

SOLDIER

MAGAZINE OF THE BRITISH ARMY

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SCAN ME

OUR CONTRIBUTORS
THIS MONTH...**SGT AMBER MARSH,
REME**

AFTER 16 years of service, this 32-year-old army footballer has learnt a thing or two about her body. Inside the mag, she shares her wisdom on nutrition and the importance of fuelling yourself with the right stuff.

**WO1 JOHN MILLER**

RUTHLESSNESS may sometimes be the name of the game in soldiering – but the incoming army sergeant major says troops must also take this approach to their self-improvement. Read his first *Soldier* interview on page 44.

**LCPL BRANDON
TEMPLE-BROWN, RRF**

THANKS to this Fusilier and his colleagues for summarising some of the more common soldiering stereotypes on our back page. Food for thought as the nation marks Armed Forces Day...

Lethal and loaded

AS LEADERS descend on the Land Warfare Conference to discuss progress towards doubling army lethality by 2027, *Soldier's* thoughts turn to the role that individuals are playing.

What must happen – alongside all the technological strides – to give every person reading this magazine the winning edge in battle?

The answers are many. And it's fascinating to see all that is happening at grass-roots level to set British troops up to win.

In initial training, **human performance science** is the name of the game, with sleep, diet and supplements being adjusted to help new recruits hit the mark fast (page 11).

On **overseas exercises**, learning how to dig into positions on a very specific kind of Eastern European terrain – while operating seamlessly with other nations – is the name of the game (page 36).

Back on home soil, core skills and drills are being hammered at every chance – including with **drone and shooting competitions** (pages 21, 30) – to make them second nature.

And as ever, competitive **sport** (page 64) builds a foundation of mental and physical resilience, not to mention camaraderie, that troops will certainly have to call on should the balloon go up.

If nothing else, being the strongest and fittest you can physically is a great place to start for anyone in uniform in 2025. Find our latest **phys and weights inspiration** inside.

If you have a story to share – or a question to ask top brass about preparing for war – contact us via the details on page 5.

Sarah Goldthorpe • **Editor**

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and fittest you can
physically’



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LAND TRAINING SYSTEM

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Land Training System Directive 25/26 Out Now

The Army Knowledge Exchange has all the information you need to understand the LTS and how you will be affected.

Search LTS on the AKX or scan this QR Code.





Picture: Sgt Donald Todd. RLC

PAY RISE KEEPS TROOPS AFLOAT

PERSONNEL are looking forward to more cash in their pockets next month following the announcement that armed forces salaries would increase by 4.5 per cent.

The uplift, which will be paid at the end of July and backdated to April, will see starting wages for soldiers rise to around £26,330 and £34,670 for junior officers. Compensatory allowances such as those paid during service away from home are also rising by the same amount.

Meanwhile, accommodation rates are increasing by up to 7.6 per cent, depending on grade, but will not be backdated, and daily food charges remain unchanged.

As an example, this would leave a private soldier living in the block with a net monthly gain of £87.

Speaking on his Savvy Squaddie financial education channel, Sgt Cam Eden (RLC), pointed out that the award was higher than most people had anticipated and compared

favourably to other public sector pay hikes, as well as civvy employers.

"I'm pleasantly surprised – I was expecting below two per cent," he said.

"Overall, we did well in comparison to other government departments. It's above inflation, giving us a bit more spending power, though after a decade of lagging behind inflation, we are still playing catch up."

The award forms part of the government's efforts to fix recruitment and retention.

LCpl Darriel Browne (RE), who is married and living in service family accommodation, said he had calculated that he would be around £1,500 better off per year.

"That is enough to cover a bill or at least go towards groceries each month – I'm quite happy about it," he added.

"I believe that the army is an easy pay check for what we actually do on a daily basis, but the flip side is the risks we face on deployments.

Those are the times when I feel underpaid."

As a junior officer, 2Lt Abbey Goodchild (RE), said her salary generally measured up well to those of her civilian friends. She explained: "The jobs market now seems pretty much impossible to get a foothold in as a graduate, so having the security of the army definitely helps, especially when you consider the wage progression as you move through the ranks."

But Spr Tom Eden (RE) thought the pay rise would not fully offset the higher cost of living, transport and mortgages.

"It's not a good basis for long-term goals such as home ownership or starting a family," he said.

'It covers a bill or at least a few groceries every month'

WHERE TO FIND SOLDIER



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1

MONTANA, USA

Bang on target

RESERVISTS from The Royal Wessex Yeomanry teamed up with US counterparts for stateside tank drills as part of an ongoing military exchange programme.

Three crews – a total of 14 troops – trained alongside the 1-163rd Cavalry Regiment, Montana Army Reserve National Guard at Fort Harrison, Helena.

Exercise Wessex Alliance saw the UK personnel live firing the M1A2 Abrams tank – useful experience for their scheduled transition to Challenger 3 in 2027 due to the platforms' similarities in armament and ammunition.

Lt Tom Lyons (RWxY) quipped: "There is really nothing like firing 120 millimetres of pure freedom."

The Americans will cross the pond for more joint training in September.

2

NEW YORK, USA

Cadets go west

TRAINEE officers from the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst travelled to the American equivalent of the institution – West Point – for an international military skills competition.

The Sandhurst Cup – named after the Berkshire establishment but staged annually in the US – pitched 48 teams from military academies around the world against each other in the likes of marksmanship, obstacle courses, navigation and sports.

For the UK cadets selected, it meant finding time for extra training on top of their already punishing academic schedules, including 0500 gym sessions for weeks on end.

While the two British teams finished in the top half of the table, bragging rights ultimately went to an outfit from the host college.



3

NORTHERN EUROPE

Staying sharp

BRITAIN and more than a dozen Nato states have joined forces for a three-month shakedown of joint working protocols across Scandinavia and the Baltics.

Starting in April, Operation Razoredge has seen a full flex of the alliance's land, air and sea muscles in a rehearsal of collective defence and power showcase.

The programme included Exercise Hedgehog (page 36) – a test of Estonia's defence plans.

Accompanying maritime escort manoeuvres also ensured that kit for 4th Light Brigade Combat Team was safely delivered.

Meanwhile, soldiers from 16 Air Assault Brigade Combat Team headed for serials straddling Sweden and Norway (page 15).

And neighbouring Finland was the venue for Exercise Northern Strike, involving units including 3rd Regiment Royal Horse Artillery, which rolled out its MLRS kit for the training.

The Army Air Corps showed its teeth throughout in providing top cover.

In all, some 13 Nato countries have contributed to the Razoredge package – which was entering its latter stages as this issue went to press – with around 6,000 UK troops among the participating 17,000 allied personnel.



A TASTE OF ARMY ACTIVITY ACROSS THE WORLD

GLOBAL SITREP

Picture: Team United We Conquer



4

ATLANTIC OCEAN

Paddle power

A FORMER sapper will take his place on a four-man team attempting a world record row across the Atlantic this month.

Jack Jarvis (ex-RE, pictured left) plus Royal Marine veterans David Bruce and Sam Edwards, and civvy Adam Radcliffe, will set off on a 3,500-mile journey from New York to Southampton on June 16.

Their goal is to complete the route in less than 43 days – the current fastest time – while raising £50,000 and spreading awareness for military mental health charity Head Up.

In 2022 Jarvis became the first person to row solo from mainland Europe to Florida.

To support the team visit justgiving.com/page/tuwc



5 FALKLAND ISLANDS

Over to you

THE latest handover of duties at Mount Pleasant Complex is complete. Troops from 3rd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment face a testing tour as the Roulement Infantry Company amid the peak of the southern winter.

But they began their tenure by remembering those who fell in the 1982 Falklands War.

Together with veterans and members of the local community they marked the anniversary of the Battle for Goose Green, in which 18 British soldiers died.

Meanwhile, the outgoing unit – 2nd Battalion, Royal Gurkha Rifles – are back on UK soil, having capped off their deployment down south with Exercise Cape Kukri (pictured), a series of day and night drills staged on Mount Harriet.

Picture: British Forces South Atlantic Islands

'The key thing is to see how other armies tackle different situations'

Defensive drills on Europe's flank – page 36

6 BELGIUM

Lancs look back

MEMBERS of The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment will visit Waterloo on the 210th anniversary of the battle to honour their forebears who fought there.

The King's and Queen's Lancashire Regiments played crucial roles in the definitive clash of June 18, 1815, when the Anglo-Prussian alliance led by the Duke of Wellington defeated Napoleon's forces south of Brussels.

As well as attending commemorations at the Lion's Mound, the British personnel will visit the nearby Nato headquarters.

With 1 Lancs currently ready for ops in Eastern Europe, CO Lt Col Bob Carman described the anniversary as a "powerful reminder of shared heritage and enduring bonds with allies".

He continued: "Connecting with our past helps us learn vital lessons and reinforces principles such as fortitude, cooperation and unity that make us stronger together."



7 AFRICA

'Trip of a lifetime'

INTREPID members of The King's Royal Hussars are reflecting on a bucket-list experience in the African wilderness.

A mixed rank team of 21 troops canoed nearly 190 miles along the fearsome Zambezi River, starting in the Kariba Gorge on the Zambia-Zimbabwe border and finishing at the tripoint between the two countries and Mozambique.

Made up mostly of novices, the group overcame challenges such as harsh weather and unforgiving terrain as they covered a punishing 18 miles per day and camped out under the stars at night.

Cpl Tommy White, a Challenger 2 crew commander from A Squadron, said the ten-day expedition had been "the trip of a lifetime".

"Seeing the wildlife up close in its natural habitat was incredible and has inspired me to take my canoe qualifications further," he added.



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Picture: Cpl Vincnet Price, RLC

COULD YOU INSTRUCT?



AITC wants the best corporals, sergeants, colour sergeants and staff sergeants. "It's a great chance to come out of your unit and build a network across the army," the general says. "Working here sets you off in the next stage of your career, with lots of skills to take back." **Speak to your chain of command or RCMO.**

BUILDING THE BEST INITIAL TRAINING GETS SMARTER

INTERVIEW

BLACKOUT blinds and mattress toppers might not seem like obvious things to top the wish list of a newly appointed training boss, but Maj Gen Nick Cowley says better sleep is going to get more recruits through training and into the ranks.

It's a bold claim from the top officer, who oversees the newly formed Army Individual Training Command (AITC). But he has the science to back it up, thanks to his own team of in-house human performance experts.

The importance of sleep for injury recovery and learning is a topic *Soldier* covered back in our March magazine.

And the general says much of the data he is seeing suggests that helping troops to get a good night is one cost-free way the organisation could lower drop-out rates and therefore improve fighting power.

"Lack of sleep is making us less lethal as an army – and I have the science now to back that claim up," Maj Gen Cowley states.

"This isn't about being hard or soft on recruits – when you are sleep deprived you start losing bone mass. So if we want to have strong soldiers, we need to allow them to sleep.

"A really important job for AITC is to minimise wastage in training – to get the best from every person.

'I think we are doing the most important job in the British Army'



Maj Gen Nick Cowley
GOC AITC

"How do we reduce the number who choose to leave? Even just an hour extra per night might have a big impact."

As the army continues its efforts to double lethality by 2027, the science around maximising individual output is being closely monitored. Among AITC's human performance specialists are civilian scientists and occupational psychologists, many of whom the general credits with "world-leading" research.

If the service wants to continue leading the globe in soldier and officer education, he says, it must also lead in this.

"It is a really exciting bit of work because we can do much of this stuff for free, bar the spend on a few blackout blinds for training establishments," he adds.

The officer, who is commandant of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, says his team are also looking at pushing back breakfast times.

"Some training in sleep deprivation may be important for our soldiers, to see how it impacts decision-making, for example," he says. "But general sleep deprivation – especially in a learning environment – cannot be defended.

"People lacking in sleep get into a doom cycle of thinking they're not doing well enough, and many of our instructors are sleeping less than they should, too.

"By making changes, we may find troops make gains quicker and with less lesson time."

He continues: "We don't need to be at the athlete level of human performance; for them it's about excelling in controlled environments. What the army needs is for everyone to perform well in inconsistent and

degraded conditions.

"For most of what we need to do, if we sleep well in a dark room away from devices – and eat good, healthy meals and at times provide the right supplementation – and of course do training that is progressive, those are all the big things.

"Our PT corps is brilliant in helping us achieve this."

Maj Gen Cowley tells *Soldier* of his vision for data use in initial training so that one day leaders will be able to pull up results to quickly discover why one group of recruits may be consistently outdoing the other.

"We are going in that direction," he says, "feeding off data to analyse what changes need to be made. The opportunities are massive."

The officer has several other priorities for his organisation – which for the first time brings all individual training of officers and soldiers together under a single command.

These include: protecting the army's licence to operate (better safeguarding, safety and making sure the service is an inclusive and positive place), making troops brilliant at the basics – shooting, moving, being physically tough and ready to deploy – and being more technologically aware.

Improving the training and selection of instructors is also a focus.

"I think we are doing the most important job in the British Army, setting the benchmark of training and our values and standards," he adds.

"There's the usual throwaway claim that army life isn't as tough for recruits as it used to be, but when I see our young people pass out I am content they're getting the training they need – they are brimming with confidence.

"But we need to understand that it is never the finished product arriving at units."

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THE PRICE OF PEACE

GUNNERS home from Op Tosca in Cyprus paused to honour the 4,000+ United Nations troops who have died in the name of peace.

Members of 5 Regiment, Royal Artillery led a wreath laying ceremony in Whitehall.

More than 61,000 UN peacekeepers are currently deployed to troubled regions around the world, including the buffer zone in Cyprus.

Picture: Cpl Tim Hammond, RAF



Picture: Sgt Donald Todd, RLC

TROOPS DON'T FEEL THE LOVE

A GROWING disconnect between soldier and civvy may be down to the service having less profile than in the days of operations in Afghanistan, troops believe.

They say the absence of personnel from TV screens and online means youngsters are less aware of the military or its role

than they were in the past.

In addition, they say an increasing number of social media influencers are touting aspirational lifestyles across their channels and people are turning to them as role models.

The claims come as the latest armed forces continuous attitude survey shows that army personnel are feeling less and less appreciated by wider society.

Just over a quarter of troops polled for the study believed their work was valued by civvies – taking a further hit from 32 per cent in last year's questionnaire.

LSgt Ashley Ryan (IG) – the senior NCO in the army's engagement team – believes visibility and changing lifestyles are a factor.

The 36-year-old Aldershot-based soldier – who is also a keen video gamer and member of the service esports community – told this magazine: "Back in the days when I joined, in the 2000s, troops were never off the TV because of our involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"Obviously the world is different now, but new technology also means that social media influencers are rivaling military

personnel as role models."

Reservist Lt Victoria Carr (Int Corps), senior research fellow at the Sandhurst-based Centre for Army Leadership, also believed that the declining media profile of the military may have contributed to the distance opening up between soldier and civvy.

While there were occasional TV series on the forces, they did not show many "positive aspects in the lived experience of soldiers", the academic added.

Other findings in the armed forces continuous attitude survey...



GOOD DRILLS

● Nine out of ten troops say their family is proud of their service

● Nearly 90 per cent felt they had the knowledge, experience and skills to do the job



BAD DRILLS

● 55 per cent of soldiers rated morale as low

● Half of troops were dissatisfied with on-base facilities



TELL US WHAT HAPPENED...

A SURVEY is being carried out on sexual harassment in the armed forces.

It is the first of its kind to capture experiences from all three services and is part of a range of continuing measures aimed at tackling sexual harassment.

All serving regular and reserve personnel, including phase one and two recruits, can complete it on Defnet, but to ensure random and proportional sampling, some troops will also have received an email invitation.

Respondents will be asked about their experiences and opinions on unacceptable sexual behaviours in the military, as well as their thoughts on how it is reported, prevented and managed.

Answers are anonymous and the data will be analysed outside of the chain of command.

Attitude survey results – page 13

Picture: Cpl Danielle Dawson, RLC



PHOTOGRAPHERS SALUTED

PROUD service snappers had their pictures showcased at the National Army Museum as the London venue hosted a ceremony for winners of the re-launched photographic competition.

Trophies were presented by rock legend and keen cameraman Bryan Adams, whose father was in the Canadian Army and grandfathers served in the REME.

Congratulating the sharpshooters, the musician – also a competition judge with other military and trade heavyweights including Assistant Chief of the General Staff, Maj Gen Paul Griffiths plus *Soldier* phot Graeme Main – said it had been a privilege to be involved.

Museum boss Justin Maciejewski, a former CO of 2nd Battalion, The Rifles who served in both Iraq and Afghanistan during a career spanning more than two decades, added that he was delighted to see the event return.

The retired brigadier told this magazine: “We had always hosted the Army Photographic Competition before it was paused during the pandemic, and it is good to have it back again.

“The images show the huge range of activities in which the military is involved and taken together are a real celebration of our troops’ service.”

Awards ceremony host Command Master Photographer WO1 Baz Lloyd (RLC) said he had been impressed with the exceptional quality of work.

Sgt Donald Todd (RLC, pictured above) was crowned professional of the year and LSgt Alisdair Szyszko (Gren Gds, left) the top amateur.

The Story of Soldier Magazine – an exhibition telling the 80-year story of this title – continues to run at the National Army Museum until next month.

Visit the museum for free between 1000 and 1730, Tuesday to Sunday to see if your unit or colleagues feature in it.





SWIFT RESPONSE

PARATROOPERS touched down in the Arctic Circle to conduct low-level jumps and multinational training with their Nato allies.

Exercise Swift Response in northern Norway was led by the United Nations and included troops from Italy, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania and Sweden.

It saw the operators work to improve their readiness with simultaneous insertions, integration of technology, a field hospital exercise and live firing serials.

FEMALES KILL IT ON THE RANGE

EAGLE-EYED loggies have blasted their way into history after becoming the first all-female team to take part in the Corps Operational Shooting Competition.

The outfit – led by WO2 Jess Kilfoyle of 29 Regiment, RLC (pictured back row, third from right) – put in a strong performance at the five-day event in Pirbright to finish ninth of more than 30 regular teams.

The impressive showing means they qualify for the defence operational shooting event in the same camp this month.

WO2 Kilfoyle told *Soldier* she was over the moon with her team,

the youngest member of which is aged just 19, adding that they had put in days of hard graft.

And she hoped their strong performance in serials such as section attacks and advance-to-contact drills would inspire other servicewomen.

“Accurate and rapid shooting is essential, wherever in the army you serve,” WO2 Kilfoyle added. “You’re firing at moving targets on the ranges and have to deal with simulated casualty extractions – all the while fatigued and under pressure.”

“I’m delighted with the team.”

Run and gun – page 30



Picture: WO1 Rupert Frere, RLC

HELP TAKE AIM ON RECRUITMENT WOES

A RALLYING call has been issued to junior NCOs and officers asking them to use their experience to bring fresh blood into the ranks.

Three dozen troops are being sought to join four new UK outreach teams and good career opportunities are promised for the successful applicants.

They are tasked with engaging people from under-represented groups – including women and ethnic minorities – explaining how a career in soldiering looks.

Army Recruiting Group CO Lt Col Vickie Warrington (RE) said those with four or five years’ experience who had sampled adventurous training, operations or exercises would be ideal candidates.

She told *Soldier*: “They need to be equally confident speaking to professionals as they are young people.”

“They will be visible role models – people who are enthusiastic and able to speak about their own experience.”

Based in Aldershot, Chilwell, Stafford and Edinburgh, each team will be headed up by an army officer.

“We’re looking at soldiers from lance corporal through to captain,” Lt Col Warrington added.

“They will show the army is a place where everyone can belong.”



Scan to register your interest



Picture: Graeme Main

diary dates



1

Do or doko

BASED on a crucial part of the Gurkha selection process, this month's Doko Challenge South sees participants take on a five-kilometre cross-country course with a weighted Nepali doko basket strapped to their backs. The annual fundraiser, organised by the Gurkha Welfare Trust, will be staged at the Richardson Evans Memorial Playing Fields, London before moving to Roundhay Park, Leeds on June 15.



7

Yompers unite

SOLDIERS and civilians will descend on Scotland's wilderness to trek 54 miles in 24 hours for the Army Benevolent Fund. Follow the event on Instagram via [@cateran_yomp](https://www.instagram.com/cateran_yomp) or sign up for next year's event at armybenevolentfund.org



2

Rink return

ALL eyes will be on Ice Sheffield from June 2 to 5 as the military's finest ice hockey players return to Inter-Services action. After losing 9-7 to the Royal Air Force in last season's final, the Army Blades will be out for revenge, while the women's team – the Army Fury – will play only their second services fixture.

12

Title in sight

THE army travel to Arundel as the overwhelming favourites in the women's Inter-Services Twenty20 Cricket Championships. Last season the Reds amassed a mammoth total of 270-1 as they recorded a 182-run win over the Royal Navy before rain washed out their match with the Royal Air Force. They went on to claim the title thanks to their superior run rate but will want to settle matters on the field this time round.



14

Birthday parade

NUMBER 7 Company, Coldstream Guards will troop their colour at the 2025 King's official birthday parade. Taking part this year will be more than 1,350 soldiers from across the Household Division and The King's Troop, including musicians from the massed bands. Guardsmen will line the processional route along The Mall – and look out for the Royal Air Force fly-past at 1300.



27

Explosive weekend

TANKFEST returns to Bovington for the world's most impressive display of historic moving armour. Running over three days, the event will feature the only fully working King Tiger – a German beast first used at Normandy in 1944. Bag a ticket at tankmuseum.org



Pictures: The Tank Museum



28

Armed Forces Day

VETERANS, soldiers and their civilian supporters will come together at the end of the month to show their appreciation for those who serve King and country. Log onto armedforcesday.org to find a parade, prom or party near to you.

Final Word – page 74

fuel

AFTERGLOW

Feel the benefit of your phys or graft – and reduce the risk of injury – with these three quick post-workout recovery steps

1

REFUEL

Your energy stores are low after a hard session so eat **starchy carbohydrate foods** such as crumpets, cereal, chicken wraps or eggs on toast as soon as you can. It's easier for your body to restore the carb supplies in your muscles within two hours of exercise than it is later... which is worth remembering if you want to maximise your performance or train again within 24 hours.



2

REPAIR

Make sure you **add protein** to recovery snacks or meals to repair your muscles. These kinds of foods – such as meat, fish, eggs, yoghurt or nuts – provide the foundation for muscle to rebuild and are crucial if you want to up your strength and perform better.

3

REHYDRATE

Drink fluids – which can include water, juice, milk, squash, tea and coffee. H₂O will replace the water lost from sweat, while milk or juice can provide carbohydrates, electrolytes and protein.



• Find nutrition tips on the Defence Nutrition Advisory Service's Sharepoint or Defence Connect pages

D

IS FOR DEPLOYABLE

TROOPS are being reminded of the importance of keeping up vitamin D levels to reduce the risk of injury and perform well when it matters.

The way they train and live already makes soldiers more susceptible to certain illnesses.

But in a briefing note to commanders, the Army Health team said these supplements could ensure fewer sick days and more consistent training.

"Studies in military populations and athletes have shown that poor vitamin D status may increase the risk of bone stress injuries, severity of illness (particularly upper respiratory tract infections) and impair aerobic performance," it said.

Produced through exposure to sunlight, vitamin D helps the body regulate calcium and phosphate.

You cannot get enough from food sources alone, so the NHS already recommends it for adults in the winter months or when in places of low sunlight. Pregnant or breastfeeding women are also advised to take it.

Research on military personnel now supports extending this recommendation to all soldiers, year-round – a minimal level of 400IU (usually one tablet).

Those undertaking higher levels of physical activity – such as phase one training or phase two for combat and combat support roles – should consider taking 800IU (two tablets).

For arduous selection courses, this is required for up to six months before the training event.

Commanders in locations such as Estonia and Norway are advised to make vitamin D available to all personnel.

Read **ABN 024/2025** for more info on the recommendation.

Did you know?
Many candidates joining the army are already vitamin D deficient



Food for thought

Army footballer on how good nutrition has upped her game:

"I BEGAN my health and fitness journey six years ago. It started with a diet and learning about macronutrients, which then escalated into my own research on foods as a whole and how to fuel around training. At 32 years old and now a mum, I'm the fittest and healthiest I've been, all because I changed my relationship with food. Eating the right amount of carbs before training or a match, and ensuring I eat enough afterwards to aid in the recovery process, has been a game changer. It's also vital to take on electrolytes when needed and get enough protein daily, not just on game days. These small changes over a period of time have meant I'm still able to compete in football at a high level."

Sgt Amber Marsh, REME

TASTE OF THE MED...



CYPRUS-based soldiers will soon find local dishes on the menu after contractor Sodexo pledged to include them in a revamped culinary line-up. The company said it would offer more traditional delicacies such as chicken souvlaki (shown) at spruced-up outlets now it has taken on a new five-year leisure contract with the Defence Infrastructure Organisation. But soldiers with a less adventurous palate have been reassured they will still find plenty of British favourites available.

tech

WHEN AI BREAKS THE LAW

The problem with fully autonomous weapons

THE recent launch of the Red Dragon suicide drone by US manufacturer AeroVironment caused a stir among nations who subscribe to the law of armed conflict.

The advanced platform (pictured below) can strike a target up to 200km away with a 10kg explosive payload.

But what caught most people's attention was its advanced AI brain which, if the operator so desires, means it can be configured to take on a fully autonomous mission where it selects and eliminates an enemy target on its own, with no human operator in the decision-making loop.

The capability could, theoretically, boost any army's fighting power, providing a potent offensive weapon while freeing up personnel for other roles.

But whether the fully autonomous option would ever be used by UK armed forces is difficult to foresee.

At the current time such action is strictly off limits and looks set to remain so, despite the fact certain foreign states and terrorist groups have already deployed this technology.

"There are major ethical and legal obstacles standing in the way of the UK doing the same," says Lt Col Tristan Davies (AGC (ALS)), responsible for operational law for capability development at Army Headquarters.

"Anything the UK fields has to strictly comply with international law."

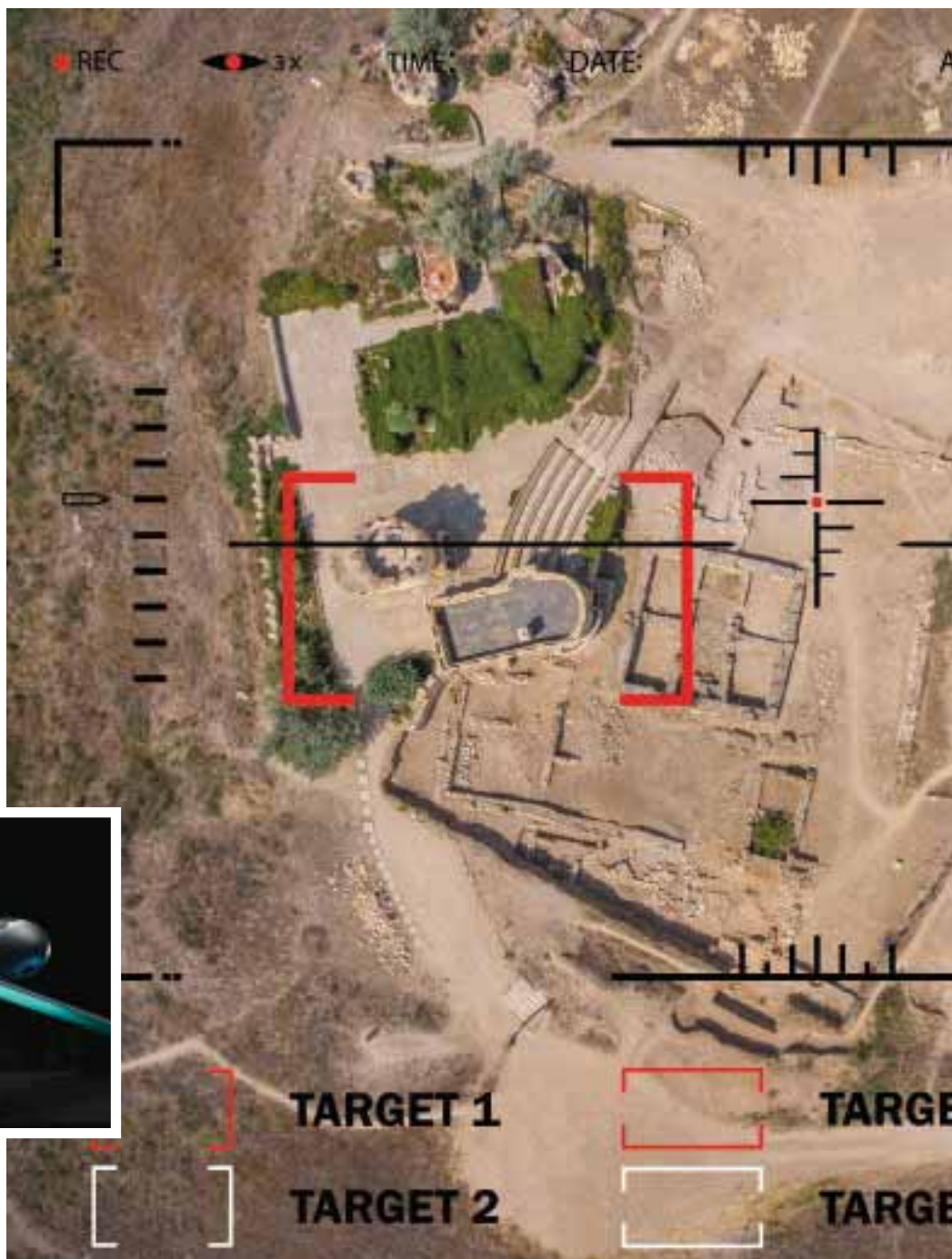
The current position is that there must be so-called "context-appropriate human involvement" with AI, autonomy and weapons.

"We have some systems with degrees of automation, such as the navy's Phalanx automated close-in weapon system (shown right), but a human operator will always be in the chain somewhere, even if just to set the parameters for targeting or to switch objectives, or to shut them down," explains the officer.

Currently, international law effectively prohibits the use of fully autonomous systems because they simply do not meet legal requirements for deployment.

"The rules mean any technology we use must be able to distinguish between military targets and civilians," Lt Col Davies adds.

"You can't cause unnecessary suffering and any action must also be proportionate – so a fully autonomous drone would need to be



Pictures: AeroVironment (AV). LPhot Belinda Alker, RN; Shutterstock



clever enough to assess the potential collateral damage against the need for the attack itself.

"Also, the AI must have the ability to cancel, suspend or amend the operation.

"Imagine if an enemy soldier is waving his hands about, trying to surrender. Can the drone recognise that and not attack?

"And can it distinguish between a badly hurt individual and one lying-in-wait in a foxhole?"

To kill personnel who are out of the fight through injury or having surrendered is against the laws of war and the UK takes its obligations in this area very seriously.

"Under Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions any new technology goes through an article 36 review, which determines whether the weapon is legal under existing international law," continues Lt Col Davies.

"In the UK we have Defence Futures, a tri-service body that undertakes legal reviews of new

weapons as they are being developed.

"Also, commanders are accountable under the law for anything used now or in the future.

"So while fully autonomous systems may be here, it's hard to see right now how their deployment would ever be permissible for the UK's armed forces."

Whether this revolutionary tech will ever be clever enough to meet the high bar set by international law remains to be seen.

However, it is not going away and according to Lt Col Davies the huge technical strides being made in AI mean law-abiding nations across the globe, including the UK, are spending more time than ever ensuring they can deliver assured systems and that any updates brought in do not break the rules.



'It is hard to see how their use would ever be permissible'

'They're the snipers of today's warfare'

Drone comp pushes skills out fast

EFFORTS to increase the number of UAV pilots in the army are continuing apace with the latest in a series of competitions.

Around 150 personnel from all three services, plus international allies, converged on Carver Barracks, Wimbish for two days of first-person-view (FPV) drone racing, shown below.

Hosted by 1 (UK) Division, the contest saw 32 different units tackle an inflatable obstacle course against the clock, followed by a more tactically focused serial with a recce feed and a target to strike.

While a Royal Air Force duo triumphed in the first element, a pilot and spotter pairing from the Welsh Guards took top spot in the combat scenario.

Organiser Capt Charlie Jefford (RE) said it was the third such event since September to use sport to rapidly grow the skill set.

"It takes a lot of practice and dexterity to successfully fly an FPV drone – it's not just like playing an Xbox," he said.

"But drones are killing more than artillery. They are like the snipers of today's warfare, ubiquitous across the battlefield, and the sooner we have a mass of pilots across combat and combat

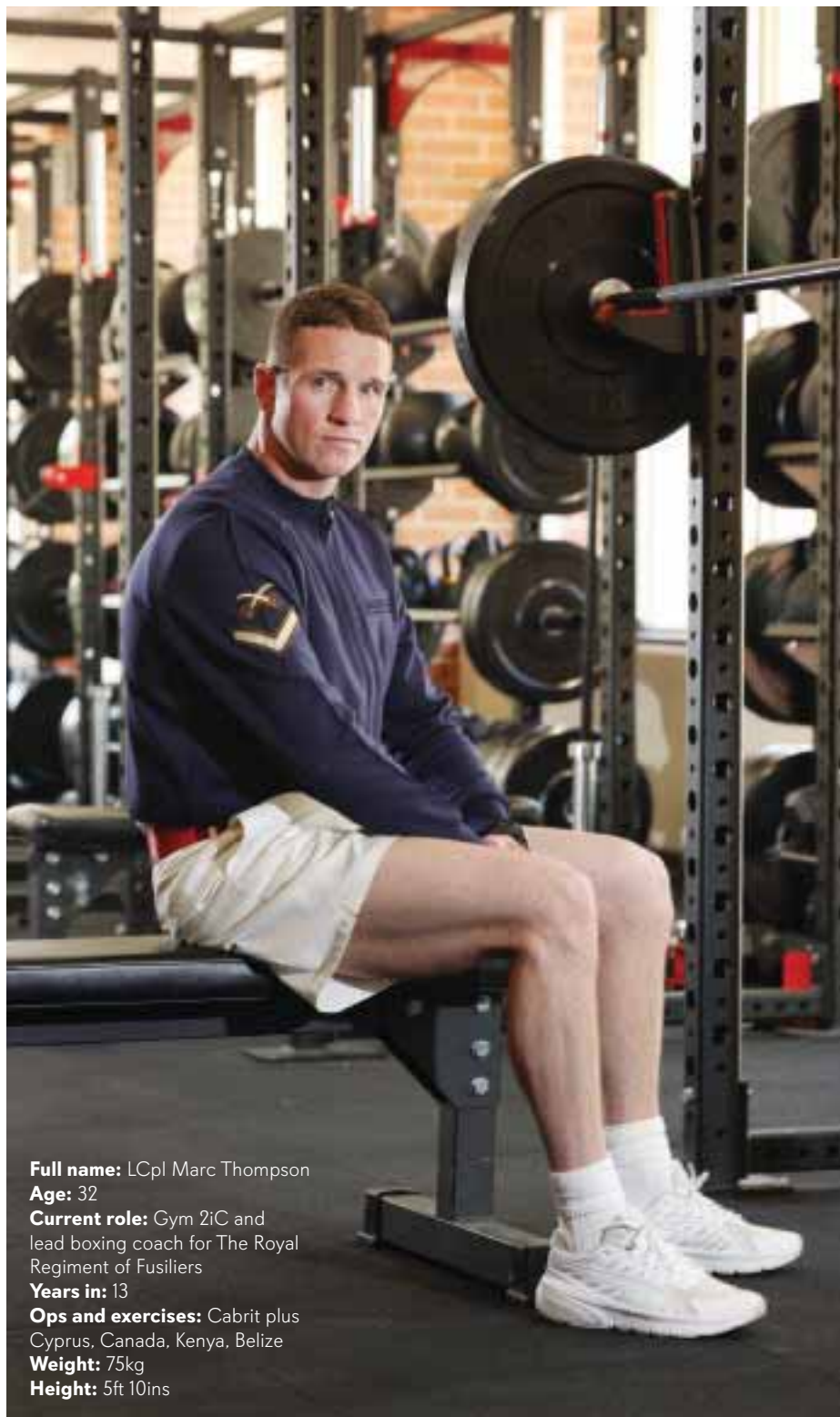


support arms who can fly them, the better."

The competition was attended by troops involved in Op Interflex – including Ukrainians, who shared real-life insights into the impact of UAVs on their war with Russia.

The fourth event in the series will take place this month, hosted by 2nd Battalion, The Rifles.

fitness



Picture: Graeme Main

Full name: LCpl Marc Thompson
Age: 32
Current role: Gym 2iC and lead boxing coach for The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers
Years in: 13
Ops and exercises: Cabrit plus Cyprus, Canada, Kenya, Belize
Weight: 75kg
Height: 5ft 10ins

Q&A

MY WORKOUT

Fresh from competing at the UK Armed Forces Championships (*SoldierSport*, May), boxing ace **LCpl Marc Thompson (RRF)** shares the secrets of his phys

How many times a week do you train?

Twice a day, every day, except Sunday

What activities?

A bit of everything. Strength and conditioning and cardio, as well as boxing.

Tell us about your biggest health setback and how you got round it

I had a hernia in 2016 that required keyhole surgery. It took me out of any sort of training for 12 weeks and I then had to do a reconditioning programme to get back to full strength. I had just been selected for the army boxing development squad, so I focused on that end game and kept reminding myself of the big goal.

How do you react to defeat?

When you train for something big and fail it can hit you hard. For me it takes a couple of days, then I like to sit down and reflect on where I've come from and what I've achieved – it's all about staying positive. I like to go back to family life, be a dad and a partner. Then I will sit down with a coach, a good friend or my boss and just speak about it and get it out there. You have to get over it.

Warriors set to do battle

THE British Army Warrior Fitness Team Series finals will be held at ATR Winchester on June 25.

Participating teams were in the process of being notified as this issue went to press, and those selected will face four challenging workouts having previously been tested in the regional qualifying competitions (shown).

The series is designed to incorporate various exercises that are relevant to the Army Physical Training System while enhancing inter-unit and team cohesion.



Picture: Sgt Ben Beale, RLC

How do you overcome mental barriers?

With positivity. I put the problem to one side and move towards the positive thing.

How do you pep yourself up for a workout when you're not in the mood?

By thinking about how I'm going to feel afterwards – that rush of endorphins.

What's been your biggest barrier to better health and fitness?

Being busy. I had a very full-on role in Catterick a while back, and was also preparing for my first child. As a result I wasn't really eating the right things and took two years out of training. I put on 25kg.

Do you follow a particular eating regime now?

Yes. When I'm training full time for the boxing I'm really strict. I'm not doing that at the moment, so I just try to stick to a healthy diet of three meals and four litres of water a day. I try to stay away from takeaways and fast food, too. No more than one cheap meal a day.

Any guilty pleasures (food or otherwise)?

Indian takeaways and a sociable drink with friends. I've found over the years that alcohol piles a lot of weight on.

Energy drinks – yes or no?

The only one I use is Lucozade Sport, they're full of electrolytes which your body needs after a session.

How many hours' sleep do you get a night?

I try to get between six and eight.

What do you wish you'd known about phys as a new recruit?

The fact there are so many different types of training, not just cardio. At one point I was running eight miles a day to stay fit, but if you do interval training, for example, you can get just as much out of a 20 minute slot as you can an hour. It's smarter, quicker and not as harsh on the body. Tailor your programme around the specific sport you do, and get the right advice to avoid overloading.



ROUND-THE-CLOCK RECOVERY

THREE days into his recent bid to tab 1,000 miles from Land's End to John O'Groats, **Farren Morgan (ex-Coldm Gds)** found himself on the ropes.

Having set the goal of becoming the first person to cover the route in 25 days – while carrying a 35lb pack – the former PTI was struggling and facing failure for the first time in his life. But determined to finish the challenge in aid of charity Reorg, the 38-year-old drew on every ounce of military grit to see it through.

He told *Soldier* how recovery became a day-by-day process...



Days 3-5

Physically, **I was broken**. Emotionally, I was up and down. I'd planned to do 40 miles per day, but had to change that. I reduced my daily target to 35 miles, broken up into as many stints as needed. A **pep-talk from mum** helped; she told me she didn't raise a quitter.

Days 6-18

My longest sessions would be first thing each day – 12-15 miles, then rest and go again. At certain points I was only doing two miles at a time. In between I **iced, elevated and compressed my legs, massaged my muscles** and rubbed in ointment. Snacks included bananas and peanut butter and jam sandwiches.

Days 19-25

The last six days I **felt phenomenal**. But I had to make up for lost time, which meant over the last 26 hours I covered 94 miles to get within the 25-day limit.

Day 25

When I reached the finish I was excited, but also sad. It had taken six months of training, so I didn't really know how to feel. I **celebrated with champagne** and ate some KFC, before doing some stretching and getting some sleep.

... AND AFTERWARDS

+1-2 days

I got back home and into my **normal routine** of clean eating instead of the junk food I was having to eat on the road.

+ 3 days

Back **in the gym** for a 40-minute chest and arms session. I was weak and had lost about eight kilos, but it felt good to be back. I continued stretching, foam rolling and going in the sauna to address where I hurt.

+ 2 weeks

In the **gym daily for ten days**. I was struggling to get down to the same squat depth because my hips were still tight. My goal now is to return to the shape I was before, and put muscle back on. It's been like being back in the army – the military community have been so behind me.

fighting



Pictures: Cpls Jamie Hart and Vincent Price, both RLC

TAME THAT TEMPER

Why unaddressed anger could be making you a worse soldier – and what to do about it

CONTROLLED aggression may be needed in combat, but if rage festers it can affect your thinking and behaviour, harm relationships and negatively impact the body too.

As Paul Minter (ex-RHG/D), co-founder of military mental health charity Head Up (head-up.org.uk) points out, frequent outbursts can be a sign that someone is depressed or suffering other emotional issues, while long-term stress can damage the immune system.

Feeling angry too often can also become a habit. These are his tips for keeping your temper in check...

Think before you speak. In the heat of the moment, it's easy to say something you'll regret. Take a few moments to collect your thoughts before saying anything.

Express anger when you are calm.

Once you're thinking clearly, try to explain your frustration in a non-confrontational way. State your concerns and needs without hurting others or trying to control them.

Do some phys. Exercise can help reduce stress. Try going for a brisk walk or run.

Take a timeout. Give yourself short breaks during parts of the day that tend to be more stressful. A few moments of quiet time might help you feel better prepared to handle what's ahead.

Look for possible solutions. Instead of focusing on what made you mad, work on resolving the issue.

Use 'I' statements. Avoid placing blame and be respectful and specific. For example, say, "I'm upset with the cleanliness" instead of "you haven't done any cleaning".

Don't hold grudges. If you allow anger to crowd out positive feelings, you can get swallowed up by your own bitterness. But if you can forgive someone who upset you, you might both learn something and strengthen your relationship.

Use humour to diffuse tension. Lightening up can help you face things and overcome any unrealistic expectations you had.

Relax. Use deep-breathing exercises, imagine a relaxing scene, repeat a calming phrase, listen to music or do a few yoga poses — whatever it takes to chill out.

Know when to get help. Learning to control anger is a challenge for everyone at times. Ask for support if yours seems out of control, causes you to do things you regret or hurts those around you.

TRENCH CLEARING

How to do it well

WITH events in Ukraine never far from mind – and miles of trenches now occupying the UK defence training estate – this type of close-quarter battle is back big-time. But what should soldiers and commanders be thinking about when engaged in this fighting? Capt James Hails (R Yorks), OC of the Infantry Battle School's survivability wing, has a few pointers...

STAY LOW

There are massive arcs of fire coming onto troops when they are inside trenches – stay as low as possible at all times.

BE AN ALL-ROUNDER

Trench fighting can be paralysing, with troops often focused on the area around the trench and forgetting flanks. Always think 3D, with drones and UAS likely to be loitering. All-round defence can be provided from inside by observing

arcs, and from outside by using troops who are not yet committed such as fire support.

KEEP MOMENTUM

This doesn't necessarily mean speed, but in any CQB it's about pushing the fight forward, be that troops or fire support. Continuous pressure will keep the enemy off balance and stop them consolidating or counter-attacking.

HAVE A SIMPLE PLAN

Once break-in is achieved, clearance must

be well controlled and systematic with limited objectives. It should ideally be in one direction to avoid blue-on-blue incidents. Platoon commanders may not be up front but further back with their subordinates executing the plan.

EXERCISE GOOD COMMAND AND CONTROL

This is vital to success. Leaders should give their soldiers ownership but ensure they don't over-extend, and control the direction of personnel and the

Rifles are suited to trench clearance and, where applicable, **bayonets** should be fixed • Carrying **pistols** allows them to be used as a close-quarter weapon in case of a stoppage • History shows the side with the most **grenades** holds a significant advantage • **Flags, smoke, flares** and **torches** also need to be carried

input of reserves at the crucial moment. Have robust fire and control measures and understand where your forward line of own troops (Flot) is.

BE AGGRESSIVE

Trench clearing is dangerous, difficult and confusing. A high level of aggression and courage is required to be successful.

Troops take to the trenches in Estonia – page 36



UP TO ARDUOUS?

EVER wondered what it takes to be a woman in UK Special Forces? Keen to learn if this career change is for you – and how to prepare for it?

If the answer is 'yes' and you're a serving soldier – regular or reserve – who is medically fully deployable, you are invited to a special event this month.

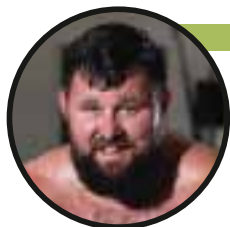
Women in Arduous Training runs from June 24-25, with a mixture of classroom and

practical sessions to help potential candidates get all the information they need.

The serials are not tests and there is no pass criteria.

For more details search for 'Women in Arduous Training' on Defence Connect.

strength



A FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH

Heavy lifting has massive benefits for soldiers, says this champ...

THERE is bound to be surging interest in Strongman competitions now they've been recognised as an official army sport.

But those who aspire to reach the top of the tree will have to overcome the imposing figure of Cpl Rhys Calland (REME) – the reigning armed forces champion and dominant service competitor since first daubing his hands in chalk and wrapping his 20-inch biceps around a 120kg stone ball three years ago.

The 6ft 2in vehicle mechanic, who's currently attached to 1 Regiment, Army Air Corps at RNAS Yeovilton, can lift an Oshkosh wheel with tyre "for a light workout". And back at home in Torquay he sometimes lugs his VW people carrier down the road to keep his hand in at pulling trucks – a famous staple of Strongman events.

Moving a car isn't exactly superhuman, we hear you say? Well, try it Cpl Calland's way – with the handbrake on.

He joined up in 2016 after working at Halfords in Torquay as a push bike mechanic left him feeling decidedly unfulfilled.

A gym rat since the age of 15, Cpl Calland came to realise, through social media, the army had its own Strongman community and decided to commit as much time as he could to the sport.

Despite being a relative novice, the 29-year-old has won four of the five forces tournaments he's entered so far (he finished runner-up in the other), and in the space of four days in April claimed the Devon's Strongest Man crown and the blue riband 'open' category of the first ever Armed Forces Strongest Man and Woman Championship, held at Catterick. The

NCO came first or joint first in all five events to claim the title.

Now he's training hard for England's Strongest Man in York next month.

We asked him what advice he would offer to anyone interested in the sport...

It's a great sport to combine with a military career.

That applies even more so now that it's an official army sport and can be integrated into our weekly routines. We'll be able to source funding for better equipment, organise training camps in advance and travel to major events. Also, the hard training develops mental resilience and that corresponds to our job roles. Most Strongman disciplines are similar to role fitness training. Deadlifts feature in both, as do sandbag lifts, and the RFT's power bag onto a platform is very like Strongman's lifting the stone.

It really helps to have a sympathetic partner.

I have a two-and-a-half-year-old daughter and another child on the way but my partner doesn't mind my hours in the gym and taking the odd weekend away to compete. She comes along to support me, loves the whole scene and watches it on TV. The only exception is when I annoy our neighbours at home by accidentally dropping a stone during training sessions in my garage. It makes a serious thud and sometimes they'll come round thinking we've had a major incident.

Don't neglect cardio. People often think this sport is just about ultimate strength. It's not – the first time I did the sandbag event I

realised that. We had to run 20 metres with a 100kg bag, then drop it, sprint back and pick up a 120kg version, then repeat with a 140kg bag. While I could lift the bags I was knackered after just one run, so now I work on my cardio all the time, mainly by doing practice sandbag shuttle runs. Also, Strongman contests last all day so you need endurance to be competitive.

When I don't eat enough my training really suffers.

I went camping recently and ate mainly breakfast cereal over the weekend. I felt weak for days afterwards and it compromised my schedule a bit. I eat about 6,000 calories a day but I'm not overly scientific about it. I eat good food, with protein and carbs in every meal. I can tune my diet and training to an upcoming event. If the disciplines are mainly power drills such as deadlifts I might pack on some extra weight and grow to 150kg. If they are more biased towards runs and endurance, I'll eat and train to stay around 140kg.

Stay focused in competitions. One time I carelessly put dry chalk powder on my hands instead of liquid chalk, which is far grippier and better for events that employ a smooth bar. During the farmer's carry, which involves carrying weights while walking a set distance or duration, I had 120kg in each hand, which isn't heavy for me, but I ended up dropping them twice.

Keep training while deployed if you can.

I usually take 100kg of weights and a bench with me if possible and train as best I can. Keeping moving and doing some weights is better than nothing. I was in Estonia for two months last year and luckily they had a gym. It wasn't optimised for someone like me so I went back to basics and trained quite light again, doing more reps at less weight to keep my strength up. My body actually enjoyed the contrast.

I've learned through bitter experience to stop training immediately if I feel any kind of muscle niggle or suspect an injury is coming.

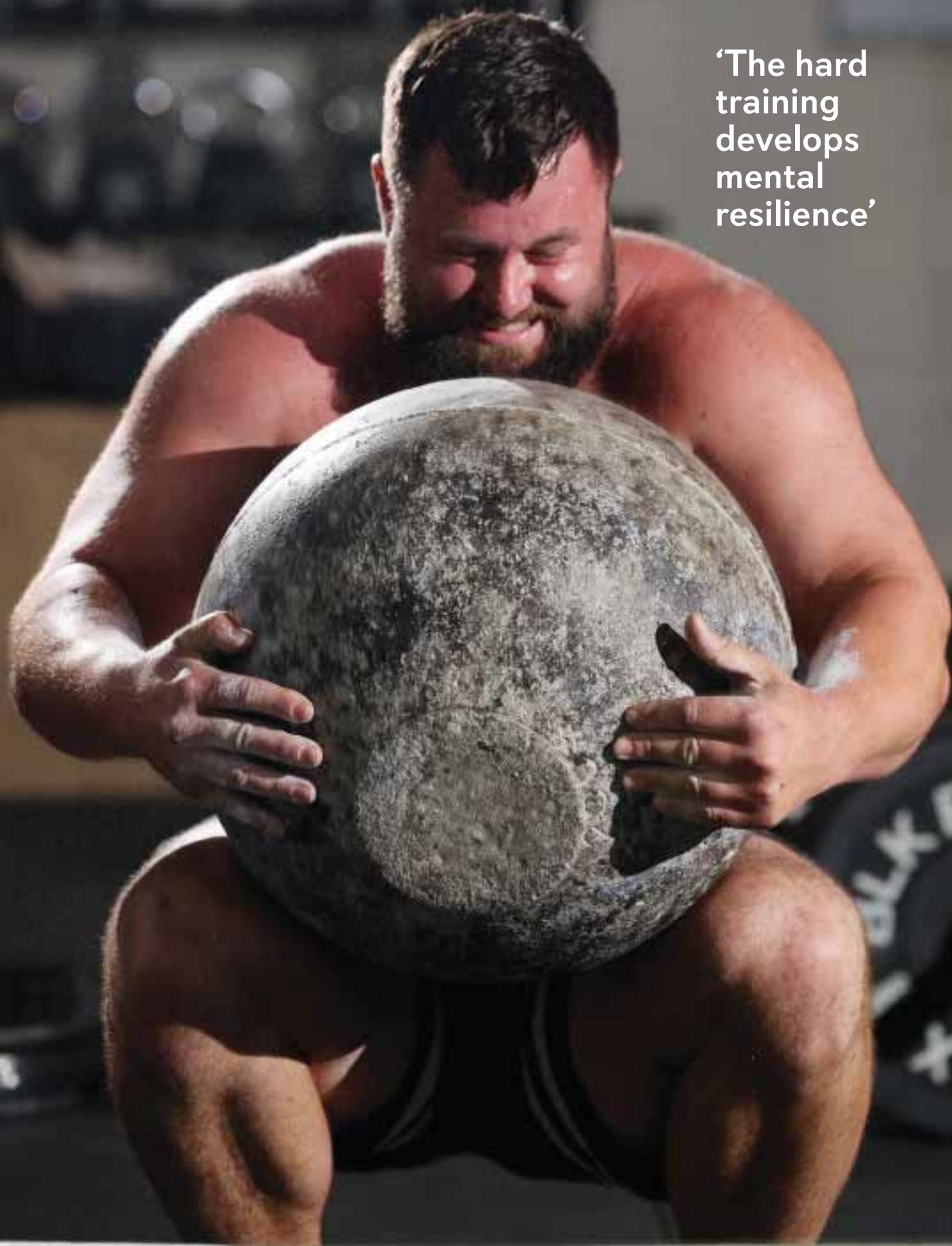
If you try and train through it you'll end up prolonging or worsening the injury. Missing one or two sessions isn't going to make you lose strength.

Cpl Calland's PBs
Deadlift – 325kg
Farmer's carry (each hand) – 150kg
Shoulder press – 160kg
Back squat x 3 reps – 270kg
Atlas stone (over a platform) – 150kg



Pictures: Graeme Main

‘The hard
training
develops
mental
resilience’



career

HIGHER POWER

AFTER 11 years in uniform, Gus Ryrie (ex-RE, shown) decided to move into the world of higher education.

Now a senior lecturer in sport coaching at Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU), the 58-year-old believes degree studies are worthy of serious consideration for personnel as they plan their life after the army.

He tells *Soldier* more...

"Never think you're not clever enough to do a degree – you are, and the skills learnt in the military will help. You are resilient, professional and can turn your hand to anything, and it doesn't have to be in a subject you've done before.

It's not an easy transition, and it can be quite complicated, but it is achievable.

For me, it got to the point where I fancied something different. I'd always played sport and had an interest in health and fitness, so I wanted to become a PE teacher.

I liked instructing during my military career and had finished up at ATR Basingbourn.

After I left, I had to do an access to higher education course to get me up to scratch. It covered history, maths and sport and generally got me to grips with what was to come. Before that I'd a handful of GCSEs, but I wasn't really academic.

I then did a three-year degree in sport science and PE at the University of Chester followed by a masters, which I did part-time while working as a PE teacher and serving in the reserves.

Afterwards I got a job in coach development. I did a workshop at LJMU, passed on my CV and have been doing this for almost 20 years now.

My five-year plan took ten, but I've got to where I wanted to be.

Remember, if you've done five years' service the MoD will help pay for your degree.

You don't have to move away from your trade; I was after a complete change but that isn't the case for everyone.

Speak to universities, have conversations and don't be held back by what you have done in the past – you can do anything."



Pictures: LJMU

Above In his role as LJMU armed forces champion, Gus Ryrie helped organise a day of sports science testing for The Royal Lancers earlier this year



IS A DEGREE FOR YOU?

SENIOR NCOs are being urged to trade their berets for mortar boards with an on-the-job graduate programme.

Places are available on the **chartered manager degree apprenticeship**, which allows students to combine studying with army tasks.

Those making the cut must be in the ranks of sergeant to warrant officer. They will walk away with a bachelor of arts degree awarded by the University of Staffordshire plus a host of other skills for service life.

Successful students will also be eligible for membership of the Chartered Management Institute.

Maj James Borthwick (Lancs), who oversees apprenticeship studies at the NCO Academy, said the first group of soldiers were due to graduate in July following the programme launch three years ago.

He told *Soldier*: "The course is designed to fit around army life, but it is not an easy ride.

"Applicants must be committed and there is an expectation they will put in 20 hours of their own time per week as well as occasional residentials.

"But along the way they will pick up new leadership and management expertise. They will also be able to take breaks if they have demands like ops."

Nearly 300 students are currently studying on the programme.

Visit the NCO Academy page on Defence Connect for more details.

Picture: Shutterstock



IT PAYS TO UNDERSTAND
YOUR PENSION

Your pension is for life. Don't neglect it. Join us. Job done.

Your Armed Forces pension is one of the best in the public sector. But to make the most of it, you need to make the best choices at key points in your career. Your personal circumstances may change, influencing those choices, and you need to appreciate various ways in which you can influence the amount you receive when you leave. It's not surprising that the Forces Pensions Consultants at the Forces Pension Society dealt with almost 30,000 enquiries last year. The guidance our experts provide is personalised and access to the team is included in your membership fee.

Don't underestimate the value of your pension. An annual income of £20k requires a pension pot of at least £400k at today's values. And as you transition from the Armed Forces, your pension will provide a secure platform for your next career or for retirement.

In short, your pension is worth a great deal and it would be neglectful to ignore it. Joining the Forces Pension Society will also keep you in touch with changes to tax regimes, ensure you're fully informed about issues with potential retrospective impact (such as McCloud), and also deliver a range of valuable membership benefits at discounted prices.

Independent, not-for-profit

As an independent, not-for-profit organisation, our membership subscriptions help to fund our support for the Veterans' Community, our Roadshows and Webinars, our attendance at CTP Employment Fairs, plus our vigilance in challenging governments whenever we spot unfairness or injustice in the system.

And importantly, we provide the whole military community with a voice that counts, on the representative bodies for Armed Forces and Public Sector Pensions.

Visit: forcespensionsociety.org/join-now/

Annual membership for you and your spouse/partner is just **£47**. You will have exclusive access to our Forces Pensions Consultants, our informative Members' Webinars and you'll receive our bi-annual newsletters and our magazine, Pennant.

You'll also have access to our wide range of membership benefits from discounts on new cars to insurances, including our latest range of travel policies.



SCAN ME

IT PAYS TO UNDERSTAND THE VALUE OF YOUR PENSION

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68 South Lambeth Road, Vauxhall, London SW8 1RL

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Run and gun

As commanders beef up army fighting power, soldiers are being urged to aim higher with their shooting >>



LEGENDARY war leader Bernard Montgomery once said that an individual's skill at arms – their ability to lay down accurate rounds – was the army's defining asset.

"If a man can't hit a target, he is of little use," the field marshal added. "Training in marksmanship is the foundation of a soldier's effectiveness."

They are wise words indeed.

Personnel of all roles – even those not considered to be at the sharp end of combat – could face a situation where they are required to fire on the enemy at some stage in their military career.

Take Op Pitting in 2021, when people of all arms and trades were given the task of assisting with the evacuation of Kabul in Afghanistan.

With an ever-present threat of insurgent attack – there was a suicide bombing that killed both civilians and US personnel – their skill with a rifle could have been critical.

The line touted by the civvy media that soldiers in supporting jobs are somehow exempt from the front line has always been a myth.

Yet the ability of troops to deliver accurate fire has been a recent talking point for leaders amid the chief of the general staff's order that the army must treble its lethality by the end of this decade. If this is to be delivered, individuals across the board must up the ante in weapons handling.

"When people think of shooting they tend to picture someone prone and taking aim at a static target," Maj Neil Whitewick (RLC), senior range officer at the Corps Operational Shooting Competition in Pirbright, told *Soldier*.

"But this is far removed from the reality of using your weapon on deployment – among other things, your effectiveness there depends on marksmanship intelligence matched with decent physical fitness and personal admin."

The contest being overseen by Maj Whitewick last month tested this combination of skills and abilities.

A far cry from a static range outing, it replicated the pressures that personnel will likely face if they need to use their weapon in anger.

Over five days, teams of eight were put through serials that included a simulated advance-to-contact, defending a position and fighting through urban environments.

Throughout, competitors were expected to deal with drills including ammunition resupply and casualty extraction plus team fire and manoeuvre.

Maj Whitewick believed contests like this could prove an effective route to meeting the head of the army's ask.

With shooting often viewed as a chore by units, carried out as part of the annual combat marksmanship tests, he said competitive events can bolster enthusiasm and instil a drive to improve.

"Picking up a rifle should be something that our soldiers are eager to do," the officer, himself a marksman and veteran of elite competition, continued.

"But it is not something many enjoy – this is not surprising when their first



experience of the ranges takes place while they are being thrashed through phase one training and later on in their careers when it is part of annual assessments.”

Maj Whitewick emphasised that shooting facilities can be secured by units with a little forward planning and preparation.

“Yes, there are pressures on range time but you can use the established Bams system to book a session,” he pointed out, urging troops to then consider competition as a way to further improve.

“This corps event is a test of shooting in the context of wider operational soldiering – participants will also move between their primary weapon in the SA80 and secondary 9mm Glock pistol in urban serials.”

The Pirbright competition – which returned in 2024 after a four-year pause during Covid – is certainly a sound way of honing good shooting discipline.

Preparation means a decent phys programme alongside time on the range and fostering good teamwork.

There were more than 40 regular and reserve teams taking part this year, dealing with the rigours of simulated combat conditions and operating in unseasonably hot temperatures that saw the mercury climb towards 28 degrees.

While full kit is normally required, organisers decided to ditch body armour given the potential for heat injury.

On the exercise area at the sharp end of the competition, marksman Cpl Shaun Manvell (REME), who was helping to supervise the event, was impressed with the overall standards.

Teams were working well and laying down accurate rounds, he said.

“At the end of the day, the focus here is not on shooting so much as preparing »

‘This is a test of shooting in the context of wider operational soldiering’

Maj Neil Whitewick, RLC





'You must apply yourself and cannot simply turn up and take part'

Capt Shaun Stanley, AGC (SPS)



» for ops," the NCO continued.

"Whatever your role in the army, everyone is a soldier first and you have to be able to kill the enemy.

"Some people do have a natural flair when it comes to shooting and you often notice this early on, but there are things that everyone can do to improve.

"For example, just following the marksmanship principles (far right) is a start, plus being familiar with the weapon type and maintaining your physical fitness."

Sound phys is a definite must – the exertion was written all over the faces of the troops returning from the field as they sought refuge in the shade, knocked back water and talked tactics.

"There is definitely a hard learning curve with this event," remarked Capt Shaun Stanley (AGC (SPS)), leading a mixed squad of loggies and members of his own corps.

"One of the big challenges is getting used to competing in kit – and on each serial there is quite a bit to take in.

"My advice to anybody wanting to enter is to do your preparation beforehand – you must apply yourself and cannot simply turn up and take part."

Teammate LCpl Tom Wright (RLC) agreed, adding: "I'd say it is important to come with an open mind – this is a good opportunity to develop."

Cfn Joshua Tonkinson (REME) said the competition had inspired him to work on his skill at arms.

"This event could not be more different to shooting on a range," the soldier – who is now a year into military life – explained.

"It is my first time doing anything like this and it is proving a great experience."

Pte Precious Boateng (RLC), part of an all-female team fielded by her corps, shared the sentiment.

"I'd encourage others to put themselves forward," she said.

Competing is certainly a good way of furthering both shooting and general military skills.

In an army that is now smaller than it has ever been, bolstering fighting power to the levels expected by CGS is going to require a determined individual and collective approach.

Developing skill at arms means strengthening – as Monty said – the soldier's very foundation.

But thankfully there is already a solid base on which to build.

Speak to your chain of command for further information on the Corps Operational Shooting Competition and other contests. «

Right Pte Precious Boateng was part of an all-female team from the Royal Logistic Corps that tested their aim on the ranges at Pirbright



1

The position and hold must be firm enough to support the weapon

2

The weapon must be held upright, pointed naturally at the target without undue physical effort

3

Sights must be correctly aligned

4

The shot must be released and followed through without disturbing the position

MARKSMANSHIP
4 BASIC PRINCIPLES



Gritty realism

Brits help to lead the charge
on Exercise Hedgehog



Right and below right **1 Lancs soldiers take aim during Ex Hedgehog** Below **Maintaining vigilance from a newly constructed trench**

ESTONIA has a tranquil feel outside of the towns – traffic is sparse, even when driving on main roads carved through the forests that form half of this small Baltic state.

It is a picturesque place that has become a destination on the tourist trail over the last few decades. Yet this quiet country would almost certainly be a flashpoint if a war in Europe was to erupt. Perched on the border of a belligerent Russian Federation that has already demonstrated a capacity for assassinations, cyber strikes and outright military invasion, it is an obvious target.

But in these woodlands, any advancing force would find themselves met with a wall of steel. In the first line of defence, Nato troops stand ready to meet any incursion head on and demonstrate the cold realities of collective defence.

"It is a very different environment to the UK," Maj Lance Morris of 1st Battalion, The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment Battlegroup tells *Soldier* as his troops embark on two weeks of Exercise Hedgehog, a rehearsal of Estonia's defence.

"The terrain is flatter and the wood blocks are not like anything you find on home turf – we are also digging our trenches through a tough, sandy ground but are working together well and joining with service personnel from other countries."

The presence of the infantry – standing ready alongside colleagues from 11 other allied nations including France, Poland and the United States – certainly guarantees a bitter time for any opposing force carrying out an incursion. >>

Report: Cliff Caswell Pictures: Cpl Vincent Price, RLC





‘We have some new equipment which gives us a picture of what is happening around us’

Right **A trench clearance serial conducted by members of 2 Scots** Below **A KRH Challenger 2 main battle tank provides cover for 1 Mercian troops**



Kgn Amelia McCauley, Lancs



» Working within the Estonian defence plan – a national blueprint which requires rapid reinforcement of Nato forces already in situ – the exercise has seen troops travel from all points of the compass to take up positions across the state.

The British battlegroup – under the 4th Light Brigade Combat Team – have hot-footed across Europe by road, rail and air. Within 48 hours they have shovels in their hands and are digging into positions as part of a 17,000-strong multinational force.

“In my case, we travelled by coach to Paderborn in Germany before taking a flight to Estonia,” Kgn Amelia McCauley (Lancs, left) explains as the exercise begins to ramp up. “We didn’t stop overnight – although the journey was okay as I had my pillow and managed to sleep for most of it.

“I think the key thing for me personally is seeing how troops from other armies do things – how they tackle different situations,” the 19-year-old former Army Foundation College student, who recently became the second female infanteer to complete the

NCO cadre, continues.

“We also have some new equipment in the shape of the Android Team Awareness Kit (Atak), which gives us a picture of what is happening around us – it has recently been refined and we are looking at how it works out here in Estonia.”

While this is an exercise, there is a definite feeling of gritty realism.

As commanders from the host nation take the lead, thousands of troops from the reserve Estonian Defence League have been called up and are assuming positions following the mock alert.

They, of all people, know the stakes. In the capital Tallinn, monuments to old Soviet triumphs such as the 1980 Olympic Games serve as reminders that this state has already seen Russian occupation. Its people were under the heel of the Kremlin for nearly five decades after the Second World War.

It is not lost on their Nato allies that, if the Exercise Hedgehog scenario were to play out for real, it would be their comrades’ way of life on the line.

Based at Camp Reedo in the south-east of the country, the 1 Lancs troops and their »

IN NUMBERS
Exercise Hedgehog

17,000

Nato troops

12

nations

2

weeks

Below **A 1 Mercian soldier defends his trench** Right, top **A section commander briefs his troops during an attack** Right, below **Troops build defensive trenches as part of the exercise**

‘The terrain is flatter and the wood blocks are unlike anything on home turf’

» augmentees remain resolute. Diverse operational taskings, which have included peacekeeping duties in Cyprus and resettling eligible Afghan nationals on Op Lazurite, has demonstrated their battalion’s versatility.

The unit has also been tested in the UK during exercises such as Wessex Storm and they will remain on high readiness as part of Nato’s Forward Land Forces reinforcement when they return home.

“There are a real mix of soldiers on Hedgehog – some younger and others more experienced,” Maj Morris – who is commanding Burma Company – points out.

“However, we have a keen learning culture and we are all focused on the chief of the general staff’s recent mandate to enhance fighting power.

“When we are back in the UK we will remain at readiness to deploy at five-to-ten days’ notice for the next two years.”

It would be a critical task in the opening days of a full-scale conventional war in Europe. But soldiers assert the training package is fit for the ask.

“We have been ramping up to Hedgehog for a little while now – we were, for example, in Brecon at the beginning of the year,” says drone operator LCpl Connor Morgan (Lancs, shown left).

“The difference in Estonia is that we are working with many

other Nato nations and their equipment – it’s also an opportunity to test the new situational awareness gear that we have alongside all the other allied countries.”

Medic LCpl Ollie Swales (RAMS) is equally enthusiastic about the manoeuvres.

Like Kgn McCauley she was also a Harrogate student and, aged just 21, has racked up significant experience during her six-year military career. The exercise is an opportunity to experience a full on multinational outing.

“As a medic, you already have the chance to see different parts of the army and Hedgehog builds on this,” she adds. “There are a fair few young soldiers like me out here and this is a chance to see Nato working up-close.

“I’m at the regimental aid post for the exercise – it is my first time in this role and I am responsible for dealing with any real-life injuries that might occur.”

This outing is a huge collective effort. It also complements the wider Op Razoredge initiative – a series of Nato manoeuvres taking place in six European states.

The training in Estonia is key, however, and is as much about deterrence as it is a rehearsal for war.

Like its animal namesake that raises its spines when threatened, Exercise Hedgehog demonstrates that bristling foes are usually best left undisturbed. <<

LCpl Connor Morgan, Lancs





SOLDIER asks...

Q What was the hardest part of the training?

A Digging in and sleeping in trenches – it takes a different mindset. If you can't work with other people, you're in a world of pain

Fus Kyle-Conner McMillan, 2 Scots



On the march

Fighting power is the focus for the service's new top soldier

JOHN Miller is the fourth individual to hold the post of army sergeant major since it was established exactly a decade ago – and the experienced Royal Signals WO1 admits his boots haven't touched the floor since.

Reporting directly to Chief of the General Staff, Gen Sir Roly Walker, the veteran of Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan represents the voice of the soldier at the senior echelons of command. And it is his job to ensure that the highest standards are maintained across the ranks, at home and overseas.

But in a volatile world in which fighting rages in Ukraine, instability prevails in the Middle East and the threat of global terrorism looms, one of his immediate tasks is helping to ensure the army can double its fighting power in two years, treble it by the end of the decade and stay match fit for all eventualities.

We caught up with the soldier, who joined aged 16 in 1999 and has served much of his career with 216 Parachute Signal Squadron, a month after he succeeded WO1 Paul Carney...

So how has the first month been?

Honestly – the fact I'm now actually in post didn't hit home until the recent Regimental Sergeant Major's convention. I'd been travelling a fair bit, but there were 240 RSMs in attendance and later I had dinner with senior people. It's going to be an immense challenge, and a great honour.

Do you have any immediate priorities?

Yes, there are a few. Education is one area of focus for me – and enhancing the NCO Academy. It must represent an identity for our non-commissioned officer leaders and, crucially, support their development.

How important is training in terms of the boss's fighting power ask?

Extremely. Gen Walker is across several strands of work around the doubling and trebling of fighting power in the coming years and I'm focused on developing our people capability. Outside of our routine schedules, I want personnel to be training whenever we can and mastering the basics well, being extraordinary at the ordinary >>

Full name:

WO1 John Miller

Cap badge:

Royal Signals

Joined:

1999

Operational

experience:

Includes Kosovo (Op Agricola), Iraq (Op Telic) and Afghanistan (Op Herrick)

Interview: Cliff Caswell Pictures: Graeme Main

**‘We need to be
ruthless in taking
every opportunity
to improve’**



Past masters...

Army Sergeant Major post holders



WO1 Glenn Haughton, Gren Gds
2015-2018



WO1 Gav Paton, Rifles
2018-2021



WO1 Paul Carney, RE
2021-2025



WO1 John Miller, R Signals
Present

» and putting in reps to make sure we build muscle memory. I know work tempo is a problem and there is not much time available to us but we need to be ruthless in taking every opportunity to improve. There is always something you can do, whether that is time on the range, PT, casualty drills or getting back to traditional navigation with a map and compass. This is going to be important given the GPS signal will likely be killed during a conventional conflict.

Being good across the board is key, then?

Yes, as is maintaining our standards. Being lawful, appropriate and totally professional underpin the army's values of courage, discipline, respect for others, integrity, loyalty and selfless commitment. As soldiers, we are custodians of an army dating back centuries; I want people to look at our standards and operationalise them. Professionalism and effectiveness on deployment go hand in hand; if you don't have the right disciplined approach at home, this is likely to translate to the battlespace.

Could you give us an example?

Well, you might get told not to use an unauthorised walking route in barracks. In Ukraine, the front is 1,000km long and 400km deep. There is no hiding, there are drones up and everything is visible. If you unmask and are deemed a worthy target, you're likely to have around seven minutes to live, so it must be second nature to stick to established routes to aid concealment and deception.

What else are you looking for in our soldiers?

We need to have good leaders at all levels, but good followership is equally important. I want people to feel able to challenge those more senior, but it is important to know how to do this appropriately. Challenge applies to me too – although CGS is many ranks above, Gen Walker says he values the perspective I bring and that soldiers know I am in the room during discussions. These days our recruits often naturally challenge – this is different from when I joined the army back in 1999 and is something that we should clearly encourage. But I think how to

do it correctly needs to be incorporated into our training.

Is our leadership generally up to the cut then?

People who are in senior positions now grew up with major operations in the Balkans, Afghanistan and Iraq – so yes, definitely. We learned a lot from those deployments, positive and negative. In tandem, the kit we now have is phenomenal – a world apart from the equipment issued when I joined.

Are we getting enough in the way of large-scale exercises?

Yes, although we are not on the same cycle of train, deploy and recover as we were during operations early on in my career. But things are changing because we now know where the threat is moving. We are deploying and working more with our Nato allies, predominately in Europe.

What gripes are coming from troops?

The bulk of the concerns generally relate to increasing lethality – soldiers ask me what they can do themselves to contribute to this. The answer is to be extraordinary at the ordinary, focusing on the basics, tactical and technical – shoot, move, communicate, medicate.

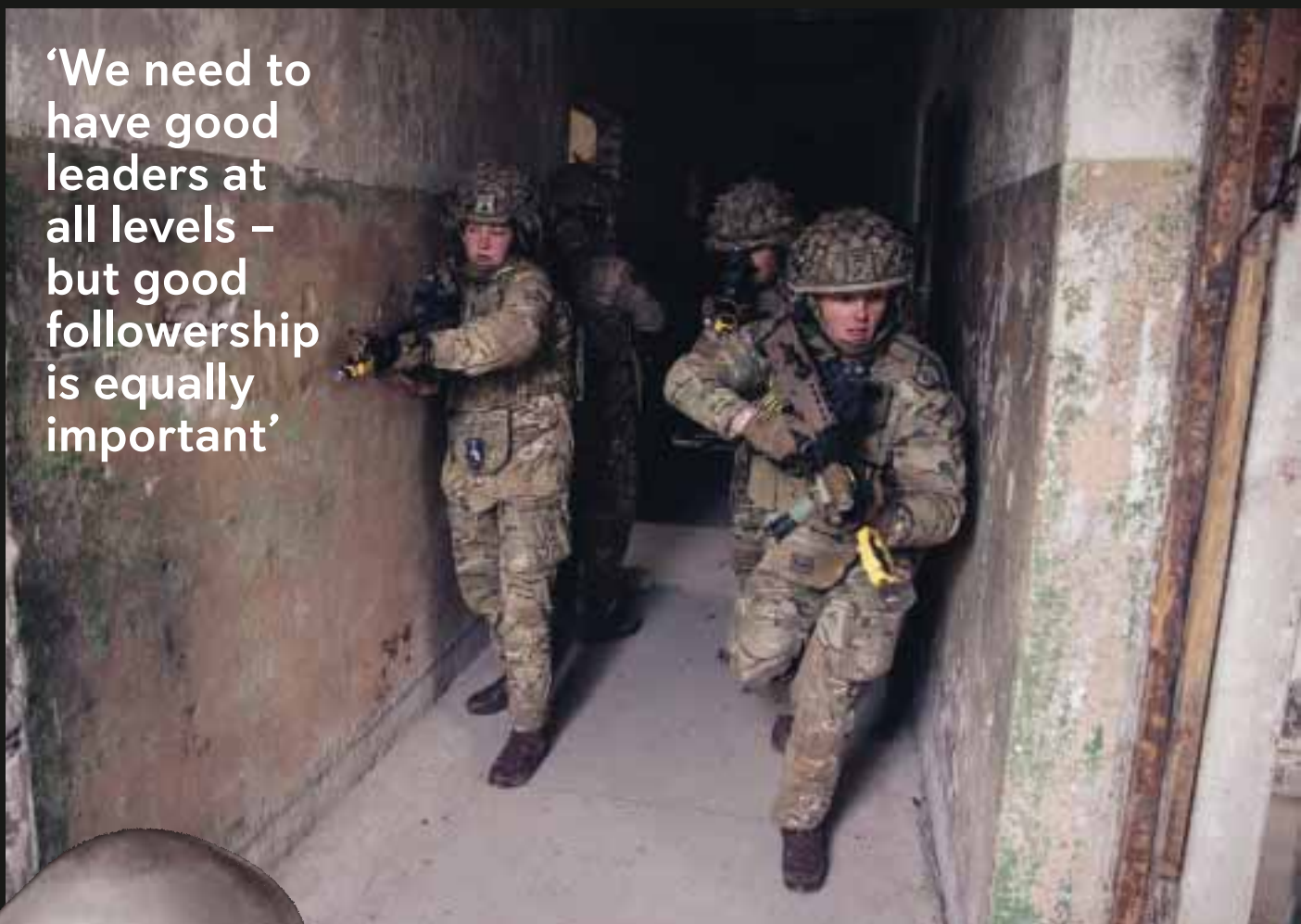
Are we still getting decent joiners?

You sometimes hear older people assert that soldiers of today are not as good as in their generation – it happens all the time. But from what I am seeing, the quality is the same as when I joined up 26 years ago. The new recruits are just different in nature and the world has changed. <<

'I know work tempo is a problem'

Top right **Troops on Ex Hedgehog in Estonia last month (read more on page 36)** Below right **A youthful Sgt John Miller, seen on the left, aces the Lashkar Gah Half Marathon while serving in Afghanistan back in 2011**

‘We need to have good leaders at all levels – but good followership is equally important’







Forces personnel were front and centre of last month's events to mark the 80th anniversary of VE Day. A procession of more than 1,000 formed up in London, where they marched up Whitehall, through Admiralty Arch and down the Mall.

Picture: Rory Arnold



Left Racers head for the pit lane between practice sessions at the UK Armed Forces Karting Championships

Right The Llandow Circuit in South Wales provided a stern test of skill



BACK ON TRACK

Army racers return to the grid for new karting season



L-R Gnr Matthew Bonnett (RA) and Cpl Steven Jones, (AGC (SPS))





Report: Richard Long Pictures: Graeme Main

“YOU can’t beat the thrill of going 60mph down the straight,” Cpl Steven Jones (AGC (SPS)) tells *Soldier* from the pit lane at the Llandow Circuit in South Wales.

The 31-year-old has just completed the first practice session ahead of the opening round in the 2025 UK Armed Forces Karting Championships and the buzz of being back behind the wheel is plain to see.

A self-confessed Formula One addict, the soldier has served for 14 years but had no idea he could pursue his passion for motorsport in service circles until relatively recently when a social media post advertising trials for the army team piqued his interest.

He duly signed up and made his track debut in 2023, claiming a second-place finish »



‘If you like cars and racing, come and give it a bash’

» in his very first outing at the Rye House Kart Raceway.

“I’d never karded before, so I thought ‘let’s give it a go.’” Cpl Jones, who transferred to the Adjutant General’s Corps after 12 years with The Queen’s Royal Hussars, continues.

“The first day at the trials went well, I got some tips from the other drivers and made it through to the second day on the pro karts, where I posted fast enough times to make it onto the team.

“I was pretty nervous at the start; I’d always played football, and this was something totally different. But when I came back with a trophy from my first race I was buzzing – I still have the pictures on my phone.

“I’ve been on the team ever since. Last year I managed to win two trophies on the same race weekend at Ellough Park and my goal for this season is to finish in the top three of the overall standings.

“I just love the sport.”

The championship is staged over seven rounds at circuits across the country – with more than 60 karts on the grid for the various classifications. As well as the official army

team, the field boasts racers from various corps outfits – including the Royal Engineers, Royal Signals and Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers – as well as the Royal Air Force, Royal Navy and Royal Marines. Civilians are also included.

Army trials were staged in February, with 60 personnel registering an interest. That number was then whittled down to 31 – which includes mechanics.

As with any motorsport, karting doesn’t come cheap, but the squad owns five pro karts for drivers to use and invested in two new chassis over the off season at a cost of more than £8,000.

Sponsorship and service funding help mitigate the financial burden on personnel, who pay £100 each per race weekend.

For Gnr Matthew Bonnett (RA), the championship has allowed him to continue in a sport that he first started as an eight-year-old alongside his father.

He joined the army at 16 and after arriving at his unit – 4th Regiment, Royal Artillery – was told about the set-up and immediately put his name forward.

“I was so happy,” he says. “I went to the trials and was one of the quickest drivers.

“I now race heavyweight karts in the endurance championship. In April 2023 we travelled up to Scotland and managed to win the team’s first trophy in that classification since 2019. It meant so much, and we went from strength to strength – taking six or seven further trophies that season.

“It is a great championship, and we all push each other on.

“This is a special team; we have a good connection and look after everyone. It’s also nice to get away from work and mix with people from different cap badges.

“This year we want to win back the Inter-Services Championship. We’re in a good place and have the right mentality.

“There are a lot of people who come into the team without experience. But if you have the ability to adapt and listen to what the other drivers say, you will develop. If anyone is thinking about trying karting, I’d say ‘give it a go and then stick with it.’”

With the team now set, the next opportunity for newcomers will come at the



trials scheduled for February 2026.

Chairman WO2 Toby Knight (QRH) – who races in the rotax ranks at speeds of more than 70mph – hopes to see as many personnel in attendance as possible, with driver and pit crew slots up for grabs.

“A lot of sports can be quite cliquey, but that is not the case here,” he explains. “If you aren’t pulling your weight, you’re out.

“We have people who have been racing since they were children, but we will take complete novices if they are quick enough. If you like cars and racing, come and give it a bash.”

Support to operations

WHILE those behind the wheel are charged with delivering on the track, the team’s support crew play an equally important part on a race weekend.

A two-hour endurance race sees the karts stop every 40 minutes, when they are pushed from the pit lane for refuelling and any mechanical work before a new driver hops in and continues the quest for the chequered flag. Mechanics are also primed and ready

should a vehicle break down mid-race.

“This is a team sport, and you have to work as one,” Knight says. “We are known for being one of the best at pit stops. You can easily lose a few minutes, so time is of the essence.”

Cpl Joe Stretton (QRH) is the 2iC mechanic and got involved in the role through his unit’s strong representation on the squad.

“I’m a Challenger 2 crewman and love getting covered in grease,” the 24-year-old explains. “And I’ve always liked motorsport.

“For us it is about the basic maintenance of the karts and addressing whatever needs fixing. Put simply, it’s a couple of lawnmower engines and some nuts and bolts, meaning they are fairly simple to use and fix.

“We can try out as drivers as well, but this side is much easier – there is no real pressure on us.

“This season we want to be better than the other army teams – it is a competitive field, and pit stops can make the difference.”

Follow [@army_kart_team](#) on Instagram to track the squad’s progress this season and for details of next year’s trials. «



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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.

Stricken by forces compensation plan

I WAS medically discharged last year due to an ongoing condition caused by and exacerbated through injuries sustained while on duty.

My first step was the armed forces compensation scheme (AFCS), but my initial claim and a reconsideration were declined.

I know countless colleagues who have been injured on operations, adventurous training trips and exercises who then went on to receive compensation. A fair proportion returned to successful careers.

So exactly what is being compensated here? They received a full salary, free health care, housing and rehabilitation and then returned to an appropriate role.

By contrast, my career has been ended prematurely, with promotion, salary and pension impacts, plus relocation to consider and stress and upset for me and my family.

I was living in service family accommodation so have had to relocate my loved ones and start a new career at significant cost.

Thankfully, I could use Forces Help to Buy but, inevitably, this will affect my terminal benefits.

Additionally, until I receive

my pension, I can't be certain on its composition or value, as the commutation I originally opted for is not permitted on an ill-health pension.

It appears that I'm no better off than if I had chosen to submit a notice to terminate, and I would have had an easier path to an AFCS award by breaking my ankle apres ski on an adventurous training trip and being returned to unit. – **Name and address supplied**

Lt Col Thomas McEvoy, Pay and Pensions Policy, Army Remuneration Policy at MoD Main Building, replies: We are sorry to hear of your medical discharge and that you are unhappy with how your case has been dealt with under the AFCS.

We cannot comment on the specifics of any case.

The MoD is committed to providing appropriate compensation to personnel where injury or illness were caused (wholly or predominantly) by an individual's service through the War Pension Scheme (WPS) (before April 6, 2005) or AFCS (after April 6, 2005).

A specialist team in Defence Business Services makes

determinations using all available evidence relating to the incident.

Each case is considered on its own merits but activities such as playing sport for pleasure or travelling to and from work would be excluded.

Equally, when a condition arises during service – but is not caused by service – the worsening of it within five years of it arising has to be the predominant reason for a medical downgrading.

Both the WPS and AFCS are no-fault schemes, do not seek to establish culpability or negligence and so are different

from awards for damages paid through the courts.

If you have been injured as a result of negligence, having a WPS or AFCS award does not prevent you from claiming through the civilian court system.

Additionally, the forces schemes carry full rights of appeal to an independent tribunal normally within 12 months of any reconsideration findings.

The Royal British Legion and other service charities provide free support and further information is available on gov.uk under 'armed forces compensation scheme'.



Picture: Cpl Aaron Stone, RLC

Policy hits sour note

WHY do I have to revert from staff sergeant to private if I transfer to another reserve band?

I understand it's down to the positions available but that's a considerable reduction in rank

and pay even if the unit has an instrument vacancy.

Is there not a contingency fund of spare PIDs, or even a higher pay scale that can be used to prevent this?

It makes transferring to

another unit very unappealing and can't be helping retention. – **SSgt Neil Atkinson, RCAM**

Lt Col Glenis Maloney, SO1 Reserves, Strategic Centre, Army Headquarters, replies: The ability for personnel to transfer is always based on the same principle – do we have

the structural space currently to employ an individual at that rank, cap badge and trade?

If there is no available position for your rank at the location you seek to move to then you must find a vacancy elsewhere or move at a different rank.

This applies to all transfers, for both regular and reserve.

DIRECTORY

SOLDIER

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

Forcesline

A free and confidential telephone helpline and email service for regulars, reserves, ex-forces and their families.
0800 731 4880
ssafa.org.uk/get-help/forcesline

Army Welfare Service

Contact directly via
rc-aws-iat-0mailbox@mod.gov.uk or
01904 882051/2053

ALCOHOL AND SMOKING

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

Drinkline

A free, confidential helpline
0300 123 1110

NHS support

Various information can be found at nhs.uk/livewell

BULLYING/HARASSMENT/DISCRIMINATION

Army Mediation Service
0306 770 7691 or
mil 96770 7691
army-mediation-0mailbox@mod.gov.uk

Army Speak Out Helpline
0306 770 4656 or **mil 96770 4656**
army-speakout@mod.gov.uk

Defence BHD Helpline

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

DEBT AND MONEY PROBLEMS

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

Forces Pension Society

A not-for-profit, independent military pension watchdog and enquiry service
020 7820 9988
forcespensionsociety.org

Joining Forces Credit Union

Saving and affordable loans for the armed forces community from not-for-profit financial cooperatives
joiningforcescu.co.uk

Money Helper

Government-backed money and pensions guidance with a wealth of in-depth guides, tools and calculators
moneyhelper.org.uk

National Debtline

A charity that can talk through your options and help you take back control
0808 808 4000
nationaldebtline.org

StepChange Debt Charity

The UK's leading debt charity offering free, confidential advice
0800 138 1111
stepchange.org.uk

GAMBLING

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

GRIEF

Cruse Bereavement Support
0808 808 1677

SSAFA 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

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

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

Newbury – June 18

York – July 2

Elgin – July 9

Bournemouth – September 10

Newmarket – October 8

Belfast – October 15

Cardiff – November 5

Telford – November 19

properly dealt with.

Pinnacle Home Services Team

The primary point of contact for families for housing and the allocation of SFA
UK 0800 031 8628
Overseas +44(0) 161 605 3517
pinnacleservicefamilies.co.uk/contact-us

Forces Help to Buy

For home ownership support visit gov.uk/guidance/forces-help-to-buy

Single Persons Accommodation Centre for the Ex-Services
01748 833797
spaces.org.uk

Veterans Gateway

A first point of contact for veterans seeking support
veteransgateway.org.uk

INJURY/SICKNESS

Personnel Recovery Centres

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

LONELINESS

Armed Forces and Veterans Breakfast Clubs

A network of clubs to enjoy breakfast and banter, while combating social isolation
afvbc.world

Samaritans

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

The Royal British Legion

Contact the friendly team for information about local groups and support services
0808 802 8080
britishlegion.org.uk

MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

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

Combat Stress 24/7 Helpline
0800 138 1619

Headspace

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

Mind – The Mental Health Charity
0300 123 3393 mind.org

NHS

General mental health support
nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters

COMPETITIONS

April 2025 HOAY WINNER

Majority internet radio tuner
Jason Turner, Brecon

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](https://www.nhs.uk) to find your local team

Samaritans

116 123 [samaritans.org](https://www.samaritans.org)

The Ripple Pond

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

Togetherall

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

RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN/ABUSE

Aurora New Dawn

Safety for survivors of domestic abuse, sexual violence, stalking
02394 216 816
aurorand.org.uk

ManKind

Support for male domestic abuse victims
01823 334244
mankind.org.uk

Relate

Relationship support
relate.org.uk

SEXUAL OFFENCES

Anyone wishing to report an incident can do so in multiple ways. It does not matter if your allegation is not recent, or if you don't feel you have any 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-dssc-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

STAFF NETWORKS

The following groups are open to both regular and reservist personnel, as well as the chain of command and civil servants. Please get in touch using the following details:

LGBTQ+ Network

elizabeth.corbett117@mod.gov.uk

Multicultural Network

priscilla.quansah100@mod.gov.uk

Parents Network

armypers-parents-network@mod.gov.uk

Servicewomen's Network

samantha.dodge733@mod.gov.uk

REUNIONS

Royal Signals Corps

Weekend on June 20-22 at Blandford Camp. Programme of events will include an all-ranks meet and greet with curry supper on Friday, followed by a parade, bar, food, entertainment and various other displays and ceremonies on Saturday. Visit the events page on royalsignals.org for more information.

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 023 9281 6165 or email rhwsxtar@yahoo.com

The Balkans 30 Years On...

Calling all **Fusiliers** who have served in Bosnia and Kosovo with the battalions since 1995 (including in 2023) or those who have undertaken individual deployments or postings in the region. The regiment will hold anniversary events on October 24 in Newcastle and 25 in Manchester. For more details visit the What's On page on fusiliersconnect.com

The Rifles Family Gala,

Silverstone on September 27 from 1800. Champagne

reception and dinner, followed by awards, special regimental event and entertainment. Onsite accommodation and camping available. Scruffs bar also available for those not wishing to dine. Tickets £55 on theriflesnetwork.co.uk

PAY

For pay policy queries read **JSP 754 Pay and Reward Payments** or visit the AF Remuneration Pay Policy team page on Defnet. Further information can also be found on the JPA portal or via your local unit admin office. You can also contact the Army Rem Pol team via their information page on Defence Connect.

A £8,000 retention

payment is available to troops who joined the army between September 1, 2021 and September 30, 2024 if they sign up for a three-year commitment on top of their initial four years. However, they must apply in a specific three-month window. These dates are shown below – mark them in your diary! Gurkha, FTRS and reserve troops not eligible. Apply on the *Digital Transfers* app and speak to your RCMO for more info.

Attestation date Apply

2021
1/9-31/12 **1/4-30/6/25**

2022
1/1-31/3 **1/1-31/3/25**
1/4-30/6 **1/4-30/6/25**
1/7-30/9 **1/7-30/9/25**
1/10-31/12 **1/10-31/12/25**

2023
1/1-31/3 **1/1-31/3/26**
1/4-30/6 **1/4-30/6/26**
1/7-30/9 **1/7-30/9/26**
1/10-31/12 **1/10-31/12/26**

2024
1/1-31/3 **1/1-31/3/27**
1/4-30/6 **1/4-30/6/27**
1/7-30/9 **1/7-30/9/27**

PENSIONS

Armed Forces Pension Calculator

Provides a projection of benefits from the armed forces pension scheme
mod-pc.co.uk

Forces Pension Society

An independent, not-for-profit organisation that acts as a pension watchdog for the entire military community. Membership includes expert pension guidance, member offers and a magazine.
forcespensionsociety.org

AT

Visit the **Army Adventurous Training Defence Connect page** via the QR code below for information on upcoming activities on offer – including skiing, climbing, mountain biking, caving, sailing, canoeing, diving and parachuting. You can also use the portal to apply for individual and unit courses, download resources for expedition planning and find out about instructor tawls.



FAMILIES

Army Families Federation briefs

Immigration (virtual) briefs

June 24, 1900-2000
July 29, 1900-2000
August 26, 1900-2000
September 30, 1900-2000
October 28, 1900-2000
November 25, 1900-2000
A specially trained adviser will give a short brief followed by a Q&A. All topics covered. Visit the link below for details of how to join the Microsoft Teams meeting.

aff.org.uk/aff-events/

Families Hubs

A wealth of information for all regular and reserve troops and their dependents, including childcare and education, health and wellbeing, welfare, partner employment and non-UK personnel.
discovermybenefits.mod.gov.uk/families

Forces Families Jobs

A career platform for relatives of serving UK personnel, to connect them with employment opportunities in forces friendly organisations – all who have signed the Armed Forces Covenant and are committed to supporting the community. The army is also signed up to the platform and will post its vacancies in targeting military families.

Hive information centres

Support for all members of the service community and their families, with hubs in Aldergrove, Bovington, Brunei, Brunsum, Catterick, Colchester, Colerne, Cyprus, Gibraltar, Grantham, Hereford, Leconfield, Leuchars, Lichfield, Lyneham, Naples, Preston, Sennelager, Shape (Belgium),

the South East (including Aldershot and London District), Stafford, St Athan, and Tidworth.

For more information follow the ArmyHIVE on Facebook or Insta or visit armyhiveinfo.blogspot.com/

Carers

The Supportability, Additional Needs and Carers Guide is designed to help soldiers, their families and commanders navigate service life. The MoD Carers Passport has also been introduced along with carers' leave. For details read *JSP 760 Tri-Service Regulations for Leave and Other Types of Absence*.

Flexible working

An option for service personnel to formally amend their working pattern to aid their work-life balance. It includes **flexible service**, which allows regular troops to temporarily work part-time and/or restrict their separation from the home base subject to operational need, and **alternative working arrangements**, which allow a degree of freedom when attempting to balance work and personal life but do not reduce pay – including remote working, variable start and finish times and compressed working.

Further information can be found in *JSP 750 Centrally Determined Terms of Service* and AGAI, vol 2, ch 44 *Army Flexible Service*.

Pregnancy / Maternity and Return to Work Guide

A leaflet to support personnel and the chain of command, including pregnancy loss, maternity, breastfeeding and returning to work. Available via Women's Health Policy and Resources SharePoint page.

PHYS

Soldier Conditioning Assessment

As part of the collective effort to multiply fighting power, a revised fitness test is being piloted army-wide until March 2026. The gender free assessment is not a pass or fail test and is designed to measure and improve physical conditioning. It includes a best effort:
- 2km run
- deadlift (following progressive incremental lifts)
- press-ups (in 60 secs)
- pull-ups

continued >>

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12 Issues £13.80

Further information is available on the Individual Training Requirement SharePoint page, in the aide memoire for commanders *A Tool For Progression* and in **ABN 016/2025**.

Defence Perinatal Handbook

A guide to maintaining health and fitness during and after pregnancy. It provides support and guidance for servicewomen through pregnancy and following childbirth – including pre- and postnatal exercise programmes, a postnatal training guide, nutrition info and mental health and pelvic health support.

APPS

The following apps and sites can be found via the Defence Gateway, SharePoint or via shortcuts on some MoD IOS devices...

My Digital Skills

Access learning for both both personal and professional development, with personalised recommendations available. Mandated and elective army digital skills foundation courses available through the Digital Skills 4 Defence library, under 'army digital skills learning'. The platform also includes defence mandated digital learning under the Library menu, which includes digital individual training requirements such as protecting personal data, information and knowledge awareness and record management awareness.

Digital Transfers

Used to manage career changes and requests, including transfers to the reserve, from the reserves to the regular army, or to another branch of the armed forces. Access the app through the Career Management Portal on Defence Gateway.

Army Health & Wellbeing Defence Connect page

Pushes health, performance and wellbeing resources out to personnel who follow the site. The service is especially important for personnel who are not physically at work, do not have a laptop or do not have Modnet access.

MyDEFENCE

A new website bringing into one place content from other digital and IT systems. The portal enables users to undertake self-service

admin tasks, find learning and development opportunities and access welfare information. It will be delivered in phases until 2026.

Armed Forces Personnel Portal

Allows troops to conduct JPA self-service tasks without logging into JPA. Currently only available on Modnet but is scheduled to launch on personal devices later this summer. It will replace some of the *MySeries* apps and will converge with *MyDEFENCE* (see above) to provide the G1 self-service elements.

SUMMITS

June 17-18

Royal United Services Institute Land Warfare Conference 2025

For more visit rusi.org/events

July 8

Army Servicewomen's Network Conference

at Ashton Gate Stadium in Bristol. This event will commemorate ten years of the organisation. All female troops and their chains of command are warmly invited to attend. Arrival time 0900 for 1000 start. The day will feature a series of panels, briefs and addresses until about 1700 and there will be a networking event in the evening with refreshments until 1930. Visit the Servicewomen's Network page on SharePoint or Defence Connect for further information.

NCO ACADEMY

Tea & Toast Talks

June 18 at 1000 – Menopause Lived Experience

July 2 at 1000 – Royal School of Artillery

Development days

July 9 – Edinburgh

September 24 – Catterick

October 23 – Blandford

Level-up leadership course

July 1-3 – Sandhurst

July 4-6 – Sandhurst

Visit the NCO Academy group page on Defence Connect

'Education is one area of focus for me'

Army sergeant major talks leadership – page 44

Your chance to **WIN**

A Majority radio alarm and charge pad



TEN details have been changed in the image below of last month's rugby union men's match between the British Army and Royal Navy at Twickenham (read more on page 65).

Circle all the differences on image **B** and send the panel to HOAY 997, Soldier, Ordnance Barracks, Government Road, Aldershot, Hampshire GU11 2DU, along with contact details, including email address, by June 30.

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

Alternatively, email a photograph of the image highlighting the differences to comps@soldiermagazine.co.uk

The first correct entry drawn after the closing date will win this Majority Darwin Bluetooth FM radio alarm clock.

Designed to be more than just an alarm – this handy piece of kit is your all-in-one bedside companion. Featuring built-in wireless charging, you can place your smartphone on top for effortless overnight reboots.



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PREGNANCY EXPERIENCES IN THE BRITISH ARMY (PEBA)

VOLUNTEER PARTICIPANTS REQUIRED FOR THE PEBA STUDY

We are looking to sign up service women who:

- Are currently 12 - 18 weeks into their pregnancy (expressions of interest welcome from 10 weeks).
- Have not previously given birth.
- Are in Regular Service in the British Army.

What?

The PEBA study is recruiting service women in the British Army to share their experiences and perspectives of pregnancy during military service.

Why?

This research is part of the Army's commitment to understand the lived experiences of service women and is part of a PhD study at Anglia Ruskin University.

How?

Participants will be asked to make diary entries during their pregnancy and then participate in an interview after giving birth. Participation in the study is voluntary and information is kept anonymous.

Interested in taking part?

Please email
kalm102@pgr.aru.ac.uk
for more information.



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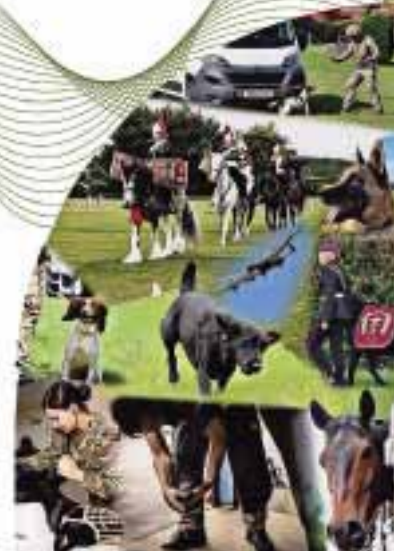
Sat 28th
June 2025

Free Entry
& Parking

Opens:
10.30 am
Closes:
4.30 pm

DETAILS:

- No pets (assistance only).
- Parking & disabled access.
- Military Working Animal Demonstrations (all day).
- Meet our animals & learn about our Military roles.
- Explore our interest stalls & commercial vendors.
- Food & Drinks retail units will be available all day.
- Planned Battle of Britain Bypass & Military band.



REVIEWS

★ PODCASTS ★ BOOKS ★ MOVIES ★



Picture: Sgt Rupert Frere, RLC



The Muster Point

Veteran duo bring banter and debate

PODCAST

SEARCH “military podcast” on Spotify and the top hits tend to involve ex-special forces bods talking about elite soldiering.

But a new addition to the genre is sparking a different kind of conversation.

The Muster Point Podcast, produced by friends Stu Mendelson (ex-RE) and Steve Black (ex-RTR), combines serious chat about topics like mental health with the lighter side of army life.

Named after a veterans’ breakfast club they set up in their local area of Stevenage, the show sees them getting candid with their own struggles in the hope that others might find it helpful.

“I was blown up in Afghanistan in 2011 and lost my right eye,” explains Mendelson (pictured left, bottom).

“I went from the front line to being a civilian in six months and had a lot of resentment and anger.

“Sadly, I fell into alcohol and drug addiction and some of the big charities slammed the door in my face. But in 2023 I found a place called Tom Harrison House, which is the only residential rehab facility for veterans in the UK and two years on I’m clean and sober.”

Meanwhile Black, who left the Army in 2010 and now works as a volunteer for SSAFA, admits to “bottling up” his troubles until a breakdown last year finally forced him to seek support.

“I feel a lot better now,” he says. “Helping others makes you feel better yourself. We’ve had messages from people all over the world, some from family members who have said what we’re doing has enabled their loved ones to talk about stuff that they haven’t before. That makes all the hard work worth it.”

While both acknowledge there is substantial support available to the ex-service community, they say it can be overwhelming and confusing trying to access the right charities – so the podcast includes shout-outs to the organisations and individuals that have proven track records.

It also features a ‘muckers remembered’ segment, where listeners can share memories of lost friends, colleagues or family.

Throughout, the sombre often gives way to laughter and vice-versa. For example, a discussion about amusing alcohol-related incidents leads to an honest reflection on problem drinking in the forces.

Above all, the duo wanted to create a forum that the average serviceman or woman could connect to more readily than elite ops.

“Ninety-nine per cent of us didn’t do that special forces stuff, we hung around in hangers flicking things at each other,” says Mendelson. “It’s the mundane, silly bits you remember.”

Black (shown left, top) agrees. In an episode dedicated to pranks he confessed to a year-long campaign of calling up his RSM from unattended telephones and saying “I love you” before hanging up.

“Being on stag for hours is boring, but it is the things you do to get yourself through that are funny,” he says.

“Like in 2 RTR we used to play a game a bit like tag, except you had to jump onto each other’s backs. We still laugh about it now at breakfast club.”

It’s not hard to see why the podcast’s audience has been growing by the hundreds week on week. The pair’s irreverent banter mixed with meaningful discussion has clearly struck a chord with the veteran community.

And with no plans to stop any time soon, they are keen to hear from readers of this magazine.

“Please tell us your stories,” urges Black. “Let us be your platform to share them – the good, the bad and the ugly.”

Listen to *The Muster Point* wherever you get your podcasts and contact stu@themusterpoint.org.uk

Interviews: Becky Clark, *Soldier*

BOOKS

Dirty Wars & Devious Politics

by Robert Elgood, published by Amazon at £14.99



THE liberation of the Falkland Islands from Argentine occupation 43 years ago this month transformed the standing of Margaret Thatcher's government and appeared to show the UK was prepared to stop at nothing

to defend its subjects.

The reality of the lead-up to a much-mythologised conflict is, however, more complex – as shown by Robert Elgood's analysis of the backstory that culminated in Lt Gen Leopoldo Galtieri's junta invading the territory on April 2, 1982.

Far from the robust stance history suggests, the academic presents a tale of haphazard diplomacy as successive British administrations considered offloading one of their remaining overseas assets with less consideration for a people who wanted to remain under the union flag.

The outcome was an occupation by an Argentine military regime notorious for human rights abuses and wholesale murder of its own citizens followed by a three-month war that claimed the lives of nearly 1,000 personnel on both sides.

Elgood, who in 1982 was a member of a lobby group representing the islanders and later gave evidence to Lord Franks' probe into the causes of the conflict, presents a compelling account of the wider story while acknowledging his own unique perspective. This history shows, perhaps inevitably, that the root causes of wars are often far more complicated than they at first seem.



Review and interview : Cliff Caswell, *Soldier*

We asked **Robert Elgood** about the legacy of the Falklands War...



Should an invasion of the islands have been expected back in 1982?

Very much so. The history has been largely forgotten but talks about sovereignty of the territory had been going on for years. Towards the 1980s, Galtieri's junta had become very bullish and it should have been clear that an invasion was likely. My book focuses on the diplomatic story.

How impressive was the British military campaign?

There were some bold moves behind enemy lines and commanders were creative, for example, in working around setbacks that arose with helicopter shortages after the sinking of the supply vessel *Atlantic Conveyor*.

Could the Argentines have done more?

Brig Gen Mario Benjamin Menendez, the junta's governor on the Falklands, did not lead as effectively as he could have in my view. He persistently held back, although there were some very good units available to him. The Argentine leadership, I believe, had considered replacing him.

Did victory change how the UK was seen globally?

Yes. The conflict was morally very clear cut – the UK did the right thing. The Argentine military junta had committed human rights abuses, including murder, against its own people. I think victory enhanced Britain's standing in the world and the way it was viewed in South America.

Is the Falklands still a live issue today?

Yes – however, I don't believe the Argentine claim to the territory is legitimate and I'm fully with the islanders on their right to self-determination. But until Argentina is convinced about this through sensible discussion the animosity will prevail. Politicians want to think this has been settled but it hasn't. It would be far better for everyone if the dispute was ended.

MOVIE

Goebbels and the Fuhrer

In UK cinemas from June 6

A STARK piece of German cinematic introspection, this historical drama explores the powers of state information control for the duration of Hitler's wartime politics. Through the clever use of speeches, recorded rallies and rare footage from infamous Nazi films, viewers are given an exceptionally well-crafted look at the methodology behind a campaign directed by propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels. It also shows how, even until the last days of the conflict, Hitler was still intent on controlling the narrative to hold onto power. Featuring harrowing footage of firing squads and mass graves, *Goebbels and the Fuhrer* is not an easy watch. But in an age where information is still freely weaponised, the film offers an important look at the effects of propaganda and how a regime deployed it to galvanise citizens.



Tpr Luke Maxwell-Libby, HAC



Over the Wall

by Will Britten



LIFTING the veil on the British Army's intelligence-gathering operation in East Germany, this book

offers a tantalising flashback to late-Cold War Berlin, when the pall of mutual suspicion still hung heavy over a divided city. The work of Brixmis, as the unit was known, wasn't especially glamorous. It was less spies in trench coats and more long patrols behind the Iron Curtain counting enemy assets and occasionally rifling through Russian military rubbish dumps. But it helped glean valuable

information. And with the Soviets doing the same in the West, it was a strange game of cat and mouse that ultimately helped underpin the uneasy status quo. Most fascinating of all is the chapter on the fall of the Berlin Wall, which took both sides entirely by surprise one autumn day, upending the world order and rendering the mission obsolete in one fell swoop. The author had a front-row seat to history and tells the tale in entertaining fashion.



Becky Clark, *Soldier*

Sword

by Max Hastings

RECOUNTING the personal stories of those who fought on



D-Day, this is a change from Max Hastings' standard approach, which tends to look at the bigger picture

rather than individual battles. While I am not sure much of this information is necessarily new, it makes for an easy read and describes events from several perspectives. This book would be good background reading for a unit on a battlefield study and wanting to get a feel for the soldiers' view of what it was like on the day, 81 years ago this month.



Capt Mike Owens, RE

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SOLDIERSPORT

RELENTLESS REDS MARCH ON



Cpl Sophie Benavent (RAMS)
on the charge at Twickenham



Skipper SSgt Jade Mullen
(AGC (SPS)) sparks an attack

RUGBY UNION (WOMEN)

FROM a quick glance at the scorelines, it would be safe to assume victory for the army women in this season's Inter-Services Rugby Union Championships was a walk in the park.

A 96-0 demolition of the Royal Navy at Twickenham was followed by a 47-12 win over the Royal Air Force at Gloucester's Kingsholm Stadium – results that saw the soldiers retain their title in style.

But for skipper SSgt Jade Mullen (AGC (SPS)) it felt anything but straightforward as the strain of a long campaign, coupled with the burden of captaincy, took its toll.

"I properly hit the wall after the RAF game," the 33-year-old told *SoldierSport*.

"While the rest of team were celebrating, I struggled to get in the mood.

"When we first looked at the

season everything seemed so spread out, but by the end it was a heavy block with a training camp in Gibraltar and then matches against the French Army and Wales under-20s before the Inter-Services.

"I don't think the score reflected how hard the RAF match was – they have some talented players and we knew it would be physical.

"It was only in the 74th minute, when I looked at the scoreboard, that I realised they couldn't score enough tries to catch us.

"As captain I want the Inter-Services to be a special occasion for the players and that brings added pressure.

"It is about making sure they feel loved, and that also applies to those not selected in the final 23. I've been in that position and have felt left out, so it is really important that everyone in the squad is involved.

"It is a burden you take on in this role, but it is worth it if they are happy and showcase that by winning matches."

The army served up an attacking masterclass in a one-sided contest at Twickenham – with Gdsm Manuqalo Komaitai (IG), Spr Lauren Brooks (RE), Lt Hannah Gilmour (RE) and LCpl Courtney Pursglove (RLC) all crossing for braces.

The result maintained a run of resounding victories over the senior service and while Mullen was thrilled with the outcome, she said there was a sense of disappointment at the team not facing a sterner challenge on such a big stage.

"It is frustrating," she added. "We want people to come and watch us. I looked at the score at

INTER-SERVICES RUGBY UNION CHAMPIONSHIPS

TWICKENHAM

ARMY	NAVY
96	0

GLOUCESTER

ARMY	RAF
47	12

half-time and thought 'would I stay to watch this?'

"It is hard, and the navy have talented players. Are their coaches setting the right standards? Are they concentrating on the correct things in camp?

"I don't know the answers to those questions, but it is a shame.

"This has almost become a dress rehearsal for the RAF game – that should not be the case."

Komaitai added four further tries to her tournament haul in the soldiers' clash with the light blues, which saw forward WO2 Rae Metters (REME) become the first player to reach the milestone of 40 army caps.

"That was the best game I've seen Rae play," Mullen, who herself scored in both fixtures, continued. "She had five strong carries that got us past the gain line and was always quick to the ball.

"Koms was great and carried hard; she even outgassed one of their wingers to score.

"Our physicality and relentlessness were key. We had the mindset that whenever we had the ball, they would fear tackling us and when they had the ball, they would fear being tackled. That was the difference."

TWICKENHAM LOSS ENDS TITLE HOPES

RUGBY UNION (MEN)

FORMER England international LCpl Semesa Rokoduguni (Scots DG) rolled back the years as a hat-trick of tries helped the army to victory in the concluding fixture of this season's Inter-Services Rugby Union Championships.

The 37-year-old's output fired the soldiers to a 38-31 triumph over the Royal Air Force in Gloucester – a result that softened the blow of losing to the Royal Navy two weeks earlier.

The 37-33 reverse at Twickenham saw the senior service crowned champions and while disappointed with the outcome, army skipper Bdr Pete Austin (RA) believes the tight nature of the games is good for the tournament.

"It shows how close the Inter-Services has become," he told *SoldierSport*.

"When I first came into the team, we knew the matches would be competitive but also knew we'd probably come out on top.

"Nobody wants to turn up knowing they are going to

win – this makes it far more exciting for us, the crowd and everyone involved."

Two first-half tries from forward Gnr Senitiki Nayalo (RHA) put the army on the front foot against the navy and they found themselves 21-19 ahead in the second period before going on to concede 15 points without reply.

Further scores from Sgt Nathanael Titchard-Jones (REME) and Spr Cameron McDonald (RE) gave them hope, but with their rivals slotting a penalty in between the deficit could not be closed as the clock ticked down.

Rokoduguni switched from centre to the wing for the RAF clash and the move paid off as his efforts, together with another brace from Nayalo, edged the soldiers to victory.

"We were so eager against the navy and too excited to score tries," Austin said.

"At half-time we talked about getting back to basic rugby but they were more composed and had the better way of playing on the day.

"We tried to change our approach against the RAF as we knew they would have more of a forward game.

"It was great having Roko back on the wing. It gave us a bit more in attack and it is a position that allows him the freedom to just go."

'WE WERE SO EAGER'



LCpl Semesa Rokoduguni (Scots DG) returned to the Inter-Services fold

RUGBY BY NUMBERS

16 Tries for the Reds as they ran riot against the Royal Navy

6 Scores in two games for forward Gdsm Manuqalo Komaitai (IG)

5 Inter-Services title wins as captain for SSgt Jade Mullen (AGC (SPS))

1 Defeat for the army women all season – a 31-21 loss to Wales under-20s



INTER-UNIT BOXING FINAL

2 PARA 6 **V** 2 R ANGLIAN 3



PARAS PROFIT FROM EARLY CHARGE

Picture: Mark Deller/Alligin Photography

BOXING (MEN)

A STORMING start in the final of the Army Inter-Unit Boxing Championships paved the way to a successful title charge for the fighters of 2nd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment.

The Colchester-based squad won all four bouts in the first half of their clash with 2nd Battalion, The Royal Anglian Regiment to find themselves on the brink of glory and two further victories after the interval saw them complete the job in style.

Pte Ghous Jellani set the standard in the night's opening fight as he locked horns with Pte Brooklyn Brown at 57kg.

The para bossed proceedings in the first round, with a string of right shots underlining his superiority. The punishment continued in the second and after forcing a standing count, he floored his rival with another

stinging right to win the contest via a stoppage.

Pte Nathan Howard maintained the momentum in an assured display against LCpl Alfie King, claiming all three rounds to take the 63.5kg honours via a unanimous verdict.

"I felt composed in there and boxed as well as I could against a good opponent," a delighted Howard said afterwards.

After a strong opening round in the 67kg ranks LCpl Callum Hayward saw Poachers rival Pte Oliver Gracey fight his way back into contention, but the para had done enough in the eyes of the judges and was awarded the victory on a split decision.

There was no doubting the outcome at 71kg where Pte Rojan Bitmez proved too strong for Pte Harry Veitch. The main action came in the final round, where strong left shots saw Bitmez inflict a standing count and with

his opponent bloodied, he went on to seal a unanimous verdict.

With a 4-0 lead at the break, the Paras only needed to win one of the five bouts that followed and while triumphs for LCpl Blake Holness and LCpl George Sheldon delayed proceedings, their success was confirmed by Cpl Tony Jones (pictured above).

Fighting Pte Charlie Anderson at 86kg, the NCO showed slick footwork to avoid his rival's attacks and countered with expertly guided jabs.

While Jones tired late on his body of work held him in good stead and was awarded a unanimous verdict.

The lead extended to 6-2 with another unanimous decision, this time for Pte Jake Dawson over LCpl Findley Bishop at 92kg, before the Poachers took the honours in the final bout of the night as Pte James Edoh was handed a walkover win at 100kg.

UP NEXT...

The in-ring season comes to an end at the Army Open Boxing Championships in Aldershot from June 2 to 5.

More than 100 personnel entered last year's event, which features a host of team and individual prizes. Coaches from the army set-up will be keeping a close eye on the action as they scout for talent for next season's development squad.

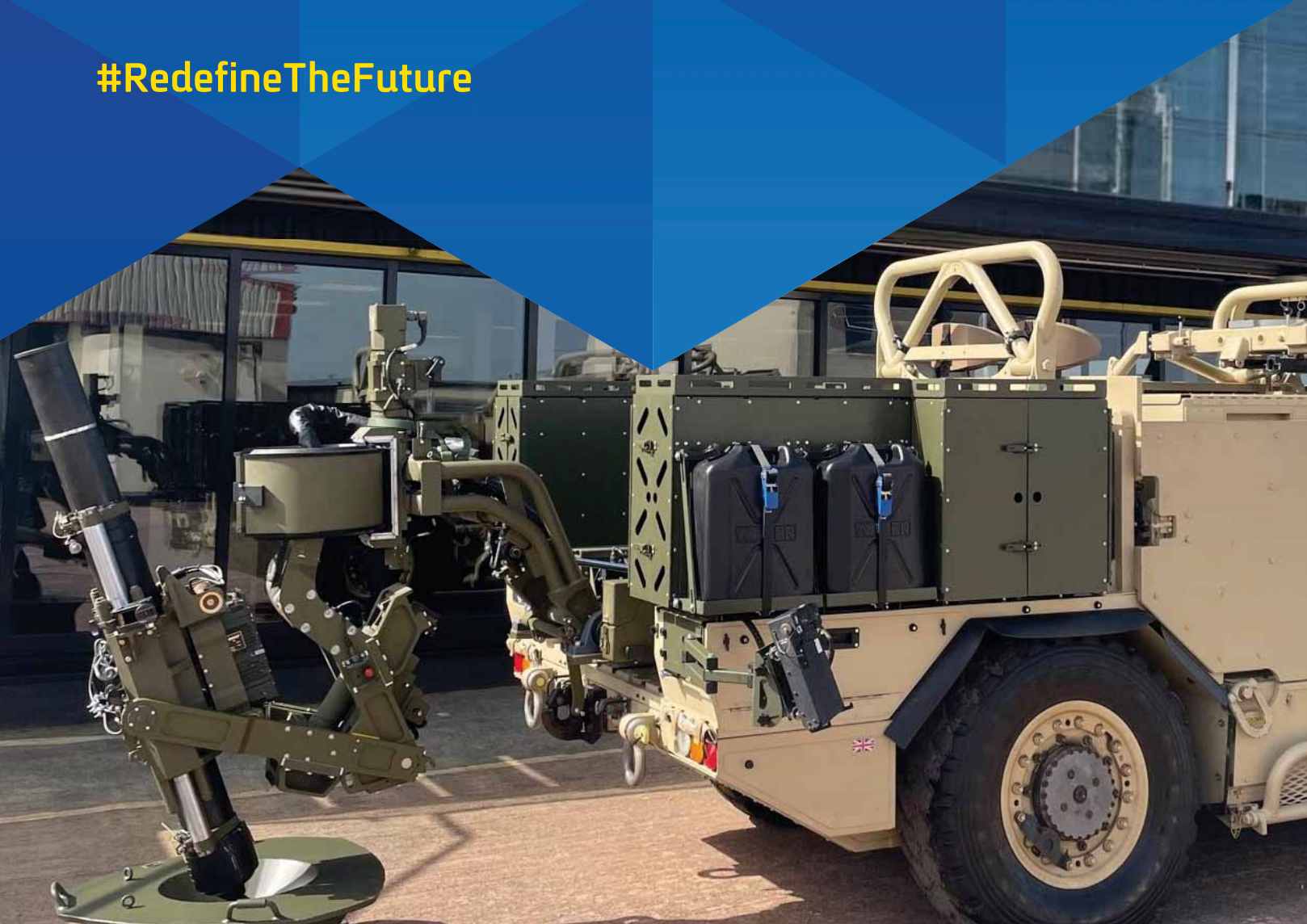


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INTER-SERVICES
MEN'S BASKETBALL

ARMY 72 V NAVY 62

COURT RUN CONTINUES



Three-point king
Cpl Ryan Clasper
(RLC) takes aim

BASKETBALL

THE emergence of new talent proved vital for the army men as they mounted a successful title defence at the Inter-Services Basketball Championships.

Sig Sulayman Suwareh (R Signals) was named MVP on his tournament debut and with another recent addition, Tpr Darreo Glasgow (RTR, pictured above), also shining the soldiers dominated the court.

An 82-70 triumph over the Royal Air Force was followed by a 72-62 defeat of the Royal Navy as the side claimed back-to-back trophies under player-coach SSgt Roshane Murray (RE).

"When Sulayman came off the bench he was an inspiration, blocking shots and dunking," army player and UK Armed Forces Basketball secretary Capt Anyegwi Tambi Spicely (RAMS) told *SoldierSport*. "He was great.

"It was an okay performance against the RAF. Darreo and SSgt

Ferris Murray (RLC) were good in defence and offence, but it was one of those games where everyone contributed – even our coach scored a few points.

"The clash with the navy was changed by one person. Cpl Ryan Clasper (RLC) hit three huge three-pointers in a row and that put them to sleep – they could not catch us after that.

"One of our biggest worries was what would happen when we lost our older players. But with Darreo coming through last year and Sulayman emerging this season, we are heading in the right direction."

It proved to be a disappointing competition for a depleted army women's team, who lost back-to-back fixtures as the RAF claimed a fourth consecutive title.

And the rebranded development tournament – which has been shifted from under-23 players to under-24s to encourage greater participation – was won by the senior service.

DIVERS MAINTAIN UPWARD CURVE

DIVING

THERE was a strong showing at the Inter-Corps Diving Championships as a field of 26 athletes battled for honours across the springboard and platform disciplines.

The Royal Engineers celebrated a successful outing in the men's field as Spr Bikash Khand Thakuri – who became the first Gurkha to represent the army at Inter-Services level last season – claimed the individual honours in both competitions, an effort that helped the Sappers to the overall team prize.

Sgt Katy Morrey (RAPTC) excelled in the women's contest – matching Thakuri in taking both individual titles – but it was the Royal Army Medical Service who lifted the team trophy.

The event maintained the upward trend seen in the sport over recent seasons and army diving coach Capt Amanda Prentice (RLC) was impressed by the talent on display.

“Everyone who competed did both the springboard

and platform – that has never happened before,” the officer told *SoldierSport*.

“This is very much a basic level. It is to encourage divers to come along and get on the boards and push themselves out of their comfort zones. You could see they did that by the reaction to some of the dives.

“It is also an opportunity for me, as coach, to look at the people I want to see more of. There have been a couple here today with potential.”

Three army team members were in action and Prentice said the competition was good preparation for them ahead of the Inter-Services.

“One has been away on tour and another on a course, so it was a chance for them to stretch their legs before our training camp in July,” she added. “We’ve seen a few people move on and some new divers are coming through. We are quite green in places, but the ability is there.”

‘THE ABILITY IS THERE’



Women's champion Sgt Katy Morrey (RAPTC)



MEN'S INTER-CORPS HOCKEY FINAL

REME 3 V RE 1

REME RISE TO THE TOP IN CORPS SHOWDOWN

HOCKEY

HAVING lost on penalties in the last two finals, the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers men's team finally reigned supreme at the Inter-Corps Hockey Championships.

After overcoming the Royal Signals, Adjutant General's Corps and Royal Army Medical Service in the early stages, the champions-elect squared off against the team that had foiled them in the past two years – the Infantry – in the semi-finals.

With the score locked at 4-4 going into the final quarter, they hit three further goals without reply to eventually prevail 7-4 and set up a showpiece clash with the Royal Engineers.

An early strike from skipper Cpl Chris Randall (pictured above) gave them the perfect start in the final and they doubled their advantage with a coolly converted penalty stroke from LCpl Ben Maltezi.

The Sappers then reduced the arrears before WO1 David Thomas converted from close range following a sublime run from Cpl Scott Rawlings.

“It has been hard graft,” Randall told *SoldierSport* at full-time. “The Infantry really made us work, and that had a knock-on for the final.

“We were so tired at the

start, but kept the momentum up in each quarter and pushed through. It was about the shared grit of people wanting to win.

“We were happy just to make it this far but are ecstatic now we’ve smashed through to get the victory.

“Those previous finals were so close, so it is nice to come away having won it on the field.

“It is amazing that the chain of command has given people the time off to come to this event. It means a lot, and sport is one of the big incentives to stay in.”

Elsewhere, it was business as usual for the AGC as they retained the women's trophy with a 100 per cent record from five games, while 35 Engineer Regiment beat Army HQ 5-2 in the Army Cup final.

INTER-CORPS HOCKEY

MEN

- 1 REME
- 2 RE
- 3 R SIGNALS

WOMEN

- 1 AGC
- 2 REME
- 3 RAMS

MASTERS

- 1 INFANTRY
- 2 REME
- 3 R SIGNALS



SAPPERS GO THE DISTANCE

ARMY FA CHALLENGE CUP FINAL

23 RE 2 V 7 RHA 0

FOOTBALL (MEN)

PERSISTENCE paid off for 23 Parachute Engineer Regiment as two extra-time goals gave them victory in the 124th Army FA Challenge Cup final.

The Sappers looked the more likely winners in their clash with airborne rivals 7th Parachute Regiment, Royal Horse Artillery but failed to capitalise on their ascendancy during normal time as the match finished 0-0.

However, with penalties looking a distinct possibility, strikes from Cpl James Thomas and Spr Callum Vincent settled the contest as the champions-elect avenged the defeat they suffered in the 2023 showpiece.

There were no hints of such drama in the early exchanges as both sides struggled to create meaningful opportunities.

LCpl Franklin Fitzmaurice and skipper Cpl Liam Silver fired over with efforts from range for the Sappers, while Cfn Seb Bradford failed to direct a header

goalwards for the Gunners after Thomas was unable to clear a ball over the top.

LCpl Ashley Tandy came closest to breaking the deadlock on the hour mark as he turned the RHA defence and drove into the area before seeing his shot strike the foot of the far post.

Tandy then pounced on a loose back pass only to be thwarted by the impressive Bdr Reece Timmins in goal.

It proved to be the final action in regular play and it was the Sappers who remained on the front foot in extra-time.

They were rewarded in the 103rd minute as a free kick into the box deflected to Thomas, who diverted the ball past the wrong-footed Timmins, before Vincent sealed the win from a slick counter-attack at the death.

"We are buzzing," player-manager SSgt Samuel Hunt told *SoldierSport*. "We showed real quality over the 120 minutes. We are blessed with talent and that was the difference."



Skipper Cpl Liam Silver (RE) lines up a shot from distance

LEUNG'S MAIN EVENT



2Lt Brian Leung (RLC) in action at Badminton

Picture: Mary Burns

EQUESTRIANISM

HISTORY was made at the Badminton International Horse Trials as 2Lt Brian Leung (RLC) became the first serving military rider to compete in its National Grassroots Eventing Championships.

Having completed a rigorous qualifying process in 2024, the reservist – riding eight-year-old Irish sports horse, Jay – started

out with one of his best scoring dressage tests for the level.

He continued to impress in the showjumping, despite dropping a pole, but the cross-country phase proved a tough step as he fell from his horse at the tenth fence.

“A misjudged jump at an obstacle led to a swift ejection,” Leung said.

“Thankfully, we were both uninjured. Sometimes these types of mistakes are the ones

we learn most from.

“What made this extra special was the fact myself and Jay have progressed through the development pathway that has been established within the Army Equestrian Association.

“This highlights the support that is now available.”

Follow Army Equestrian on Facebook and [@ArmyEquiUK](#) on Instagram for updates from the sport and details on how to get involved.

WATER POLO

THE Royal Engineers secured the men's and women's team titles at the Inter-Corps Water Polo Championships.

Defending champions the Royal Logistic Corps finished runners up in the women's competition, a feat matched by the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers in the men's draw.

The Sappers capped a successful week by winning the women's Inter-Corps swimming crown, with the REME triumphing in the men's field.



Picture: Mark Deller/Alligin Photography

ESPORTS

THE first esports league exclusively for the UK armed forces community has been launched by the British Forces Broadcasting Service (BFBS).

Aimed at serving personnel and their families, reservists, cadets, veterans, MoD civil servants and members of the bereaved community, aged 13 years or above, the tournament features the *Rocket League* title and will stage qualifying rounds this month and next, ahead of in-person finals in September.

To register for the BFBS Pro League visit [bfbsesports.com](#)

Players of all skill levels are welcome to compete to win a share of a £15,000 cash prize pool, high-end gaming PCs, game credits, and prizes for the top 100 gamers.



SEASON MOVES ON



Picture: Cat Goryn/Alligin Photography

TENNIS

THE army tennis season has progressed from its indoor to outdoor stage with the Inter-Services at Wimbledon looming on the horizon.

Maj Tristan Williams (R Welsh) defeated SSgt Lawrence Tere (RAMS) to be crowned army indoor champion for 2025, with Capt Holly Fleming (RAMS) taking the women's title with victory over Sig Emma McMahon (R Signals, pictured).

The Infantry took top spot in the Inter-Corps Winter League and then added to their haul at the corps one-day tournament.

And at the Inter-Services Development Championships, the army men regained the title by just one rubber from the Royal Navy, but defending champions the army women lost out to their Royal Air Force rivals.

The Army Outdoor Championships run from June 7 to 11 in Aldershot, with the full Inter-Services set for July 29 and 30.

Men's indoor champion	Maj Tristan Williams, R Welsh
Women's indoor champion	Capt Holly Fleming, RAMS
Indoor plate champion	Cpl Stu Jones, REME
Inter-Corps Winter League winners	Infantry
Inter-Corps Winter League runners up	Royal Armoured Corps

Gnr Denzel James (RA) tries to build momentum



DAY ONE DEFEAT STALLS TITLE BID

INTER-SERVICES
TWENTY20

ARMY **142-8** V **145-2** RAF



Pictures: Lt Cdr Shaun Roster, RN

CRICKET (MEN)

A BELOW-par performance on the opening day scuppered the army's hopes of victory in the Inter-Services Twenty20 Cricket Championships.

Batting first against the Royal Air Force at the Utilita Bowl's nursery ground, the Reds lost key wickets early on as they struggled for momentum in the power play.

Useful contributions from Cpl Liam Fletcher (REME), Gnr Denzel James (RA), Sig Michael Cowdell (R Signals) and skipper SSgt Jay Boynton (REME) pushed the total towards respectability, but none went on to post a match-winning score.

A lack of late innings fireworks then saw them close on 142-8.

The RAF made a steady start in reply, reaching 36 before opener Flt Lt Sam Moorby was dismissed by Sgt Denson Narayan (RLC).

A partnership of 105 between Cpl Tom Shorthouse, who earlier claimed three wickets with the ball, and Flt Lt Luke Hansford pushed them to the brink of victory and when the latter fell for 43, skipper Flt Lt Adam Fisher came out to hit the winning runs.

The action switched from Southampton to Lord's two days later and once more, the soldiers batted first in their clash with the Royal Navy.

Again, early wickets proved costly as they slumped to 34-4 after six overs, before Boynton and James set about repairing the damage.

But after looking well set they both perished in the 20s, meaning the army needed late cameos from Narayan and Cowdell to edge their total to a challenging 148-8.

The senior service lost opener Cpl Sam Hewitt for six and then star batter AET Ben Johnston – who fired his team to glory last season – for just one as the run

chase stuttered at the start.

Lt Cdr Dan Robbins held firm with a knock of 44 but with wickets falling at regular intervals the Reds seized control.

Skipper Mne Finlay Marks tried desperately to keep his side in touch but when he became one of two wickets claimed by James in the final over the game was up.

Boynton also shone with the ball, claiming figures of 3-22 in his final short-format appearance for the army, as his team won by 16 runs.

The RAF lifted the trophy with a nine-wicket victory over the navy in the final game, with Shorthouse posting an unbeaten 66 to go with his 76 not out against the army.

Earlier in the day, the UK Armed Forces women suffered a comprehensive defeat at the hands of Marylebone Cricket Club – despite a half century from stalwart SSgt Amanda Potgieter (REME).

CELEBRATIONS CONTINUE



WOOLWICH CUP FINAL
RE 4 V RLC 2

FOOTBALL

AN extra-time brace from Spr Ryan Fagan fired the Royal Engineers to glory in the Woolwich Cup final.

The army ace took centre stage as the Sappers' clash with the Royal Logistic Corps finished 2-2 after 90 minutes, with two composed finishes sealing the silverware to cap a season of celebration for the team.

This year marks the 150th

anniversary of their FA Cup win and they had another trophy in their grasp as they raced into a 2-0 half-time lead thanks to strikes from Cpl Matty Coar and Cpl Ryan Perry.

An own goal and a drilled effort from distance by Pte Buster Reed brought the loggies level in the second period, before Fagan's brilliance in the additional half hour settled the contest.

"We didn't make the start we wanted in the second half,"

said winning skipper Spr Aaron Marley. "Once we got the two goals in extra time, we were quite comfortable and knew we could sit back and defend.

"It is a big year for us; we've had a great season and this is well deserved."

There was further disappointment for the RLC in the final of the women's corps competition – the Edwards Cup – as they slipped to a 2-1 defeat to the Adjutant General's Corps.

STATESIDE SUCCESS



RUGBY UNION

THE Royal Military Academy Sandhurst rugby union team has returned from a successful tour to the United States.

A total of 26 officer cadets and five permanent staff crossed the pond for the trip, which included battlefield tours of Yorktown and Gettysburg as well as two challenging fixtures on the pitch.

The personnel started out with a victory over Washington Rugby Club before locking horns with their host nation equivalents, West Point.

And after a closely contested game, it was the visitors who emerged on top thanks to a narrow 26-24 win.

"It was a fantastic experience, emphasising the importance of sport in the military," said forwards coach WO2 Luke Brimble (RAPTC).

"It provided the officer cadets with invaluable lessons and highlighted the role of teamwork, leadership and physical fitness in their future military careers."

RUGBY UNION

A LAST-gasp try from WO1 Chris Harris (R Welsh) helped the army masters rugby union team claim the bragging rights in this season's Inter-Services Championships.

The fly half's effort saw the soldiers draw 25-25 with the Royal Air Force at Gloucester's Kingsholm Stadium – a result that secured the silverware on points difference.

They defeated the Royal Navy 49-5 in their opening fixture, but with the RAF only managing to beat the same opposition 32-13 the trophy headed back to Aldershot.

At the other end of the playing spectrum, the army rugby union under-23 team is on the lookout for fresh talent ahead of the new season starting in September.

Plans for squad trials are taking shape and personnel under the age of 23 on September 1 who are interested in getting involved should scan the QR code to register. Anyone with queries can contact Lt Col David Falconer (RRF) via **david.falconer140@mod.gov.uk**



Picture: Graeme Main

Pictures: Alligin Photography

Picture: WO2 Luke Brimble, RAPTC

World apart

We asked soldiers what misunderstandings civvies have of army life

Interviews: Cliff Caswell and Sarah Goldthorpe Pictures: Graeme Main



People think we can do everything – that

soldiers should be called when there are strikes, for example. They don't realise this takes us away from the day job.

Cpl Shaun Manvell, REME

Civvies see it as just a job – they don't know what it involves; the physical endurance and mental robustness. It's definitely not a nine-to-five.

Fus Bradley Williams, RRF



People instantly assume you're tough as nails – emotionless or robotic. They also think you just do as you're told all the time and never have

opinions or decide stuff for yourself.

LCpl Brandon Temple-Brown, RRF

Some believe this life is only for people who couldn't succeed elsewhere. But that's not the case.

LCpl Hobie Boyd, RRF



They tend to believe everyone in the army has the same job – they don't realise there are different roles, including many technical trades. Soldiering isn't just one thing.

Sgt Maxine Crombie, RLC



Generally, I don't think civilians understand how busy the service is – there's a lot going on.

WO2 Jess Kilfoyle, RLC

The public aren't connecting with the military as they did in the Herrick era. It's probably because troops aren't on the news in the same way, although it's good there isn't a conflict happening.

Capt Shaun Stanley, AGC (SPS)



The British Army is very well respected by the civilian community in Nepal – there is a good understanding. For young people aged 18 to 21, the military is the life they want.

Pte Anish Rai, QOGLR

Many don't see the opportunities we have in the army, such as sport or AT. They think you're just turning up and getting beasted without any time off.

LCpl Luke Barr, RRF



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