

### Parting shots

AIRBORNE troops rounded off a packed tenure down south in explosive style as they took part in their final exercise as the Roulement Infantry Company.

The soldiers – from 3rd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment – tackled serials including trench clearances and drills using unmanned aerial systems before coming together to strike mock enemy positions on Pleasant Peak.

They also worked with members of the local Falkland Islands Defence Force throughout as they concluded their winter tour on the British overseas territory.

The personnel have now returned to their Colchester home and were relieved by fellow infanteers from Northern Ireland-based 2nd Battalion, The Rifles, as this issue went to press.



Picture: Shutterstock

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## CANADA AND BEYOND

### New horizons?

AMBITIOUS British troops looking for overseas opportunities have been urged to consider upping sticks as part of an annual exchange initiative with allies.

Regulars from the rank of lance corporal to major can put themselves forward for the programme, known as Long Look, which provides short-term openings in Canada or further afield in New Zealand and Australia.

Personnel are expected to serve in-country for a minimum of six weeks – although most opt for a three-month tenure. They can also be extended for up to six months.

While the exchanges, which aim to promote better understanding and more effective joint working between allies, do not have to be reciprocal, clear objectives must be finalised before applications are rubber stamped.

Those interested should also talk to their chain of command before putting in paperwork.

See **ABN 046/2025** for further info.

3

## GERMANY

### Deeper and down

ARMY divers plunged into their work in Minden during an annual test of core trade skills.

Exercise Submerged Shield saw 120 sapper specialists put through serials on the River Weser, including cutting up and removing submerged obstacles.

They also conducted an assessment of the underwater infrastructure – a real-life task for the German authorities – as part of the training programme.

Senior diving operator Lt Col Tony Pick (RE) said underwater skills could be battle winners.

“Armies stopping due to the inability to cross rivers present themselves as a target,” the officer stressed.

“Maintaining the mobility of our forces is the primary aim.”

The manoeuvres have previously been carried out in the UK and Cyprus, but this year moved to Germany to take advantage of fast-flowing water conditions.



Picture: Duncan Campbell

Picture: Spc Nathan Morse, US Army



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## ESTONIA

### Logging on

MEMBERS of The King's Royal Hussars serving on Op Cabrit took time away from Nato duties to join American colleagues in a time-honoured physical challenge.

Hosted by the US Army's 5-7th Cavalry Squadron at their base in Camp Reedo, the so-called Spur Ride saw teams complete a variety of gruelling tasks over 32 hours, covering up to 35 miles in the process.

Part of a long-running tradition, the event has been a rite of passage for generations of American cavalry troops as they seek to prove their soldiering competence and earn the right to wear silver spurs.

A TASTE OF ARMY ACTIVITY ACROSS THE WORLD

# GLOBAL SITREP





## 5 UK

### Hannibal lecture

PLAYING opfor proved particularly valuable for the 250 or so members of Task Force Hannibal during Exercise Iron Storm on Salisbury Plain (page 32).

"We've been primed to act like Russian ground forces at all times," Capt Mike Lindgren, Officer Commanding D Company, 5th Battalion, The Rifles, told *Soldier*.

"We've been practising and rehearsing after receiving very detailed briefs about how we should operate as Russians, which has been useful for everyone."

The objective of their task was to help validate The Queen's Royal Hussars Battlegroup as the UK's lead armoured

formation by providing a credible enemy during the month-long package.

"On the Tes system our Warriors have been configured to be BMP 2s, so we have anti-tank missiles, which Warrior doesn't have, and a 30mm automatic cannon that isn't as punchy as ours but can offer a high rate of fire," continued Capt Lindgren.

"Because the Russians fight differently to us we've had to think a lot about how their armoured infantry companies would act, incorporating some of the latest observations from Ukraine."

The process had been "very educational" for all involved, concluded the officer.

Picture: Alex Hood



## 6 AUSTRALIA

### Joining up down under

SOLDIERS from 1st Battalion, The Royal Gurkha Rifles acted as a defensive reserve, supporting interoperability and joint readiness training alongside Australian Defence Force personnel during Exercise Talisman Sabre in Queensland.

The package was an opportunity to strengthen ties between allies and demonstrate rapid deployment capability in the Indo-Pacific.

Spanning a vast area of Western Australia, the Northern Territory, Queensland and New South Wales, the Australian-US led biennial package was bigger than ever, involving more than 35,000 military personnel from 19 nations.

The UK Carrier Strike Group, including HMS Prince of Wales, also played a significant role, conducting dual operations with the US Navy, making it one of the largest military exercises in the world this year.

Picture: Graeme Main



**'Reservists join to travel and experience different cultures'**

Medics make a difference – page 12



## HIGH NOTE

RESERVISTS from The Band of The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment performed to delighted crowds in central Edinburgh as the world-famous Fringe festival kicked off last month.

Picture: Sgt Murray Kerr, RA

## NEW GUIDANCE FOR VICTIMS

**A FRESH set of guidelines has been released for personnel who believe they've been the subject of sexual harassment or an assault.**

The Victim Support Pathway: Sexual Offences scheme provides a clear and comprehensive, explanation of how individuals can find out what their options are, and the best route for getting help.

**ABN 050/2025** gives direction to units, links to posters providing information (**page 59**) and details of a dedicated website.

"This is a vital initiative that empowers people to choose their own route to recovery," Lt Col Andy Thackway (RLC), of the unacceptable behaviours team in the personnel directorate at Army Headquarters, told *Soldier*.

"It brings clarity, compassion, access to trusted internal and external support and proven pathways that prioritise safety, dignity and informed choice.

"This is not just a resource; it is a commitment to care, resilience and justice for every individual affected by sexual violence."



Picture: Sgt Andrew Grayson, RLC

## GURKHA ARRIVALS

**A TOTAL of 274 trainee Gurkhas recently passed out of the Infantry Training Centre in Catterick, marking the occasion with a cap badging ceremony to receive their new unit insignias.**

The group of proud personnel were also presented with their khardas, a traditional Nepalese scarf that represents respect and goodwill (pictured).

Around 20 of the recruits will be heading to the King's Gurkha Artillery (KGA), which is the first regiment to be named after King Charles III and the first Gurkha cap badge to be created in 14 years.

It features the Royal Artillery emblem with crossed kukris superimposed over the top.

Over the next four years, 400 Gurkha soldiers will join the KGA and they are initially being trained on the Archer system as well as the L118 Light Gun.

The unit will deliver close support artillery batteries and in the future is scheduled to operate the planned Remote Controlled Howitzer (RCH) 155 artillery platform.

This is currently being jointly developed by the UK and Germany.

The RCH 155 should reach initial operating capability in 2029, with full operating capacity scheduled for 2032.



# LEVEL PEAKS



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# MEDICS MAKE AFRICAN MARK

**Exercise provides vital support for communities in isolated areas**

**FIRE-UP British clinicians headed south in support of Kenyan counterparts – bringing their healing power to the tribespeople of the country's arid savannah.**

Some 90 reservists with Birmingham-based 202 Multi-Role Medical Regiment made the 6,000-mile trip for Exercise Haraka Serpent – a joint humanitarian effort with the host nation's Ministry of Health and local defence forces. They also worked to assist charity Beyond Zero, established by Kenya's former first lady Margaret Kenyatta to reduce child deaths and HIV transmission.

In a combined endeavour, the organisations set up clinics for civilians in the isolated counties of Laikipia and Samburu deep in

remote countryside.

Travelling by road for two hours and in temperatures topping 35 degrees centigrade, the teams operated out of tented clinics in austere conditions for just over a week.

In one location – near the British training area at Archer's Post in Laresoro – in excess of 300 people, more than half of them children under the age of 12, turned out for help in the first 24 hours. Many had walked for several days to attend.

Patients included a critically ill four-month old baby, diagnosed with sepsis (see panel), who received lifesaving intravenous antibiotics plus painkilling drugs. Medics also treated other conditions from respiratory problems to malaria.

Exercise planner Maj Rob Mathews (RAMS) revealed that the British contingent had included a wide range of specialists to help address a plethora of conditions.

They included midwives, gynaecologists, paediatricians and neo-natal practitioners, many bringing expertise from their civvy day jobs in the National Health Service.

He stressed that the medics had been well prepared for the deployment, and ready to face remote locations, searing temperatures and a difficult working environment.

Planning, which had been

under way from the beginning of the year, had paid off.

Assistance provided by the clinical engagement officer, Kenyan-born Maj Christine Duffy (RAMS), also proved invaluable in dealing with the language barrier and cultural issues.

Maj Mathews said the experience the soldiers had accrued would stand them in good stead for the future.

The officer concluded: "This exercise highlights why many of our reservists joined the military – that is to travel, experience different cultures and be challenged clinically as well as in supporting and leadership roles."







## LIFESAVING MISSION

**ARMY paediatric nurse Capt Bradley Setchell (RAMS, pictured below) was confident that the combined efforts of Kenyan and British troops had made a significant difference during Exercise Haraka Serpent.**

The arrival of one seriously ill baby, in particular, had focused the mind.

The officer revealed how the four-month-old had been suffering from a rapid heart rate, high temperature and breathing difficulties.



Sepsis was diagnosed and Kenyan Health Ministry nurse Rehema Lekalau responded with immediate intravenous antibiotics and paracetamol.

The infant's life was saved as a result.

Capt Setchell (pictured at a vaccination clinic) said the exercise had been a tough but satisfying experience, involving the expertise of African and British health professionals.

He added: "This has been a collaborative effort, locally driven and it is something I am quite proud of the army for achieving.

"Paediatrics is an emotional speciality, just by its nature and there are lots of children and young people here."

Commanders were satisfied that the exercise had helped expand troops' experience, giving them confidence to work anywhere in the world.



# NEW RULES FOR SA80

## Weapon handling updates introduced

**THE Small Arms School Corps has rolled out a series of changes to weapon handling procedures, marking the most significant evolution in SA80 practices since the kit's introduction 30 odd years ago.**

The new drills have been brought in to "reduce the cognitive load on soldiers, and enable them to focus more effectively on the tactical and dynamic situations during operations," Maj Dave White (SASC) told *Soldier*.

The officer, who manages training regulations and tri-service operational shooting policies, added that the updates address both fundamental and advanced aspects of weapon handling, with a focus on streamlining and best practices. Key changes include:

- \* Revised immediate action drill:** More efficient approach to ensure faster and effective responses in combat.
- \* Removal of the tap forward assist:** Simplifying the process for greater ease of use.
- \* Updated weapon handling tests:** To keep high standards high while improving efficiency.
- \* Introduction of the 'high ready' position:** Replacing the standing alert position to enhance readiness and response times.
- \* Post-firing checks:** Now integrated into basic drills to

reinforce safe and effective weapon handling.

- \* Enhanced muzzle discipline:** Updated practices to align with modern operational requirements.
- \* Finger placement and trigger operation:** Introduced in Rifle Lesson 1 during initial training to establish strong fundamentals.
- \* Deletion of the make safe drill:** Simplifying the repertoire by removing this action.
- \* Updated close quarter battle lesson:** Adds new positions – low ready, compressed ready, and modified compressed ready.

"These updates are vital in aligning with CGS' intent to multiply lethality," Maj White explained.

"They not only enhance standardisation across units but also align the SA80 with other weapon systems we use.

"This ensures a consistent approach to training, handling and operational procedures, reducing complexity and improving cohesion across the force.

"By enabling soldiers to recover and re-engage in the fight faster, these updates directly enhance combat effectiveness."

For more details on these updates, personnel should consult the SA80 publication available on the **British Army electronic Battle Box**.



## READY FOR A CHANGE IN BERET?

**SOLDIERS of all cap badges are being reminded of the opportunities to serve in The Ranger Regiment.**

The cap badge, which consists of four battalions, relies on an inflow of volunteers from across the army.

It is open to regulars and reservists of all arms, and new members are trained in the skills they need to operate in small dismantled teams in austere environments with limited support. However, it is up to any individuals who are interested to start the process themselves.

To be eligible, personnel must have completed at least 12 months' service after initial trade training – or 18 months or more for non-infantry personnel.

All applicants must be medically fully deployable and should not be subject to any ongoing disciplinary or administrative action. For more details read [ABN 049/2025](#).



Picture: SrA Katie Mullikin, USAF

## MED TEST GETS GREEN LIGHT

**AIRBORNE medics enhanced their skills for potential joint operations as they trained alongside US counterparts on Exercise Mobile Serpent.**

The week-long test saw soldiers from 16 Medical Regiment establish treatment facilities on the ground at the Stanford Training Area in Norfolk, with personnel from 352nd Special Operations Wing offering supply drops from the air.

Among the items parachuted in were refrigerated blood and a quad bike and trailer loaded with kit.

The training culminated with simulated casualties being

evacuated by both MC-130 and C-146 transport planes, while British clinicians continued treatment onboard.

Combat medical technician SSgt Shaun Newbury said: "The defining character of 16 Med Regt is our specialism in delivering medical care by air, be that how we arrive on the battlefield and are supplied, or how we move casualties.

"Working with 352nd SOW has given each of us an insight into the other's capabilities and an understanding of how we would be able to operate together."



Picture: Graeme Main





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THE Massed Pipes and Drums make their debut at the 2025 Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo, forming the shape of a 75 to mark the event's special anniversary last month. Picture: Mark Owens





# diary dates

## 1

### Pulling together

THE back-breaking mission to lug a Boer War-era field gun from John O'Groats to Land's End in aid of charity Military vs Cancer begins today. The relay will see teams of personnel from all three services haul the one-tonne vintage armament 1,000 miles, finishing in Cornwall on October 31. Organisers hope it will serve as a reminder of British troops' resilience through the ages, while raising funds. Find out where to cheer the troops on at [militaryvscancer.com](http://militaryvscancer.com)



## 9

### DSEI hits London

BADGED the Super Bowl of the military world, Defence and Security Equipment International (DSEI)

UK comes to London's Excel for four days once again. The 2025 event, which will see the usual line-up of army teams and bigwigs, will focus on the theme of 'preparing the future force' and will also feature a new tech zone. To find out more or register your attendance visit [dsei.co.uk](http://dsei.co.uk)



## 8

### Teeing it up

SAUNTON Golf Club welcomes the forces' finest players to the tee as they battle for Inter-Services honours in a week-long golfing showdown. The army had mixed results last time out as the men's team triumphed at Formby, with the women finishing as runners up. Can they claim a double in Devon for 2025?



Pictures: Graeme Main



# 10

## Start your engines

THE Army Motorsport Day rolls onto Thruxton Circuit for a celebration of all things four wheels and two. Representatives from nine disciplines within the British Army Motorsport Association – including go karts, road race bikes and sports cars – will be present in a showcase designed for everyone from serious petrolheads to curious newcomers. Visitors can experience passenger hot laps with the army's best drivers, get hands on with vehicles and speak directly to the soldiers behind the wheels and tools. Visit [@britisharmymotorspot](#) on Instagram for more



Picture: Graeme Main



Pictures: Gurkha Welfare Trust



# 19

## Trailwalker test

AFTER a memorable event in 2024 which saw more than 1,000 trekkers tackle its formidable 100km course, this year's Trailwalker challenge has something to live up to. But participants will not be disappointed as they enjoy stunning views across the South Downs, in an altitude gain equivalent to scaling Mount Snowdon and Ben Nevis. Last year's winners were the Gurkha Allied Rapid Reaction Corps Support Battalion, who smashed a 20-year record of 9hr 50min to finish in 9hr 23min. Who will take top spot in the Gurkha Welfare Trust fundraiser this year?



Picture: Graeme Main

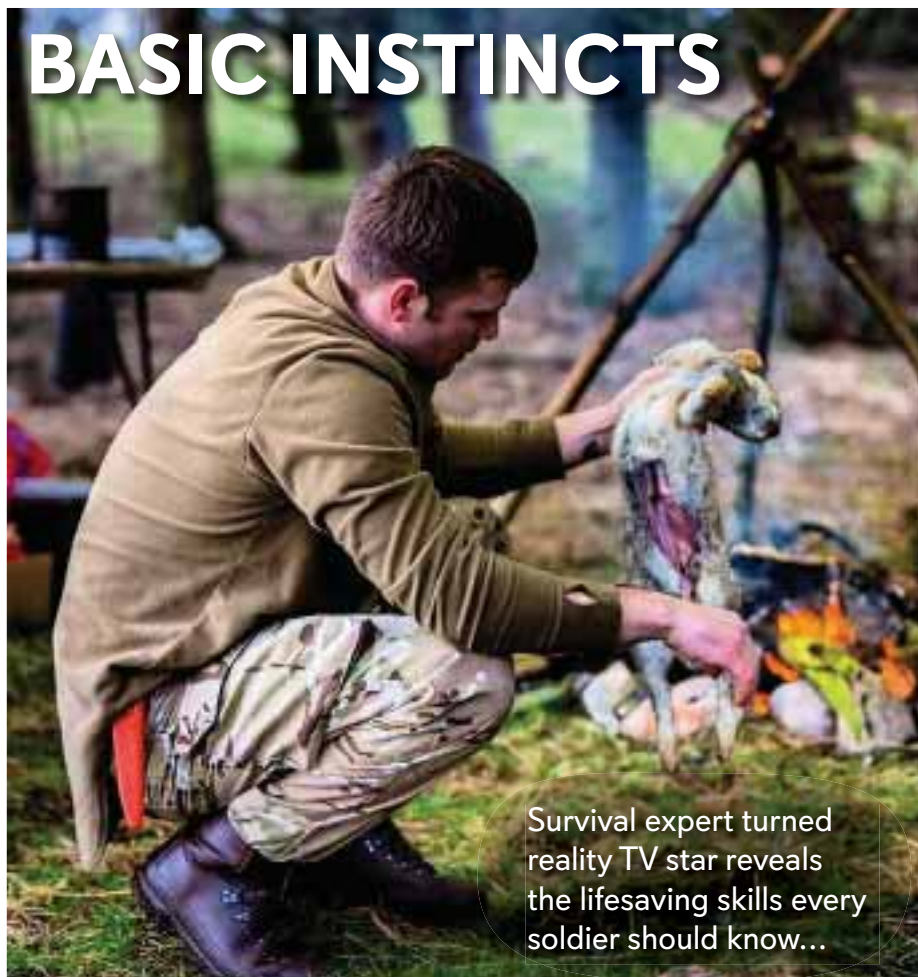
# 14

## League lift off

THE army's rugby league squads travel south to Portsmouth to face the Royal Navy in the opening round of this season's Inter-Services campaign. The women will be odds on favourites as they look to continue a remarkable run of form that has seen them win 15 consecutive titles, while the men will be seeking to avenge a 42-8 defeat to the senior service last season.

# skills

## BASIC INSTINCTS



Survival expert turned reality TV star reveals the lifesaving skills every soldier should know...

**CAREER** commando gunner Steven Kelly has been fascinated by the finer points of survival since his days in the Scouts.

Joining the army was the obvious choice and the WO2 has continued to teach such skills during 23 years in the Royal Artillery.

But the 39-year-old recently found himself pushed to the limits on the extreme reality show *Naked and Afraid: Apocalypse* – where contestants are stripped of their clothes and dropped off in a remote location with nothing but a knife to help them.

“I cannot give away too much while the programme is broadcast but needless to say you have to draw on all you have to get through that type of experience,” the member of 29 Commando Regiment told *Soldier*.

“There were other personnel taking part from different countries – including the US – and it was a great show to compete in.

“I’ve been well supported by my CO and

the wider British Army throughout.”

While tight-lipped on the outcome of the Discovery Channel outing, the Herrick veteran – who also runs civvy firm South West Survival – said the extreme experience served as a reminder that all troops should keep basic instincts sharp, and plan for the unexpected.

He shared a few top tips...

### Water is the fountain of life

You won’t last more than three days without water. So wherever you are in the world, keep your purification tabs close at hand. You’ll find a supply in your ration pack; look after them because you can add them to water that isn’t clean and you’ll have a drink ready within an hour or so. It might taste a bit like bleach, but at least it’s not going to make you ill. Ensure your bottle is always full, too.



**Full name:**  
WO2 Steven Kelly  
**Age:** 39  
**Cap badge:**  
Royal Artillery  
**Years in:** 23  
**Operational experience:** Includes Afghanistan and Sierra Leone

### You’re only as sharp as your knife

It’s an old saying, but very true. Look after your knife because it is the tool that unlocks so much in survival. You can use it to build your shelter as well as making traps, gutting fish and many other things. It’s a vital asset – that’s why you get one in *Naked and Afraid*.

### Take cover; take rest

Wherever you are, shelter is critical. You need somewhere to protect you from the elements, whether the climate is hot or cold. It’s also important for resting and getting sleep, which is key to mental and physical wellbeing. In a survival situation you need to rest where you can to conserve energy.

### Stretch your resources

Military survival is based around the premise you will be found and extracted within 72 hours, but you might find yourself needing to stay alive for longer than that. Therefore, it is important to think ahead – you can make a 24-hour ration pack last for a week if you have to. Know the basics of what you need and listen to your body – you can end up at risk by depriving yourself too much.

### Improvise to survive

Your everyday kit can help you in ways the makers never intended. For example, you could employ the little mirror you use to apply cam cream to attract attention; you can bang cans together to make noise. Think about cutting wood to make an SOS message visible from the air.

### Mentality matters

You must be in the right frame of mind if you are going to survive. Your mental resilience is vital so look after yourself in that area. Focus on what is important to you back home, the reasons why you want to survive. Recall memories, experiences and stories in detail – whatever it takes to keep your mind sharp.



# STAYING IN THE FIGHT

Military personnel are being upskilled in first aid

**TREATING and evacuating casualties will be a demanding task in any conflict against a well-matched adversary.**

In contrast to campaigns such as Op Herrick it is unlikely we will enjoy air supremacy, making any extraction a complex and dangerous affair.

Withdrawing the injured by ambulance might be the only option. And while field hospitals will be closer to the front line, they'll need to be concealed from prying eyes – as the Ukraine war is starkly demonstrating.

This means soldiers might have to take on more medical responsibility, potentially coping with injuries for longer and in the heat

of battle. Consequently, they are being given updated protocols and equipment.

The tactical combat casualty care (UK) system – which brings British soldiers in line with other Nato forces – is being rolled out as part of the individual training requirement.

It introduces a new emphasis on skills and drills to deal with a range of wounds including severe bleeding and eye injuries.

Instead of being issued with the existing first aid kit, containing dressings and tourniquets for deployments, they will now be given a pack at the outset of their career that includes blood-stemming haemostatic dressings plus antibiotics to help treat infection and painkillers.

"The packs will initially be issued to units that need them most, such as those deploying," said Maj Chris Hambly (AGC (ETS)) – who is leading the implementation of the casualty drills.

"These changes are going to affect all personnel and are a reaction to the nature of conventional fighting," he added.

An updated syllabus will be introduced for

front-line medical practitioners, nurses and other clinicians. They will also see changes in their protocols and training in due course.

New resources, including videos and an aide memoire will be made available as well.

**See ABN 036/2025 for more information. Training resources are available on the ITR portal of the Defence Learning Environment**



Picture: Graeme Main

## Q&A

### SETTING YOUR SIGHTS...



Picture: Graeme Main

**WITH Chief of the General Staff Gen Sir Roly Walker mandating the army must double its fighting power by 2027, troops are going to have to aim higher when it comes to shooting.**

Competency with rifle and pistol are abilities everyone in the army should have. We asked Maj Bri Trainner (SASC, below), the service's combat shooting team captain, for his tips...

**Is there anything that makes any one individual good at shooting?**

Not really – it's a combination of different things. The best always do the basics well.

**How important are phys and stamina?**

Essential. The ability to move fast, control the weapon and engage targets under pressure is tied to physical conditioning. You need good upper body strength, grip control and overall fitness. For example, a sniper must move into position quickly and stabilise their body. Rapid recovery of heart rate and lung function is crucial to accuracy. Close-quarters battle and rapid fire need upper- and lower-body strength.

**Above:** The Corps Operational Shooting Competition at Pirbright

**'The best shots always do the basics well'**

**Is mental agility helpful?**

It's as critical as physical fitness. It begins with everyday knockbacks – for example, dealing with a bad report or a failed assessment. Coping with pressure in day-to-day life builds the resilience needed for high-stakes situations, where the difference between success and failure comes down to composure.

**How important is nutrition?**

Water is key as dehydration can affect eyesight. Eating well directly aligns with physical fitness and the fundamentals of shooting.

**How much time per month, say, should people be putting into their shooting prep?**

Ideally, have one session per week on the range live firing, complemented by daily dry training. In Malcolm Gladwell's book, *Outliers*, he said it takes 10,000 hours of practice to achieve competence in any skill.

**Is there anything NCOs and officers can do to help subordinates?**

Systematically identify the root cause of poor performance. Ensure the weapon, sight, and ammunition are working perfectly. Help with stance, grip, trigger control and follow through. Avoid quick fixes. Focus on correct practice and having a positive mindset.

**Do competitions help develop skills?**

Yes – the majority are conducted at battalion level, with a chance to progress to higher formation contests. Those taking part in the Defence Operational Shooting Competition could be selected for the British Army team.

**What else can troops do to improve?**

Compete against individuals who are more skilled. This will push you to your full potential by identifying and addressing weaknesses and achieving marginal gains.



# phys



## PULL-UP



**SERGEANT Warren Robinson (RAPTC)** outlines three common mistakes that troops make with the upper body exercise...

Number of pull-ups troops are required to do in the soldier conditioning assessment

## 1 SWINGING

*Don't neglect good form just to get the job done. Swinging or using momentum to pull yourself up reduces the effectiveness of the exercise and risks an injury. Focus on controlled movements*

## 2 DODGY ELBOWS

*Don't flare them out – keep them close to the torso*

## 3 OVERDOING IT

*Mastering an exercise is a slow process so walk before you run. Think progression and don't hurt yourself doing loads every single day*



# AFTER-ACTION REVIEW

TICKING off six 100km+ ultramarathons in three months, Cpl Ryan Day (QRH) has been reflecting on the ups and downs of an energy-sapping fundraising challenge. Here, he shares three of the lessons learnt while pushing his body to the limit...

## PREP, PREP AND MORE PREP

What are you going to take? What is the weather forecast? Nutrition, sleep, water and electrolyte intake are among many factors that should be planned for the day, as well as the week beforehand. Going in ill-prepared, even with the micro things, can have a big impact.

## LISTEN TO WHAT YOUR BODY IS TELLING YOU

This is something I had to rely on – and still need to keep learning. Putting so much stress and kilometres on the body has a big impact. Picking up cues early will save you in the long run. Feeling rubbing on a toe? Stop and check those feet. Feeling slight discomfort? Then slow down – it might be hard, but it will save you in the long term.

## THE WEATHER

From scorching hot sun to the heavens opening, the weather over the past three months has gone from one extreme to another. Did I prep for that? Sort of. But your level of preparation can lead to great success or great disappointment. From planning what clothing to take to the pace you are running at, be smart.

Cpl Day was raising money for the Army Benevolent Fund. Donations can still be made at [justgiving.com/page/ryan-day-2](https://justgiving.com/page/ryan-day-2)

## FIGHTER MEETS HIS MATCH

ULTIMATE Fighting Championship star Tom Aspinall took time out from training for his latest bout to test himself against the army's fitness standards.

The 32-year-old was put through a combo of the soldier conditioning assessment and the role fitness test by former PTI turned civilian coach Farren Morgan (ex-Coldm Gds).

Among the exercises the duo completed were deadlifts, pull-ups, the bleep test and the repeated lift and carry.

Aspinall admitted he had been surprised by the intensity of the weighted walks despite his high level of fitness.

"Honestly, my body took a few days to recover, and I train six times a week so I'm used to the physical aspect," he said.

Commenting on the heavyweight fighter's performance, Morgan added: "He's a phenomenal athlete – he absolutely smashed it."



Soldier

asked Tom Aspinall...

**How do you think you'd cope in the army?**

"Not very well! Physically, I think I'd be fine and of course routine is very much part of my life, but what these guys do mentally every day is incredible. I don't think they get the credit they deserve."



# health

## DRIVEN TO DRINK

Could the job be making your other half binge?

**RESEARCH has shown that wives and girlfriends of service personnel are more likely to binge drink than their civvy counterparts.**

Based on diaries and interviews with 62 women in relationships with UK troops, the study by King's College London found that although they drank less frequently overall – and did not display high levels of misuse – they tended to consume more alcohol per session than non-military cohorts.

Frequent separations appeared to play a role, said the paper's authors. But they were unable to explain exactly why this should be the case and which other factors may contribute.

The first of its kind, the project aimed to shed light on an under-researched area, as well as reviewing support for spouses concerned

about their drinking.

While the research identified 50 programmes offering assistance, these either didn't take into account the specific demands of forces life or were geared towards helping manage a soldier's behaviour around alcohol.

The boffins recommended that schemes expand to include partners, as well as calling on the MoD to incorporate 'lifestyle' provisions into its family strategies.

Michelle Alston, chief executive of the Forces in Mind Trust, which funded the study, said it was important to understand how the pressures faced by service families can affect their health.

"Military partners make a significant contribution to our armed forces community and we must ensure that policies recognise this," she added.

## Service life and booze

*Among the trends identified in the study were...*

### Unplanned binges to manage stress,

loneliness, boredom and sadness, particularly during periods of separation.

### Influence of partner's habits

– some respondents said they drank more when their partner was home, particularly if their social circle contained boozers.

### Fragmented social networks

caused by frequent relocations. Some women said these reduced opportunities to drink, but others reported drinking more when reunited with friends or family.

### Saving up drinking for social occasions

due to responsibilities such as parenting, especially if partners were away.

### Drinking more at weekends

if the other half serves away from home during the week.

### Post-deployment drinking

– consuming more booze if their partner drank heavily after returning from a tour.

### Being on 'mum duty'

encouraged both abstinence and stress-based drinking.

Photo: Shutterstock





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# career

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**‘They will promote mentoring and other continuous professional development’**





# EXPERIENCE PAYS

New NCO Academy initiative to produce a trusted pool of advisers

**GIFTED commanders who assist the NCO Academy are to get their support officially acknowledged under a new scheme.**

The Champions recognition pathway, as it is known, commends leaders who resolutely push the organisation's work and ethos of lifelong learning.

Those taking part will find themselves responsible for promoting a raft of initiatives such as mentoring and other continuous professional development. And this will be rewarded with a unique ID in their email signature block, officially affiliating them to the Sandhurst-based outfit.

Crucially, it is hoped the endeavour – which is open to lance corporals through to warrant officers – will create a trusted pool of personnel with the experience to develop strong leadership skills across the army.

Academy Command Sergeant Major WO1 Matty Howarth (RE) reported that 180 champions are already on board and said the aim is to grow that number to 200 by the end of the year.

Each individual will hold one of five digital badges depending on their level of involvement – from the entry-level **emerging** category to **tactical**, **operational** and **strategic** status. The most senior assume the title of **advocate**.

Deeper involvement in the academy's work, such as delivering Tea and Toast Talks and hosting conference sessions, will bring greater recognition, according to WO1 Howarth.

## What's in it for me?

The senior leader hopes the scheme will develop the careers of the champions while opening up their collective experience to others.

He said: "The academy has come a long way since it was first

formed some two years ago – but we are not yet a household name, so to speak.

"At the moment we only have a small team at the organisation – so our aim is to build up a network that will give us a presence right across the service.

"Our champions will be identifiable by the digital badges – the first two of the five are live at the moment and, with the others coming online soon, those involved in the scheme will be able to progress through the different levels."

WO1 Howarth said the project had received backing from the top, with both the Deputy Chief of the General Staff, Lt Gen David Eastman, and new Army Sergeant Major WO1 John Miller briefed on the move.

WO1 Daz Abbott (RE, pictured below), who has been overseeing its roll-out, said champions were already providing a useful 'temperature check' for the chain of command.

They had given their views on a commanding officers' toolbox for dealing with inappropriate behaviour – created from the recent Op Teamwork events. And they would be ready to critically look at any other initiatives in future.

"This network will assist the academy and wider army while giving the individual champions the opportunity to develop themselves professionally," he said.

"It is important as we continue to expand the academy and its role."

Future perks for the champions could include an annual dinner night matched with an awards structure for the best of the best, WO1 Abbott added.

Those wanting to take part needed to complete paperwork at the academy's Defence Connect page, outlining their current skills and experience.

They should ideally make their involvement known to the chain of command too, he explained.



## Opportunity knocks

We asked academy champion **LCpl Elliott Taylor** why he wanted to get involved in the scheme

### How did you hear about this pathway?

Through the NCO Academy Defence Gateway channel.

### Why did you get involved?

Because it's a great step in the development of non-commissioned officers. In my view, the average educational and operating level of NCOs has increased dramatically during my career – this can be harnessed by the army for greater operational effectiveness.

### Anything you're hoping to achieve personally?

To expand my own leadership and organisational skills as well as helping to develop the next generation.

### Will this be popular with colleagues?

Yes – the NCO Academy is in its initial stages, yet it's already done a lot of work and delivered great results. As time goes on, more doors will be opened as we see the potential that NCOs can realise for themselves and the wider army.

**Name:** LCpl Elliott Taylor

**Cap badge:** AGC (SPS)

**Age:** 30

**Enlisted:** 2013 with 1st Battalion, Grenadier Guards before joining the Adjutant General's Corps in 2021

**Deployments:** Include Cyprus, Falkland Islands, Kenya and Norway



# cash

Pictures: Shutterstock



## SUMMER LEFT YOU SHORT?

What to do if your wallet took a hit over leave

**THE sun, sea and good vibes of summer are sadly in the rearview mirror, but your bank balance may still be feeling the pain.**

Not to worry – the folks at financial planning app RiseUp ([letsriseup.com](https://letsriseup.com)) have these tips for a September spending reset...

### Decide on your tactic

For some, the cold turkey method works – bringing expenses down as quickly as possible by cutting all non-essentials. Switch takeaways for home cooked meals, bring a thermos instead of buying coffee on the go and avoid impulse buys.

Or you could opt for a soft-landing approach – being more mindful about spending while not banning treats completely. Limit meals out to once a week or allow yourself a small budget for purchases.

### Don't beat yourself up

Rather than stewing over the mistakes you made, reframe your mindset to ask, what can I learn from this? Maybe you'll realise you need to be more careful next summer, or that those small, regular splurges add up to more than you thought. Take these lessons on board for the future.



### Practical steps to get the ball rolling:

**Take a look at where your money went over the summer.** Identifying any patterns will help you see where you can cut back.

**Set a budget.** Whether it's a strict one or more flexible, having guidelines in place will make it easier to stay on track.

**Prioritise needs over wants.** not by cutting out all fun, but by making sure essentials are covered before luxuries.

**Automate your savings.** Set up a direct debit to your savings account as soon as you get paid – this builds a financial cushion without having to think about it.

**Lean into free or low-cost activities.** From hiking to free museum days, look for ways to have fun without spending big.

## TAX-FREE TREAT

**TROOPS who leave the British Army after 12 years are now set to receive a tax-free lump sum of £14,059.**

The resettlement grant, designed to assist regular personnel with the

transition to civilian life, is linked to armed forces pensionable pay and has increased by around £1,500 in the last two years.

To receive the money you must have accumulated 12 years of qualifying

service and not be eligible for the early departure payment, ill-health pension or immediate pension.

The cash is paid automatically when you complete Armed Forces Pension Scheme form one on JPA upon leaving.



# DECODING YOUR PAYSリップ

IT'S easy to ignore your monthly pay statement as long as everything looks roughly in order, but getting your head around the details can help you spot errors, plan finances and understand any additional benefits you might be entitled to.

As well as the total payments, deductions and all-important net pay boxes along the top, scrutinise the following sections to make sure the numbers stack up.

## The tax code box

Your code could change if you also have a private income, or you've been posted to Scotland, for example, where the codes start with an "S". New recruits and rejoiners may also find themselves placed on an emergency tax code. Depending on when in the month you enlisted it could take a few weeks for HMRC to switch you to a standard code.

**Check** the code is correct and inform HMRC if you think there has been an error. Your unit admin team will not be able to help with this.

## Spotted a mistake?

Let your regimental admin office know in the first instance. If you've been overpaid it's important not to keep quiet as the system will likely recoup it further down the line. These are usually charged at a rate of four days' salary until cleared, suspended for two months so that you have enough notice.

You also have the option of paying the amount off more quickly, or, if you believe you've been unfairly penalised, you can submit an objection to the debt management team.

Total Payments 0000.00		Total Deductions 0000.00		Net Pay 0000.00	
<div> <div>JPA E017 (Online)</div> <div>Statement of Salary and Deductions (Reproduced through MyPay)</div> <div>May 2025</div> </div>					
Name	Paid Rank	Organisation / Unit	Period	Pay Date	Page
Joe Blogg	Capt	XXXXXXXXXXXX	May 2025	31/05/25	1 of 1
NI Num.	Emp Num.	Spine / Level of Max Available		Payroll Type	
XXXXXXXXXX	0000 0000	Capt / Level 15		XXXXXXXXXX	
Tax Basis		Tax Code: 0000X	NI Category: X	Uniform Tax Relief: 00.00	
Balances Current Period		Value	Balances Current Tax Year		Value
Gross Pay YTD		0000.00	Gross Pay YTD		0000.00
Noble Pay YTD		000.00	Noble Pay YTD		0000.00
Taxable Pay YTD		000.00	Taxable Pay YTD		0000.00
Split Amount		Pay Method	Exchange Rate	Sort Code	Acc Num
000.00		Int.	1.9580 EUR	00-00-00	0000000000000000
0000.00		BACS	1.0000 GBP		
Total Payments		0000.00	Total Deductions	0000.00	Net Pay
Pay and Allowances		Value	Charges and Deductions		Value
Basic Pay		0000.00	PAYE		0000.00
			Accm Ch (00)		000.00
			CLOCT Qtr		000.00
			Garage Rent		00.00
			SFA Furniture Charge		00.00
			Sports Lottery		000.00
			Service Days Pay Giving		00.00
			Postgraduate Loan		000.00
			NI A		000.00
Pay Information		Other Balances		Value	
CLOCT Family Accn Charge: Type 0 Accn		NI Employer YTD		0000.00	
Garage Charge: Standard Garage		Uniform Tax Relief YTD		-00.00	
(DH+1 Upper / Remote)		LSA (Shown in Days)		0000.00	
Basic Pay: Annual Salary 00000					
00.0% Amount 0000.000 SSPP End Date 00-Month-00 (BD 00-Month-00)					
Family Accn Charge: Type 0 Rental Band X Part-Furnished					

## 'Pay information'

This column in the bottom left corner details how your pay is made up, including basic salary, trade supplement (for soldiers) and the X-factor (14.5%), plus any allowances and additional claims such as wrap-around childcare. It also tells you the date of your next incremental pay increase according to your current rank.

**Check** all of the entries line up with what you expect, for example, track the number of days you qualify for extras such as longer separation allowance and confirm the amounts match up. These may be more or less than you anticipate, depending on when in the month a tasking started. Speak to your HR staff if you're unsure.

## 'Charges and deductions'

This box on the right-hand side shows your outgoings, such as accommodation costs, contribution in lieu of council tax (Cilot), forces help-to-buy repayments and pay-as-you earn amount. It's also where repayments for advances of salary would be listed.

**Check** you're not paying anything you shouldn't be – for example, an advance that you have already paid back. Make sure the accommodation charge is correct, especially if you've recently moved – the grading is listed under 'pay information'.

# tech

## BIRD BRAINS

Scientists create stealthy drones using taxidermy

**FOR those of you wondering where drone technology might go next, here's a glimpse into one possible future.**

Boffins at the New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology in America have started building drones that fly, move, and look exactly like birds – by constructing them from actual dead birds.

Thanks to electronic motorised parts and lightweight rods fitted inside the ethically sourced corpses, the wings mimick natural flapping actions and sounds with eery precision, making them appear convincingly real when airborne.

Some models have cameras installed in the chest cavity, others are fitted with shape-memory alloy claws that can grip a branch, while a duck has a convincing paddling action thanks to a small electric drive powering its prosthetic webbed feet.

Currently, the devices the scientists have created are not quite as agile as the real thing when flying.

Birds use complex actions to manipulate and contort the profile and direction of their wings to perform sharp aerial manoeuvres, while these drones can only flap their wings up and down to stay in the air – at the moment that is.

Mostafa Hassanalain, Associate Professor at the institute's department of mechanical engineering, told *Soldier* the projects were progressing well and more development work is in the pipeline.

"We have been creating these drones for civil applications, including environmental monitoring, search and rescue in hazardous areas, and other research-driven initiatives," he added.

Real feathers give these devices enhanced stealth capabilities because they can take off and fly without making the typical buzzing or humming sound associated with drones.

The potential they have for quietly sneaking up on targets without alerting the enemy is all too obvious. With that in mind, it's surely only a matter of time before people in green come knocking at the door.



Pictures: New Mexico Tech



# veterans

## MULTI-MARATHON MEN

**A SUPER-FIT veteran duo have been readying their bodies and minds for a punishing charity challenge in aid of serving and ex-military personnel in need.**

Stafford residents Olly Waters – who served in the REME – and former Para Conor McAdams are joining forces to take part in next April's Manchester Marathon before running all the way to the capital for the London event.

The test will see them averaging 43 miles every day before – all being well – they end the week-long endeavour along The Mall.

The pair – who served as PTIs during eight-year army careers – are hoping to raise £5,000 for SSAFA, going towards projects for the armed forces family.

And with neither team member ever having run a marathon before, the duo – who are posting updates on the

feat on their Endurance Amateurs Instagram account – admit their challenge will be a baptism of fire.

But Waters said he was spurred on after seeing the charity's work. The 32-year-old dad-of-two, who trains six times a week, added: "It is personal and I want my daughters to see,

with the right mindset, you can achieve anything."

McAdams, 33, shared the sentiment. The former P Company instructor said: "We were chatting about how cool it would be to do the London and Manchester Marathons, then Olly said 'why don't we just run between them?'

"It was a half-joke but we realised that it could work," he added. "And here we are."

Follow the duo via **@enduranceamateurs** on Instagram and give your support.



Picture: Ssafa

**Conor McAdams (left) and Olly Waters**

## GARDEN SANCTUARY

**VETERANS and reservists in Moray have a green space they can visit to unwind thanks to an initiative by local personnel.**

Capt Scott Shaw, of 7th Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Scotland, spearheaded an allotment project at the unit's barracks in Elgin, transforming a piece of wasteland into vegetable beds and an orchard.

Originally thought up as part of 1st (UK) Division's Global Charge environmental scheme, the former regular said he wanted to establish something long term that would also enhance the military community's wellbeing.

"My mission is to create a place where our reservists and veterans can feel at home and find peace," he explained.

"Our camaraderie is invaluable and creating a space where we can reconnect and reflect would mean a lot to many."



## "NO MORE STOLEN VALOUR"

**A GROWING lobby of former service personnel is calling for a new law aimed at punishing fantasists who falsely claim to be veterans and wear medals.**

They claim that so-called 'stolen valour' offences should be made criminal matters and that perpetrators should be locked up or slapped with community service.

Former Royal Navy radio operator Karen Stevenson has been the latest vet to act, launching an online petition and calling on MPs to draft a new law.

Her demands echo similar calls from South Atlantic Medal Association chairman and ex-Para Tom Herring and others who have now said enough is enough.

Stevenson, who served on aircraft carrier HMS Invincible during the wars in former Yugoslavia of the 1990s, said fantasists were disrespectful to real veterans.

She told *Soldier*: "Lying about military service and falsely wearing uniforms or medals is a huge insult to those in the armed forces community."

"I come from a military family. Like me, my father saw service and went to sea so I feel strongly about this issue."

"Nobody should be able to claim service or wear medals they have not earned – and the worst offenders should face prison or a community penalty."

The petition had nearly 2,000 signatures as this issue went to press.

If it reaches 10,000 by the time it closes at the end of September, the government will respond.

Stevenson – who was in uniform for six years until 1995 – said she had decided to take action after the sacking of Northamptonshire Police chief constable Nick Adderley.

A disciplinary hearing last year was told that the former top cop had made false claims about his Royal Navy service and worn a South Atlantic Medal to which he was not entitled.

Search **'stolen valour petition, Karen Stevenson'** for more info.



Picture: Mike Weston

# THERE'S A STORM





# COMING...

Armoured brigade exercise shows tactics, procedures and kit are changing fast to meet future threats >>









**‘This is the biggest thing we are doing to generate a better understanding of the foe we might face’**

**I**N KEEPING with the strong breeze of innovation that’s currently running through the service, Exercise Iron Storm on Salisbury Plain provided a perfect platform for The Queen’s Royal Hussars (QRH) Battlegroup to assess an array of new tactics, techniques and kit, all conducted with a certain potential foe that lies to the east in mind.

The headline objective of the package – the largest armoured exercise the British Army has staged in recent years – was to sign off the QRH for deployment as part of the service’s lead armoured brigade, while 3rd Armoured Close Support Battalion, REME and 1 Medical Regiment were to be validated at battlegroup level.

With around 3,000 people and 35 sub-units deployed, including two squadrons of Challenger 2 main battle tanks, this was a demanding process involving a build-up through the Land Training System’s Cyclone stage at sub-unit level before moving on to the brigade environment and Iron Storm.

Behind the scenes, however, a fascinating sub-plot developed as planners and ground personnel took advantage of this major exercise to conduct a series of trials aimed at increasing the battlegroup’s fighting power (see page 36).

The main barometer of success was performance measured against a highly organised and well-equipped Task Force Hannibal, led by 5th Battalion, The Rifles equipped with Warriors and near-surface effectors while employing Russian ground force tactics based on what has been seen in Ukraine.

“We used this exercise to maximise our understanding of what and how we need to modernise,” Brig Adam Foden, commander of 20th Armoured Brigade, told *Soldier*.

“We did that through a series of experiments covering a range of things we know armoured brigades need to be better at doing than they currently are.

“While we are beginning to field some of the army’s newest equipment, in other areas we recognise there are things we are currently not optimised to do – for example near-surface effectors or the proliferation of fires at range.

“Ukraine and other conflicts are demonstrating we need to rebuild and re-imagine what the close fight is and Iron Storm was the first chance we’ve had to conduct physical runouts of these ideas.

“It’s part of a concerted effort, working with partners such as the Land Warfare Centre and Defence Science and Technology Laboratory, to assess what armoured warfare might involve in the future.”

One of the main concepts piloted was an “armoured brigade in a box”, which exercised

the full formation through a blend of real life and simulated domains.

“We came here and trialled some of that in live and virtual arenas to see what it told us and then went back and wargamed it again,” added Brig Foden.

“Crucial to the whole activity was having a proper understanding of the enemy and one of our experiments here is called Project Zimmer, which is instilling a tactical understanding of our adversary right down to the very lowest level inside all of our organisations and units.

“We have driven all our tactics not just to make them generically good but to counter our potential adversary, Russia. For me this is the biggest thing we are doing to generate a better understanding of the foe we might have to face.”

## On the ground

For the troops out in the field the experimentation meant an occasional stop, pause and repeat of a mission with a reorganisation and change in approach the second time around.

“In one scenario we looked at how we could bolt in anti-tank weapons and mortars into an armoured battlegroup – what impact did it have and could we fight differently?,” explained Maj Rory Williams (R Yorks), an exercise planning officer in the brigade’s headquarters.

“We used the data we collected to analyse whether lethality was enhanced or not while we also compared some of the data collected from Batus over the last 20 years or so.

“In the end this will help us rewrite doctrine with some scientific evidence behind it.

“We also started looking at remote autonomous systems which give us greater reach,” he continued.

“We have used the Eagle UAS for the first time, which meant we could call for fires from a medium-weight platform in a way that we weren’t able to do before.

“We’re heading in the right direction but there’s loads more work to do in this area and we recognise that.”

The focus on drones and the near surface threat was a major change for many participants, partly because it was the first properly resourced brigade-level exercise staged for some time and partly because of the arrival of new kit, such as Ajax.

Eight of the platforms, including an Ares and one Argus engineering variant, were deployed during the package.

“This is our first time out in the new vehicle and as a result we’ve been learning how to work with small UAS for the first time,” said Bdr Jacob Dawson (RHA), 2iC for a fire support team attached to the QRH.

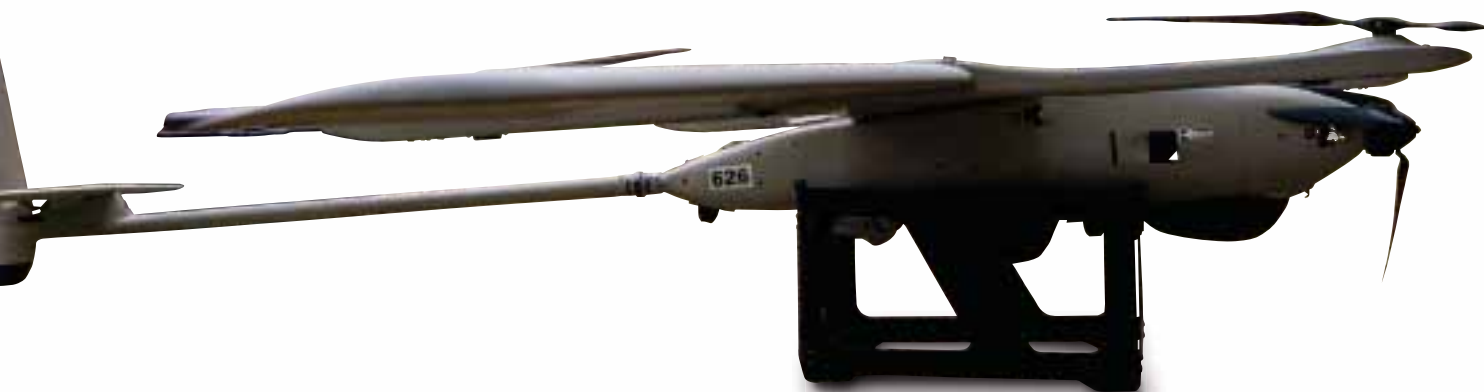
“Last night the call sign we’ve been >>





## ON TRIAL WITH 20<sup>TH</sup> ARMoured BRIGADE

1. **ISTAR** – fielding of the Eagle medium weight UAS (below).
2. **Command and control** – using AI to gain decision advantage in battlegroup planning.
3. **Fires** – integration of 81mm mortar and new sensors to enable armoured battlegroup recce strike.
4. **Vehicles** – experiments with the Ares platform in infantry roles.
5. **Close combat armoured cavalry** – enhancing the find and counter-find battle through the integration of Ajax (right) into the advance guard.
6. **Close combat armoured** – new combined arms groupings. Placing effectors and sensors into single sub-units to increase independence and potency.
7. **Protection** – breaching with an experimental remote controlled armoured asset.
8. **Protection** – integrating air defence and electronic warfare sensors into armoured battlegroups.
9. **Sustain** – networked combat service support, with enhanced electronic comms and more flexible forward repair teams.





» working with put up drones to spot the enemy, sent over the coordinates to us and we typed up the mission, sent it digitally to the command post and then it was quickly relayed to the guns without any use of voice to avoid detection.

"We couldn't do that when we had Warrior, and with Ajax we also have acoustic and infra-red sensors, hunter-killer sights and a really sensitive chemical detection system. If we went back to Warrior now it would feel like we had a blindfold and ear coverings on."

## Drone threat

Counter drone measures were also a major priority thanks to Task Force Hannibal operating as a contemporary Russian force.

"We knew a UAS threat was out there so the preparations for that, such as dispersion and camouflage, were taken very seriously and occupied a lot more of our time than previously," noted Maj Neil Rudd (QRH).

"As a battlegroup 2iC and late-entry officer I've not been out on an exercise of this size for about ten years.

"Getting back in the field and going through low-level skills and drills, digging holes, putting camouflage up and administering ourselves is invaluable – it can't be simulated in a classroom.

"One major change from the past is that we have two drone teams out with us.

"We have been attaching them wherever we feel is best suited at the time, so they were often forward with our recce troop because we wanted to get eyes on the enemy as soon as they came into our area.

"We linked them with our gun battery so we can prosecute early and that is something we have been experimenting with.

"They are not standard assets of our battlegroup as it stands – we repurposed a number of personnel from our D Squadron and put them out in Bulldogs.

"Thankfully, we have far more resources here than for our low-level squadron exercises and we are really appreciative of that. It's not often we get to do things in a full battlegroup context where we are supported by guns, anti-air or engineers building our obstacles and clearing the enemy's."

## Happy sappers

Iron Storm provided an invaluable opportunity to bed in new engineers as well as test fresh techniques and procedures that have been learned from Ukraine.

"This was the first armoured exercise our guys have done since they trained for Cabrit two and a half years ago and we also have lots of faces straight out of phase two training," said Capt William Evans (RE), a battlegroup engineer with 22 Engineer Regiment's 3 Armoured Engineer Squadron.

"It's been a busy and stressful period, with all our main clearance and bridging assets – Trojan, Terrier and Titan – out at the same time," he continued.

"We had an Argus out there as well and we're still learning how to fight that. It's been with the Household Cavalry to reach initial operating capability but this is its first time with an armoured engineer squadron.

"We're getting used to its size and weight compared with the CVRT but its sights are superb and having thermal imaging and laser distance finders is a step change for us.

"It also has impressive protection for the crew, a remote weapon system on top as well as a rack for NLAWs in the back.

"All our engineers are now being trained to use those – when we attacked recce screens in the past we had GPMGs coming up against BRDMs (Soviet-era armoured reconnaissance vehicles) but now the regiment has its own NLAW and instructors, our lethality has stepped up significantly."

That fighting power will be sorely needed on the battlefields of the future – as the war in Ukraine continues to starkly demonstrate.

"We've been working out how to adjust our TTPs to overcome defences such as minefields and obstacles while dealing with persistent drone threats," added Capt Evans.

"During Iron Storm we had a Royal Marine detachment in BV206 vehicles armed with »





## Exercise Iron Storm

» shoulder launched anti-air rockets that can take out UAS, such as Russia's Orlan 10, which could attack us at range."

Being able to operate freely to clear mines is more vital than ever. Reports from Ukraine say the Russians are now burying mines much deeper and double stacking or using devices with different fuses so some are triggered by a specific resonance of vehicle or presence of heavy metal, while others are programmed to spring up and then attack from height.

Platforms like Trojan, Titan and Terrier that can negate these threats have become high-

value targets as a result, and the enemy will know where these vehicles are likely to be deployed in the area of operations.

"There are so many obstacles and minefields we have to prioritise which ones we try to breach because every time we do it we risk the asset," explained Capt Evans.

"During this exercise we cleared a main defensive position which had all sorts of stuff lying on it and by trying out some new tactics our teams – and platforms – survived, which is a key objective.

"We're assessing the use of remote-controlled obstacle and mine clearance

equipment too – why would you risk personnel in that role if you could do it with an unmanned ground vehicle?"

Why indeed. Which just goes to show what a valuable test bed Exercise Iron Storm has been for 20th Armoured Brigade.

The ability to experiment with new techniques, tactics, procedures and equipment against a relevant and formidable opposition has provided reams of valuable data – and has undoubtedly accelerated the development of this already highly potent warfighting formation into a force that should be feared by anyone. <<



## AJAX ON TRACK

Despite having initial reservations, **Cpl Paul Bell (QRH)** says he now sees the value of the army's vital new platform

“ I AM a Challie 2 instructor, and while we were out on Op Cabrit in Estonia my OC called me in and said 'do you want to convert to Ajax?' to which I replied 'no', after what I'd heard. Then he said 'well, the army says yes'.

However, even though I was reluctant at first, now that Ajax is over its teething issues and I've been able to learn even more about its capabilities on this exercise, I have to admit it's a fantastic vehicle.

It feels very fast, has six forward and six reverse gears and can pivot easily.

Everything we can do with it aids being able to find the enemy far earlier than we could with Warrior.

The sights are fantastic. It has the local situational awareness system too, which works with camera pods in each corner and back door, giving the crew the ability to see

360 degrees.

The main sight has four levels of zoom and our guys have been spotting even individual soldiers at great distances.

For me and fellow instructors the biggest change has been going from Challenger 2, which is almost like an analogue clock, to a fully digitised asset with all systems integrated.

We can take audio and video recordings of a target, then ping it with a laser to give us a bang-on ten-figure grid bearing, stack all that together and send it via a data link to the gunners who know exactly what the target is and set an appropriate fire mission.

On Iron Storm we've been engaging anti-tank screens from long range and hitting them before they even knew we were in the area, allowing us to push forward quicker.

The 40mm cannon has dart and high

explosive ammo and we are getting programmable air burst ammunition that can be used in a variety of tasks – to help clear trenches, for example, by setting the ordnance to explode just above ground.

The turret is also a huge upgrade over Warrior. It has a stabilised gun, so you can fire on the move, and electric turret traverse, which some Warriors have but many don't.

One downside of Ajax is that living in the turret could be easier as so much space is taken up by computers, processors and screens so there's not much room for personal kit.

It all has to be stored down in the hull. And if you want to make a brew you've got to stop, climb out and go round the back, which isn't ideal.

But one great thing for the future is that Challie 3 will have the same architecture and sights as Ajax so they will be able to talk to each other. At the moment Ajax is a bit lonely. This means its crews will be able to swap data with a Challie and the shot can be taken with its 120mm gun if that's the preferred option. ”



# Sling is an **operationally proven 120mm mortar system** which delivers **enhanced lethality, deployability, and survivability** for light forces

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# FROM THE BOTTOM UP

The army's use of assault courses is dwindling, according to senior soldiers. Should they be more routine? Many say yes, but there are obstacles... and change may need to start with lower ranks









## ‘Young people joining the army today still expect to be doing this sort of thing’

Report: Sarah Goldthorpe Pictures: Soldier archive

**T**O CIVVIES, they are the definition of army life and the military mindset.

Obstacle courses – or assault courses, to give them the military name – require stamina, teamwork and the ability to face your fears head-on.

But glance around the defence estate and you may find this training tool surprisingly absent in 2025.

And while all five of the service’s initial training establishments have courses that they regularly deploy, the picture gets a little muddier beyond that.

Once recruits arrive at trade training – generally the only other time they’re guaranteed to encounter the assault course – they are currently more likely to find the facility marked ‘out of bounds’ and awaiting maintenance than they are functioning.

And at the time of going to press, one quarter of the 28 courses across army training areas were not bookable, according to the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO).

Human performance expert Capt Matt Connelly (RAPTC, shown left) says the situation needs to change.

At the forefront of the army’s mission to increase lethality – in his case by overseeing dismounted close combat survivability training – the late-entry officer says he and his colleagues have been saddened to see the demise of this kind of activity over the last two decades.

“If you asked me for the one form of training that gives you the best bang for your buck, I would say assault courses every time,” he tells *Soldier*.

“It’s the stuff that it trains – balance, coordination, speed and agility. But also aggression and determination.

“When you need to get people over a 12ft wall, that requires aggression. You need to attack your objective and work as a team to do it.

“But you can do an assault course with just two people and they don’t require a lot of space to build.”

### Decay

The fitness expert continues: “As assault courses have been lost over the years, nothing has replaced them.

“So a lot of the OCs today have never known things to be any other way.

“But when I was younger we did

assault courses all the time, tabbed all the time, ran all the time.

“The reality is that young people joining the army today still expect to be doing this sort of thing.

“You go into basic training and get exposed to it quite a bit, but it stops soon afterwards.

“Then you lose that skill of being able to assault an obstacle altogether.”

In part, the serviceman blames a vicious circle of dilapidated courses, units therefore not having the option to train on them, but a resulting drop in demand meaning repair becomes deprioritised by the DIO and others responsible for their maintenance.

However, the officer also says the army’s shift in mindset around physical training – namely a more clinical approach to exercise with focus on reps, gym time and data above getting messy outside – may also have resulted in a loss of interest from some units.

“In a gym you are not getting wet or cold,” he adds.

“Being a soldier is about getting down and dirty. It’s important troops hone these green battlefield skills and experience on PT what they are going to experience on ops.

“The assault course is exactly the kind of training we need to bring back at a time of wartime readiness – doing things that soldiers actually do.”

### Real life

Their use might go way back in time, but Capt Connelly says assault courses could not be more relevant to the modern battlefield and the conditions Ukrainian soldiers are experiencing on the front line today.

“Let’s say you come under contact in battle,” the officer adds. “The first thing you need to do is get under cover. But to do that you must move your body, perhaps with tree roots underfoot and with your stress heightened and blood pumping.

“If your coordination and balance isn’t there in that situation, and you stumble or don’t get down quick enough, it could cost you your life.”

Other military training might take care of some green skills, but it is these balance and coordination aspects of assault courses the officer believes are unique because they are largely missing from other types of phys.

### Sporting chance

If commanders want to encourage a greater take-up of assault courses, however, there may be other obstacles to overcome besides dilapidated equipment.

But as any leader knows, if you want to drum up enthusiasm for just about anything among soldiers, a sure-fire way to do that is with some healthy competition.

Obstacle course racing (OCR) may

»



» have quite a following across defence, but Army Command Standing Order 1209 states that it must not be conducted as an 'authorised activity'.

In other words, soldiers cannot do this while on duty and it is not recognised as an official army sport.

However, OCR athlete Sgt Reece Sanders (REME) – who got into the pursuit four years ago after getting sick with Covid – hopes there could be change on the horizon.

"I lost a lot of weight and physical fitness," the 30-year-old senior NCO recalls.

"When I got back to normal unit PT after rehab, one of my friends had just done one of the Spartan races and I decided that kind of thing would be a good way to gauge my fitness level.

"I gave a 5km race a go to see how I went, and by the time I'd finished I was looking to book the next.

"I liked the competitive element of OCR, but also the fact you are doing it with a group of likeminded people.

"When you cross the obstacles you have that 'exercise head' on – you're in a hole, hating life but actually you want to do it all again afterwards.

"Whether it's monkey bars or cargo nets, when people think of the army this is the stuff they have in their head."

## Good recruiter?

It is a fact that isn't lost on the army's recruitment team, who attended one of the renowned Spartan obstacle course racing events at Belvoir Castle, Grantham in July at the request of the enthusiastic service personnel taking part off duty.

When *Soldier* spoke to these troops, they said they were convinced more army participation in these civilian fitness events could open the doors to more youngsters signing up to serve their country.

Sgt Sanders agrees.

"It's a shame it isn't permitted," he continues, "because the races are very safe.

"I have been doing OCR for four years and – touch wood – have not had any injuries in that time. And I do anywhere between 20 and 40 races per year.

"Even if you do get injured, every obstacle has a paramedic on hand."

Determined that OCR should receive proper sporting status, the Germany-based soldier reveals that British Obstacle Sports – the national governing body for the sport – has applied to Sport England for the discipline to be recognised.

The process for approval will be slow, perhaps a couple of years, but if successful he hopes it could pave the way for this to become an official army sport.

But what would the wider service gain from taking on a new sporting discipline,

along with all the associated risk, in a sea of many others?

"More resilient and adaptable soldiers," Sgt Sanders replies.

"In OCR you get to throw yourself out of your comfort zone and use leadership skills too – especially when you see others struggling with obstacles.

"When I did the Spartan World Championships in Greece last year, there were several people having difficulties – and it just flicked a switch in me where I thought 'I can help someone here.'"

## Risk and reward

It is hardly a secret, however, that the army could scant afford to make any changes that might result in more armed forces compensation scheme payouts.

But like many, Capt Connelly believes

risk-averse attitudes towards activity which supports green training need to be challenged if future targets relating to lethality are to be met.

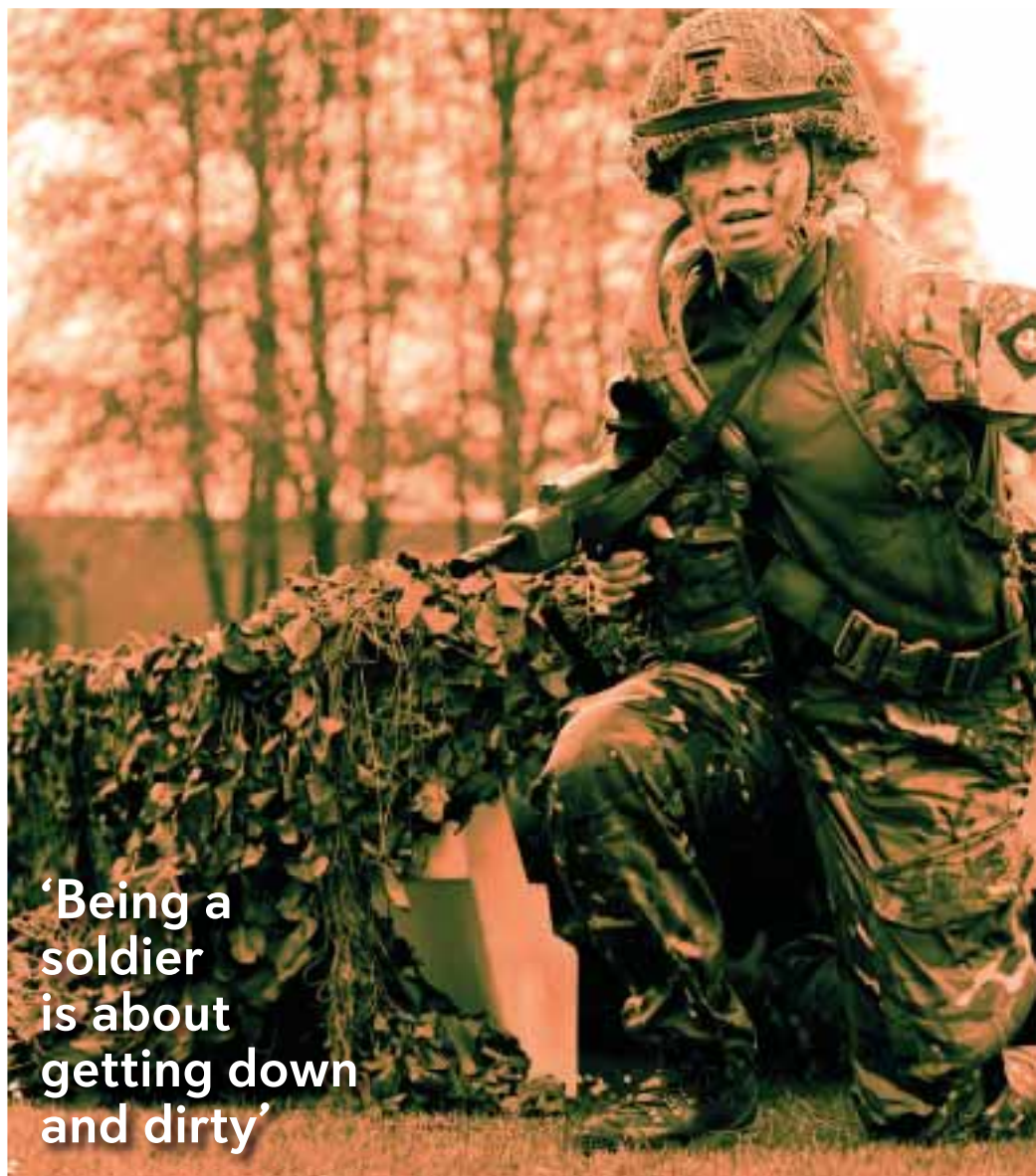
"In risk management there is a term called ALARP," he adds. "People often think that stands for 'as low as reasonably possible' but actually it's 'as low as reasonably practicable'.

"You can always make risk lower and lower – but eventually that will stop being valuable training."

## Soldiers unite

As decision-makers ponder the future of the sporting side of assault courses, what can personnel do to try and ramp up the use of facilities for phys and other training?

"I think like most things, this needs to be driven from the bottom up," Capt Connelly says. "Soldiers join the army to do assault



'Being a soldier is about getting down and dirty'



courses. When you go to recruitment shows you see that cargo net, then you take part in basic and initial trade training... but once you're in the field army, where arguably this kind of thing is needed even more, you just don't see them now; they don't get utilised.

"We can be, and should be, better at this. Assault courses need to be seen as a steadfast training mechanism.

"There are people contracted to repair them, but it's often not prioritised.

"So if we start to see a rise in requests to use assault courses, when they are out of use that will get highlighted to the right people quicker. If OCR then gets approved as an official sport, that could create even more interest in rejuvenating their use as a fundamental PT medium.

"They really do create such a positive impression of military life." <<



## ASSAULT ON THE SENSES

Well-known obstacle courses on the British Army estate...



### TRIPLE CROWN

Set up for the Adjutant General's Corps annual challenge which brings together teams from across the cap badge and is designed to test endurance, teamwork and tactical proficiency



### THE TRAINASIUM

An important part of P Company training at ITC Catterick, this 60ft beast sees troops undertake the notorious 'illusion jump' and practise following orders at height



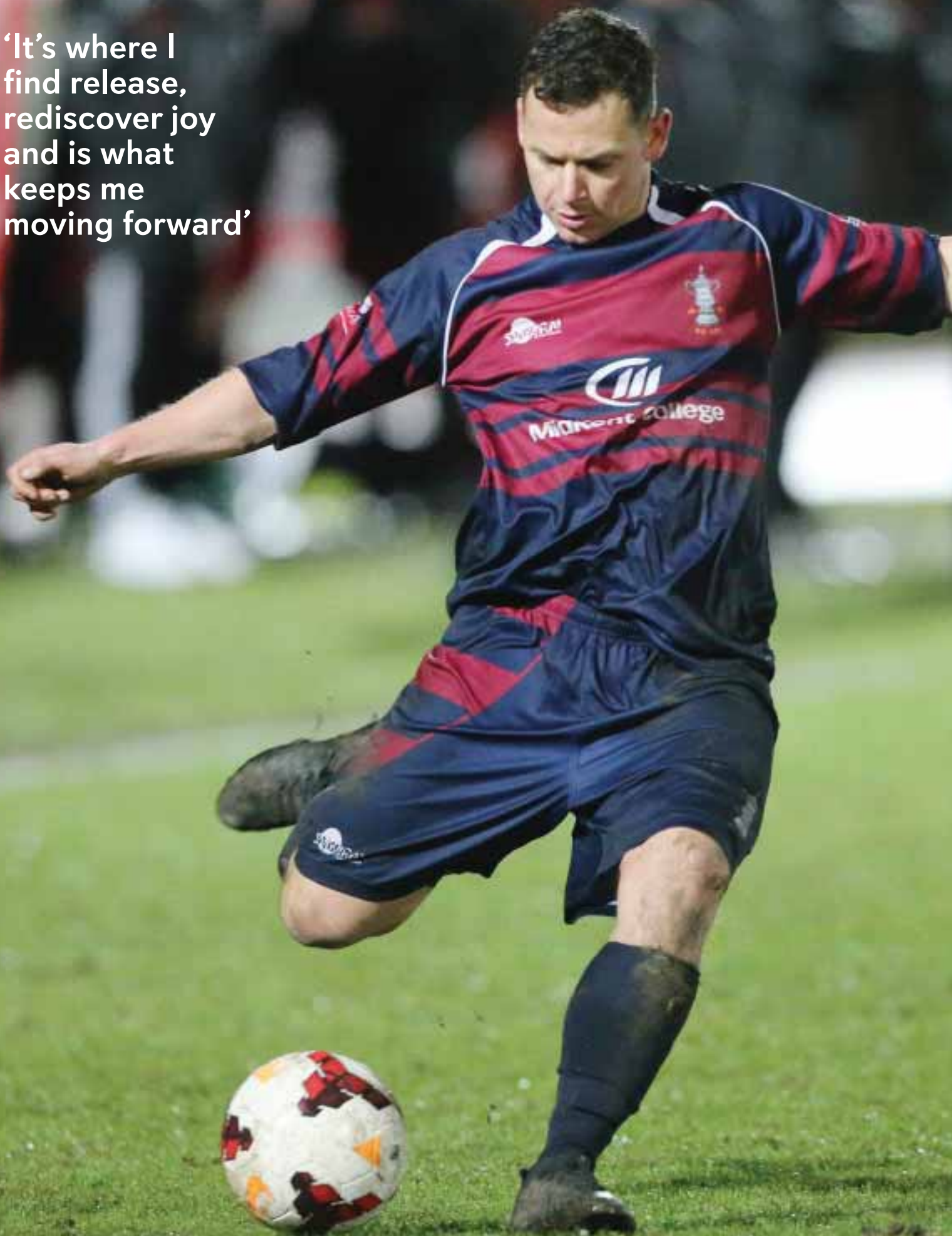
### FOX LINES

The set-up at the home of the Royal Army Physical Training Corps in Aldershot will be a familiar sight to most PTIs and anyone else who has undertaken training courses at the establishment

### What's your most memorable assault course?

Share your experience via [news@soldiermagazine.co.uk](mailto:news@soldiermagazine.co.uk)

'It's where I  
find release,  
rediscover joy  
and is what  
keeps me  
moving forward'





# 'Find your escape and hold on to it'

How the beautiful game helped this soldier navigate life's ups and downs

**A** **S** HE approaches the end of a 24-year military career, and with the new season now firmly under way, former army footballer WO2 Gerwyn Griffiths (RE) reflects on what the sport means to him.

A five-time winner of the Woolwich Cup with his corps team and later a coach for the army under-23s and UK Armed Forces, among others, the 40-year-old believes the game's benefits stretch way beyond 90 minutes on the pitch.

Here, he tells *Soldier* why...

“There's something special about being surrounded by like-minded people, whether playing, coaching or watching.

Throughout my life, football has been my constant – more than just a game, it has been a bond that connects teammates, coaching staff,

friends and people beyond the pitch.

The banter is unmatched. It only takes one teammate walking in with a dodgy haircut, a questionable outfit, or their club suffering a bad result and the one-liners start flying.

The camaraderie and shared passion make it more than just a match; it's a community that supports you, lifts you up, and carries you through tough times.

Life can be unbearably cruel. In recent years, I've lost family members, including my father, who battled COPD, and my brother-in-law, who fought cancer.

I've also had to endure the loss of my grandmother, close uncles and dear friends, while both my mother and sister faced their own battles with cancer, and my brother suffered serious health scares.

On top of that, I went through a divorce after more than 20 years of marriage – a difficult time not just for me, but for our two teenage children.

This year brought another crushing blow >>



Report: Richard Long Pictures: Graeme Main



Left: **Trophy success with son Ryan**; Above: **Coaching the UK Armed Forces**; Right, from near: **Family time watching Wales**; **Lifting the Woolwich Cup as skipper of the Royal Engineers in 2015**; **Representing the army against an FA legends team in 2014**

» – my partner, Sophie, has been diagnosed with stage four brain cancer. It's an incredibly challenging time and overwhelming in so many ways.

Yet, through it all, football has been my escape. It's where I find release, where I rediscover joy and what keeps me moving forward.

### A bond like no other

One of the greatest pleasures it has given me is the bond I share with my son, Ryan.

Playing together for Tidworth Town, we've had two memorable seasons, winning nine trophies, both scoring goals, assisting each other and celebrating wins – it's been the highlight of my football journey.

But it's not just about the minutes on the pitch. It's the pre-match chats, the post-game beers, discussing fixtures elsewhere and the moments we share with friends that make it so special.

Coaching Ryan and seeing him grow on

the pitch has been incredibly rewarding, but watching my daughter, Maisie, play when she was younger was just as fulfilling.

Seeing her love for the game and witnessing her develop – not just as a player but as a more confident young girl – was another example of why this sport is so special to me.

It connects generations. Whether I'm watching the kids play, coaching them, or sitting together as a family in the stands supporting Wales, these are the moments I've cherished most.

### Universal impact

During a deployment to Africa, I arranged a visit to a local orphanage with a couple of close friends to coach the children.

What started as a simple session turned into something far greater.

Their excitement was contagious – every goal was celebrated like a trophy; every pass met with cheers.

The joy and gratitude they showed in return was overwhelming. It was a powerful reminder that football is a universal language of hope, connection and pure happiness.

That day, we set out to give them something – but in the end, they gave us so much more.

### Giving back

Coaching at the Wiltshire Regional Talent Centre and working with various academy clubs has been a huge privilege.

Witnessing young players flourish – gaining confidence, honing their skills and chasing their dreams is one of my greatest rewards.

The most fulfilling part is helping shape good people, not just good footballers.

While the game has evolved in many ways, its essence remains unchanged.

The pure joy on a child's face when they have a ball at their feet, the exhilaration of pulling off a nutmeg, or the pride in a





**‘Witnessing young players flourish is one of my greatest rewards’**



moment of magic they'll remember for weeks – that feeling is timeless.

Growing up in a deprived area of mid-Wales, football was more than just a game to us even back then; it was an escape, a passion, and the foundation of lifelong friendships.

More than 30 years later, many of my old teammates are still among my closest friends. Our connection started with football, but it became something much deeper.

### **Vase victory**

Coaching at my local non-league club last season has also brought great satisfaction, and nothing has summed up the game's power to unite and inspire more than Andover New Street's run in the FA Vase.

A small club in Hampshire that has never featured past the second round of non-league's prestigious cup competition, we found our way to the semi-finals.

A standout moment was army striker Cpl

Greg Peel (REME) equalising in the 94th minute, before winning a penalty shootout to progress to the quarter finals.

Moments like this remind me why football means so much to so many. It creates unforgettable experiences with people I appreciate and respect.

### **Embracing a new mission**

As my time in the military nears its end, I look back with immense pride at completing a full 24-year career. Meeting incredible people and serving my country has been a phenomenal honour.

Representing the British Army and UK Armed Forces teams as a player and coach against international military sides has been amazing.

To see the players I've worked with continue to flourish also brings great joy.

The discipline, leadership and mental resilience the army instilled in me has shaped my approach to football.

The organisation offers incredible support for its people, but football became my true outlet – giving me a purpose, focus and the drive to keep moving forward.

### **More than a game**

Looking ahead, I'm eager to continue my journey through coaching, mentoring, or talent identification – giving back to the game that has given me so much.

If there's one message I hope to leave behind, it's this: find your escape and hold onto it.

Life throws challenges at us all but having something that brings joy and purpose makes all the difference.

I'm grateful for my teammates, coaches, colleagues and true friends who have stood by me, reminding me that there's always something to smile about.

For us, football is more than a pastime; it's a lifeline, a release and a way of coping with life's toughest battles. « ”





# UNIVERSITY CHALLENGE

Why top brass are encouraging students to try a slice of army life...







**L**YDIA Ridgway has the typical face of any soldier on summer exercise – sweat has smeared her cam-cream and she has a near-hoarse voice from the rigours of continuous close-quarters combat.

With ice-white eyeballs stark against her dulled face, the 20-year-old's pupils expose a laser-sharpness – as if she is still tracking the world for threats.

It is unsurprising given that her urban serial with the North West Officers' Training Regiment on Salisbury Plain has required an all-consuming focus.

It is impressive, too, considering OCdt Ridgway was sitting in a comfortable lecture theatre at the University of Salford just a few weeks ago.

Now her higher education crew, from institutions stretching from Manchester to Liverpool, have packed their Bergans and headed several hundred miles south for »

Report: Cliff Caswell Pictures: Graeme Main





**‘My brother told me I’d never make the grade – how wrong he was’**

» a two-week camp that is centred on the art of military command.

“I only joined because my brother told me I couldn’t cut it,” the midwifery student confides to *Soldier* as her platoon sprawls out and unpacks their foil-wrapped butties at Copehill Down village.

“He did this before me when he was at university and told me I’d never make the grade – how wrong he was.

“The subject I’m studying doesn’t have a huge profile within the army – although it’s definitely there in the medical field of the service – so there’s a lot for me to think about moving forward.”

This conversation is interesting given that student life has always had its stereotypes, usually involving vast quantities of subsidised booze and boisterous fresher parties.

The picture of OCdt Ridgway and her platoon talking tactics, however, is completely divorced from all that.

While troops from the 15 officers’ training corps and regiment units across the UK are paid in the same way as reservists – which might be an attraction at a time in life when finances are tight – meeting the military requirement is no easy task, especially given the studying they have to do. And their commitment has not been lost on senior command, who are looking to grow the university cohort.

There is also a deeper interest for Col Tony Gawthorpe (pictured far left), who is overseeing the

army’s renewed push into higher education.

“I joined the UOTC and have served for 30 years,” he says. “But whatever you go on and do in life, this experience helps you develop confidence – and importantly, it doesn’t matter what experience you’ve had beforehand.”

Col Gawthorpe’s team are aiming to bolster the numbers of student officer cadets by around ten per cent over the coming months – from 3,000 to 3,300.

The training programme, which essentially steps the participants up from leadership at platoon-level to larger infanterie cohorts, is also being adjusted to fit more neatly around a typical three-year degree schedule.

“These are things we can do with current levels of staffing and the resources already in place,” the officer – who served in The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers and has been on ops in both the Balkans and Iraq – adds.

“We want a stronger proposition for the students, showing them that they can be a part of military life – and be paid for it – while they are at university.”

Col Gawthorpe is confident that bolstering student opportunities will also strengthen bonds between civvy and armed forces communities – an aspiration of the chief of the general staff.

While many joining will have an interest in a career in uniform – with some here accepted on defence sponsorship programmes – there is no commitment to service. The leadership experience and skills accrued can easily be applied to any job.

He clarifies that the offer is different,







however, to the cadet forces – organisations open to younger people and aimed squarely at promoting good citizenship.

The higher education students are classed as non-deployable soldiers and must accordingly meet stringent armed forces medical standards.

Maj Alec McKenzie (QoY), 2iC of the North West Officer Training Regiment, echoes the colonel's sentiments.

Surveying a second urban serial from a high vantage point on the training area, he attests to the high quality of the volunteers.

"The people coming forward are certainly very self-aware," the reservist (pictured facing page, right) who deployed to Afghanistan during Op Herrick, adds. "They have a good level of emotional intelligence and are committed to their service here.

"We have about 150 officer cadets out on Salisbury Plain for this package, ten of whom have army bursaries and others are looking at armed forces careers of one form or another.

"But all of them have good opportunities to develop themselves – at this camp, for example, we are allowing them to build confidence by learning to abseil."

Most of the students at Copehill Down speaking to *Soldier* have definite designs on army life after leaving university, with both full- and part-time aspirations in evidence.

"I'm actually between years in my studies at the moment – in civilian life I'm with Airbus on a work placement," says 21-year-old OCdt Ethan Ellis-Sixsmith (pictured far right) from Sheffield Hallam University.

"I think a lot of us are going to be putting

in our applications to become army officers.

"As for me, I'm looking at the airborne forces as a reservist – however, the training you do here does generally stand you in good stead for any career."

OCdt Ellis-Sixsmith points out that sampling military life can be a game changer and influence the trajectory of some career paths towards the services.

With the disconnect between military and civilian worlds higher than ever, more recruits might also be encouraged if the process of enlisting was made faster and easier, the student concludes.

OCdt Kit Jackson-Brown (pictured near right), studying at the University of Liverpool, agrees.

The 22-year-old accepts that a military life is not for everyone, but believes the student route offers a useful taster for a potential career in uniform. The ancient history undergrad also has aspirations in the airborne forces.

Service has changed the outlook of OCdt Ridgway, who enlisted to prove a point and is now considering the reserve.

"I have been looking at available units," the 20-year-old reveals. "But for now, I am loving the challenge of being with this regiment and my fellow students – there is more to army life than I realised."

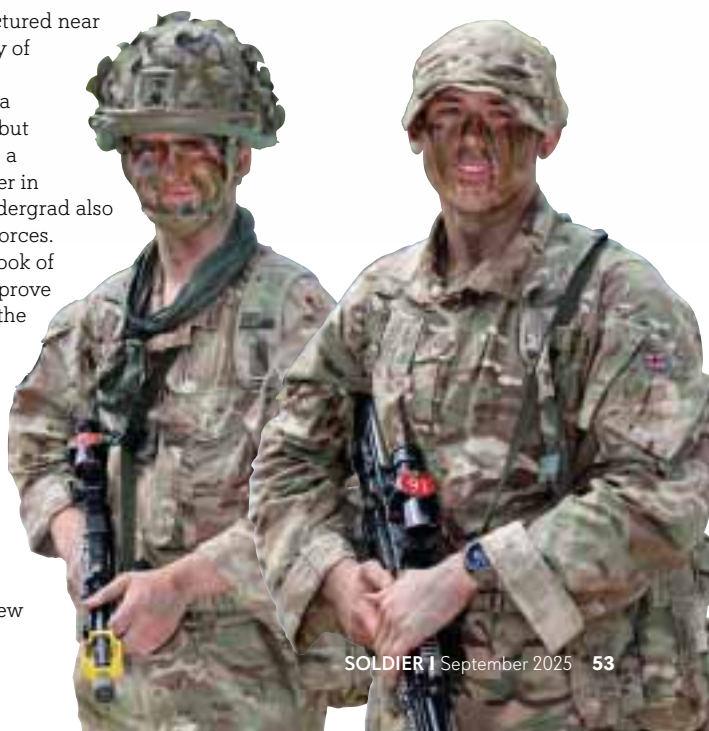
There have been many advertising campaigns and recruitment drives to bring in new

blood over the past decades.

The older generation will remember Frank in the 1990s, the recruit who lived a dream life, and more recently the *You Belong Here* campaign on TV and social media.

But nothing – it seems – is quite as good as giving a potential recruit the opportunity to sample the real thing. The chance to try before they buy, as the salesman says, provides an experience that shows a few realities and dispels many myths.

The army has a good offer – and with a test drive, that product might just sell itself. <<





ARMY TRAVEL

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# BIG PIC

Senior Pipe Major WO1 Peter Grant (Scots) plays the bagpipes at Edinburgh Castle to mark the 80th anniversary of Victory over Japan Day. He was among the military pipers to perform solemn laments across the UK, the Far East and aboard HMS Prince of Wales at sea to honour the end of the Second World War.

Picture: AS1 Hamilton Palmer, RAF



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# TALKBACK

mail@soldiermagazine.co.uk WhatsApp +447973 614782

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

## Dental pain

I AM a reservist about to deploy on an overseas adventurous training trip.

I've been told the medical plan and admin instruction say I must have a dental check-up prior to departure.

The policy detailed in **2023DIN01-124 DMS Dental Care for Deploying and High Readiness Reserve personnel** says I am not entitled to military dental service, though.

Can I claim back part or all off the costs of a civilian examination via JPA?

And, in the case of not being able to access my hugely oversubscribed local dental practice, would I be permitted to use the military system in order to comply with the exercise order and ensure any medical risk of this type is mitigated for the deployment? – **Name and address supplied**



**Lt Col Christoph Harper, SO1 Dental Regulation and Training, Army Health, Directorate of Personnel, Army Headquarters, replies:** You are correct to reference that DIN, noting an updated version is now available.

Reservists currently do not enjoy access to Defence Primary Healthcare (Dental) provision and for this reason are unable to claim any costs or access this service for a dental assessment prior to attending adventurous

training overseas.

Dental care is currently being considered as part of an improved offer to reservists, though the prevailing situation is unlikely to change in the short term, I'm afraid.

## Medal qualifying 'one-way only'

THERE is an injustice when it comes to reservists looking to transfer into the regulars.

I have eight-and-a-half years of service towards my Volunteer Reserves Service Medal (VRSM).

If I make the transition, I cannot count any of the VRSM qualifying period towards the Long Service and Good Conduct medal, nor can I count any regular service towards the one-and-a-half years remaining for my VRSM.

However, regulars who transfer to the reserve may use up to five years' contribution from their service to qualify for the VRSM, potentially earning it in just five years as opposed to ten.

How can this particular policy only work one way?

I've been through my chain of command and the medal office and I've essentially been told: "That's the policy. It doesn't seem fair but crack on".

Is this another example of the

'one army' mantra again not working in practice? – **Name and address supplied**

**Lt Col Christopher Prior, SO1 Exploit, Personnel Directorate, Army Headquarters, replies:**

The VRSM is awarded to reservists of all ranks in recognition of ten continuous years' efficient service.

Those personnel serving on full-time Reserve service assignments and non-regular

permanent staff are also eligible for consideration.

Clasps are available for additional periods of service.

As you say, under current regulations, it is not possible for you to count the time spent towards qualifying for a VRSM against qualification for the LSGC medal.

This specific matter, and wider issues regarding VRSM policy have been highlighted for review and plans are underway to resource a holistic study into the current policy.

While I cannot promise changes will be made to the criteria, this issue will be seriously considered.

**'IT DOESN'T SEEM FAIR BUT CRACK ON'**

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# THE VICTIM SUPPORT PATHWAY: SEXUAL OFFENCES



**If you have been a victim of sexual assault and you are in danger or in need of immediate medical care, call the emergency services on 999.**



- **Try and get somewhere that is safe and warm**  
the most important thing is your safety
- **Try to talk to someone**  
if you feel able to, tell someone you trust what has happened. If you don't feel you can talk to someone close to you, there are specialist organisations that will listen and support you
- **Try not to blame yourself**  
what happened to you is not your fault

## Visit a NHS run Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) (UK Only)

**NHS**



If you have been raped or sexually assaulted within the last 72 hours, we strongly advise that you go to a SARC.

Here they will be able to give you a medical assessment, gather evidence of the event that may help you in the future, and generally help you in seeking future support. **You do not need to go here alone.**

**If you think you have been a victim of sexual harassment or assault, please follow this QR code for more.**



**Formally report** an incident to DSCU/RMP/Civilian Police (0800 555111) or to CoC



**Disclose** to the Medical Centre / Doctor



**Anonymously inform:** Confidential Reporting Line 0800 085 0658



**Just talk to** a trusted charity Aurora New Dawn 02392 479254



**Want to seek help outside the Army?** We recommend The Survivors Trust



This is the best way to report an offence

The Police will manage your case confidentially. You have the option to be referred to the Victim Witness Care Unit, who can provide guidance for evidence collection and support you throughout the process.

If you inform your CoC they will help you through this.

**Crime Line**  
0800 555111

The Medical Centre is a safe space to confide in. Unless there is risk of harm to yourself or others,

Medical Centre Staff will not report any further. They will give you physical and mental help, refer to professional therapy and critically will be able to manage you 'at work' without divulging any details to the CoC, even the CO.

This is the best route if you are unsure if you want to formally report an offence.

This anonymous phone line allows you to **inform confidentially of an incident without triggering an investigation but still receive a referral to the Victim Witness Care Unit.**

At any point you can either cease proceedings or raise to a formal report.

**Call or Text:** Aurora New Dawn are the trusted and recognised civilian charity that the Army work alongside in support of victims of sexual offences.

They know what life in the Army is like, they do not have to tell anyone in your CoC and they are there for you wherever you are in the world.

If preferred, please email: [armedforces@aurorand.org.uk](mailto:armedforces@aurorand.org.uk)

If you do not feel comfortable speaking to anyone in the Army, we recommend [thesurvivorstrust.org](http://thesurvivorstrust.org) to help you move forward.

**HOWEVER please note** that by not informing the Army you will not be able to access the full range of support available to you whilst still enabling your career.

You can always seek Service Support whenever you wish, at any time.

## DEPLOYED OR BASED OVERSEAS?

When deployed, you still have full access to the same next steps as above.

In addition, please reach out to your nominated medical provider (military Medical Officer or, for those assigned overseas, your nominated DPHC practice) who will seek to get you back to the UK ASAP and to a SARC.

**The Formal Reporting Crime Line Confidential Reporting Line and AURORA NEW DAWN**

[armedforces@aurorand.org.uk](mailto:armedforces@aurorand.org.uk) are fully accessible overseas.

**0800 555 111  
0800 085 0658  
02392 479254**



# DIRECTORY

Bite-sized data to keep you in the know

## WELFARE

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

### Army HIVE

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

[army.mod.uk/hives](http://army.mod.uk/hives)

### Forcesline

A free and confidential telephone helpline and email service for regulars, reserves, ex-forces and their families.

**0800 731 4880**

[ssafa.org.uk/get-help](http://ssafa.org.uk/get-help)

### Army Welfare Service

Contact directly via [rc-aws-iat-0mailbox@mod.gov.uk](mailto:rc-aws-iat-0mailbox@mod.gov.uk) or **01904 882051/2053**

### Forces Connect

A free, simple, advert-free and confidential app that signposts soldiers, veterans and families to local and national organisations that can help them with everything from crisis support to business advice or housing. No personal information required.

[forcesconnect.co.uk](http://forcesconnect.co.uk)

### ALCOHOL AND SMOKING

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

### Drinkline

A free, confidential helpline **0300 123 1110**

### NHS support

Various information can be found at [nhs.uk/livewell](http://nhs.uk/livewell)

### BULLYING/HARASSMENT/DISCRIMINATION

**Army Mediation Service**  
**0306 770 7691** or **mil 96770 7691**  
[army-mediation-0mailbox@mod.gov.uk](mailto:army-mediation-0mailbox@mod.gov.uk)

### Army Speak Out Helpline

**0306 770 4656** or **mil 96770 4656**  
[army-speakout@mod.gov.uk](mailto:army-speakout@mod.gov.uk)

### Defence BHD Helpline

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

### DEBT AND MONEY PROBLEMS

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

### Forces Pension Society

A not-for-profit, independent military pension watchdog and enquiry service **020 7820 9988**  
[forcespensionsociety.org](http://forcespensionsociety.org)

### Joining Forces Credit Union

Saving and affordable loans for the armed forces community from not-for-profit financial cooperatives  
[joiningforcescu.co.uk](http://joiningforcescu.co.uk)

### Money Helper

Government-backed money and pensions guidance with a wealth of in-depth guides, tools and calculators  
[moneyhelper.org.uk](http://moneyhelper.org.uk)

### National Debtline

A charity that can talk through your options and help you take back control **0808 808 4000**  
[nationaldebtline.org](http://nationaldebtline.org)

### StepChange Debt Charity

The UK's leading debt charity offering free, confidential advice **0800 138 1111**  
[stepchange.org.uk](http://stepchange.org.uk)

### GAMBLING

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

### GRIEF

**Cruse Bereavement Support**  
**0808 808 1677**  
[cruse.org.uk](http://cruse.org.uk)

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

## RESETTLEMENT

Career Transition Partnership employment fairs help support the transition to civilian life by providing resources, networking opportunities and direct access to forces friendly employers. To book your place at an event visit [modctp.co.uk](http://modctp.co.uk)

**Bournemouth – September 10**

**Newmarket – October 8**

**Belfast – October 15**

**Cardiff – November 5**

**Telford – November 19**

## HOUSING

### Single living accommodation

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

### Pinnacle Home Services Team

The primary point of contact for families for housing, the allocation of SFA and details of local housing officers **UK 0800 031 8628**  
**Overseas +44(0) 161 605 3517**  
[pinnacleservicefamilies.co.uk/contact-us](http://pinnacleservicefamilies.co.uk/contact-us)

### Forces Help to Buy

For home ownership support visit [gov.uk/guidance/forces-help-to-buy](http://gov.uk/guidance/forces-help-to-buy)

### Single Persons Accommodation Centre for the Ex-Services

**01748 833797**  
[spaces.org.uk](http://spaces.org.uk)

### Veterans Gateway

A first point of contact for veterans seeking support [veteransgateway.org.uk](http://veteransgateway.org.uk)

### INJURY/SICKNESS Personnel Recovery Centres

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

## LONELINESS

### Armed Forces and Veterans Breakfast Clubs

A network of clubs to enjoy breakfast and banter, while combating social isolation [afvbc.world](http://afvbc.world)

### Samaritans

Someone to talk to, night or day, for free and without judgement **116 123 samaritans.org**

### The Royal British Legion

Contact the friendly team for information about local groups and support services **0808 802 8080**  
[britishlegion.org.uk](http://britishlegion.org.uk)

## MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

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

### Combat Stress 24/7 Helpline

**0800 138 1619**

### Headspace

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

### Mind – The Mental Health Charity

**0300 123 3393** [mind.org](http://mind.org)

### NHS

General mental health support [nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters](mailto:nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters)

## COMPETITIONS

### July 2025 HOAY WINNER

Majority Naga 60 Bluetooth soundbar  
**Nicola Skelding, Kent**

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



### Op Courage

A specialist NHS service for armed forces leavers, reservists, veterans and their families. Search for "Op Courage" on [nhs.uk](http://nhs.uk) to find your local team

### Samaritans

116 123 [samaritans.org](http://samaritans.org)

### The Ripple Pond

A self-help support network for relatives of physically or psychologically injured troops and veterans

0333 900 1028

[theripplepond.org](http://theripplepond.org)

### Togetherall

A safe, online community where people support each other anonymously

[togetherall.com](http://togetherall.com)

### RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN/ABUSE

#### Aurora New Dawn

Safety for survivors of domestic abuse, sexual violence, stalking

02394 216 816

[aurorand.org.uk](http://aurorand.org.uk)

### ManKind

Support for male domestic abuse victims

01823 334244

[mankind.org.uk](http://mankind.org.uk)

### Relate

Relationship support

[relate.org.uk](http://relate.org.uk)

### SEXUAL OFFENCES

Anyone wishing to report an incident can do so in multiple ways and there is a fresh set of guidelines (see page 59) It does not matter if your allegation is not recent, or if you believe there's no evidence. There is no need for anyone to speak directly to their chain of command.

### The Defence Serious Crime Command

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

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

Alternatively, complaints can be reported directly to the **civilian police**.

To discuss victim support contact the **Victim Witness Care Unit**, which operates independently from the chain of command, on 07974 074259 or via [people-dscc-vwcugroup@mod.gov.uk](mailto:people-dscc-vwcugroup@mod.gov.uk). Your information will be treated in confidence and you can discuss your options for

reporting any allegations. Further support can be found on the **Defence Connect Call it Out Hub** or via the **Speak Out Helpline** on 0306 770 4656 or [army-speakout@mod.gov.uk](mailto:army-speakout@mod.gov.uk)

## STAFF NETWORKS

The following groups are open to both regulars and reservists, as well as the chain of command and civil servants. Get in touch via:

### LGBTQ+ Network

[elizabeth.corbett117@mod.gov.uk](mailto:elizabeth.corbett117@mod.gov.uk)

### Multicultural Network

[priscilla.quansah100@mod.gov.uk](mailto:priscilla.quansah100@mod.gov.uk)

### Parents Network

[armypers-parents-network@mod.gov.uk](mailto:armypers-parents-network@mod.gov.uk)

### Servicewomen's Network

[samantha.dodge733@mod.gov.uk](mailto:samantha.dodge733@mod.gov.uk)

## REUNIONS

### Royal Hampshire Territorials and Hampshire Companies, The Wessex Regiment

78th post-war reunion lunch on Saturday, September 20 at The Winchester Royal Hotel. Contact Jim Cooper on [rhwsxtar@yahoo.com](mailto:rhwsxtar@yahoo.com)

### The Balkans 30 Years On...

The **Royal Regiment of Fusiliers** will hold anniversary events on October 24 in Newcastle and 25 in Manchester. For details visit the What's On page on [fusiliersconnect.com](http://fusiliersconnect.com)

### The Rifles Family Gala

at Silverstone on September 27 from 1800. Champagne reception and dinner, followed by awards. Tickets £55 on [theriflesnetwork.co.uk](http://theriflesnetwork.co.uk)

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**Sept 17** at 1000 – Inclusion  
**Oct 1** at 1000 – AITC  
**Oct 15** at 1000 – CAL

### Development days

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**October 23** – Blandford  
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For more info visit search NCO Academy on Defence Connect.

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TEN details have been changed in this image of cricket's Inter-Services 50-over Championships final in Aldershot, where the soldiers slipped to a disappointing defeat (page 72).

Circle all the differences on image **B** and send the panel to HOAY 1000, Soldier, Ordnance Barracks, Government Road, Aldershot, Hampshire GU11 2DU, along with contact details, including email address, by September 30.

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

Alternatively, email a photograph of the image highlighting the differences to [comps@soldiermagazine.co.uk](mailto:comps@soldiermagazine.co.uk)

The first correct entry drawn after the closing date will win a Majority Eversden waterproof shower/outdoor radio (available to buy on Amazon).

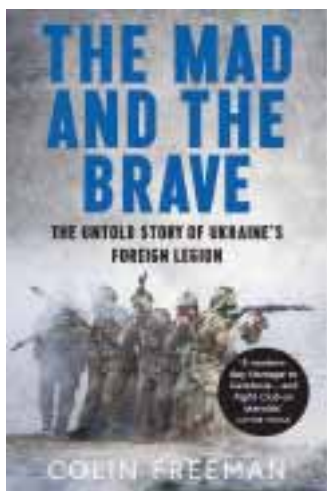
With a wide variety of DAB/DAB+/FM stations – and a built-in rechargeable battery with up to 15 hours' life – this handy piece of kit is perfect for travel, the bathroom, work or outdoor use. All the usual rules apply. Good luck!



# REVIEWS

★ GAMES ★ BOOKS ★ MOVIES ★

Picture: Alamy



## The Mad and the Brave

*The Untold Story of Ukraine's Foreign Legion*

### BOOK

by Colin Freeman is out now at £22

WITH US President Donald Trump meeting Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin for peace talks in Alaska as this issue approached the presses, the potential for an end to the three-year war in Ukraine was once again on the front pages.

Little had then been revealed about the content of the discussions, although a follow-up conference with European leaders in Washington was also taking place. Away from the political jaw-boning, however, a conflict that has claimed thousands of lives on both sides continued its inexorable course.

Aside from supplying arms and training, Nato states have held back from becoming involved in a war with the very real potential for a nuclear escalation. But the crisis has sucked in thousands of foreign fighters who responded to a call for assistance from Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy and have been serving as part of an international legion.

It is these individuals, their backgrounds and motivations that come under scrutiny in the *Mad and the Brave*. Drawing on interviews with a handful of volunteers from nations including the UK, America and Germany, journalist Colin Freeman shines a light on the make-up of these units, the troops fighting in them and their impact on the war effort.

The story certainly lays bare a few uncomfortable and untold realities. Far from a being a cohort exclusively driven by conviction – although many undoubtedly turned up under a sense of duty – Zelenskyy's call to arms attracted a broad church that included fantasists, steroid addicts, video game warriors and other fatally flawed individuals unsuitable for combat in one way or another.

With these misfits mingling with ex-soldiers of genuine pedigree, it is unsurprising – as the book points out – that the selection process was problematic from the outset. Even Afghanistan and Iraq veterans found conventional warfighting – with long-range artillery, missile strikes and a constant drone threat – pushed them to the limits.

A number of the most extraordinary stories in the book, however, take place thousands of miles from theatre in the leafy English countryside. Among them is the tale of a parish councillor, who discovered that cheap Mitsubishi L200 pickups used in farming were the ideal platform for Ukrainian rocket systems.

The tale of the volunteers is – in short – a complicated affair involving some highly unlikely warriors. Of particular interest to current British soldiers are the first-person accounts of a conflict continually changing, especially on the drone front, while descriptions of precision high-velocity missile strikes underscore the importance of dispersal, concealment and rapid movement across the battlespace.

All in all, *The Mad and the Brave* is a solid piece of journalism and as much a story of human nature as old as war itself. Volunteers have come forward in every conflict, the veteran fighting alongside the fantasist and the noble rubbing shoulders with the vain and self-interested. This book retells the tale in the social media age, and against the backdrop of a conflict that might yet have far deeper implications for us all.

★★★★★

Review: Cliff Caswell, *Soldier*



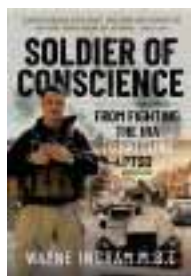


## BOOK

**Soldier of Conscience**

by Wayne Ingram

AN ACCOUNT penned by a soldier who helped a young boy through treatment for serious facial injuries, this is an inspiring true story of an army career cut short by injury and his later life of charitable work. As second-in-command and CO of the 9/12th Royal



Lancers in the 1990s Northern Ireland and Bosnia tours described by the author, I can confirm the atmospheric of those far off days are exactly right. But it was Ingram's resilience and determination in helping others in many daunting situations after his military service was prematurely ended that captivated me. His 14-year-crusade to fund the facial reconstruction of a Bosnian boy, in particular, verges on the heroic. Ingram's charitable works eventually earned him a well-deserved MBE. I unreservedly recommend this book.

★★★★★

Nick Everard, ex-9/12 L

In case you missed it...

## MOVIE

**The Narrow Road to the Deep North**

Available on BBC iPlayer

LAST month's commemorations marking the 80th anniversary of VJ Day brought the experiences of those who fought in the Far East into sharp focus. So too does this fictional mini series about a medic's time working on the Burma Railway while in Japanese captivity. Laying the horrors endured by the prisoners of war bare in devastating fashion, one episode in particular plays on the mind long after the credits roll. A powerful, if disturbing must-watch.

★★★★★

Capt Mike Owens, RE



## GAMES

**Air Combat 22 and Ridge Racer**

Out now on Nintendo Switch 2

ANYONE fortunate enough to have acquired a Nintendo Switch 2 amid early stock shortages can give a retro feel to autumn mess parties with this outstanding arcade pairing.

*Air Combat 22* and *Ridge Racer* were coin-op machine classics of the 1990s – and both stand up superbly on Nintendo's refreshed console.

While the passing of the decades is graphically evident, the duo still have a slick playability and will be definite big-screen crowd pleasers at social gatherings. Whether blasting enemy aircraft *Top Gun*-style or driving like a lunatic through city streets, these titles lend themselves to high-score competitions aplenty when paired with cases of beer and sarnies. At £15 each, you cannot go wrong on price either.

*Soldier* was lucky enough



to wrangle a Switch 2 over the summer and has, so-far, been impressed with the upgrade it offers. With a promising spread of titles set for release over the coming months, we'd be happy to hear from any potential reviewers on this platform too.

★★★★★

Cliff Caswell, *Soldier***Ninja Gaiden: Ragebound**

Out now on all formats

THE latest in the long-running martial arts franchise heads back to its two-dimensional roots for this latest offering – and it doesn't disappoint in the slightest. This time players assume control of fighter Kenji Mozu in a storyline set amid dark forces in feudal Japan. With overtones of *Prince of Persia*, this hack-and-slash platformer will certainly please fans of the genre. It's proved a definite tea break favourite at *Soldier*, where we've occasionally been held back from work by "just one more go" syndrome.

★★★★★

Cliff Caswell, *Soldier*

## JOIN OUR REVIEWS TEAM

If you fancy giving new games, movies, music and podcasts the *Soldier* treatment, email [reviews@soldiermagazine.co.uk](mailto:reviews@soldiermagazine.co.uk)



# SOLDIERSPORT



## WOOD DIGS DEEP ON DEBUT

### TENNIS (WOMEN)

**NEWCOMER** OCdt Milly Wood (East Midlands UOTC) enjoyed a Wimbledon debut to remember as an epic victory in the singles competition helped fire the army women to glory at the Inter-Services Tennis Championships.

Having made short work of Royal Navy number one LNN Olivia Stapley in her opening match, the top seed (pictured above) found herself embroiled in a three-set classic with the Royal Air Force's ASI Eve Brady before finally prevailing.

The result proved pivotal to the cause as the women's team went on to post a 100 per cent record from the 12 ties they played over the course of two days – matching their achievement from 2024.

Wood, in her first season of army tennis, showed early nerves in her clash with Stapley as unforced errors helped her rival

win the first game.

However, she soon settled into her work and went on to take the set 6-2 – an outcome that was repeated in the second as she started in style.

2023 women's champion Brady provided a sterner test, and the RAF ace broke serve on three occasions as she claimed the first set 6-4.

Brady then raced into a 3-0 lead in the second before Wood came roaring back by winning four consecutive games.

Her opponent found herself on the brink of victory at 6-5 but Wood held serve and went on to take the tiebreak 7-4 to square the match at 1-1.

The back-and-forth continued in the decider as service became increasingly difficult to hold, while several games were determined by lengthy tussles at deuce.

But Wood eventually broke the resistance to win 6-4 and conclude a contest that lasted



Sig Emma McMahon (R Signals)  
in doubles action

Pictures: Cat Goryn/Alligin Photography



more than two-and-a-half hours.

"It was a battle from the beginning," the victor told *SoldierSport* afterwards.

"Having lost the first set I knew I had to win the second, but it would be tough.

"I had to rely on some luck, and she was a gritty opponent, but these are the matches that put fire in my belly.

"Focusing ball to ball is the most important thing and you cannot afford to feel low or negative from the previous point. It is a case of zoning in on what's in front of you.

"It was so close and there was nothing between us. There were some fortunate net chords that came in important points for both of us and it was the support of the crowd that eventually got me through.

"This is my first time at Wimbledon, and it has been amazing – this is the best grass out there.

"Beforehand our coach said that if we are not stepping away having enjoyed it we have done something wrong and that is what I carried forward.

"We are a team, and this is a team effort – I did not think about the pressure of being army number one.

"We wanted to go out and get the results we needed.

"We didn't know who was coming from the navy or RAF, so it was a case of focusing on ourselves and the team."

The outcome meant Wood finished the 2025 season as both army and Inter-Services individual champion.

Second seed Sig Faye Worrall (R Signals) also made a dominant start to proceedings as she cruised past Flt Lt Sarah

## INTER-SERVICES TENNIS CHAMPIONSHIPS

### MEN

1	ARMY	10
2	RAF	5
3	NAVY	3

### WOMEN

1	ARMY	12
2	RAF	3
3	NAVY	3

Wilkie (RAF) 6-0, 6-2.

But the navy provided a tougher challenge second time round as AB Lauren Howard traded strong groundstrokes from the baseline. Worrall eventually claimed the first set on a tiebreak, before winning the second 6-3.

While Wood and Worrall had questions to answer it was plain sailing for third seed and 2024 champion Capt Holly Fleming (RAMS, pictured below), who won both her contests 6-0, 6-0 without breaking sweat.

In a sign of the team's strength, Sig Emma McMahon (R Signals) – a beaten finalist at this season's army championships – and former number one Cpl Chloe Pike (Int Corps) were not selected for singles action.

And nor was Maj Fiona Welborn (RAMS) – a player who has never lost an Inter-Services tie at Wimbledon.

However, the trio took to the court in doubles action a day later to help maintain the soldiers' position of dominance and the three pairings won all six contests to complete back-to-back tournament clean sweeps.

## RAI LEADS THE SINGLES CHARGE

### TENNIS (MEN)

AFTER being crowned army champion for the first time in June, LCpl Warok Rai (REME) was called up for singles action at this season's Inter-Services Tennis Championships.

Having previously played in the doubles draw, it was the soldier's debut outing in the individual ranks, and he duly delivered on the courts of Wimbledon as the men's team avenged their narrow defeat to the Royal Air Force last season.

Rai was named as third seed and produced sublime form in his opening tie, defeating the Royal Navy's Lt Doug Trimmer 6-0, 6-0.

"He's a good player but it was not his day," Rai told *SoldierSport* after the win. "It was a case of staying solid and making him beat me.

"I love playing singles and was so happy to get this chance.

"My serve was very good,

and I didn't miss many returns. The first four balls are always so important, and I tried to keep it simple.

"We got a full week of training beforehand and were doing all sorts of tactical stuff.

"We are all switched on and hungry for the win. The guys have put a lot of effort in in their own time, and we want that title."

Rai followed his initial success with a 6-3, 6-1 triumph over ASI Alex Moore (RAF) and the army went on to win five of their six singles matches on the opening day.

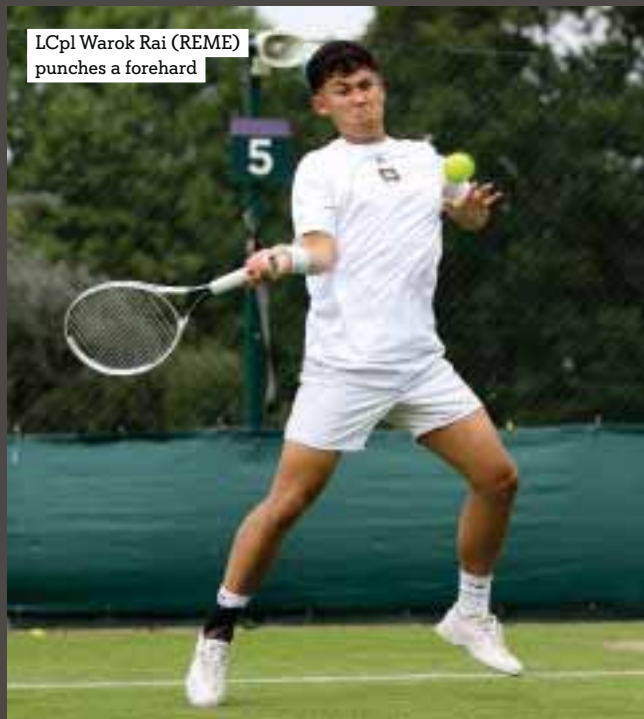
Captain and top seed Maj Ben Rogers (RA) also sealed back-to-back successes, the first of which was over three tough sets against the navy's Lt Cdr Andy Rodgers.

Number two Capt Angus McCaul (RHG/D) started with a 6-4, 6-4 victory over ASI Michael Greedy (RAF), before losing to CPO Scott Nicholls (RN) second time out.

Rogers and McCaul joined forces to win both outings as the army's number one doubles pairing and, again, the soldiers won all but one of the six matches to be crowned overall champions.

## 'I WAS HAPPY TO GET THE CHANCE'

LCpl Warok Rai (REME)  
punches a forehand



## WIMBLEDON BY NUMBERS

**10** Inter-Services campaigns for Maj Ben Rogers (RA)

**5** Successive tournament wins for the army women's team

**0** Games dropped by Capt Holly Fleming (RAMS) in her two singles matches

**2** Defeats in 12 rubbers for the army as they regained the men's title



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## MODERN PENTATHLON

**EFFORTS** to grow the sport of modern pentathlon continue this month as Tidworth welcomes athletes for laser run's army championships and tri-service invitational competition.



Picture: Graeme Main

Open to personnel of all standards, the event on September 10 covers two of pentathlon's five disciplines – running and laser pistol shooting – and features individual, unit team and relay categories.

Training and equipment will be provided on the day.

Follow [@army\\_modernpent](#) on Instagram for more updates from the sport.

## RUGBY UNION (WOMEN)

**THE Army Rugby Union** is hosting a women's training and skills camp as part of its mission to attract more female personnel to the sport.

Staged at South Cerney from September 22 to 25, the sessions are open to everyone from newcomers to army-level players and will be led by an experienced coaching team.

The focus will be on developing core skills, enhancing game understanding and fostering teamwork.

Visit [armyrugbyunion.org.uk](#) for more details.



Picture: Graeme Main



Sgt Denson Narayan (RLC) claimed eight RAF wickets

## CRICKET (MEN)

**AFTER** seeing the Royal Air Force celebrate an Inter-Services double in 2025, the army's cricketers finally secured some bragging rights over their rivals with victory in their three-day match at Larkhill.

The RAF travelled south with high hopes having claimed the forces' 50-over honours a week earlier (pages 72-73) and they looked to build on that momentum by batting first after winning the toss.

However, it was a decision

they would soon regret as the soldiers' attack hit top form – dismissing the visitors for just 89.

Spinner Sgt Denson Narayan (RLC) spearheaded the assault with figures of 3-14, while LCpl Jacob Clark (REME) saw 15 overs of pace bowling rewarded with 3-34. Flt Lt Sam Moorby top scored with 34.

The army then took a commanding lead as they hit 244 in their first innings thanks to 52 from Gnr Denzel James (RA) and 41 from Narayan, although Cpl Jon Hawk gave the RAF something to cheer as he claimed 5-49.

Trailing by 155, the airmen made a better fist of things second time round as AS1 Ellis Richards found his range. The opener struck 14 fours in a rapid-fire 68 before being caught behind off the bowling of James.

Skipper Sgt Ross Diver and Flt Lt Luke Hansford made useful contributions but Narayan maintained his superb personal form to take 5-38, and with James also posting 3-14 the RAF were all out for 211.

That left the Reds needing 57 to win and they reached their target in the 14th over for the loss of just two wickets.

## RUGBY LEAGUE (WOMEN)

**ARMY** teammates went head-to-head on the international stage as Wales took on Scotland in Neath.

Bdr Bethan Dainton (RA) captained the hosts against a Scottish team that was making its test match debut and included Cpl Kaiya Glynn (RAMS) and LCpl Charlotte Hill (RLC, pictured) in the ranks.

The contest appeared to be heading for a draw as the score was locked at 12-12 with just two minutes remaining, but player-of-the-match Dainton produced a moment of magic to crash over at the death and give her side an 18-12 victory.

"We play against a lot of those girls week in, week out and knew it would be tough," she said. "Those are the games we want."

Dainton led Wales in a 62-0 loss to England a week later.



Picture: John Shirras

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# FORCES START CAMPAIGN IN STYLE

## RUGBY UNION (WOMEN)

**ARMY players made a telling contribution in a successful start for the UK Armed Forces at the women's International Defence Rugby Competition.**

The hosts emphatically dispatched Tonga first up – running in 17 tries as they thrashed the minnows 105-0 in Esher.

Skipper SSgt Jade Mullen (AGC (SPS)) crossed twice, while WO2 Rae Metters (REME), SSgt Sarah Batley (AGC (RMP)) and LCpl Courtney Pursglove (RLC) were also among the scorers.

And fresh from captaining Wales on rugby league's international stage, Bdr Bethan Dainton (RA) returned to the union code to produce a superb display at flanker.

The team went on to defeat the Irish Defence Forces four days later and were due to play Zambia in Aldershot as this issue went to press.

Defending champions France started their campaign with a 22-17 win over Australia.

The tournament final will be held at Gloucester's Kingsholm

Stadium on September 3.

Elsewhere, Gdsm Manuqalo Komaitai (IG) has been included in the Fiji squad for the Women's Rugby World Cup, which continues this month.

She made her international debut at the Oceania Championships in the build-up to the tournament, coming off the bench to score in a 59-5 win over Tonga. The soldier then started in the final against Samoa, which Fiji won 24-20.

"I am honoured and humbled to be part of the World Cup squad," Komaitai said. "This is a dream come true – not just for me, but for my family, regiment and everyone who has supported me along the way."

Fiji were in action against Canada as *Soldier* hit its deadline for the September edition, with pool matches against home nations Scotland and Wales to follow.

**'THIS IS A DREAM COME TRUE'**



SSgt Sarah Batley drives UKAF forward



OCdt Libby Moor at the European Military Climbing Championships

Picture: Graeme Main

# LEAGUE HEADS NORTH FOR OPENING LEG

## CLIMBING

**THE new season of the Armed Forces Bouldering League gets under way at Depot Climbing, in Leeds, on September 10.**

Comprising six rounds at venues across the country, the event has proven increasingly popular in recent years and will feature elite and open categories.

An individual competition, the winners will be decided from their best three results across all legs. Rounds four to six will also double as the single service championships.

OCdt Libby Moor (Liverpool UOTC) has competed in the event previously and believes the sport offers a welcome challenge for personnel.

"I like the problem-solving aspect to it," she said. "It is a collaborative approach with others, thinking about what you can do."

"There is also the physical side and the need to be strong."

Scan the QR code to register.



Picture: Graeme Main

## RUGBY UNION (MEN)

**HAVE you got what it takes to pull on the famous red shirt and represent the army at rugby union?**

If you think so, the men's senior team will be holding trials for aspiring players from October 7 to 9 at a location to be confirmed.

The sessions are open to regular and reserve personnel, who should scan the QR code to register their interest.

For more details visit [armyrugbyunion.org.uk](http://armyrugbyunion.org.uk)



# TITLE BID TAKES OFF



Cpl Jack Morgan (REME) hits full throttle at Cadwell Park

Pictures: Graeme Main



## MOTORSPORT

**THE British Army motorcycle road race team is closing in on a successful defence of their Inter-Services title after a strong showing in the sixth round of championship action at Cadwell Park.**

Sgt Aaron Evangelista (REME) took the chequered flag in the forces' race at the Lincolnshire circuit, and with teammate Cpl Jack Morgan (REME) finishing third the soldiers formed a commanding presence on the podium.

They also claimed four further positions in the top ten as welcome points were recorded in their battle with nearest rivals the Royal Air Force.

Staged by No Limits Racing,

the championship sees personnel hit full throttle over eight sprint rounds at some of the top venues in the country. Cadwell Park was the sixth leg in that journey, and the action was switching to Oulton Park as this issue was going to press.

The campaign then concludes at Donington Park on the weekend of September 27 and 28.

Morgan is eyeing a services double come the end of the season as he currently sits second behind Evangelista in the individual standings, with the team riding high.

The 31-year-old is also battling for honours in the newcomer 600 class in No Limits' civilian competition, claiming two third place finishes and a second over the Cadwell Park weekend.



And in a further test in what is just his second season with the army set-up, the soldier has featured in the BMW F 900 R Cup, one of the support series to British Superbikes.

"I think I can win, but it is going to be very close," he told *SoldierSport* from the pit lane as he reflected on his chances in the Inter-Services.

"It has been a great season so far. Going to Anglesey in the wet has been one of the highlights – I had a really good feel for the bike and managed to get a win.

"When it comes to British Superbikes I'm not expecting anything. It is a chance to see how I get on and it would be naïve to think I can go there and get on the podium.

"The F 900 is supposed to be an entry-level series, but you have ex-Moto GP riders in there. They are professionals who would not dream of going out on a used tyre – that's the difference."

Morgan is a former motocross rider and has credited the service for helping him make the step up to track racing.

"I love the thrill of it," he said of the transition. "There is more of a crowd, and the environment is really good. It's also safer.

"As a civvy, if you're not working, you're not earning, but the army gives me time off to come and compete and there is funding available for things like tyres and entrance fees.

"I'm not sure what I'll do next season in terms of series and British Superbikes but I'm still new to this and I have plenty of years ahead."

The set-up is also on a mission to attract newcomers to the sport and Capt Mark Felton and LCpl Abi Faulkner (both REME) are among those embarking on their rookie seasons.

The former has been racing with one of four army teams in No Limits' endurance competition, while the latter has been putting her skills on the tools to good use as part of the

pit crew.

"The best thing about this is the team ethic," Felton said. "As the new guy I was a bit worried coming in, thinking the other riders would be focused on being the fastest.

"But they are here to help. A session has just finished, and we were chatting about the gearing for different corners – there is a real collective spirit.

"I am racing in team four and we are not going to be pushing for the podium as it is our first year. It is about progression and finishing races.

"Each round is different, but some can last for six hours. You'll ride for at least 20 minutes before changing so it is physically demanding. You are trying to go as fast as you can, but you still need to focus – if you make a mistake, it can be all over."

Like Felton, Faulkner joined the team for winter training in Spain ahead of the new season and while she took her bike out on the track, she is content with a role in the pits for now.

"I've always been involved with road bikes," she said. "I saw the army team on Instagram and got involved from there.

"I like getting hands on as part of the pit crew. A lot of the riders know their bikes well, but we are here to help. That can be anything from checking tyre pressures to rebuilding a machine after a crash.

"You learn to appreciate racing from the pit lane.

"In the last round at Anglesey, I was crewing for one of the endurance teams in a four-and-a-half-hour race, while also running the pit board.

"We only had two riders and there were a lot of issues and crashes in the race, but we survived it.

"I want to keep coming back to learn more while also continuing to ride, even if that's just at track days."

Follow the team's progress via [@armymrrt](#) on Instagram.



## ROAD RACE BY NUMBERS

**14** Point lead for Sgt Aaron Evangelista in the forces standings

**4** Soldiers competing in three support series to British Superbikes

**8** Rounds scheduled in the No Limits' endurance calendar for 2025

**16** Army riders in action across various classes at Cadwell Park

Sgt Graham Wiseman (RA) was a centurion against the navy



WO2 Ross Dearden (RE) leads an army appeal



their rivals reach 103-3 at the halfway stage, the soldiers had assumed an element of control.

But Cpl Tom Shorthouse – a centurion against the Royal Navy a day earlier – and Cpl Ollie Rogoff then combined in a stand of 131 to drive the RAF forward and the latter went on to top score with 72 as his side closed on 269-6.

The army's openers made a conservative start to the run chase as they attempted to establish a platform from which to attack later on.

Sgt Graham Wiseman (RA) showed intent with back-to-back boundaries before becoming the first of two wickets to fall in Flt Lt Luke Hansford's opening over.

Cpl Liam Fletcher (REME) and Boynton both made it into the twenties only to depart when well set, leaving Capt Ollie Cross (RA) and Capt Ben Ringrose

in his first over.

With WO2 Ross Dearden (RE) operating in tandem from the other end the army were able to keep the scoring in check and Narayan claimed a second scalp in the shape of Sgt Ross Diver shortly after the opener had brought up his half century.

Dearden saw his accuracy rewarded as he trapped the dangerous Flt Lt Adam Fisher leg before for 14 and after seeing

following eight trophy-laden years at the helm.

After winning the toss and electing to field first the Reds came under immediate pressure as the RAF's batters took a liking to the opening pace bowlers – racing to 50 without loss inside seven overs.

But the introduction of spin reaped immediate dividends as Sgt Denson Narayan (RLC) bowled AS1 Ellis Richards for 14

## FINAL CHASE FALLS SHORT

### CRICKET (MEN)

**SKIPPER SSgt Jay Boynton (REME) saw his time in charge of the army cricket team end in disappointing style as the soldiers slipped to defeat in the final of the Inter-Services 50-over Championships.**

Chasing 270 to beat the Royal Air Force in Aldershot, the hosts fell 12 runs short as Boynton was denied the perfect send-off





(RAMS) to repair the damage.

The duo put on 54 for the fifth wicket before the latter was caught off the bowling of Cpl Jon Hawk and when Cross fell for 69 the contest tipped firmly in the RAF's favour.

The army's lower order did their best to close the gap and after smashing a booming six straight down the ground, LBdr

## INTER-SERVICES 50-OVER CRICKET CHAMPIONSHIPS

**ROYAL AIR FORCE** 269-6

O ROGOFF 72

R DIVER 56

D NARAYAN 2-37

**ARMY** 258

O CROSS 69

B RINGROSE 27

T BERZINS 3-47

Jake Benson (RA) gave them an outside chance of victory in the last over of the day.

But with two sixes required from the final two deliveries he was caught in the deep as the soldiers posted a score of 258 to lose by 11 runs.

"Their powerplay was a lot better than ours," a disappointed Boynton told *SoldierSport* at the close of play.

"They built their innings with wickets in hand and going into the final ten overs that is key.

"They also had that big 100 partnership, but we were happy with 269 considering how well we had done with the bat against the navy.

"We had a couple of 40-run stands and one of 50, but ultimately, they performed better in the key moments.

"That said, I'm proud we were able to take it to the final over."

Dearden claimed three wickets and Boynton two as the army dismissed the navy for 217 in their opening match.

Wiseman then smashed 107 in a 201-run opening partnership with Fletcher and they went on to reach the winning target in the 42nd over, with the latter finishing unbeaten on 80.

The senior service also lost to the RAF, with Shorthouse smashing 129 to help his side win by 89 runs.

## MILESTONE MAN STANDS DOWN

### CRICKET (MEN)

**DESPITE missing out on Inter-Services glory, outgoing skipper SSgt Jay Boynton (REME) reached a sporting milestone as he became the most capped player in the history of army cricket.**

His appearance against the Royal Air Force was his 207th in the red shirt, an effort that surpassed the previous record held by Nick Palmer, a former Army Air Corps pilot who starred for the soldiers in the 1990s and 2000s.

Boynton made his debut in 2007 and counts two hat-tricks with the ball among his many highlights – one of which came against the Royal Navy at Lord's.

"I'm incredibly proud to reach the landmark," he told *SoldierSport*. "The support I've had from my family in that time has been key.

"When I first put on that shirt, I never thought I would reach 207 matches.

"I've always had the motivation to be better and as soon as I step onto the pitch I want to win."

Over the course of his army career, the all-rounder has scored 2,803 runs with a top score of 119, while also

claiming 243 wickets. His best figures with the ball are 7-46.

Having walked away from the Twenty20 format earlier this season, Boynton will look to stretch his appearance record in 50-over matches next year – although he will no longer be leading the side.

"I think it is an opportunity for some fresh faces and ideas to come in," the 37-year-old said as he announced his decision to stand down.

"The season starts in April and we now play four or five games a week through to July. Mentally, you have to be strong and it is getting harder physically, so it is time to bring in the youth.

"I will back the new skipper and he deserves that support.

"Being army captain has been one of my biggest achievements. I got the job in 2018, and we lost at Lord's in my first season.

"We then came back a year later and won – that is one of my best memories.

"But you know when the time is right to go, and this is that time."

## 'IT IS TIME TO BRING IN THE YOUTH'



## CRICKET BY NUMBERS



**4** Wickets in two games for the army's leading bowler WO2 Ross Dearden (RE)

**14** Years since the RAF's last T20 and 50-over Inter-Services double

**8** Seasons as skipper of the army team for SSgt Jay Boynton (REME, left)

# Raring to go

We asked students and staff from the North West Officers' Training Regiment for their highlights since joining the reserve unit...

Interviews: Cliff Caswell Pictures: Graeme Main



Getting so much exposure to army

life. I'm studying ancient history and looking at The Parachute Regiment or airborne forces more generally.

**OCdt Kit Jackson-Brown, University of Liverpool**

Realising that I want to join the army. The reserve, rather than the regular, route is for me – hopefully with 4th Battalion, The Parachute Regiment.

I'm studying aerospace engineering and am between years on a work placement.

**OCdt Ethan Ellis-Sixsmith, Sheffield Hallam University**



The energy of the students is amazing. I'm the quartermaster and it is great to be with officer cadets who are enthusiastic and committed to learning.

**Capt Joe Fleming, Lancs**



Understanding more about myself. I didn't think I would be physically capable of military life until I joined the regiment. I'm studying animal behaviour and considering the light cavalry.

**OCdt Olivia Gilbertson, Manchester Metropolitan University**

Definitely the experience of military life – honestly, you will not know how enjoyable it can be until you try for yourself. You see how many different career roles there are too, including midwifery, which I'm studying.

**OCdt Lydia Ridgway, University of Salford**



Seeing young people grow in confidence and become more self-aware is great. I have been 2iC at this regiment for the past year or so – it's a rewarding job.

**Maj Alec McKenzie, QoY**



I've discovered that army life is definitely for me – I've already done my main board and I'm going to Sandhurst in September next year. I've been

studying history and economics and I'm hoping to commission into the Welsh Guards.

**OCdt Kaspar Rameshni, University of Manchester**

There are so many opportunities – especially in sport. My application for the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst has already been sent. In future, I'm hoping for a career in the intelligence field.

**OCdt Molly Drown, University of Manchester**







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